A ROUMANIAN VENDETTA

By Carmen Sylva

A Roumanian Vendetta

And Other Stories

BY

CARMEN SYLVA

(TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY E. H.)

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"CARMEN SYLVA"

(Introductory Poem, written in English for this volume.)

Through sunlit leafy shadows, o'er the ground
That decked in golden garb echoed my step,
I swept along and sang. The Forest was
My father, called me child, and tuned my harp.
The Forest taught me secrets yet untold,
And filled my ear with richer harmonies
Than mortal orchestras might render,—songs
So deep, so weird and wild, that men's romances
Seemed poor beside them. Which, indeed, of these
Were sadder than the wood's great tragedies,
Than Nature's outcry, struggle, storm, and death?
Fain would I be in truth the Forest's Song—
The very "Sylvæ Carmen"—but my voice
Is but the voice of a mere bard, that echoes
Throughout this wondrous world in strains as old
As Time, as Life, as Suffering. The Forest
Hath sung the self-same Song from East to West,
Ten thousand years ago it sang the same,
For Love, and Hate, and Death were still the same.
Therefore, did Song remain when nations died:
Their laws, their monuments were swept away,
Their history dwindled to an empty name,
Themselves forgotten. Song alone remained—
An adamantine rock, a sough of wind
That oceans could not silence, nor the force
Of Time, of Strife, of Earth's migrations. Still,
It sang of Love, and Hate, and Death, and these
Are ever new in every generation.
The young believe that they were first to know
Life's mysteries, therefore bards are ever young;
Young as the trees, the fountains, or the wind.
And Sylvæ Carmen, that wild Forest Song,
Still wanders through the centuries unchanged.

Hark! the Lament is ringing through the woods!

A ROUMANIAN VENDETTA

A STARLIGHT night. The Olto rushes madly along between its high, stony banks, and a cool breeze is wafted through the side valleys, down which a number of little mountain torrents come tumbling in haste, bubbling and foaming as they rush to mingle their waters with those of the bigger stream.

It was into one of these little side valleys that a tall figure was just turning, looking all the taller in the surrounding gloom. Just then the moon rising shed a sudden flood of light over the whole landscape, making the shadows, into which the figure had quite disappeared, blacker still. The light streamed over the villages that lay wrapt in slumber, over the murmuring forests, and over the meadows sweet with the breath of innumerable flowers, and with the breath of the cattle scattered over them.

And now the figure steps out again upon the meadow—a man, tall and upright as a young fir-tree, clad in a short dark jacket, and with shining weapons stuck in the broad belt round his waist; his white woollen breeches are tucked into the top of his high boots, the felt hat on his long hair is garlanded with

flowers, and shades a low forehead and bushy brows, beneath which eyes black as coal blaze forth. His small, wiry hand twitches nervously at his mustaches, twirling them out to their full length, and then plunges into his belt, and draws forth from it a broad-bladed knife and a piece of rope. With quick noiseless steps he goes up to one of the cows. His white teeth gleam fiercely under the black mustaches, and the aquiline nose seems to take a still bolder curve as he mutters: "I will at least have a pair of sandals out of that skin of thine!" In a trice he has tied the cow's legs tightly together, and the knife flashes swiftly over the glossy hide. First one big strip and then another he cuts out very deliberately, laughing to himself the while at the agonised moans of the tortured animal.

The blood trickles down and lies in black pools upon the grass. The man takes the two strips of hide to the nearest brook, rinses them there, rolls them together, and disappears once more, swallowed up in the darkness.

The moon has travelled on, and peers down into the Olto, over the dark beetling crags that shut it in; the crisp wavelets sparkle with silvery light, as they ripple along in careless unconcern of him who wanders by the bank, his hands still reeking with the blood of an innocent dumb creature.

The wayfarer has soon reached his own door; he lifts the latch very gently, and goes to stretch himself upon the bench which runs all round the wall of the

little room. But his wife is not asleep; she has lighted an Easter candle, and sits before it, staring with wide-open eyes out into the night. A scream rises to her lips as she sees the blood on her husband's hands; but he only laughs at her.

"Have no fear, Ancutza! This time it is only from his cow, who has presented me with a fine pair of sandals. It shall be his own skin I will have next."

Speaking thus, he extinguishes the wax-light, and flings himself at full length in his accustomed place.

At that moment a sudden gust of wind howls round the little dwelling, rattling the window shutters, shaking the shingles of the roof, knocking over the flower-pots in the verandah, and waking the baby lying asleep in the kneading-trough slung from the rafters. The noise also disturbs a young girl who lies stretched on a bench in the kitchen, and she awakes with a start, jumps up, hurries to the hearth, and sweeping together the embers dispersed by the wind, proceeds to fan them to a flame. The firelight falls upon a face in every feature like that of the man in the adjoining room; there is the same aquiline nose, the same deep-set, jet-black eyes, the same low brow shaded by heavy masses of black hair, that falls in dishevelled tresses down her back, reaching far below the knee. Now, as she raises herself to her full height, her head almost touches the low ceiling. She stands still a moment, listening attentively, and shaking her head at the baby's cry.

"Would you like some milk for the little one, sister?" she calls into the other room.

"Yes, Sanda; if it has not turned sour. There is a storm coming up!"

The girl tastes the milk, and puts it to warm at the fire; then she opens the shutter and looks out. Dark clouds drive across the face of the moon, and the wind as it blows past the little window is laden with eddying dust and with the aroma of sweet-scented flowers. Then there is a sudden stillness, and in the midst of it the lightning flashes close overhead, and almost at the same moment the thunder rolls. The onlooker crosses herself, and closes the shutter again. Then she goes back to the hearth, takes up the earthenware pannikin, and pours the bubbling contents backwards and forwards into another little bowl, her dark brows contracting impatiently the while, until they almost meet in the centre of her forehead. The child cries louder still. Soon, however, the feeble little voice is quite drowned in the noise of the down-pouring rain and pattering hail. By the time that Sanda enters the room bearing the bowl of milk, the Easter candle is again alight, and the young mother is sitting up rocking her infant, and vainly trying to hush its cry as she presses it to her bosom.

"If only I had not had such a fright! To think of the good milk I had, and so much of it! And now it has quite stopped! Ah! Holy Mother of God! what a flash was that!"

Her sister-in-law shrugs her shoulders somewhat contemptuously.

"How is it possible to be so easily frightened?"

"I have paid him out for the fright he gave thee, Ancutza!" mutters her husband between his set teeth.

"But that will not bring back my milk! It only frightens me the more. Holy Mother of God! what a peal of thunder!"

Mother and child have the same blue eyes, fringed by long dark lashes, and the same fair hair. Seeing that the poor thing goes on trembling, Sanda takes the baby from her and pours a little of the milk into its mouth. As she looks up, she catches sight of her brother's blood-stained hands.

"Have you killed him?" she calmly asks.

The other laughs.

"Sanda is not so timid as thou art, Ancutza!"

"No, timid I am not; but if you have killed him, then it is high time you were already over the mountains. Shall I saddle the horse?"

"Nay, I have but practised a little blood-letting on his best cow to stop her milk for a while, as Ancutza's stopped when he set our hay-rick on fire."

"Alas! what will he do next?" wails the woman, wringing her hands.

"Whatever harm he does, he shall have it back in full from us, shall he not, Dragomir, my brother?"

Meanwhile the baby has fallen asleep in Sanda's lap. She lays it down again in its old place in the kneading-trough, and after stroking her hand

soothingly across her sister-in-law's hair, she goes back to the kitchen, where she rakes the smouldering embers carefully together and smothers them with ashes, and then flinging herself down on the bench is in another minute fast asleep, while the storm rolls away in the distance, and every leaf and blade of grass begins to glisten in the moonshine.

It was a feud of very long standing, that dated back for several generations, the quarrel between Dragomir's family and that of the village schoolmaster. Stories verging on the marvellous were told among the villagers of the way in which both parties were accustomed to satisfy the cravings of their hate. Poor Ancutza lived in perpetual alarm. There was, of course, no more rest for her this night; she could do nothing but paint over and over again to herself in the liveliest colours the new misfortunes which she felt sure must ensue from this last deed of violence.

Pârvu, the schoolmaster, had been sleeping off a drinking bout, and only made his appearance very late in the small, low-roofed, stifling schoolroom, in which, as was always the case in summer, only a handful of the smallest and sickliest of the children had assembled—just those who could be of no use at all in the fields. Pârvu wore the peasant's costume, although he had spent several years in town, even carrying off the first prize, with flying colours, on three separate occasions, at the examination at

Craiova. He was of athletic build, had grey eyes as piercing as steel, wore his black hair cropped close to the head, and his powers of conversation were unrivalled. On that account he was held in high esteem by the whole village.

"He has book-learning!" folk said one to the other below their breath, looking up at him in awe. The children were in dread of him, and in their fear learnt to rattle off whole pages by heart like little parrots, for they knew that the long cane with which he admonished them was not to be laughed at.

On the morning in question he was evidently in a very bad temper, and the children stood huddled together trembling, waiting in mortal terror to hear which of them would be called upon first.

"Florica!" he called, and a very slim little girl rose at the summons, her dark tangled locks hanging over her eyes, and shading her thin, sallow face. The startled black eyes were fixed anxiously on the schoolmaster's face, then the heavy lids sank, and following every line in the book with her finger, the little creature stumbled through a fable, of which she evidently did not understand a single word. Pârvu was not listening to her at all.

"Go on reading!" whispered in her ear a small boy seated on the bench beside her, and, as if impelled by the instinct of self-preservation, the child read on and on, without a stop, without a pause of any sort, whilst the others simply sought to divine the expression of the dreaded teacher's face.

But Pârvu paid no heed, lost in his own thoughts. There had been one being on earth to whom he was devotedly attached, his only brother. And but a few weeks ago he had found that brother lying murdered in the wood. The picture was always rising up before his mind ; he could not get rid of it. Sometimes he tried to drown his grief in brandy; but no sooner was he sober again, than the horrid sight was there once more, shutting out everything else that went on around him. And then he would go over it all again, step by step, calling back to mind every incident of that day, when he was on his way home from the town, carrying as usual a little packet of tobacco in his hand for his brother, whom he indulged like a child, always finding out some trifle to give him pleasure. It was evening, and the crags already cast lengthened shadows across the way. All at once he saw someone sitting motionless on a stone by the wayside, with his head resting against the rocky wall that rose above the path. As he drew nearer, he saw that it was his brother. But why did he not move ?

" Dan ! " he shouted from afar. Not a limb, not a fold stirred. Pârvu grew frightened. He rushed up and touched his brother's hand ; it was cold as ice, and the wide-open eyes had a meaningless stare. Pârvu gave a scream ; he felt as if he were choking. He rubbed the cold hands and temples; he kept calling his brother's name, now loud, now speaking quite softly in his ear, till he suddenly perceived the gaping wound in the back of the neck. Then he

understood what had happened, and knew that he would never hear his brother's voice again. He threw himself upon the ground; he sobbed, and tore his hair. All at once he thought of Dragomir, and the thought dried his tears. . . .

In the meantime, the little girl's monotonous reading went uninterruptedly on. She had come to a passage in the reading-book taken from Roumanian history:

"The Wallachian Prince Tzepesh had sworn to avenge himself upon the boyars who had rebelled against him. He invited them to a magnificent banquet, to which they all came in their robes of state, the boyars with their wives and daughters, and sons and daughters-in-law. And whilst they sat at table, eating and drinking, and making merry, they suddenly beheld themselves surrounded by soldiery, and Tzepesh called out to them with a ferocious laugh:

"'Not one of you shall go hence until you have built up for me the fortress of Tchetazuia with your own hands. Night and day you shall work, or I will have you impaled.'

"The guests grew white as the white walls around them, and begged that they might at least be allowed to lay aside their jewels and robes of ceremony.

"'The jewels I will take for myself,' said Tzepesh, smiling grimly. 'They will serve as a present to the Turkish envoy, and help to make my throne secure. But the robes you must keep on.'

"And just as they were, they were driven to

work with blows, all of them, even delicate women and aged men. Soon their hands and feet were torn and bleeding, soon their long-flowing gold-embroidered garments hung in tatters on their half-naked limbs; their faces were haggard and pale; but still the pitiless lash continued to fall, and they must go on piling stone on stone, for many long and weary months, until the fortress was raised.

"Tzepesh stood looking on from the walls, and jeered at the woeful, ghastly forms, who constantly sank down from sheer exhaustion, but only—save when Death mercifully released them from their sufferings—to be driven back to their task again, until it was all complete, and the massive pile towered proudly above the stream. . . ."

The perspiration was standing in cold drops on Pârvu's brow; he was calling to mind how he had carried his dead brother home on his shoulders, how he had sworn to himself to discover the murderer, and how, after all, to this day he had not been able to hunt him down. It was true that he had set fire to Dragomir's barn, in which the whole crop of maize was stacked, partly for sale, partly to be sown for the next harvest, and had looked on exulting, while the flames that were reducing his enemy to poverty curled and darted snakelike on high. But what revenge was that? Was that a sufficient price for a brother's life? It was true also that Dan himself had heaped such insults upon Sanda at the last village Hora that she had been obliged to leave

the dance—not, however, without first clenching her fist and muttering a threat. Pârvu clutched at his own forehead; what if Sanda herself had done the murder? But no, that was impossible! Dan was so much bigger and stronger; he would never have let himself be worsted by a woman. Pârvu had grown quite dizzy as all these thoughts rushed upon his brain; and this prevented him from hearing a single word of the story which was now being read, of the foolish little lamb that would not obey its mother, and therefore came to a bad end, being gobbled up by the wolf. The child's monotonous voice only reached his ear in a confused murmur, mingled with the rushing of the wild little mountain stream, dashing through the village on its way to join the Olto. It had just occurred to Pârvu how his own father, who had been pope in that same village in which Dragomir's father also lived, had murdered the other man in cold blood. The priest had sworn to take revenge, for what precise injury Pârvu hardly knew. But riding home one evening from a neighbouring village, he had found his enemy peaceably engaged in washing his sheep in the stream, and at once set upon him with his loaded pistol. The other, being unarmed, no sooner caught sight of the muzzle pointed at him in the priest's hand than he took flight, his assailant giving instant chase on his pony. After vainly trying to baffle his pursuer by availing himself of every twist and turn of the most inaccessible paths, the peasant, hard pressed, sought refuge

in a little wayside chapel. His inexorable foe however followed him right into the sanctuary, and shot him down on the very steps of the altar, which was stained by the victim's blood. For this barbarous and sacrilegious act the priest was degraded and unfrocked ; his head was shaved, and he was confined for the rest of his life in a distant monastery, Pârvu being left to bring up his younger brother as best he could.

The children, feeling themselves unobserved, had been for some time busily engaged in carving and chipping the wooden desks before them, or drawing pictures on their slates and spitting on them to rub them out. The flies buzzed loud on the dirty window panes, the atmosphere grew more and more oppressive, and more than one child began to yawn. All at once the door burst open, and in rushed a small boy in a smock, with a huge fur cap on his straggling mane of black hair.

" Schoolmaster ! " he gasped, breathless. " Schoolmaster ! your cow ! "

Pârvu awoke from his reverie.

" My cow ? " he asked, wondering. " What is the matter with my cow ? "

" Come and see ! " panted the boy.

The children could hardly contain themselves for joy—in the first place, at being set free from school ; and secondly, at the delicious prospect of witnessing something to make their flesh creep. They crowded into the narrow doorway, and streamed through it

out into the field. Soon half the village had collected in the schoolmaster's little meadow, where the poor cow, almost mad with pain, was driving its horns into the turf, digging it up in great patches, and all the time pushing away the poor little calf, which was begging for milk in piteous tones, while its big eyes looked reproachfully at the bystanders. Pârvu felt his own blood boil with indignation as he fetched big cool green leaves and laid them on the poor creature's wounds. All round stood the women, with their infants in their arms, shaking their heads gravely under their white veils, serious and dignified as an assembly of Roman matrons called together to decide some weighty matter. The children hustled together full of burning curiosity ; they were anxious to miss nothing of what was going on, but at the same time they were somewhat afraid of the poor wounded cow, and still more so to see the schoolmaster's excitement, which they knew might very easily transform itself into anger against themselves. They were half-frightened, too, at the great pools of blood upon the grass, quite red at first, and then rapidly turning from crimson to black. A pretty slender girl dipped her hand into one of the wooden pails, and held her fingers compassionately to the poor little calf's mouth, laughing at the tickling sensation occasioned by the little creature's vigorous sucking, and colouring, too, at the somewhat broad jests of the young men looking on. The women nudged one another.

"Look at her, the bold thing! She is trying to attract the schoolmaster!"

Suddenly silence fell upon the group, and all eyes were directed towards the path along which Sanda's tall figure was seen advancing in the full sunshine, her amphora of green glazed earthenware poised aslant on her black hair, her distaff stuck into her girdle, and her spindle in her hand. The red petticoat, which fell in thick folds from the girdle at her waist, had been turned up in front so as to be no hindrance to her in walking, and showed the long white smock and the pretty bare feet peeping out underneath. Sleeves and shoulder-pieces of the smock were richly embroidered, and it stood just a little open at the neck, letting one guess the beauty of the high, well-shaped bosom which rose and fell under the rows of amber beads. A kerchief of yellow silk was twisted round her head, with the ends knotted together at the back under the heavy braids, leaving the clustering little curls on the nape of the neck free. The warm sunburnt skin, that had something of the golden hue of a ripe apricot, the strongly marked black eyebrows, the severe outline of her face and the peculiar gravity of her expression, combined to lend something lofty and unapproachable to her whole aspect. All the village lads were in awe of Sanda, with whom they dared not jest too freely, since her sharp, cutting answers were more stinging than a blow in the face, and always

turned the laugh against the joker, making him look foolish. She lingered a moment near the spot, her big eyes fixed intently on the cow, and then turned them on Pârvu, watching his movements closely. Soon she heard her brother's name spoken, at first scarce above a whisper, and then in a murmur that grew ever louder, and before she was well aware of it, she found herself surrounded and, so to say, called to account. Pârvu forced his way through the little throng, and the two stood facing one another, with flashing eyes, like two lions in the desert, preparing to spring.

"This is Dragomir's work!" hissed Pârvu.

Sanda was silent.

"Deny it if you dare!" cried Pârvu again.

Sanda continued to keep her eyes fixed upon him, without speaking a word.

"Speak, or I will shake you!"

Sanda's glance measured him from top to toe; then she spoke in her calm, deep tones:

"No such easy matter to shake me, and it would take a better man than you to do it, you bookworm! You are only good for setting fire to a place at night, when there is no one in sight!" and having spoken thus, with a quiet sweep of the arm she divided the circle that shut her in, and walked slowly away, without once looking round.

Pârvu was livid with rage. "I will make you pay for this!" he muttered, grinding his teeth.

"Take my advice," said an old peasant, "marry

the lass; she is strong, and a good worker. And then the quarrel will be at an end."

"Marry her!" screamed Pârvu, beside himself. "May the Olto swallow me up in its waves before I take that little viper for my wife! But I will give her something to remember me by. I will put such an affront on her that she shall hang her head and not dare open her lips again! I will avenge myself, and the other lads along with me!"

The women and girls exchanged sidelong glances; the young fellows grinned. Then the men began pulling out their tobacco-pouches and rolling cigarettes, while the women-folk prepared to go back to their work. The children, when they saw themselves left alone with the schoolmaster, ran off as fast as their little legs would carry them; and Pârvu, standing over the cow, went on putting fresh leaves on the poor animal's wounds, moistening the feverish nose and tongue with cold water, casting about in his own mind the while whether he had not better slaughter her without more ado.

Meanwhile Sanda, having arrived at the well, had grasped the long cross-beam, which stood out like a gallows against the dazzling white distant horizon of the far-stretching plain, and proceeded to let down the bucket to fill her pitcher. She was quite unconscious how beautiful she looked at that moment; she little thought how enchanted an artist would have been with the effect of her bright red skirt, snowy chemise, and yellow kerchief, in the midst of

that waving sea of verdure; how, above all, the perfect harmony of grace and strength in all her movements would have delighted him. She was literally boiling over with anger and indignation against Pârvu, and her whole soul was filled with such violent and uncontrollable hatred that it left her room for no other feeling, no other idea. As she recalled the scene that had just taken place, she told herself that she had not said half enough to him; she should have been much more outspoken, and have shown her contempt for him more plainly. What had he to complain of? Had they not kept silence when he set fire to their whole store? when he almost burnt the roof over their heads? While he must needs call the whole village together to make a fuss about his stupid cow, screaming and using big words, just because he could read his books! And did not the others listen to him, simply because they thought he knew more than they? Her aquiline nose seemed to grow sharper, and her eyebrows almost met as these thoughts passed through her mind. She could not help telling herself at the same time that both she and her brother had earned for themselves the unfavourable opinion of the neighbours by their disdainful silence, and that it had strengthened the suspicion which already pointed to Dragomir as Dan's murderer. People are always easily taken in by those who weep and wail, and are apt to feel uncomfortable in dealing with those who keep their

own counsel. Ancutza even was not much liked, chiefly because she came from another village, and her blue eyes gave her a foreign look. It had been taken very ill in Dragomir that in his own village he had found no girl to suit him, and this was generally set down as one of Sanda's misdeeds, it being supposed that she had found no one good enough, and above all no one mild and gentle enough to get on with her. All this Sanda knew quite well. That is the worst of having such sharp eyes and ears, unkind words and actions cannot escape one; and then, too, little as Sanda was given to gossip, some kind friend was always to be found to repeat the unpleasant things which she had either overheard or which had come into her own head. How often had Sanda to listen to hints of this sort—"I cannot tell you how horridly such a one speaks of you!" or, "What a pity that folks will believe so and so!"—just because not one of those who made the remarks had the courage to find fault with her to her face. They knew too well her hasty temper, her sharp tongue, and the strength of her shapely arm—that arm that had once lifted a waggon right out of the furrow in which it stuck, and out of which four oxen had been struggling to pull it in vain, in spite of the repeated blows with which they were driven to their feet each time they slipped and fell. Of her strength, indeed, marvellous stories were told, and her fearlessness had become proverbial. Dragomir would often say jokingly that he need have no fear of his house being attacked

by robbers as long as Sanda was in it! Had not, in truth, a band of robbers once made their appearance in his absence, and had not Sanda shown such cool courage and self-possession that the robber-chief, delighted, was for having her go with them—as his wife, comrade, what she would, queen of the whole band, provided she would but accompany them. Sanda had, however, declined the honour with a peculiar smile, that passed across her face like a flash of summer lightning.

"Not but that the offer tempted me a little," she said afterwards; "and were it not that I know myself to be indispensable here to my good little sister-in-law and the child, I should perhaps have gone with them. And it is no easy time they would have had with me, that is certain! I would have made them all obey me like slaves!"

But she had remembered in time that her brother might be made away with any day, either murdered himself or carried off on an accusation of murder, and then who would be there to protect the two helpless ones left behind, or to avenge his memory? Dragomir's abode was, however, safe from any further incursion of robbers from that day forth.

"What! crying again, Anca?" asked Sanda rather severely, as she entered the kitchen with her pitcher full of water.

"No, no, Sanda! I have really hardly been crying at all. But everybody tells me that Pârvu is quite furious, and is certain to do something dreadful to us.

Heavenly Father! what shall I do? what shall I do? And how am I ever to bring up my poor baby among you all, with your wild, fierce ways?"

"Leave him to me, Anca. Let me make a man of him!"

At this prospect the poor mother only wept more bitterly.

"Ah! you would teach him your own hatred and revenge, so that these horrors may never die out among you."

"Never, as long as one of either family is left alive!"

"My poor little darling! Look at him. Is he not like a lily-blossom? And I would have had him remain as pure and sweet his whole life long!"

"I would rather have him grow into a young fir-tree!"

"To be cut down before its prime!"

"To set the storm at defiance, strong like ourselves!"

"He looks just fit for heaven, with his blue eyes!" sobbed the young mother.

Sanda gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders, and went out to fetch firewood. She soon returned, laden with great boughs and branches broken off by the wind, and dragging after her one or two saplings that had been uprooted in the storm. She flung her whole burden down on the floor, making it creak under the weight, and then set to work breaking and chopping up faggots for the

fire, which was soon rekindled, and sent up a whole volley of little sparks hissing and crackling towards the smoky ceiling.

"Everything wet with the rain!" sighed Sanda. "And showers of tears indoors, too! It is too stupid! There is no proper warmth in such a fire; it does nothing but smoulder and throw out a few chilly sparks."

They formed a pretty picture at the window—the young mother sitting there with her baby in her lap, the child's tiny fists fumbling among the geranium leaves that twined about them, while Anca, lost in thought, played with the soft flaxen curls that framed the little face, like the halo round the head of a saint. Half unconsciously, she had begun crooning a song, one of the strange, wild, popular laments known under the name of Doina, a sort of plaintive and monotonous recitative in enharmonics, rude in metre, but not without a certain simple pathos of its own. It ran somewhat in this fashion:

"Green leaf of the willow tree!
Life is dark and drear to me!
Ere I left my mother's side—
Setting forth the stranger's bride—
Careless was I, blithe and gay,
Laughed and sang the livelong day!
Worn and weary, racked with fears,
Smiles have now given place to tears!
Sad and lonely here I pine;
Hear me, help me, Mother mine!
Would I ne'er had gone from thee!
What may Life still bring for me?
Green leaf of the willow tree!"

The baby cooed an accompaniment to the melancholy chant, whilst a sunbeam, stealing through a chink in the sloping wooden roof of the verandah, fell upon the fair little head like a blessing from above.

At that moment the village priest came by, and seeing Anca, paused for a moment to speak to her, leaning against the balustrade.

"This is a bad piece of work, Anca, that your husband has been up to now!"

"What has my husband been doing?"

"You must know very well what he did to the cow!"

"What cow?"

She trembled all over, and her very lips were white. The child clung to her, hiding its face in her bosom.

"Do not put on that innocent look and pretend not to know what I mean! Ah! I know you all well for the set of bandits you are!"

"And what have not the others done to us?"

"Aha! and so he did it, then, because he thought the other had set fire to his corn?" the pope chuckled complacently behind his thick beard, looking straight into the terrified eyes of the woman before him. "I tell you what it is, Anca, he will never rest, that husband of yours, until he gets himself shut up in Ocna in night and gloom, to pass the rest of his days with chains on his feet, and his head shaved, hacking the blocks of salt. Ah! it will go ill with him—very, very ill—unless you bestir yourself to

offer a few more wax-candles, and to bring somewhat better wheaten-cakes strewn with fine white sugar, and unless you have a mass said now and then to keep him from harm!"

"What good have all your masses done us?"

"Well, then, I will say prayers for you instead—the prayers that shall make Pârvu wither and waste away."

"Did not you say masses for him too, to make my husband pine and sicken?"

"But you have only to offer a bigger candle than his, that your mass may have more effect!"

"I cannot do so any longer; we are too poor now."

"Then I am sorry for you. In that case there is certainly no help for it, and your husband will find himself sent to Ocna before long."

And with much shaking of the head, the pope took his leave.

"And what has the priest—ill-looking vampire that he is—been telling you, Anca?"

"He has been telling me that Dragomir will certainly be sent to Ocna, unless—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless we have some masses said."

"I thought as much! Well, and what did you say?"

"I said we had no money left to pay for them."

"You said that?—you really said that? Now he will go about speaking ill of us to everyone!"

"But, Sanda, did you not tell me yourself that I must not give away another para?"

"All the same, it would have been worth while now. You might have offered him your ear-rings for his wife."

"Yes, yes, Sanda. I will take them to him at once."

"No; not at once, Anca. What a dear little simpleton it is!"

"He already knew about the cow."

"Of course he did! Pârvu had called the whole village together in no time, raging and swearing, and heaping insults on me before them all."

"On you, Sanda? Ah, you never told me that!"

"Why should I? It is of no consequence. I paid him back."

"Ah! your pride will soon be taken down," said a harsh voice, breaking in upon their conversation, and startling them both.

It was the village notary, a disagreeable-looking fellow, with round, staring eyes like a frog, and spectacles on his big nose.

"I have come to see if two pieces of cow-hide are to be found here, which have been unlawfully abstracted from their rightful owner."

"And where did you happen to be, then," asked Sanda, "whilst our property was being destroyed by the flames?"

"Ah! I was unfortunately absent just then—called away to town on business."

"Then I advise you, for your own sake, to be called away again before my brother returns, so that he may not find you here, prying about in his house with that long nose of yours! Though you may have a good look round, for the matter of that, if you care to do so!"

She knew that he would nowhere find the strips of cow-hide; she herself had put them in a place of safety, and had even already begun tanning them.

"Well, I will wish you good-day, and you can tell your brother from me that he had best be careful how he puts himself within reach of justice."

"Justice we shall always know how to procure for ourselves!" muttered Sanda between her closed teeth.

Not long after this, she set out on foot for a place at some little distance, to which she was accustomed to take her poultry for sale. She had chosen several of her best chickens, and was carrying them, according to the barbarous custom of the country, with their legs tied together, slung head downwards from a pole across her shoulders. It was a hot summer's day, and the pollen from the flowering grasses flew up in clouds of fine dust as she passed along, the crests of the poor, panting fowls looking like red poppies dangling over the blossoming fields. Till now Sanda had always ridden on these expeditions, with the chickens hanging at her saddle-bow; but Dragomir had the one horse with him, and the other they had been obliged to sell.

With buoyant step she sped along through the blazing sunshine, the glossy brown plumage of the young birds taking a tint of burnished gold, whilst her own white smock showed from afar like a luminous spot moving across the landscape. The whole atmosphere had that peculiar yellow glare only to be seen in the East, as if the sunbeams had been powdered fine and dispersed throughout it, while just above the horizon it vibrated in a whitish haze, like the exhalations from a lime-kiln. The chirping of the grasshoppers was almost deafening; it sounded as if they were trying to drown the croaking of the frogs.

Sanda made haste to reach the wood, that looked so inviting, stretching alongside the river with its cool shade, and with here and there the trunk of a fallen tree lying picturesquely athwart the others, or crumbling and decaying upon the ground among the thick, soft moss, that was so pleasant to the tread of bare feet. The thick carpet of moss prevented the girl from hearing the swift footsteps that were following hers. It was Pârvu, who had taken off his shoes so as to tread noiselessly, and who came hurrying along between the trees as stealthily as a huntsman in pursuit of game. Suddenly Sanda heard a quick, short breathing close behind her, and before she had time to look round a sharp blow in the bend of the knee brought her to the ground, and Pârvu was kneeling on her back to hold her down. He drew a knife from

his belt. Sanda saw the gleam of the bright steel, and felt sure it meant her death. Then she felt his fingers sweep over the heavy braids of hair which coiled round and round her head, and the next moment he was brandishing them on high; he had cut them off close to the neck. Speechless with rage for a time, he shook them in her face, white as a sheet.

"So I am too weak to master you, my fine lady!" he gasped out at last. "Shame for shame! We are quits now, for you might as well have lost your honour as your hair. You will not dare to show yourself again, but must hide at home, and can sharpen your tongue there! You shameless thing! you little devil!" And with every word he swished the long tresses through the air, lashing her face with them.

However much she might twist and turn, he did not let her go till his own arm was tired out, and she lay still, with her face buried in the moss, as though she were dead. Then Pârvu got up, and the blood streamed back once more into his cheeks and lips. Sanda sprang to her feet too, and he stood his ground firmly, awaiting her, for he fully expected she would fly at him like a young tigress.

But instead she leant against a tree, hiding her face in one of her wide white sleeves, and burst out crying like a child. At this he was utterly discomfited, and stood there looking as foolish as a schoolboy taken in fault. He kept glancing first

at the magnificent black tresses which had untwisted in his grasp, and then at the yellow kerchief which he had torn off and flung down upon the moss, where it lay with a sunbeam playing over it, and the light shadows of the quivering beech-leaves dancing up and down. Then he noticed how a little water-wagtail came hopping along, holding its head on one side as it gravely contemplated the poor fowls lying there in such pitiful plight, for all the splendour of their proud red crests. And the beautiful girl went on sobbing convulsively, as though her pride and strength were utterly broken down, and all her joy in life gone from her for ever. And Pârvu stood still looking at her, and saw how beautiful she was, and he felt a strange thrill come from the long black locks he held in his hand, and steal up his arm right into his bosom, so that it caught his breath. He felt himself to be quite contemptible—a poor, miserable creature. All the hatred in his heart was suddenly extinguished; he had completely forgotten his anger. He saw now that he had acted like a coward, attacking a poor weak girl, and he knew that he could never make up for the injury he had done her, though he would have given all he possessed in the world for the power to conjure back the beautiful hair on to her head again. He had expected anything but this; he had looked to find a little fury—ready to plunge a knife into his heart, to fly at him with tooth and nail—anything on earth except just this bitter

crying, which completely unmanned him. At last she lifted her head, snatched her kerchief from the ground, tied it close round her face, so that it came right down over her eyes, and plunged into the wood as fast as her feet could carry her, without a word or a glance.

And Pârvu was left standing there, looking irresolutely at the coil of hair which his fingers still held fast, wondering what to do with it. Should he leave it there on the ground, or fling it away into the river? At last he made up his mind, rolled it together, and thrust it into his shirt-front. Then he sauntered back to the village, trying to take a quite unconcerned air. But the thick soft tresses were lying close to his heart, and seemed to twine themselves about it in all their youthful grace and charm, penetrating it like a mute caress. When he reached his home he opened an old wooden chest in which he kept his few possessions, emptied it out so as to place the hair carefully at the bottom, and then laid all the other things back in their place, and after this, having turned the key, carried it away with him—a thing he had never done in his life before, since he had nothing of sufficient value to be worth locking up.

The sun was sinking rapidly, and looked like a great fiery eye peeping between the tall tree trunks, when Sanda came gliding through them as timidly as a hunted fawn, making her way back to the spot where her poor chickens were lying with their beaks wide open, almost spent with thirst. She gathered

a big leaf, filled it with water from the stream, and let it drip slowly on to the dry, parched tongues, till the poor creatures revived a little. Then she took the load upon her shoulders again, and set out once more, stepping out firmly, but casting an anxious glance behind her from time to time. She left her poultry with a woman on whom she knew she could rely, to take it for her to market next morning before sunrise.

On her homeward way Sanda stopped to bathe face, hands, and feet in the running stream. The delicious coolness of the water refreshed her burning eyelids, the crystal drops clinging to her long lashes, and glistening like dewdrops in the grass. By the time she reached the wood it was already enveloped in darkness. That was a relief to her. She was certain of not being seen by anyone. She stopped at the spot that had been the scene of the struggle and of her enemy's shameful triumph, and sat down upon an old tree stump to think it all over.

And then suddenly it occurred to her that Pârvu —a man and her sworn enemy—had seen her cry. Up to that moment none could boast of ever having forced a tear from her? Was she not stronger than any of the lads? Had she not held her own against the robbers? And now she had cried like a child, and in the sight of whom? Such a burning flush came into her cheeks at the thought, she quickly loosened her kerchief, and finally took it right off, to let the air get to them. She had even to untie

the fastening at the neck of her chemise, for the veins in her throat were so swollen she felt as if they would burst.

Why had she not strangled, stabbed, torn him to pieces? Had he not acted infamously towards her, putting on her the worst insult he could devise? and she—who had ever gone about with thoughts of revenge—she had found nothing better to do than just to burst out crying like any weak, foolish girl, and then to take flight as if in terror of him! She ran her fingers angrily through the short thick meshes of hair which fell in disorder over her eyes, and, strange to say, she experienced an almost pleasurable sensation in being able to shake out her locks as a young colt shakes its mane. It was as if she had been turned into a boy, as if she could venture to be all the more wild and daring now that she was no longer reminded of her womanhood by the long heavy tresses. But in the midst of this half-exultant sensation of freedom, Pârvu's image kept rising before her as that of the first who had ever been able to subdue, to master her—stronger, bolder than herself—one who could ill-use her and make her weep. She had not cast a single glance towards him as she fled—not one; she had resolutely turned her eyes away, and yet she had seen him distinctly, standing there with dazed eyes, holding the trophy in his hand. Again the blood suffused her cheeks. What had become of her hair? she wondered. He had probably thrown it away into

the Olto. If only she had torn it from his grasp! What could have possessed her to leave it to him like that? She sat leaning forward with her elbows resting on her knees, with her fingers plunged among the short, loose locks of hair, whilst she tried to collect her thoughts. Every minute night sank deeper and deeper upon the wood, and there was a silence so intense, it was as if the myriads of living creatures it contained were all hushed in the sleep of death.

A slight shudder passed through Sanda's frame as she remembered the relentless grasp that had pinioned her but a short while since, and the iron fingers that had torn down her braids, the touch of the cold steel upon her neck—the moment of horrible expectation of death.

How completely her enemy had her at his mercy at that moment. He might easily have killed her had he pleased; there was nothing to prevent it. Ah, if he had but done so! Better death than disgrace. Better, a thousand times better be dead than live on, shamed and humiliated thus. And yet—she must own it herself—it was sweet to be still alive, to feel her heart beat, and the warm blood course through her veins, and to draw her breath freely, instead of lying there cold and stiff and motionless. If only he had not made her feel as though he had spared her life, as though she owed it to him — the robber, the thief! Again she shivered as though she once more felt the sharp blade

graze her neck. She put her hand to the place to make sure that there was really not the slightest wound. Again she heard the grating sound of the knife as it passed through her hair. Again she felt the singing in her ears, the stifling, choking sensation she had as he knelt upon her. Again she felt the sharp, stinging cuts of her own hair upon her cheeks, as he slashed it in her face. And after that he had looked on quite quietly while she cried her eyes out. Why had he not mocked and jeered at her? she wondered. Why had he not gone on triumphing over her? Why had he not exulted to see his vengeance so complete? Her fingers clutched spasmodically at her dishevelled locks as she pondered these things. All the time she seemed to see Pârvu standing there, stupefied and perplexed, staring at her with wide-open eyes; and each time she recalled his gaze, wave after wave of blood shot into her cheeks. She would always feel ashamed to meet him after this, and would feel obliged to lower her eyes before his. But no, there was no danger that they would ever meet, since she could no longer go out, could not let herself be seen anywhere.

The dead silence continued, and the darkness deepened every minute. All at once Sanda, looking up, perceived that it was no longer possible to distinguish one tree from another, or to see the clearings anywhere, and she realised that there was nothing to be done but await quietly the first glimmer of dawn in order to find her way home. And somehow, the

time did not seem long, although she kept on thinking the same thing over and over again. At times she felt as if a hundred pulses were beating simultaneously in her hands and feet, at her throat and at her heart; then they would all stop at once, and she would try to be perfectly cool and calm, so as to think out some plan of revenge. But with that she could not succeed at all; it was as if her will were paralysed, as if her own thoughts and wishes were no longer under her control. What was it that had come to her, that she could not even rightly desire her enemy's punishment? Ah, it was doubtless an evil spell cast over her by her own hair, that would give him power over her as long as it remained in his possession. But had he kept it, then? Why should she feel so sure that he had kept it? Was it only because he had not thrown it away at once? But what was there to prevent him from having flung it away immediately afterwards, and then it would be used by the ravens in building their nests. Ah! that, too, was a horrid idea! She would almost prefer that her beautiful braids should remain in his keeping, than that the ravens should pluck at them as if she were already dead, and were being torn to pieces by wild beasts and birds. And again her tears began to flow, she scarce knew why, but she wept softly to herself for a long time.

Suddenly she was startled by hearing a cock crow in the distance. Was it possible? Could the night have passed so quickly? Yes, there were actually

the trunks of the trees beginning to be visible. She jumped up, tied her kerchief close round her head again, and set off towards the village, as fast as ever the dim light would allow.

Again the cock crowed, and a chilly greyish haze rose from the earth and gradually spread itself over the whole sky, at last reaching to the zenith, where some few stars still twinkled faintly. As Sanda entered the house, she found her brother standing in the doorway, with an angry scowl on his face.

"Since when have you taken to running about the country alone at night?" he asked her roughly.

"Since I have no longer been able to show myself by day," was the curt reply, as she threw off her kerchief and tossed her head.

A savage curse broke from Dragomir's lips. No need to ask whose work this was.

"Find out some way to avenge me!" said Sanda, disappearing into the kitchen, and letting the door close with a bang.

Dragomir stood for an instant looking after her, but soon went out to escape the sound of Anca's querulous complaints—to avoid, too, the sight of his pretty sister's cruel disfigurement. Sanda herself, however, cut all superfluous commiseration short.

"There is nothing to be done," she said. "We must just make up our minds to it that for the present I stay in and do the housework, while you run all the errands; for let myself be seen like this I neither can nor will!"

And speaking thus, she set to work with greater energy than ever, taking the business of weaving entirely out of her sister-in-law's hands. The latter had instead to fetch water and whatever else might be required, and also to occupy herself with the sale of the woven material.

Dragomir prowled about, bent on revenge. But it soon became apparent to him that he was shunned by everyone, that every little knot of gossiping villagers dispersed at his approach, that he obtained but the curtest answers from those whom he addressed, and that none accosted him of their own accord. Pârvu had won the whole village over to his side, an easy task to one known to be so well-to-do, and with so great a reputation for book-learning. Dragomir's exasperation became uncontrollable.

"Shall I set his house on fire, Sanda?" he asked.

"It would be useless, for they would build it up again for him in no time. It is the school-house as well."

"How would it be if I lamed his horse for him?"

"He would buy another directly; he is rich enough."

"Let me put a bullet through him, then!"

"To be sent to Ocna yourself afterwards? That is not to be thought off."

"What do you say to destroying his field of rape? I will burn up the whole crop!"

"Of what use, if you left the maize standing. He has enough and to spare!"

Dragomir saw that there was no possibility of hitting on any plan of vengeance which should satisfy Sanda. She had always some objection to offer to everything he proposed; was however equally unable to make any available suggestion herself when called upon to do so.

She had broken to pieces and trampled underfoot the one little scrap of looking-glass she possessed, after catching sight of her own reflection in it; the short unmanageable black locks, standing out round the pale face, with its dark eyes and strongly-marked eyebrows, gave her a Medusa-like aspect, from which she herself shrank. Perhaps, too, she may have thought that in destroying the looking-glass she could at the same time silence the uncomfortable accusing voice within her own breast—that voice which was always reminding her of her wrongs, and inquiring if her indignation were really as great as it ought to be. Often in the midst of her work she might suddenly be seen to stop and stand still, dreaming, with her eyes fixed on vacancy. Then she would rouse herself with a start, and set to work again harder than before.

"Ancutza," said Dragomir to his wife one evening, "Pârvu is too much for me. He has set everyone against me; I am shunned and avoided by all. It is useless to struggle against it, for I cannot make a penny in any way, and things will only go worse with us from day to day. So there is nothing for me to do but to leave the place and go and seek work

elsewhere, till things have quieted down a little."

"And what are we to do?" she asked.

"For the present you must stay on quietly here, and look after our belongings."

Anca sighed; she had reached such an anxious, nervous stage, she scarcely knew whether a change of any sort could be for the better or the worse. All her youthful buoyancy had deserted her, and she was never happy now except when sitting with her baby on her knee, listening to its innocent prattle. But even then her tone and manner were full of a gentle and resigned sadness, and nothing alarmed her so much as the father's violent explosions of tenderness towards the little one. She would even tremble to see Sanda snatch her darling up in her arms, and smother it with kisses, ready the next moment, if it cried, to push it from her contemptuously with the words: "Ah, he will never be one of us; he will turn out mamaliga—his mother's own child!"[1]

As Dragomir was passing through the village one day, a stone was suddenly aimed at him by an unseen hand, and before he could look round he was assailed by a perfect volley flung by the children, just then on their way home from school. Dragomir picked up the stones and flung them back at his youthful assailants, with such good aim that they fled

[1] Mamaliga, here equivalent to milksop. It is a sort of maize porridge, the national polenta and staple food of the Roumanian peasantry.

shrieking and howling in all directions, one boy with a big hole in his head, while another had lost an eye, and a little girl had her ankle fractured. Dragomir's hand was not accustomed to miss its mark. But there was a tremendous outcry and perfect storm of indignation against him in consequence. The parents went to lodge their complaints with the notary, demanding compensation for the damage done to their offspring. And as he refused to pay, they seized almost all he possessed. He was literally like a wild animal that is being hunted down.

"Sanda," he said at last, "you are braver and stronger than many a man. I confide my wife and child to you. I must go! It will be better for the rest of you when I am no longer here. And you shall not remain unavenged, I promise you that. But for the moment there are too many of them against me. It is the work of that damned schoolmaster fellow; he has succeeded only too well! There is no help for it; I must be gone."

Sanda nodded her head without speaking, and held out her arms to take the baby from him. Anca had run into the house so as not to see him depart.

Pârvu twisted his mustaches and smiled to himself when he heard that Dragomir had disappeared from the village. It had been a constant matter of surprise to him that the vengeance he was expecting should be so long delayed. He was always going to the chest in which he kept his prize —the beautiful stolen tresses—and would open it to

look in and stroke them gently, to make sure that they were safe. Often he felt inclined to throw them away, so as to free himself from the spell they had cast over him ; but there was such a strange, incomprehensible sweetness in that evil spell, he had not the strength of mind to make a real effort to shake it off. Whenever he thought of the vengeance that must so surely overtake him, he would laugh quietly to himself, and give the hair a little pat, and as he did so he would see the whole picture plainly once more—the beautiful girl leaning against the tree crying so bitterly—and then so wild and passionate a longing to behold her would come over him, it was just as if strong chains were dragging him towards her. He had felt so proud of his achievement in humbling, and insulting, and ill-treating the handsomest and proudest maiden in all the countryside. He had persuaded himself it was quite a fine and manly action he was bent on ; and now that it was all over he only felt most unutterably ashamed, and had the perpetual longing to take her in his arms, and soothe and comfort her as one does a poor hurt child.

The holidays came as a boon alike to teacher and scholars in the sultry midsummer heat. Both at sheep-shearing and at hay-making Sanda was missing ; Anca took her place, but was neither so active nor so skilful at the work. Anca might well be tired ; she sat up night after night, always listening and hoping for her husband's return. And

he did come, many a time, riding without saddle and bridle at full gallop through the pale moonlight, to look after his pretty little wife, of whom he was as madly jealous as any Turk, and who had often seen his heavy whip raised against her, simply because he had taken it into his head her eyes had strayed for a moment from him. But that she took to be a perfectly natural and justifiable proceeding on his part. Had not her own sister complained bitterly of the good-looking and good-tempered young peasant whose wife she was, even petitioning the nobleman on whose land they lived to grant her a divorce, on the ground that her husband in three years of marriage had never once beaten her.

"He does not care for me," she kept repeating. "He is not jealous. I will not stay with him."

The great man had listened patiently, though with a suppressed smile, to the story of her wrongs; then taking the over-gentle husband aside, he tried to make him see wherein lay his mistake.

"Take her by the hair, man, and give her a good thrashing without more ado, since nothing else will content her!"

"Alas, sir! she is too pretty, and I am too fond of her. I could not find it in my heart to lay a finger on her!"

Anca could be quite satisfied as to the sincerity of her lord and master's attachment; she had felt the weight of his hand often enough, and she knew her

life would be but of short purchase should he ever find her in fault.

On one of these moonlight nights, Dragomir, coming along at his usual breakneck pace, took it into his head to pull up at some little distance from the house, and tying his horse to a tree, made his way barefoot through the brushwood, in order to take his little family completely by surprise. But what was his astonishment to see another individual also creeping stealthily round the dwelling. Rage and apprehension filled his heart, and his hand at once sought the dagger in his belt. With cautious steps and flashing eyes he drew a little closer; then he recognised the man: it was Pârvu! Pârvu? What could he be doing here, wandering like a thief at dead of night on Dragomir's land? Had he come to set his house on fire, to murder his child, to rob him of his wife? It could be nothing good that brought him thus to his enemy's door. Ah! what was he doing now? Standing just below the little kitchen window, and tapping very gently on the pane.

"Sanda!" he called in a low voice; "Sanda, hear me!" Then he stood still, waiting, and Dragomir waited too. "Sanda! I will do you no harm! Only listen to me a moment!"

The lattice sprang open with a click, and Sanda appeared framed in the window. The moonlight fell full upon her as she stood there with flushed cheeks and tumbled hair, just like a child roused out of its first sleep.

"What do you want of me?" she asked, in tones that vainly tried to assume indifference, for her voice trembled, and her breath came quick and short.

"I want your forgiveness!"

Sanda gave a hard little laugh.

"Since when has that word come into use between us? It is quite unknown in our dealings."

"Sanda! I can no longer rest, I can no longer sleep! You have bewitched me with your hair!"

"Then give it back to me!"

"Oho! give it back to you? Never! never! I have carried it off; it is mine!"

"As much as stolen property can ever be said to belong to the thief!"

"But it would be no good to you if I did bring you back your plaits again."

"Yes; I could fasten them on, and go to the dance once more, instead of being obliged to stay at home, hiding away from the daylight, like an owl."

"Then I will keep them sure enough. You shall not have the chance of showing yourself at the Hora again; you are far too pretty for that! It is better for you to stay indoors, where none can see you."

In his hiding-place Dragomir screwed his lips together, as if about to give forth a prolonged whistle, and his nostrils quivered in a diabolical sneer as he muttered:

"Ah! I have you at last! You are quite lost now!"

Sanda gave a quick sidelong glance at Pârvu.

"Since when have you taken upon yourself to give me orders?" she asked defiantly.

"Since I gained the mastery over you, Sanda. You have fallen into my power. It is useless for you to resist."

She tried to close the window hastily, but he had thrust his arm into the opening and intercepted her movement.

"No good, little hot-head! I mean to stay here just as long as it pleases me."

"Unless my brother should happen to see you!" she retorted."

Pârvu laughed. "Ah, you think I must needs be as much afraid of your brother as you are of me!"

"I am not afraid of you, not the least in the world."

"Then why do you tremble so? Why is your heart beating so violently that the pulses throb in your throat, and the folds across your bosom rise and fall?"

"Because I have not yet had my revenge."

Dragomir smiled to himself in his place of concealment. "You shall be thoroughly avenged as soon as you have him completely in your toils."

Pârvu had suddenly become quite serious.

"You are already avenged, if only you knew it," he said very softly.

"Hush!" exclaimed Sanda. "What was that noise?"

"A bat or an owl."

"No, it was like someone drawing a deep breath and laughing."

"It was the cooing of the wood-pigeons. Why, Sanda has grown timid! Who would have thought it! How long has that been?"

"Ever since I lost my hair."

"It will grow again, like the young grass!"

He put out his hand to take hold of the short, thick locks, but she eluded his grasp.

"Ah, if I were but a man!"

"And what would you do then?"

"I would stab you!"

"You would? Well, here is my knife! Stab me, then!"

He put the broad blade into her hand. Sanda stood still and looked at it, glistening in the moonlight; then she turned her eyes once more on Pârvu, who had not changed his position, but remained with his arm resting on the window-sill, quietly awaiting what she might do.

"I am only a woman, after all!" she sighed, shutting the knife and handing it back to him.

"Sanda, Sanda! where are you?" called Anca's voice from within; and Sanda disappeared like the wind.

Pârvu remained a few minutes longer leaning on the narrow window-ledge, lost in thought. Once or twice he sighed deeply, and then smiled. He did not see the dangerous glitter in the eyes that were

watching him from out the bushes close at hand; he saw nothing but the glorious young creature, with whom he was so madly, so desperately in love. He felt as if it would have given him pleasure to be stabbed by her, for then she must have come near enough for him to take her in his arms and kiss her, and go on kissing her as long as a drop of blood were in his veins. And why had she not plunged the knife into his breast when he gave it her? Could it be that she was really in his power? All his senses were aflame at the thought, and his heart beat so wildly it was almost more than he could bear. Very gently he at last closed the little lattice, and walked away as if he trod on air.

It was a bad dream that had disturbed Anca's rest, making her call out, and it took Sanda some time to calm her and soothe her to sleep again. When all was quiet she went back to her kitchen. After a time she opened the window, and leant out into the night. Was it fancy, or did she really hear the tramp of a horse's hoofs dying away in the distance, quite drowned at last in the sound of the rushing stream? With her cheek resting on her hand, she recalled all that had just taken place, trying to analyse her own sensations at the moment when Pârvu had stood there quietly awaiting his death-blow at her hand. What was it had held her back? What was it had stilled the thirst of vengeance in her? Like clouds driving across the face of the moon, one thought chased the other

rapidly through her brain, till a sort of shudder came over her, and putting it down to the chilliness of the night, she shut the window hastily and lay down on the bench, where, as a rule, she would instantly fall asleep.

But this night sleep would not come. She turned and tossed about from side to side, restless and feverish. The room was so unbearably hot, she felt as if she would be suffocated. So she rose very quietly and crept out of the house. She wandered towards the river and sat down on the brink. The trout sparkled like silver as they leapt in the moonshine, and the wavelets danced swiftly past with their crests of foam. Sanda watched them draw near and break one by one against the selfsame rock. It seemed to her as if she were herself just such a wave, and as if Pârvu were the rock against which she had been dashed to pieces, whilst she had thought to sweep him like a loose pebble from her path. She pulled the hair over her eyes and then pushed it back from them again. How calmly he had stood there when he put his life in her hand, bidding her work her will, but with so lordly a tone and bearing, she had actually trembled before him, like a child! How could she have been so silly? At the time when he attacked her with such furious words on her way to the well, she had not felt in the least afraid; on the contrary, it was nothing but contempt she felt for him then. This made her remember the cow, on which Dragomir had inflicted

such brutal wounds that Pârvu had been obliged to have the poor creature slaughtered, and a feeling of compassion stole over her, quite a new and strange emotion of mingled pity and sadness, which she had never experienced before, and had never been able to comprehend in others. And she thought of Pârvu himself, and remembered what he must have suffered when he found his young brother dead. What had he felt? What had he done? Had he wept and groaned and torn his hair? Had he taken the dead boy in his arms, she wondered, calling him by name? All at once she felt as if she could no longer be so fond of her own brother, for having deprived Pârvu of the one he loved so well. . . . Ah! that was too frightful a revenge to take for the burning of a barn! . . . Sanda felt a lump rise in her throat, and her long lashes were quite moist. She started up, passed her hand across her eyes, and wandered on, to try and escape from her own thoughts.

But the thoughts pursued her, and would leave her no peace, mocking at her and tormenting her, and they were altogether such bad, troublesome thoughts that she was fain to shake the hair over her eyes again, so as to prevent the moon from reading what was passing there.

"Ha! ha! Sanda! Plucked gosling! Unfledged sparrow!" shouted some rude children after her one morning, when she happened to make her appearance later than usual at the well, to which she was accustomed to come before sunrise. (That was the worst

of those tiresome thoughts, they hindered her at her work, and made her lose time over everything!) The blood came into her cheeks, but like a big mastiff surrounded by a pack of yelping curs, she walked on without turning her head to the right or to the left. The throng of her tormentors, however, increased every minute, and the noise became deafening, like the roar of a torrent swollen by the rain. "Is the chicken ready for roasting? What has become of your wool, poor dear little lambkin? Shaven and shorn! Aha! little fledgling! so its wings have been cropped!"

Such were the compliments that were showered upon her. But all at once they ceased. For like the archangel with the flaming sword, Pârvu, armed with a long switch, stood suddenly in the midst of the little mob of jeering youngsters, and dealt such vigorous blows on all sides, they fled like chaff before the wind.

"Poor girl!" he murmured very softly, unconscious of the innumerable inquisitive little eyes that were peeping and peering through every hedge and paling.

The children had felt so sure that they could not do anything that would better please their master than to be rude to Sanda. And now he did not seem pleased after all! What did it mean?

"The little wretches!" he began again.

"Your own doing!" she said, in a low voice.

"Will you let me go with you a short way, to prevent them from setting on you again?"

"Thanks, I prefer to go alone; and as for their noise, I do not mind it at all," she answered curtly; and she walked swiftly away, leaving Pârvu rooted to the spot, gazing helplessly after her receding form.

She did indeed look the picture of disdain, but she had still a singing in her ears, and they had flushed rosy red. The children were so utterly amazed they could not take their eyes off the two figures, but kept looking from one to the other, as the distance widened between them.

"Only think, he wanted to go with her!" remarked one girl to her companions, with a mysterious air.

"And she would be glad enough to have him do so," said a lad who had stolen up behind them unperceived, startling them, and sending them off into fits of laughter.

Once more Dragomir came like a ghost at dead of night, galloping furiously through the darkness. This time he was able to observe how his sister came out of the house when Pârvu tapped at her window-pane. He saw, too, how the young man put his arm round her waist, and that she offered no resistance. At this Dragomir bit his own fingers so hard that the marks of the teeth were left in them, but he stifled the curse that rose to his lips, and held his breath to try and hear what they might say. And they wandered past him, on into the woods, talking in soft, low tones, as lovers are wont. Dragomir's fingers closed on the knife at his belt. He would have liked to spring upon them like a

tiger, and plant the blade between Pârvu's shoulders, but he bethought himself that there was no need for haste; his prey was safe—he had but to let it run a little to spin out the pleasure of the chase—he could follow it up when he pleased; it could not possibly escape him! So he would let them go for a time—leave them to dally and fondle to their heart's content—and he, Dragomir, would be always on their track with his eyes wide open, letting his vengeance ripen, and gloating over it in imagination already for days and weeks in advance. A positive thrill of pleasure ran through his veins as he pictured to himself the delicious moment when he would at last wreak upon his victim his long-pent-up hate and rage; not for worlds would he have cut that enjoyment short, for when it was once over, and his enemy dead and gone, he knew quite well that the chief pleasure would be gone out of his life too, and that it would be but a very dull and tedious business from henceforth. But there would still be the satisfaction of torturing his sister to death afterwards, quite slowly; he would invent such refined and exquisite cruelties to punish her as only a vindictive spirit like his own could possibly devise!

Listless and languid, Sanda went about her accustomed tasks. She spoke little, and Anca's words often conveyed no meaning to her; she heard them, but had only a disagreeable impression, as of a disturbing sound falling into the midst of that ocean of new thought and sensation in

which she now dwelt; and they were the more disturbing because they generally took the form of complaint.

"Oh! why does he not come back?" was their constant refrain.

"He will come soon enough, never fear!" Sanda would sometimes reply irritably.

"Sanda!" exclaimed Anca, with her eyes opened to their full extent, "I have such horrible dreams! If that dreadful Pârvu should have killed my husband! Oh, Sanda, I could not bear it!"

"And supposing you could not bear it, what then?" said Sanda, in so cold and impassible a tone that the other was still more frightened.

She seized her sister-in-law by the arm and shook her.

"Oh, Sanda, you are keeping something from me! My husband is dead, and you know it!"

"No, he is not dead, and there is no danger that he will be stabbed by anyone."

"How can you know that?"

"I do know it."

And no entreaties could obtain a word more from her; she remained like a sphinx, cold and impenetrable, with her great weary eyes staring straight before her. Everything had become indifferent to her—her brother, his wife and child—everything! Those dreadful thoughts were always there, night and day, racking her heart and brain, and she would sit on the ground for hours together, her head bent

forward and her hands clasping her knees, in the vain attempt not to give way to them. Never in her life had she had such hard work as now, when she did not work. And then Anca would call to her to say that if she remained idle like that they would soon all of them starve. And she would get up slowly, without a word, and go back to her spinning-wheel or her loom, and work on silently for hours with the same fixed look on her face. It frightened Anca to see her thus, and the poor little soul shed many helpless tears in her distress. Once or twice she had tried to rouse Sanda by bringing the baby, and putting him gently on her lap to distract her thoughts; but the girl then started up with a look of horror and pushed the child away, running out into the woods. She ran all the way by the riverside till she reached a very dilapidated little hut, quite overgrown with moss, in which dwelt a most witch-like old woman—a fortune-teller and interpretess of dreams, who was also a great adept at the brewing of love-philtres, and many other philtres besides. What took place there no one ever knew, for no one was very fond of speaking of their visits to the old sorceress.

Anca could not help noticing how extraordinarily pale Sanda looked, and timidly asked if she felt ill.

"Ill? No; why should I? I am perfectly well."

"What makes you so pale, then?"

"It is because I do not paint my cheeks like the other girls."

"If you would only tell me what makes you so sad, perhaps I could help you?"

"I should like to see how you would be able to help anyone. You have not brains enough to help yourself!"

"You are all of you so much cleverer than I am—I know that; but it does not seem to me that your cleverness has brought you much happiness."

"Our happiness is perhaps of rather a strange kind. It is like the storm-wind that breaks down the forest trees as it goes past."

And so the weeks went on, and Dragomir still bided his time. One evening the lovers were standing quite close beside his hiding-place.

"Pârvu! I am afraid!" he heard his proud sister say.

"Afraid?—of what, little one? Am I not here?"

"It is for you I am afraid, not for myself. My brother keeps so quiet, one hears nothing of him. If he should ever come upon us—"

"The forest is big enough, and the night pitch dark."

"But Dragomir is like a lynx; he has eyes that see through the darkness, and he can come along so stealthily."

"I am strong and well-armed."

"He will find you out in some moment when you are off your guard. Oh, I cannot go on like this!

I shall die of fear. For weeks I have not slept, not closed my eyes for a minute. It is as if my eyelids had grown so stiff and dry, that I cannot shut them any more. And I want to sleep so badly—oh, so badly!"

She said all this like a tired child, nestling closer to Pârvu, who pressed her passionately to his breast. Dragomir ground his teeth.

"Then let us go away from here," said Pârvu at last.

"Yes, yes, away from here—right away, as far as possible. Let us go over the border, into another country, where no one knows us, no one can ever find us more."

The words poured from her lips in feverish haste, and she clung to her lover's neck as though to save herself from drowning.

"On Sunday night I will be with my horse beside the well. Then we will fly together, and by cock-crow we shall be far away in the mountains, and over the frontier before dawn."

Sanda gave a deep sigh of relief.

"And then I shall never be frightened again, never any more. Ah, you cannot tell, Pârvu, what a terrible thing Fear is—like some dragon, some horrible monster, that seizes upon you, and then lets you go again, and you feel the icy shudder to the very roots of your hair when at last the dragon has you by the throat. . . ."

Pârvu smiled.

"No, I have certainly never known what it is to feel like that, for I have never been afraid."

And the eyes of his mortal enemy, lowering close behind him in the darkness, flashed hatred at him as he spoke.

Anca had latterly complained of feeling ill, and had to take to her bed. Sanda nursed her devotedly night and day, in despair to see she grew no better. She confided her misgivings to her lover—her reluctance to leave the sick woman alone.

"What then! Are there not neighbours enough at hand? Leave her to take her chance. It will only serve your brother right."

So Sanda went to a neighbour to ask her help.

"My sister-in-law has the fever so badly, and I have sat up with her so many nights, I am quite worn out myself. Will you take my place for this one night, and let me come and sleep here?"

"Willingly," replied the woman. "And what will you give me in return?"

"You shall have our young goat," said Sanda. "And if you will watch her for several nights, then a piece of new-spun linen as well."

"Throw your red silk kerchief into the bargain, and I will look after her for a whole week."

"Agreed," said Sanda, taking off the coveted object—which had been a present from Pârvu—and handing it to the woman. The latter was only too delighted that Sanda should have let herself be overreached so easily, but kept her satisfaction to herself,

and also kept to herself her astonishment at the girl's altered appearance—her face so pinched and drawn, with hollow cheeks, and sunken eyes with such dark circles round them, and the lids so heavy and swollen—well, it might be from the sitting up at night, if the story were true!

It was a mild, calm night. Showers of meteors shot across the sky, and the glow-worms held their revels on the earth below. It looked as if there were tiny bonfires lighting up the grass, as if there were fireworks blazing in the air. But there was perfect silence both in heaven and earth, although so full of movement and splendour, of the drama of love and death. And who knows but that the shooting stars themselves may be merely lovers, hastening to meet in an eternal embrace!

Pârvu was standing waiting by the well-side with his horse's bridle in his hand, when Sanda came tripping lightly through the grass. A firefly had settled on her hair, caught in the folds of the coloured kerchief, where it sparkled and shone as does the ray of a lamp in a gloomy cell. In spite of the warmth of the night, she was shivering as in an ague-fit, and the hand her lover clasped was cold as ice.

"You are not sorry to go with me?" he questioned earnestly.

"Sorry? Ah, no, no! But I cannot shake off my fears. Look at those falling stars! Perhaps our star is one of them! And listen to the rushing of the

Olto! The waves have such an angry sound; it is as if they were calling for a victim!"

"Foolish child! Do not let me hear those idle tales. One no longer pays any heed to them when one has learnt to read in books. It is a pity that you cannot see the light that is burning on your own forehead, and that makes you yourself resemble a wandering star!"

"A light? Good God! A light to burn my brain!"

"Nay, dear one, see! It was nothing but this!" and he took the poor firefly and crushed it in his fingers, extinguishing its light. "Come, you are not yourself to-day! There is no talking reason with you," he went on in a graver tone, seeing that she still held her hands before her eyes, and without a word more he took her round the waist as if she had been a baby and swung her on to the horse. Already at starting the animal stumbled, and then stood stockstill.

"See, see!" cried Sanda, "that bodes misfortune!"

But an ugly expression had come into Pârvu's face, and with an oath he brought his whip down so furiously that the horse bounded madly forward, while a deep red mark was left on its flank.

Sanda sat, as was the country fashion, astride in the saddle, and her seat was firm. Very cautiously they skirted the slumbering village, so that not a watch-dog stirred, and they took care to keep in the neighbourhood of the stream, in order to ford it, if

necessary, to escape pursuit. From time to time they looked round, but they were not pursued.

Before daybreak they had reached the mountains, on whose further side lies Transylvania, and as the first rays of the sunrise tinted the highest peaks with rosy light, they breathed more freely. Not an hour more, and they would be over the frontier! For the first time in their flight Sanda smiled at her companion, and the look of terror faded from her eyes.

"Do you see," said Pârvu, "how foolish you were to be so frightened? Now all danger is past, and all will be well."

He had scarcely spoken the words when Dragomir started up from behind a rock. His face was so pale and distorted with passion that for the moment they took him for a ghost. But with the cry, "I have you at last!" he sprang on Pârvu, and stabbed him in the throat and eyes again and again, only withdrawing his dagger to plunge it in deeper still, and continuing the hideous work with insatiable fury when his enemy had already lain some moments in his death-throes on the ground.

Sanda had slipped from the horse, and stood leaning heavily against it, paralysed in every limb, as if chained to the spot. Her horror-stricken eyes lost not a single one of her brother's movements as he trampled on his prostrate foe, disembowelling him, and cutting off his nose and ears—each pause succeeded but by a more savage onslaught still—the

murderer taking care through it all that not one of his deadly thrusts should reach the heart, lest it should curtail his victim's agony.

When at last all was over, and the mangled body no longer gave signs of life, Dragomir, dripping with blood, turned to his sister with a fiendish grin :

"Thanks, my girl, for delivering him so neatly into my hands! Now I have paid off old scores, and we have done with him for ever. Have a good laugh over it, Sanda!"

And Sanda lifted up her voice and laughed—a wild, weird peal of laughter—that rang among the hills so loud and long it appalled even the remorseless Dagomir. He rushed at her to try to silence her, but shrieking "Blood, blood!" she darted back, avoiding his touch with horror, and her laughter ceased.

"Be quiet now, and help me to think what had best be done for me to escape being sent to Ocna. It would serve me little to have had my revenge if that were to be the end of it."

Sanda's face again took its stony expression.

"I know what you must do if you do not want to go to Ocna. You must go down to the river, and wash yourself clean in it—your face, your hands, your clothes, your hair—that is what you have to do."

And without looking round she sprang on the horse again, and turned its head in the way whence

they had come. Dragomir followed quickly, though not without a hasty glance in all directions, to see if he had been watched. As he did so he perceived a vulture circling overhead, and then a second one, and both birds prepared slowly to descend.

"Aha!" he exclaimed, taking hold of the rein; "so the scavengers are already on their way, and when they have cleaned up here, those who come after may search in vain!"

And hardly had the sound of the horse's hoofs died away in the ravine than the vultures descended on their prey. More and more of them kept swooping down till there were between two and three score gathered there, and soon nought was left but a few bleached bones to mark the spot where Pârvu had lain.

"The next question is, what is to be done with you?" said Dragomir, looking up with a scowl into his sister's face.

Sanda looked back at him with no more interest than if he had been a stone or a tree stump, and vouchsafed no reply.

"Have you no fear of me at all?" he asked again.

"Fear! What then should I fear?"

"The punishment I have in store for you, my child! A little foretaste of hell is what I will give you. Ah! that will be sweet indeed."

"Wash! you must wash the stains away, so that you may not be sent to Ocna," she said quietly, as if she had not heard his words.

"What has become of all your fears, Sanda? You were trembling like a leaf a short while since, and now that you know you are in my power, and you know, too, that I have seen you with him and know everything, you do not tremble at all!"

"Wash! wash yourself, quick! or they will send you to Ocna!"

They had just emerged from the mountain pass and stepped out on to the steep heights which overhang the Olto. Down below the river foamed and raged, bubbling and boiling as it leapt along in its narrow bed, hemmed in by bristling rocks.

"Is there a way down there?" asked Sanda.

"No," replied her brother, letting go the horse, and leaning over the rocky parapet to look down.

"Wash yourself!" were the words that once more sounded in his ear, as Sanda's fingers fastened on his throat with an iron clutch, and pushing him violently, hurled him headlong into the depths below. At the same moment she sprang from her horse, and leaning over the precipice, watched the body bound and rebound on the rocks before it was swallowed up in the raging flood. Just once his hand appeared above the waves, then they closed over it, and nothing more was seen. Over the hollow basin of rock in which he lay bedded the waters dashed on in their restless downward course, as if eager to bury the ghastly secret out of sight and hearing in the turmoil of their rolling thunder, and their clouds of feathery spray.

Anca had at last come back to consciousness from the fantastic visions through which her mind had wandered during the long days and nights in which the fever held her fast. She was alone, for the woman who had been nursing her had to return to look after her own home, and the invalid lay there, silent and motionless, steeped in the delicious languor which infinite bodily weakness sometimes brings. All at once a little pebble flew in at the window, and fell on the foot of the bed. With a great effort she managed to turn her head towards the window, and saw Sanda looking in. Shaking her tangled hair out of her eyes, and showing her white teeth in a strange smile, the latter nodded once or twice, and then vanished.

"Sanda! Sanda!" the sick woman tried to call in her feeble voice. Her next thought was that the delirium was returning with its phantasms, and that it was but an apparition she had seen, and she crossed herself with a shaking hand. But there lay the pebble on the coverlet, a convincing proof that Sanda had really been there.

Nothing further was, however, seen or heard of her for many days. Pârvu's horse, its reins all blood-stained, found its way to its master's door, and then came children running to tell that they had seen Sanda; they had spied her out sitting in a hollow fir-tree, singing and decking her hair and dress with flowers.

Folks wondered more and more what could have

become of Pârvu, and there was fresh excitement when the news came from the next hamlet that Dragomir was missing too. In the meantime, Sanda had been seen again, wandering singing by the water-side. But directly anyone tried to approach her, she fled. Then people brought food for her—mamaliga—which they placed close beside her tree, and waited to see her eat it. But she only shook her head in answer to all their questions, and not a word could they obtain from her. Anca made her way out there too, as soon as she had strength enough, but with no better success. Sanda greeted her with a smile, but not a syllable passed her lips.

"Sanda had gone mad, and the horse was covered with blood! What did it all mean; what was it that had happened?" people went on wondering for a while. Many would have been glad to take Sanda into the house, since it brings luck to give shelter to a mad person; but there was no persuading her to leave her tree. Soon her clothes hung about her in rags. Before winter came they took her new ones, but these were soon in the same state, in the most picturesque tatters, of all possible colours, and adorned with red and yellow leaves, and with blackberry brambles when there were no more flowers to be had. The snow fell. Sanda did not feel the cold. The wolves came down from the forests. Sanda felt no fear. She sang on through the moonlight nights, and she would talk to herself for hours together if she thought there were no listeners near.

"Come to me, beloved," she was heard to say. "Come, let me crown thee with flowers! Rest thy dear head on my bosom, so soft and warm. Come, let us go down to the river; to wash our clothes there. And let us wander through the woods together, beloved, as we have so often done before!"

Once she disappeared, and was absent for a longer period than usual. When she returned she was carrying a skull, which she placed carefully in her tree. For hours she would sit with the skull in her lap, wreathing it with garlands and kissing it, rocking it in her arms, and singing to it songs like this:

"Heather-sprig of dusky green,
Say, hast thou my true love seen?
Bid him seek me, trusty heather,
Where so oft we roamed together
Through the forest shadows deep,
While the world lay wrapt in sleep.
Ah, beloved! hast thou found me?
Clasp thy strong arms firmly round me,
Let me lean my cheek on thine,
Feel thy heart beat close to mine,
Then, while for one moment's space
Time stands still in our embrace,
Lily-bells their chimes are ringing,
Glow-worms bridal torches bringing,
Litanies the fir-trees singing,
Till the golden eyes of night
Faint and fade in love's delight!
Fairer night sure ne'er was seen,
Heather-sprig of dusky green!"

Children were often sent out after her to watch her and see where she went. Once they followed her as

far as the ravine in which the murder had taken place, and here they saw her search for a long time among the moss, murmuring "Pârvu! Pârvu!" all the while, till at last she dragged forth the bones of a human hand, with which she went off in triumph. Directly she was out of sight, the children set to work to search at the same spot, and soon, under dead and decaying leaves, all overgrown with foxglove and wild briar, they found a small wallet, which they recognised as having belonged to Pârvu. It was still full of money, so it was plain that revenge, and not robbery, had been the motive of the crime. But what then had become of Dragomir?

One day Sanda waded out into the Olto, stopping ever and anon to break off little pieces of the icicles which hung from the rocks, and swallowing them with great apparent relish. Further and further she wandered down the stream, and the onlookers expected every minute to see her carried away by it, but she went on as though with a child's unconsciousness of danger, swaying a little from side to side, but recovering herself and never losing her footing. Suddenly she stopped, and bending down, dragged forth what looked like a little scrap of clothing from out the froth and foam, and then another, and yet another, disappearing each time in a cloud of spray as she stooped in her mysterious search. At last, with an expression of extreme satisfaction on her face, she turned back, accomplishing the perilous passage once more in safety. Afterwards, when the

countryfolk, moved by curiosity, dragged the river at that spot, a body was discovered, which they knew to be Dragomir's from the dagger sticking in the belt. Fresh attempts were made to question Sanda, to induce her to tell what she knew, but in answer to all inquiries she only laughed and said: "Washed, washed clean in the Olto of all that blood!" Nothing further was ever to be had from her.

Anca's baby had never rightly got over being deprived of its proper nourishment; it pined away rapidly, and the poor mother did not long survive it.

The village children grew up to be men and women; Sanda still lived on. Sanda lives on to this day contentedly in her tree, holding uninterrupted converse with her lover. She shows few signs of growing older, and has still traces of remarkable beauty. Her story has passed into a sort of legend, which folks tell one to the other with the utmost indifference; and indeed when one sees her in her happy unconsciousness, playing with her flowers in childlike careless glee, it is hard to believe that she was once made the instrument by which, in that long dark record of violence and bloodshed, the last deed of vengeance was finally carried out.

HIS FIRST FIGHT

THICK clusters of alpine roses covered all the slopes of the [1] Buchegi, filling the air with that aromatic perfume which these flowers possess in the Carpathians alone, and which impregnated the wool of the sheep and lambs scattered over the sides of the Furnica like snowy patches of edelweiss. High up on the mountain a shepherd-boy was sitting with his head bent forward resting on his knees, and his hands clasped together at the back of it, weeping as if in utter despair. In front of him crouched his shaggy grey-coated dog, now pricking its ears and observing him keenly with its head on one side, now whining in deep tones, and at last with its nose impatiently pushing away its young master's hands from his face, so as to lick his forehead and hair, and force him to look up. The lad flung his arms round his friend's neck, buried his face in the long shaggy hair, and went on weeping more disconsolably than ever. The poor dog did not know what to do to comfort him.

[1] A group of mountains in the southern range of the Carpathians, or Transylvanian Alps, which includes the peaks of the Furnica, the Jipi, and others; in it the Pelesh has its sources.

He wagged his tail, whimpered, and stretched his neck to lick the boy's long hair. But the latter would not let himself be comforted, for this was the first great sorrow of his life. The dog understood that quite well, he knew all about it; and, indeed, up to a certain point he could sympathise with his master's grief, but he simply could not bear to see the lad so inconsolable. That was something new to him, and worse than anything he had ever known, old sheep-dog though he was, and of very great experience. Had he not performed the journey countless times between the Furnica and the plains of the Baragan and the Dobrugea, in summer heat and winter storms. Was he not acquainted with snow and with wolves, with bears, dust, and all the other perils and hardships of the way? Carpathians and Balkans, Argesh and Danube, he knew them all, every hill and river; he remembered the old sheep who had been the ancestress of the whole flock, the great-great-grandmother of those whose lambs were now gambolling on the grass—in a word, he was a dog of much wisdom and knowledge of the world. But for once his sagacity was at fault; this new case lay quite outside his experience. Never until now had he seen a tear shed by his favourite shepherd-lad, his chosen friend and companion; never in his life had he heard sobs like these; and now when he perceived that all his efforts at consolation were quite in vain, the good dog lay down and lifted up his own voice and howled. But that was just the most sensible thing that he

could have done under the circumstances, and many a human being would do well to follow his example, and carry out the old divine precept that bids us weep with them that weep, instead of pouring the vinegar of reproof and reproach into the open wounds.

"Hush, hush! Rumir! Take care, or you will frighten the sheep, and the other shepherds will think there is something wrong," said the boy, looking up.

The glow of youth and health in his sunburnt cheeks was like the bloom on a rich, ripe fruit, the outline of his face was the purest oval, nose and forehead almost in a straight line, the eyes like blackberries, soft and velvety, under their finely-pencilled brows, the bold curve of the full red lips showing teeth strong and regular as those of a dog. The young shepherd's face was framed in long hair, as are those of some of the Rembrandt portraits, and on his dark locks was perched a brown lambskin cap, much bigger than his head, and specially full and wide at starting, but running into a point at the top. He jumped up now, shaking himself very much as a dog does, dashed the tears off his long lashes, that fluttered up and down like feathers, and seized his alpine horn. He must signal to the shepherds on the other hills that all was well, as that stupid Rumir had made such a noise. Standing out in clear relief against the dark-blue sky, the slim young figure, in its grey shirt, broad leather belt and

leggings, looked as tall and straight as a fir sapling. Leaning his horn on the ground he blew a long tremolo, a wavering, undecided note, that rises and falls, like the sighing of an Æolian harp. It does not sound at all loud when you are near, but it can be heard at a very great distance, and echoes from one mountain to the other.

After sounding his horn for about half an hour, the lad placed his left hand on the mouthpiece, leant the other elbow on that, and with his cheek resting on his right hand, remained standing thus for hours, motionless as a statue. Not once did he even change the position of his feet, which he had crossed. But a whole drama was being played out silently upon his face. He saw the bear before him again, one of those really savage bears, with a light grey frill round the neck, on which account they are called "gulerat" (ruffled)—he saw it suddenly fall upon his flock, and tear and devour and scatter the sheep in all directions. That he could have borne, though, for the sheep were his master's, and his master was rich. But that which went to his heart was the loss of his little donkey, for the donkey was his very own; and the wicked bear had killed it too, had strangled and half eaten it. The lad bit his under lip, for he was ashamed to burst out crying again—he felt that he ought to be too much of a man for that, with his eighteen years. Other lads of his own age were already married and had children, and here was he ready to cry. But his donkey—his dear little

donkey! What a good little creature it had been, and what a droll appearance it always had, with its rough shaggy coat and unkempt mane! Its hair seemed literally to stand on end everywhere, all over its body, even over its nose and eyes, in thick, tangled masses, out of which peeped the bold, wilful eyes, as full of fun and mischief as are those of a child that insists on staying up to play instead of going to bed! And it was such a hard-working little donkey too, carrying all its master's possessions about with it on its back, as it trotted along proudly in a cloud of dust, in the very centre of the flock, itself not much bigger than a good-sized sheep, and on the best of terms with all of them, but more specially intimate with shepherd and with shepherd's dog. It was no wonder indeed that the boy had been so fond of his faithful little Ghitza (for that was the donkey's name), and now it had come to such a miserable end, and he had been unable to defend it!

With the aroused consciousness of his manhood, other thoughts and feelings had awakened in the lad —fierce and angry thoughts, to which his gentle disposition had been a stranger until now. "Horia," he said to himself, "Horia, thou must avenge thy friend! It is thy duty. Otherwise thy sheep will no longer respect thee, and thou wilt lose Rumir's good opinion. For Rumir is brave himself, and would despise a coward. That would never do, Horia!" And the soft velvety eyes sparkled and

flashed, the handsome brows contracted, and a hard, determined expression came over the youthful mouth. But how was he to fight the bear? He had no fire-arms, nothing but a hatchet—no other weapon of any kind. And the bear was a big one, as far as could be distinguished in the darkness. An idea occurred to him.

"Rumir," he said, "stay thou here with the sheep till I return. I must be off to the Jipi, to the other shepherds."

Rumir wagged his tail to show he thoroughly understood. In point of fact, he always looked upon himself as the really responsible person in their partnership, and considered Horia to be confided to his care, just like the sheep. For, after all, what was he but a child?

Lightly Horia's sandalled feet sped across the carpet of soft verdure that clothes the slopes of the Buchegi. On every side he saw the gentian blossom and edelweiss peeping out of the crevices in the rock, but he gave no heed to the latter's beauty, nor thought of the store that would be set upon it in the valleys below. The edelweiss had neither colour nor perfume, and seemed to him altogether such an ordinary little flower. It had not even a name of its own, for no one in the whole land then knew of its existence; no one guessed that the Roumanian mountains possessed this treasure, and it would perhaps have been as well had the discovery never been made. The flower was just as unconscious of

its beauty as the shepherd of his good looks; both blossomed up here on these lonely heights to the glory of God alone, ignorant of all that was going on in the world below. Not that it would have made the slightest difference to them had they known it. Little, indeed, would they have cared!

In the hollow that lies between the twin crests of the Jipi Horia found the shepherds he sought—two old men and a youth—and asked them at once to tell him how he had best attack the bear.

"Let it alone," they replied. "Thou art yet too young, and hast not thy full strength. He would kill thee easily!"

At this Horia's face put on the stubborn look which he had so often seen his donkey wear, and he answered nothing. Till nightfall he lay hid among the rocks, so that the others supposed he had long since returned to his flock; and then when all three were fast asleep he crept up to them very softly and robbed the one of his fur cap, the second of his coverlet, the third of his big sheepskin cloak. With these trophies he hastened back to Rumir, who welcomed him with loud, joyous barking. Then Horia wound the thick woollen blanket round his left arm, set both caps upon his head, one on the top of the other, pulling them down over his ears till they reached almost to his shoulders, and hung the second sheepskin cloak round him, over his own.

Thus equipped, looking like some strange monster, he seated himself beside the spot where the poor donkey's remains still lay, for he felt sure the bear would return to his unfinished meal. There he waited hour after hour, curled up in a heap, looking like a mass of drifted snow, so still and motionless was he, wrapped in his white sheepskins, and with no sign of life, save in the wakeful, watchful eyes. The moon rose between two of the highest peaks in the range, bathing the sleeping forests with its silvery light. Horia looked down over the dark hill-tops, that seemed so many petrified crests of gigantic waves, rising above the great dim plain, which spread itself out like a silent lake far, far away to the Balkans. There, where the vapours lay thickest, was where the Danube wound its way through the enchanted land. From the nearer valleys came faint echoes of running streams and rippling mountain sources. The edelweiss shone so brightly, it was as if it had some mystic affinity with the moonbeams themselves, and the moon, as it climbed higher in the sky, cast such floods of light over the landscape, the sharp outlines of the shadows made them look like unfathomable yawning abysses. Out of these depths the fir-trees soared, like giants of yore, and in the perfect stillness around they seemed to be slowly ascending the mountain sides —one might almost have fancied they drew closer every minute. The silence continued: there was still no sound, no movement anywhere. Horia

waited, his hatchet by his side. The moon wandered on, across the whole arch of heaven, and had already approached the further horizon, when the sound of a soft footstep made the boy's heart beat. There was a snorting, followed by the peculiar low growl, the dull droning which sounds like prayers being recited, and which has given rise to the gipsies' saying: "The bear is at his books again; he must be the priest's son!" In another minute the animal was quite close, a big bear, with huge paws, looking bigger still in the moonshine, in which he cast a very long shadow. The white frill round his neck was plainly visible in the midst of the dark fur.

With little grunts of satisfaction, Sir Bruin sniffed at the dainty morsel left in reserve, and was just about to attack the meal when Horia, springing up, dealt him a vigorous blow between the shoulders. The axe, however, only penetrated the thick hide feebly, just grazing the skin. Furious, the creature rose on its hind legs, quite towering above the shepherd lad, who stepped back a few paces, in order to choose a spot less thickly covered with wool for the next blow. As the bear drew near, Horia swung the axe round, inflicting a deep wound in the left paw. The enraged animal now struck out at his assailant, who felt the bone of his left arm shattered and shivered, whilst he himself was taking desperate aim at the bear's eye. The latter now raised his paw to scalp his foe, for that

is generally a bear's first endeavour; they tear the whole scalp from off the back of the head right down over the eyes. But there were the two fur caps, and the lad ducking at the right moment, caused the bear to come down heavily to the ground with the caps in his paw. Horia saw his advantage, and quick as thought brought down his axe with a tremendous swing, planting it so firmly in Bruin's skull that he could not for all his efforts draw it out again, for he was only able to use one hand, the left arm hanging powerless by his side almost since the beginning of the fight. But the bear now lay moaning on the ground, writhing and wriggling in its death-agony, and Horia looked on calmly, till he felt his own senses reel; a sudden darkness came before his eyes, and he fainted away.

The silvery moonlight was still resting on the mountain-tops, when the rosy flush of dawn began to tint them also. Such delicate gradations of colour played around the aged rocks, and lighted up the snow which still crowned the highest summits or lay collected in the crevices—it was as if Nature kept high holiday, and were attiring herself in her robes of state. Further and further down the slopes the wondrous pink silvery light crept on; it reached the beeches, making them blush for very joy, and passed on to lend loveliness to every stock and stone. Nature has no lack of festal days; for to her every working day is in truth a holiday.

Suddenly, to the astonishment of the shepherds on the Jipi heights, Rumir made his appearance among them, barking and wagging his tail, jumping up on them, seizing their clothes in his teeth and dragging them forward, and making a hundred frantic signs that they were to follow him to the Furnica.

"What does it mean? What can have happened there?" said the one, setting his horn to his lips and blowing a long quavering blast.

No answer came. Rumir had never taken his eyes off them, and he now pricked his ears, and set up his short sharp bark, the bark dogs give when they beg for something, and again began running in the direction of the Furnica, and returning to pull at them and force them to follow him. At last they did so. The dog kept running backwards and forward the whole way in the greatest excitement, as if their pace were far too slow for him. In course of time they reached the scene of the fight.

"There lies the bear!" cried the eldest shepherd, when scarce within sight of the spot.

"And there lies Horia too," said the younger man, and in three bounds was at the place where the bear lay dead, with Horia's axe planted two inches deep in his skull, and the boy himself lying senseless beside him.

At first the shepherds thought the lad too was

dead, but were reassured by the sight of the warm blood still spouting from the wounded arm. They soon discovered that the arm was badly fractured, and bandaged it as best they could, rubbing the lad's temples gently and pouring a little brandy down his throat. This revived him a little, and he lifted his long lashes, smiled with lips still ghastly white, as of one but just brought back to life, and drawing a deep breath, asked: "Is the bear dead?"

When they told him that it was so, he simply answered: "Ah, then all is well!" and closed his eyes again. The old man lifted the boy's head on his own knee, rubbed his hands, and gave him more brandy, calling him "a dragon's son and the pride of the mountains!" till some colour came into the pale lips, and a groan of pain burst from them. Then the three contrived a sort of rough litter out of fresh green branches, and bedded in this foliage they carried Horia down in triumph to the valley.

Three weeks later Horia was standing once more on the self-same spot, in the same fixed attitude, leaning on his alpine horn, and Rumir sat before him, wagging his tail and making all sorts of noises to attract his attention, just as if he were trying to speak and congratulate his master on his prompt recovery. But Horia stood there for hours together, resting on his shepherd's staff, dreaming and gazing into vacancy. Down in the valley below he had seen a beautiful girl; he could not take his thoughts

off her, and he was so astonished to find himself thinking of a girl for the first time in his life, that he could not get over the astonishment at his own thoughts.

TWO WAIFS FROM THE TAYGETOS

THEY dwelt by the riverside, both of them. He was over yonder on the further bank, keeping guard over the newly-stacked sheaves of corn, and she had her geese to mind in the meadows on this side. He was called Soare, and they called her Evanghelù.[1] His name, which means sunshine, suited him well, for Soare was fair-haired, while Evanghelù had a pale dark skin and black hair, and the brows and lashes that shaded her green-grey eyes were quite black too; her lips were coral-red, and she had dimples in her cheeks and a dimpled chin.

They were alike in this, that both were foundlings —children left beside the river, on two separate occasions, none knew by whom. They had grown up beside it as if they belonged to it, and the river seemed to form a part of their young lives as it flowed along. Nothing ever happened in that quiet life of theirs, except that one day they began to look at one another across the stream from the opposite banks.

In winter-time he worked as a silversmith in a

[1] With a strong accent on the last syllable, and the vowel pronounced as in Italian.

tiny little smithy just outside the village, making silver candlesticks, and ear-rings, and chains, and all sorts of silver ornaments, which he then sold for very trifling sums, whilst she did a day's work in all the houses round about in turn, sometimes sitting at the loom from daybreak till far into the evening, in order to earn her scanty meal and night's lodging—the right to lie down and sleep in a corner by the hearth.

But after that came the beautiful time for them both, the season in which they could live altogether out of doors, having nothing to do with any other human beings, but only with the other inhabitants of the fields and meadows—the beasts, and birds, and flowers. That was a happy time indeed for both of them. The summer was always one long holiday, for when Evanghelù had fed her geese, and given them plenty of water to drink, and watched to see that they did not stray inside the neighbours' boundaries and do mischief there, then her day's task was done, and she could lie down tranquilly in the midst of her flock and go to sleep. And as for Soare, he was obliged to take his rest in the daytime, so as to keep awake all night long to wander through the shocks of corn with his gun slung across his shoulder, on the watch to protect the harvest-fruits from fire and from midnight thieves. And he felt that he was mounting guard over Evanghelù at the same time, protecting her as she slept, and he kept sending stealthy glances over towards her, to see that she was safe, and that nothing disturbed her slumber.

So far they had never yet spoken to one another, for in summer the river separated them, and in winter the different nature of their work ; they could only look at one another very hard indeed. The strange part of it was that they somehow began to see one another suddenly in quite a different light. Now Evanghelù found herself thinking of Soare, even if he did not happen to be in sight, and she was always in his thoughts, at all times. Whether she were absent or present, it was all the same, he always saw her before him, with those wonderful deep eyes of hers, gazing out from under the well-marked brows, and the laughing dimples, and the tall, slender figure into which the insignificant little girl seemed suddenly to have developed, like a magnificent blossom unfolding from a tightly-closed bud. She had shot up so quickly, she had outgrown the bushes at the river's edge, and could now reach quite easily to the branches of the trees overhead, to pluck the cherries hanging from them. All that he saw quite distinctly, as he lay stretched at full length in the long grass pretending to sleep. And she saw him lying there, and saw what beautiful golden hair he had, hair of a colour so rarely seen in Roumania, as yellow as the sheaves of corn he watched over. They were all alone in the world, those two, without a friend or a relation ; they had not become orphans, poor children, they were so from the first. It never occurred to anyone to notice how beautiful Evanghelù had grown ; no one saw that her hair was

so thick and long, it covered her like a mantle when she let it down—a long black mantle, that hid her completely from head to foot. She only saw herself how thickly the heavy black tresses shaded her face, when she looked into her tiny looking-glass, no bigger than the palm of one's hand, and she did not like this at all, for there was no one there to tell her how pretty dark hair and green eyes may be. All the other young girls had black eyes; why must hers be green? But these green eyes of hers had a dark core—their pupil was so big it made the whole eye seem of an extraordinary size, bigger even than those of the other children, though these were considerably bigger than most of the eyes you see elsewhere. "Those tragic Roumanian eyes!" people from foreign countries are in the habit of saying when they come amongst us. Evanghelù knew nothing of that; she would not have understood what a tragedy was, nor what was meant by foreign countries. She only knew that she was quite forsaken and alone, with no one belonging to her in the whole wide world. As to how far the wide world extended, about that she had only very confused and hazy notions.

One day she observed that Soare, after he had bathed in the river as usual in the morning, went down again later close to the water's edge, and set something afloat on it, which he held by a long string. Feeling curious, she drew closer to the bank, and then she perceived that it was a very big leaf, on

which stood something, floating across the stream towards her. She now stepped right down to the waterside, and found that on the leaf was placed the prettiest little hut, made of rushes most skilfully plaited together, and she was so pleased with it, she sent a very grateful look over to where Soare stood in the sunshine, as tall and straight as a sapling. He had dark-brown eyes with his fair hair, and a finely-cut nose, and a light down was beginning to show on his upper lip. In his white shirt, held in by a broad leather belt, he looked slight and supple enough to be drawn through a ring. His fair hair hung over his shoulders, and shone like gold in the sun, which seemed to be in a specially bright mood that morning, and sent down a perfect flood of light and heat upon the yellow cornfields.

The next day a tiny raft of twisted reeds came floating over the stream, with a young hare sitting on it; and at this Evanghelù laughed for very joy, and her clear ringing laughter reached over to the other shore where Soare stood, and caused his heart to leap in his breast, as if the space that contained it were too small, and it must burst its walls. That evening Evanghelù found it impossible to fall asleep as usual; there was something she had to tell the stars—something she kept on repeating—and that was the marvellous discovery she had made: "Soare has fair hair!" The stars twinkled, and then went out slowly one by one; for it is well known to the country people that the stars have to be lighted up

afresh every evening, as they only last the night, and have always burnt out towards morning. That was the reason that Evanghelù could tell them anything she liked, as everything they heard would be burnt out with them during the night. So she was not afraid to keep on telling them over and over again her wonderful secret: "Soare has fair hair!" It was such a pleasure to go on saying that, and the stars seemed to like listening to it—at all events, she saw distinctly how they always flared up more brilliantly for a minute or two at the words: "Soare has fair hair!" Once in the middle of the night she heard the waves of the river splash more loudly, and then she thought she heard steps quite close beside her in the grass, and she shut her eyes tight, fearing —she knew not what. In the morning she found a bunch of the prettiest of the field-flowers lying beside her, tied round with a blade of grass. She stuck them into her girdle and smiled at Soare, who was watching her. The river that day was brighter and more sparkling than it had ever been before.

After this he came every night—for his duty in watching the corn did not allow him to sleep in the night-time—and laid flowers in the grass beside her as she slept; and she put them in her girdle next morning, and wore them there all day, and both young things were as happy as could be. But all the time they had not spoken a single word to one another; they were much too shy for that.

But one night when she was really fast asleep, he

stole up close beside her, and slipped a little silver ring upon her finger; and in the morning when she was bathing her face and neck in the stream, she saw it sparkle on her hand, and she blushed all over her neck and arms for pleasure, and the tears stood in her eyes at the sight of this marvellous treasure. She could do nothing but look at it, and her eyes were still fixed on it when Soare waded across the stream in its shallowest part, and suddenly stood behind her, putting his arm round her waist, and whispering her name, "Evanghelù!"—that was all he said. And she could only murmur "Soare!" very gently in reply. So in this manner they were betrothed, and from that moment they always sat together, side by side, as many hours of the day as possible; and when he could not come over to her, then she drove her flock close to the water's edge, so that they were in sight of one another the whole time.

But winter came, to put an end to this happy time, and separate them once more. They would have to go in different directions to their daily work; he to his smithy, she back to the loom, in any house where employment might be had and a living earned.

But before they parted, Soare went to the village priest, and told him how they wished to be married, begging him to wed them.

A dark shadow came across the priest's face.

"You cannot marry," he said.

Soare laughed.

"Not marry—we two?" he asked. "I wonder who should try to prevent us! We are all alone in the world, both she and I; we have neither kith nor kin, nor any soul to care for us. We have grown up together, boy and girl, and love one another, and now we would be man and wife."

"I dare not sanction it."

"Dost thou know, then, who we are?"

"I know, alas! the secret of your birth. I know that you unhappy children are brother and sister. 'Twas told me in confession, that I might, in case of need, ward off the danger that now threatens!"

Soare flung himself upon the ground.

"Cruel!" he groaned, and gnashed his teeth. "Why could they not keep silence for ever? Why must they needs come with their accursed secret, to take from us the one little bit of happiness we possessed? And now I must be for ever alone! alone! alone! and none can ever take the pain from out my heart!"

Thus the poor lad gave vent to his despair. But there was no help for it, it had to be borne; and he had, moreover, to break the cruel tidings himself to his Evanghelù. She listened in silence, but she grew white to the very lips, and tottered a moment as though she would have fallen, had she not leant against the wall. Then she seemed to draw herself together, and went back quietly to her work, and no one ever heard a word of complaint escape her lips.

Soare too set to work again, but it was easy to see that his heart was no longer in it, for he seemed constantly tired, and had to sit down to rest. He grew thinner and paler, too, from day to day, so that folk were full of compassion for him when they came to his little workshop to make purchases. He never spoke of what ailed him, but as time went on he paused more frequently in his work, to wipe away the cold drops that stood on his forehead, and his eyes grew bigger and more hollow, and seemed to blaze with a strange inward fire.

At last one day Evanghelù came to see him, and the two poor children sat side by side for a long time without speaking a single word. What should they have said to one another, indeed? Their hearts were too full of words. But before she left him Soare spoke:

"When I die, you will come too, will you not, Evanghelù?" And she nodded, that was all; there was no more said.

But when they carried Soare to the grave, then Evanghelù crept out of the way into a corner and lay down on the maize leaves strewn there, and had not strength to rise from it again. She did not complain, nor moan, nor shed a single tear. She smiled the whole time, a sad, patient smile, and when people asked her how she was, then her magnificent eyes began to shine like stars, and she murmured softly to herself: "Soare had fair hair!" Those were the only words she ever spoke, and when the

spring-time came Evanghelù was dead too, and they buried her in the same grave with Soare.

But late at night, when the world was wrapt in sleep, a veiled figure crept into the silent churchyard and knelt beside the grave, and wept as if it could find no peace. For some years after that the same veiled figure came again many times at nightfall to weep upon that grave; then all at once the visits ceased, the mysterious visitor was seen no more. Very soon Soare and Evanghelù were forgotten too, their story was just a legend in the village, and even the children could scarcely point out the grave in which they lay. Nothing was left but a few silver ornaments, specimens of Soare's workmanship, to tell of the two young lives that had so soon passed away.

NEAGA

"HOIO! hoio!" Far down inside the earth the dismal cry rang out, echoing through the impenetrable gloom of the immense vaulted chamber. Then a basket filled with blocks of salt was silently drawn up on high, and instantly, from the small aperture above through which the daylight glimmered like a distant red star, an empty basket descended with a thud on the grey salt, spread everywhere, in thicker or thinner layers, like drifted dust or snow over the whole floor of the mine. Round about stood little knots of men clad all alike in grey linen shirts with leather belts, knee-breeches, and sandals fastened on with leather straps; it was they who gave the melancholy cry "Hoio!" every time a basket was filled. Whenever they moved there was a rattling sound, for they all of them had an iron ring fastened round each leg just below the knee, and the two rings were connected by a chain which allowed no great freedom of movement, and rattled with every step. A little farther on other men were standing in rows, all striking in cadence with their hammers against a huge block of salt at their feet until it sprang asunder with a loud crash. In another place a wedge was being driven in, two or three men

hurling a huge round stone against it, the shock of which was every time like the noise of thunder, reverberating through the vault. On the ground before each man stood a little tin lamp, about the size of a thaler, filled with tallow, and with a tiny little wick, the light from which fell just on the spot where the hammer should strike, while it only sent a feeble, sickly ray upon the haggard faces of the workers. All of these wore lambskin caps, but instead of having their hair long and falling loose on the shoulders, as is the custom of the Roumanian peasants, their heads were closely shaved. For the salt-mines are Roumania's galleys—it is here that the worst criminals are sent, all those who in other countries would be hanged or guillotined. And at the time of which I am relating, those who were condemned to the mines never saw the daylight during the term of their sentence; there where they worked they slept, surrounded by the salt to their dying day.

Innumerable long shafts or galleries, just high enough for one to stand upright in, lead from the mine to the upper air, and from the entrances to these shafts one can look right down into the gloomy pit, as if having a peep into Dante's hell. Involuntarily one exclaims: *Lasciate ogni speranva, voi che entrate!* And with good reason; for it is in utter hopelessness that the pale phantoms wander here, dragging their heavy chains.

On the day in question, an old man was standing

a little apart from the rest, leaning on his hammer, resting. To do so, he had thrown his grey-white woollen cloak over his shoulders, and he stood with his eyes fixed on the miserable little lamp at his feet, the flame of which flickered feebly up and down, like the flame of an expiring life. Other men, dressed just like himself, but carrying their little lamps fixed to their caps, called to him as they went past, but he did not seem even to hear what they said, and only sighed from time to time. His face, his beard, his cloak, his shirt—everything about him seemed to have taken the grey, dingy tint of the salt. Presently there was a certain stir in the galleries, lights flashed through them, and as they went past they fell on a handsome, boyish face, that seemed absolutely petrified with horror at the surrounding gloom. The new-comer, a very young man, was led along by two soldiers, and he leant forward, peering into the darkness, as if in the vain hope of seeing through it. He made a desperate attempt to fling himself headlong from the next gallery, but was held back. Many eyes were turned upon him as he passed, and many a convict felt his heart beat quicker as he recalled the day when he too had been led for the first time along these dismal passages, from which there is so little hope of return.

At last the young man had reached the great central chamber of the mine, and he cast one despairing glance around, and flung himself on the

ground. He was at no great distance from the old man, who had never changed his attitude, but watched with melancholy interest the frantic gestures of the other.

"How can I bear it?" cried the poor wretch. "To live here without light or air! What have I done that I should be thrown into this hateful den—this pit of hell? I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!" He struck out wildly with his hands on all sides, then tore at the chain between his feet. "Chained, too, like a wild beast—chained up for ever, in eternal night! Let me go! Let me go, I say!" Suddenly he perceived the old man's eyes resting on him with a mild, compassionate glance. "Ah!" he exclaimed, throwing himself on his knees before the silent, motionless figure, "you look as if you pitied me. Take your hammer, and strike me dead with it! Split my skull open! I will not move nor utter a groan! See, I stand here ready for the blow, and will bless you for it! Take pity upon me, and strike me dead!"

"I must not!" answered the old man.

"But I am determined to die!" And saying this, he tried to dash his brains out against the wall, but was restrained by the others.

"It is not for life!" said one of them roughly.

The young man laughed wildly. "Fifteen years! is not that a lifetime!"

"I have eighteen!"

"And I twenty-four!"

"And I my whole life!"

Thus it echoed around him on all sides.

He looked at them with a startled, horrified expression.

"Who knows what crimes you have all of you committed?" he said at last. "But mine was no crime. I did but protect an innocent maiden!"

"Aha! love?" said one of them, laughing. "I guessed as much. It is not the first time that love has brought a young fellow down here."

"Did you kill the girl herself, or the other man?" asked another, in a confidential tone.

The youth shrank back.

"I will tell you nothing. I cannot speak here!"

He felt the old man's hand laid gently on his shoulder.

"Sixteen years I have already spent here," he said, "and I was never aught but an honest and hard-working man. Nay more, the deed for which I was sent here is one for which I will answer boldly in the sight of God and man!"

"What was it, then?"

"My master was a hard and cruel man, one who made the lives of all those under him a misery to them. For years we had borne his tyranny and injustice patiently—I and the others of my family. But at last one day he went too far. He had my sister beaten to death before my very eyes—yes, beaten to death! That was more than we could bear. So we plotted together—six or seven of his

peasantry—and drew lots to decide which of us should shoot him. The lot fell on me. He had been into the town, and had to pass through the wood as he drove back. I lay in wait behind a tree. I shot him dead on the spot; but he was just able to call out: 'Doamne sfinte! Merciful God!' and I was glad to think that he had time to taste the bitterness of death. Afterwards, when we were brought before justice, and were threatened that if we did not name the assassin, we should be forced to speak, I stepped forward and said: 'There is no need to seek far, for I did the deed; and did it alone!' Therefore I was sent here for premeditated murder for the rest of my days, according to law."

The young man had not taken his eyes off the speaker's face, as if he were drinking in each word. Little by little a group had gathered round them, dimly lighted by the lamps which some of the convicts carried in their caps, and which threw a feeble light at a distance, while the faces of the wearers themselves were always plunged in the more complete shade. The voice of the old man was so perfectly monotonous and colourless, it sounded as if he no longer felt any interest in his own story. Throughout it the melancholy "Hoio" resounded at intervals, and ever and anon the crash of the hammers was heard, and reverberation of the falling stones. Here and there a damp streak shone out upon the walls as the lamplight fell over them. In the youth's face the colour still went and came,

whilst the others all had the same pale, ghastly hue—befitting shades in the Underworld.

"And I too," he said at last, with a deep sigh, "I was no worse than yourself. You did but avenge a woman, I defended one. I was at the Hora one Sunday, and all we lads had just formed the ring and were dancing round, and looking as we danced towards the girls who stood outside it, with the flowers in their hair, waiting to be chosen. And I chose Neaga."

"Neaga?" asked the old man, with a start.

"That is her name, and when I signed to her she came up to take her place between the lad who stood next me and myself. But the other pushed her hand away, and left the circle, saying: 'With the convict's daughter I care not to dance!' I was blind with anger; in an instant I had torn the knife from my belt and stabbed at him, that he lay dead. I had not meant to kill him, and horror came upon me when I saw him lie there without moving. But it was too late. Neaga sobbed and tore her hair, and mourned that all was at an end for both of us. She was right indeed. For us all was at an end. 'Sandu!' she kept saying, 'Sandu! I was fated to misfortune from my birth; you should not have loved me!'"

"Who, then, was her father?"

"I know not; for she never spoke of him, and it was already long ago that he had been sent to Ocna. I never even heard his name. God knows, I may perhaps meet him here!"

"Perhaps," said the old man softly. "And is Neaga beautiful?"

"Beautiful!" cried the young man, and his eyes glowed in the darkness. "She is so beautiful that the sun follows her about, to look at her. Her eyes are as big and sad as those of the chamois, when it has its death-wound and drags itself away to die. Her hair is black as the raven's wing, and she has lips red as coral, and teeth white as milk. No other maiden is so slender and supple, nor has hands and feet so small. And when she walks, swaying gracefully from side to side, she looks like an empress, and she balances the pitcher on her head as if it were a crown. And those to whom she hands it to drink from feel as if Heaven's precious dew were suddenly descending on lips long parched with thirst; and if she ever laughs, the whole world laughs with her. Seldom it was that she did laugh, and now never again! never again!"

With his sleeve the poor fellow wiped away the hot tears that had gathered in his eyes. He stamped impatiently with his foot, and the rattling of his chains, reminding him of the horror of his situation, might have called forth another outbreak of despair, had not his companion quickly asked:

"And has thy Neaga already had much to suffer on that account—for her father's sake, I mean?"

"For those who are down here, it were better far they had no children," was Sandu's answer.

He was again staring moodily before him, but ere

long a warder came, and gave him a hammer in the one hand, a lamp in the other, and bade him follow and take his place in one of the grim rows of workers before a huge block of salt. Cold, indifferent curiosity was in all the eyes that were turned on Sandu, as he imitated the movements of his fellow-convicts, lifting his hammer and letting it fall in time with the rest.

Not long had he been at work, when all at once the whole of the dark vault was brilliantly illuminated. Hundred of candles were lighted everywhere, for the newly proclaimed Prince, it was said, was about to pay a visit to the mine. At the news a tremendous commotion spread through the ranks of the criminals, a murmur of expectancy and apprehension, of hope and dread; the wonder in each breast—Whose turn will it be this time? Who will be pardoned and set free? The spectres had evidently still some life-blood flowing in their veins.

In due time the Prince arrived, accompanied by his beautiful young wife, in her long, flowing mantle and white veil. He bent down to whisper to her reassuringly, as she started and looked timidly around her. Her eyes filled with tears at the sight of the sad, wan faces surrounding them. The unhappy beings pressed closer every minute, some falling on their knees and stretching out their hands in mute supplication, while others raised their voices to beg aloud for liberty. The Princess trembled with emotion, but her sweet smile was like a ray of light and hope to the unfortunate men. She

herself could see nothing else—it was in vain that her husband and those with him had tried to interest her in the working of the mine, and had pointed out to her the dazzling splendour of the pillars and blocks of salt, now so brightly illuminated by the lights burning everywhere—she had eyes only for the human misery the place contained; with each one of the many hundred steps that led down there she had felt her heart sink, and now as the convicts crowded around her, the pitying exclamation burst from her lips: "And none of these are ever more to see the daylight!" With tears in her eyes she implored the Prince to have mercy on them and set them free. He shook his head with an indulgent smile:

"If you could have your way, I know well enough we should have all the prisons thrown open, and there would no longer be chains or imprisonment for anyone! But could we be so sure that there would be no more criminals?"

The visit came to an end, the princely couple took their departure, the candles were extinguished, and the mine resumed its wonted aspect of hopeless gloom. Presently, however, an official entered, with a parchment scroll in his hand, and the prisoners were summoned to hear the list of pardons and commutations of their punishment read out to them. For one the sentence had been reduced from lifelong confinement to a term of five-and-twenty years; another had his twenty-five years lessened to

twenty; others who had been sentenced for lesser offences were let off with ten years, or even less—few, in fact, there were who did not reap some small benefit and consolation from their Prince's presence in their midst. Four were called forth from among the rest, and their chains struck off their limbs:

"Ion, Stan, Tannas, Vlad, you are pardoned!"

Grave and silent, the four listened to the words that set them free. The old man with whom Sandu had first made acquaintance went straight up to him.

"My name is Vlad," he said. "I am set free, and I am going to Neaga, for I am her father."

"You her father! Ah! then tell her—tell her from me—no, tell her nothing; do not say to her that you have seen me here. Perhaps she does not even know where I am. Better she should forget me—better she should think me dead!"

"But I am free, and you will be free too one day," said the old man.

Sandu's glance measured him sadly.

"Yes; when I too am an old man, and she has altogether forgotten me!"

"If she has my blood in her veins, she will not forget so easily. Farewell now for the present, and do not let thy heart sink!"

The four men liberated made their way towards the exit, followed by the eager, envious glances of their less fortunate fellow-prisoners.

In the village overhead, just above the dismal

mine, all was joy and sunshine, festivity and mirth. Carpets and hangings of bright colours draped every window and balcony, and wreaths and garlands of flowers hung across the narrow, picturesque streets. In the principal open space a crowd had collected, and from its midst issued the sounds of mandolines, of violins, and dulcimers, played by the black-eyed, dark-skinned gipsies, the Lautari, who are ever the musicians at every village holiday, and whose quick, agile fingers never seemed to require a moment's rest. Now and then the shriller tones of the Pandean pipe were heard above the other instruments, and through it all the stamping of the young men's feet in time to the music, as they danced around the Lautari in an ever-widening ring. All were dressed in their holiday attire; their snow-white shirts were richly embroidered, they wore white breeches, with sandals on their feet, and their hats were stuck full of flowers all round the brim. Each lad had an embroidered handkerchief hanging from his belt, and they all laughed and shouted, and gave wild jumps in the air as they danced, while the young girls whom they held by the hand moved very quietly and sedately, appearing to glide over the grass without moving their feet. They, too, had their skirts and white linen smocks embroidered in gay patterns, with red and black silks, and with gold thread. All of them had put flowers in the braids of hair coiled round their heads, and even the married women, wrapped so closely in their long fine white veils, had at least

a carnation stuck behind the ear. The Roumanian women are skilful weavers, and truly artistic in their needlework. Peasant men and women alike wear the picturesque national costume with marvellous grace and dignity, and the scene which such a village Hora presents is one that never fades from the memory of those who have once witnessed it.

Presently the leader of the dance broke out into song, a challenge to his companions, who took it up instantly, so that the dance stood still for a moment, while their mock defiance was bandied from one to the other in word and gesture. Then, too, from time to time, one of the gipsies would sing to his instrument, walking round and round within the ring, as if he were taking part in the dance or trying to animate the dancers. The musicians seemed perfectly indefatigable; they had no sooner finished the Hora than they began some other of the pretty national dances — Kindia, Briu, Sultanica, Calabreaza — all followed in turn. Warm with their exertions, the young men kept running to the well to drink there.

From the balcony of a house richly hung with coloured draperies, the Prince, the Princess, and their guests looked down upon the gay spectacle. Upon the features of the Princess still lay the sadness of the impressions of her visit to the mine.

All at once the ring of dancers divided, to permit the four pardoned convicts to pass through their midst, and return thanks for their liberty. They looked as if they had come out of the tomb, with

their deathly pallor and dejected bearing, so utterly out of place did they seem in the living world. One of them stood stiff and silent, only turning his head according to the sounds he heard, for he had become blind from living in the darkness so long.

The Princess ordered that money should be given them, and spoke to each in turn, asking in her sweet voice if they had far to go to reach their homes.

"Only so few," she said in low tones, half reproachfully, to her husband.

"The rest of them another time," he answered in an equally low voice.

The Prince wore a long silken robe, with a magnificent shawl twisted like a sash round the waist; on his head he had one of the big fur caps called an Ishlic. His glossy, well-trimmed beard hung far down over his breast, his bearing was extremely dignified, and he smiled very seldom. The Princess's mantle of green silk embroidered with gold, and edged with costly sable, trailed behind her on the ground; over it fell a silken veil, fine as a spider's web. She was much struck by the beauty of the peasant women's attire, and paid them many compliments on their exquisite needlework. To several she gave new coins to hang on their Salba—the heavy necklace of gold-pieces worn round the neck, which well-to-do peasants preserve as an heirloom in their families—and the modern pieces of money now hung there side by side with the big old Turkish coins and ancient gold ducats, all of them long since out of

date, and only to be found as curiosities in the possession of the country folk.

As soon as the lengthening shadows made the prospect of the drive more agreeable, the carriages drove up to the door, some with eight and one with twelve horses, and for every four horses a postilion in his picturesque costume: the short richly embroidered sleeveless jacket showing the full white shirt-sleeves, a broad sash round the waist, top-boots, with their broad over-turned tops embroidered, and countless long coloured ribbons flying from the low-crowned hat. Cracking the long lashes of their short-handled whips, and shouting to their horses, they started off at full speed, and soon the whole party disappeared in thick clouds of dust.

The stillness of evening spread itself over the village, as the four men who had just been set at liberty started on their way, each one wandering out in a different direction into the old and once so well-known world, that had become so strange and incomprehensible a place to them.

At some little distance from the salt-mines there is a beautiful mountain village, which was still bathed in the rays of the setting sun at the moment when a lonely wanderer approached it. The man paused to rest, leaning on his staff, and peered anxiously under the wooden verandah of every house, as if in search of a well-known face. But no one had yet come back from the fields. Presently the sound of distant

cow-bells was heard, and laughing youths and maidens strayed in singly or in groups, followed by the women carrying their babies—this one holding the little creature in her arms or on her back, another with her child seated in triumph on her shoulder—and all of those whose hands were free spinning indefatigibly from the spindle at their girdles as they walked along. The men, with their heavy loads upon their shoulders, came along more deliberately, smoking and talking. Then they stood around chatting in little groups, while their wives disappeared inside the houses to prepare the evening meal, and soon little fine blue clouds of smoke curled upwards from the chimneys on the quiet air. The girls came out with their jars and pitchers of coloured earthenware perched on their shoulders, to fetch water from the well. Many of the lads went after them to beg for a draught, and there was much laughter and merriment. None had yet perceived the stranger where he stood a little aside, watching all that was going on.

"Come, come this way, all of you!" cried one of the girls, looking down into the well with a mischievous smile. "I see something in the water; I saw him just now quite clearly. I know now who is to be my husband."

All wanted to see, and they pushed and jostled one another, giggling all the time, for everyone knows that a girl has only to look hard enough into the water and her lover will appear to her, or, at all events, the man she is to marry before the year is out.

At that moment a girl of very remarkable beauty stepped outside a house a little higher up the hill. The deepest melancholy veiled her magnificent eyes. Her dark tresses, coiled round the small graceful head, appeared even darker by contrast with the flowers she had placed there. When she saw the little crowd gathered at the well, she made a movement as though to return into the house; but a harsh voice from inside bade her hasten to fill her pitcher, and she paused in evident embarrassment, hesitating as to whether to advance or turn back. But she had already been perceived, not only by the solitary stranger, but also by the merry group of girls, who pointed at her, whispering and sneering, as she at last made up her mind to proceed. There was a deeper flush on her cheeks, and the jar she held shook in her hand as she made a few resolute steps forward. In a moment she was surrounded, and jeering voices assailed her from all sides.

"Aha, Neaga! how pale you are! And how silent! Where is your sweetheart, Neaga? Yes, tell us what has become of him. Ah! do you see, that comes of having secrets from the rest when you come to the dance."

"Where is your fine lover, Neaga? Where is the fellow? He has lost his good name. He is a murderer, down there with the common thieves and cut-throats in the mine!"

"Go and look for him! See if you can help him!

Do not stand there ready to cry or faint, as you did at the Hora."

"Take the flowers from her hair!" cried the most spiteful of the voices, and the pale, delicate carnations fell to the ground.

Neaga let her pitcher fall, and raised her hands to heaven.

"I am all alone!" she cried. "Is there no one will protect me?"

"Yes, I will!" said a deep voice, and a strong arm divided the throng.

The astonished girls fell back, leaving Neaga face to face with Vlad, who gazed at her for a full minute in silence.

"And who are you?" she asked, looking at him with fear in her eyes, and her lips parted in wonder, as if she dreaded to hear of some new misfortune.

Again he paused, and then replied: "Your father."

A sound, half sigh, half sob, was wrung from her breast; she shook her head, and her arms fell hopelessly by her side.

"I have no father," she said in an expressionless voice.

The other girls drew nearer, listening eagerly.

"Did no one ever speak to you of him?"

Her head sank forward, and she looked down. "They said he was in Ocna."

"It is from there I come."

There was a tone of such intense misery in the

words, the listeners shuddered. Neaga, however, raised her eyelids and looked straight at him.

"Do you know your father's name?" asked the stranger.

"Yes, he was called Vlad."

"That is my name. And is not your mother called Florea, and your brother Radu?"

She nodded.

"Where are they?"

"My brother is away, I know not where. It was no good time he had here, so he wandered out into the wide world."

"And your mother?"

"She is dead. I still live in her husband's house, and look after the little children."

"Your mother's husband! Was it long ago she married again?"

"Six years ago at least."

"And has he been kind to you?"

"Never! He has never given me aught but hard words and blows. Often has my poor mother cried and said, 'Why did I marry again? It would have been better for me had I remained a widow.' She cried so much that at last it went to her heart, and six months ago she died."

"But who then told her I was dead?"

"I know not."

"Well, I am alive, as you see; and if things go ill with you, then come to me. We will set out on our wanderings together, my child, and somewhere we shall surely find a roof."

"And even were you not my father, I would go with you willingly, kind old man," said Neaga, taking him by the hand.

Several women had come out of the houses. They put their hands before their lips, and shook their heads meaningly.

"Was the like ever seen? Just look at her! The shameless thing! Enough to make her poor mother turn in her grave!"

"Ah! it is a good thing for her mother that she is dead!"

Such were the unfriendly comments that accompanied the strange pair, as they made their way through the village hand in hand, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. They had not gone far, when one of the women tapped at the window of Neaga's stepfather.

"Am I to wait much longer, Neaga? Where is my supper? What do I care if they tease and insult you? It serves you right, you worthless girl, you murderer's brat! Wait till I can get at you, I will break every bone in your body!"

And evidently the man was prepared to suit the action to the words, for he burst out of the house, with an infuriated face, and a heavy whip in his hand. The woman met him very calmly.

"Nay, keep your bad language and your blows for another time. They are thrown away to-day. Neaga is gone."

The man laughed. "Gone? Which way?"

"Gone away altogether, with an old man who said he was Vlad, her father, come back from Ocna. And he also asked after Florea, and his house, and his son Radu."

The man had turned blue in the face, and could not speak. Alarmed at his appearance, the woman beat the palms of his hands, and gave him water, asking:

"What is there to be so frightened at? It was no ghost, but Vlad himself. Old Vasilina says she recognised him."

But the man had received such a shock, that he could not recover, and the services of the wise woman had to be called upon to bleed him. He had not even strength to swear. But when they asked him if he would like Neaga to be brought back by force, he shook his head violently. It was quite a little excitement in the village, and till late in the night a group of curious idlers stood round the house, within which several women were trying to soothe the crying children, who only asked for Neaga. In the opinion of many, it served the brutal stepfather right to be deserted thus, for he had always ill-treated the girl, and his wife had died of his ill-usage. Others thought that he had long been in love with his stepdaughter, and had ill-treated her simply from jealousy, especially since she had been talked about with Sandu; since then her life had not been a moment safe, poor thing, for he had always threatened to kill her.

In the meantime, the subject of this conversation

was stepping out bravely along the highway, with the thin hand of the old man resting on her shoulder, while every moment the conviction was strengthened in her that he was indeed her father, so intimate was his knowledge of the whole countryside, and so well was he acquainted with every nook and corner of their house, and with everything concerning her mother and herself.

Of Sandu neither spoke a word. Both were afraid to approach the subject, and Neaga had firmly resolved that no syllable from her lips should betray her secret. They slept in the open air, and Vlad rejoiced, for it was long since he had seen the sky and the stars, or felt the fresh night breeze. Neaga spent the whole of the first night sitting with her hands clasped round her knees, thinking of all the sorrows of her young life. What had become of Sandu? What had they done with him? He was so young, and so gentle and good; even his judges surely could not have had the heart to deal very harshly with him! Everyone could see that he had stabbed the other in a fit of anger, and without intending to kill him. And what he did had been done for her sake! It was the insult to herself which had driven him out of his senses. Ah! well that he could not see all that she had had to suffer since! All her nights had been spent like this, thinking these things over again and again, since that dreadful day. The old man saw quite well that she could not sleep, and he heard her sigh, and longed to comfort her; but he knew not

what to say; he felt that he was a stranger to his child, and it was not likely she could feel much confidence in him, for she had certainly heard little to his credit; the wife, who had so soon forgotten him, had surely not spoken too well of him.

At last he broke the silence.

"You are not sorry to have come with me, my poor girl?"

She started.

"Surely no; I have nothing to regret. I thank God to be free at last, and that no one any longer knows me, no one in the world!"

"Not even your father?"

She started again, and looked at him wonderingly. Was it reproach in his tone? Could she venture to tell him everything? or would he too have hard words for her, if he knew of the lover whose hands were blood-stained like his own? Vainly she tried to read the worn, wan face; for the old man's eyes were closed again, and he appeared to sleep.

At last day dawned; the field-larks started from the ground and rose in the air singing, as if to greet the sun, who came forth with wonted majesty.

"The first sunrise I have seen for sixteen years!" said Vlad, with a sigh, looking so haggard in the morning light, as if he were in real truth a spectre risen from the grave.

"Do you hear the lark, Neaga? the first lark!" and a smile trembled on his pale lips. "Ah! to a sun-burnt maiden like yourself it is impossible to think

what it means to be deprived of light and liberty! Thank God that you cannot even know what it means!"

Neaga's lips now trembled too, and heavy tear-drops hung in the dark lashes that quivered with the effort to restrain them. She bit her lip hard, then turned to her companion.

"There is something I want to ask you?" she said at length.

The old man looked up eagerly; was she going to ask him about Sandu?

"What was it you had done?"

"Did no one ever tell you?"

"No one."

"They let you think I was a common assassin, without excuse for my crime?"

She nodded her head.

"They did not say that it was simply the murder of an innocent girl that I avenged!" And he told her his story.

Neaga listened to him in silence, and field and forest swam before her eyes as she followed every detail with rapt attention, and with growing sympathy for him who had suffered so much. But her father was mistaken if he thought that after his confidences she would at once open her heart to him.

"Poor father!" was all she said; but it was the first time she had called him so.

At the next village Vlad brought out his little store of money, the money he had been at such

pains to earn with making little figures and ornaments of salt or of wood in the evening hours by the light of his miserable lamp. He laid this sum out chiefly in purchasing bagpipes, in the hope, as he told his daughter, of supporting them both by playing on this instrument as they went about from place to place.

And so for a time they wandered from one village to the other, and the old man played all the dance music for the young people at their gatherings, and both he and his daughter sang from time to time. If they could not earn enough like this, then Neaga hired herself out for a day's work in the fields, and thus was able to provide food and shelter for her father. Never did she murmur at the hardships she was exposed to, wandering all over the country like a beggar, with no fixed abode, and never knowing where the next day's bread should come from; and if the old man pitied her on that account, she only shrugged her shoulders, and assured him she was better off like this than she had been before.

One day they arrived at a big prosperous village, just decorated for a wedding that was about to take place. It was a general holiday, and great excitement prevailed, especially before the little drinking tavern, which faced the church. Then the whole merry crowd melted away suddenly in the direction of the bride's house. Vlad sat down in the churchyard on an overturned gravestone. Neaga stood beside him, and a deeper shade of melancholy was

in her eyes as she watched the laughing couples pass, with their fluttering ribbons and garlands of flowers. She was thinking of the last Hora in which she had taken part, and half to herself she murmured :

"Could one be sent to Ocna for unpremeditated murder?"

Vlad looked straight at her.

"Yes, even for unpremeditated murder one might be sent there."

"Ah, even for that!" and a shudder went through her whole body.

"I saw your Sandu there," he went on quietly.

"You have seen him?" the girl almost screamed, and sank down on her knees by her father's side, burying her face in her hands, and sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Poor child! poor child!" said Vlad, stroking her hair gently, but making no attempt to console her.

At last she looked up.

"It was really there—there that you saw him?"

"It was there. Ah! he is a fine fellow, Neaga, and he only thinks and speaks of you. I recognised you from his words."

"And you came away and left him there!"

"Ah, child, in Ocna one does not come and go as one likes ; one has no choice!"

"You left him there!" she repeated, as if she could not get rid of the thought.

"Listen to me. He is so young still—a mere

lad. Who knows but they will take pity on his youth?"

"You were young too when you were sent there."

"No, I had a wife and child already; and then it was against me that I had lain in wait for my enemy. It was in hot blood that Sandu struck his blow."

"And all for me! all for me!" wailed Neaga, clasping her knees, and rocking herself to and fro in her despair.

Presently the air was once more filled with sounds of mirth. A band of young men, in holiday attire, with bunches of flowers in their hats, and their gay coloured ribbons streaming behind them, came rushing to the spot, and no sooner spied the wayfarers than they accosted them.

"Holla! old fellow with your bagpipes, come this way! Play us one of your tunes while we wait for the bride. And you, pretty girl, can you sing us a song?"

Neaga nodded. Vlad began playing quickly, to give her time to recover; but the young fellows were impatient for a song, and swallowing down her tears, with a choking voice she sang:

"One more weary night is ended;
Yet what joy can daylight bring
To the hearts that unbefriended
Ceaseless feel grief's bitter sting?

Thus no respite from my sorrow
Bids Night close my eyes in sleep,
And each sad succeeding morrow
Still shall see me watch and weep."

"That is too sad!" cried the young men. "Sing us something livelier. Here is money for you!"

They meant to be kind and cheer her; but she found it hard work to accustom herself to sing for alms, and a deep sigh heaved her bosom. Vlad cast an anxious glance towards her.

"Listen to me," he said. "I will tell you what to sing. Try the song of 'The Mulberry Tree.'"

"No, no! too sad, much too sad!" they exclaimed on all sides.

"Then the one that begins 'Green leaf of the hazel-bush!'"

"No, not that!" was the general shout. "All the songs of the hazel are doleful ones."

Vlad tuned his pipes, and Neaga began to sing:

"Green leaf that dost sprout on the withered bough!
Like Love in a wintry world art thou!"

Her voice trembled a little on the first notes, but gained strength as she proceeded:

"Love, fair still and young, in a world grown old,
Love, warming our hearts when all else is cold!
Hurrah!

I have saddled my horse, my trusty roan;
I will ride forth this night, unarmed, alone.
'Tis no foeman I seek in my midnight ride,
I but speed to my darling, my heart's own bride!
Hurrah!

Like a riverside reed she is supple and slight,
And her hair is dark as the shades of night,
And all the fervour and glow of the skies
Seem to shine in the depths of her loving eyes!
Hurrah!

And the good roan knows where our course is bound,
And he champs the bit, and he paws the ground,
And thus we stand waiting till day be past,
And the darkness shall let us set forth at last!
Hurrah!"

The song began in a minor key, that lent something intensely pathetic to the first verse, but with every succeeding stanza the fresh young voice grew clearer and stronger, finally ringing out on the last "Hurrah!" as if the singer were trying to silence her own sad heart. The listeners burst into loud applause, crowding round the musicians.

"Bravo!" said one of them, "that was well sung. And where, I should like to know, shall we find a brighter pair of eyes than your own, sweet girl, or a waist so slim?"

And he tried to put his arm round her, but was so promptly repulsed, with so vigorous a thrust, that he staggered back, looking extremely foolish. There was a general laugh at his discomfiture.

"Oho!" cried his companions; "we will all take warning. Here is a girl who can take care of herself, and will stand no nonsense!"

By this time a number of young women and girls had been drawn to the spot by the sound of the music. At last one of them turned to Vlad.

"Now it is your turn, old man, to sing us something. But it must be one of the good old songs, full of horrors to make one's flesh creep. Surely you know something of the kind?"

"How will this suit you?" said Vlad, beginning to sing:

"'Twas a lovely May morning,
Ah! woe worth the day!
As I crossed my own threshold,
Sin stood in my way.

Her cold eyes looked through me
With deadly design;
Her cold fingers clutched me—
She spoke: 'Thou art mine!'

I started in horror,
Sought safety in flight;
But closely she followed,
By day and by night.

I plunged in the thicket,
In utter despair;
I fled to the desert,
Again she was there!

O'er mountains, through quicksands,
Wherever I sped,
I still heard behind me
Her swift stealthy tread;

She has poisoned my being
With foul baleful breath!
And her toils are around me,
In Life and in Death!"

And he put so much meaning into his song, as if it were really something he had himself experienced,

that it gave quite a pleasing shudder to all who stood listening.

Suddenly they were interrupted by strains of more joyous music. It was the wedding procession approaching. The Lautari, the fiddlers, marched ahead, playing the whole time; then came children strewing flowers, numbers of little boys and girls, followed by the bridegroom on horseback, accompanied by a whole band of young peasants, also mounted, all of them with their long hair hanging over their shoulders, and with large loose white cloaks which almost covered the backs of their sturdy little ponies. Next came the bride's carriage—a big waggon, drawn by six white oxen, which conveyed the bride herself, together with all her household goods. High up in the midst of her goods and chattels she sat in state—the golden threads, that here take the place of the bridal veil, streaming around her. She was young and handsome, and her face beamed with happiness; and although, in accordance with custom immemorial, she was obliged to keep her eyelids modestly lowered, from time to time a stolen glance shot forth from under the long lashes. Her cheeks, her chin, and even the tip of her nose, had been rouged according to the country usage, by being rubbed with the petals of some red flower; this denotes the degree of fortune possessed by marriageable girls among the peasantry, and showed that the parents of the present bride must be a more than commonly well-to-do couple; for had she been less rich the touch of rouge would have

been spared the tip of her nose, while the additional colour in her cheeks alone would have implied that hers was quite an ordinary dowry. A bevy of laughing girls surrounded her, and on either side sat her father and mother, a comfortable old couple—he full of importance in his handsomest suit and broad belt, she matronly and dignified under her long veil embroidered with gold threads.

The cavalcade pulled up, and the bridegroom sprang from his horse to assist the bride to alight.

"Do not forget, as you pass me in the church," whispered one of her companions to her, "to drag your foot after you a little, so that I may be a bride too before the year is over!"

Neaga had resolutely turned her back on the whole gay spectacle, and was standing a little aloof, her brows knit, impatiently tracing figures in the sand with the tip of her toe, while the old man went round, cap in hand, collecting small pieces of money from his audience. This part of the performance was always the greatest trial to the proud-spirited girl, and had she followed her own impulse she would have scattered the entire contents of the cap into the road. At last, thinking the hated ceremony must be over, she looked round just at the moment when the bridegroom was lifting his bride from her high perched seat to the ground. Neaga had no sooner caught sight of his face than with a loud joyous scream she rushed at him, pushing her way among the astonished wedding-guests.

"Radu, my brother! is it possible? Radu, have I found you at last? Oh, father, father, come!" And she darted back to where the old man stood, and seizing him by the arm, dragged him forward. "Here, father, see! This is your son, Radu. Oh, what joy to have found him! Now all your troubles are over; he will let no harm come near you!"

She stopped short, for Radu stood before her motionless, and spoke no word.

The bride looked from one to the other, and something of a sneer curled her full red lips.

"Tell me, Radu, are these indeed your father and sister—these beggars, these tramps? A charming family, indeed! But no, the girl is not right in her head—her story cannot be true! Speak out, Radu, and tell us what to think of it."

Radu seemed to be struggling to swallow something that stuck in his throat. At last, with a violent effort, he brought out the words:

"I do not know the old man."

"That is true enough," said Vlad; "me you may not know. But how about Neaga, your sister?"

Radu kept silence.

"Well, Radu!" cried the bride again, "have you deceived your promised wife? Did you lie to her, when you gave yourself out to be an honest peasant's son, and do you in real truth belong to folks who beg their bread in the streets? Speak up like a man! If their tale is not a true one, what does this mean? Perhaps the girl is not your sister, but your

sweetheart, whom you have deserted to marry the richer Ileana?"

Again it was only with a spasmodic struggle that Radu contrived to say:

"I do not know her at all!"

"Oh, Radu!" cried Neaga, "will you stand there and let your own sister be insulted and jeered at?"

"How then?" cried Ileana's sharp voice once more, and anger dyed her cheeks a deeper red than the artificial colour on them. "Is it not true then, wench, that you wander through the streets and sing for the paras flung to you?"

"It is true that I wander from place to place and sing for paras, and I am not ashamed to own it!" said Neaga, with as proud an air as if she were a princess rather than a beggar-maid.

And a little murmur of approbation ran through the crowd, impressed by the quiet dignity of the girl's speech and bearing.

"Listen to me, Radu," said Ileana, with a scornful laugh. "I do not enter the church with you before I know if these beggar-folk really belong to you or not."

"I have already told you; I have nothing to do with them."

A vivid flash of lightning, followed by a loud peal of thunder, seemed to be the answer to his words.

Intent on the scene, no one had noticed the one heavy thunder-cloud which had risen in the bright blue sky. All crossed themselves, but excitement

and curiosity were still too strong for anyone to flee from the threatening storm.

"Radu!" exclaimed the old man, "I will leave you in peace. I will wander on my own way alone, and you shall never hear of me again, if you will but acknowledge your sister and act justly by her."

"Never!" was the answer.

Ileana laughed spitefully.

"Do not deny any longer. I see it all clearly now. The girl is your sweetheart; that is plain enough. Look at her, all of you, how she eyes him, and shows her white teeth and her black hair! Ah! it was a nice plan, to wait till his wedding-day to come and claim him. Take your lover, then, you beggar-girl; you are welcome to him! Take him to tramp the country with you, and learn from you to sing and beg."

"Radu," said Vlad, once more, and his voice was so hollow, it was like that of one speaking from the grave, "I call upon thee to speak the truth, or else I must do so!"

Cold drops of perspiration stood on Radu's brow.

"I have nothing to tell," he said. "It is all a lie; I have nought to do with her!"

"You say so!" said the old man. "Then listen to me. I, your father, am but just set free from Ocna. It is there I have worn my life away, and have grown old before my time. But this girl, my daughter, did not despise me nor refuse to go with me, and has shared the outcast's fate, and sung for

bread in the streets, honest and blameless maiden though she be. Therefore blessings shall be on her, while only curses shall be the portion of the son who has disowned and turned his back upon his father. My curse be on thee, my son Radu, to all eternity! Thy house shall fall to dust and ashes, thy fields become barren, thy wells dry up, and thy cattle fall sick and die! And if any son be born to thee, may he bring down on thee tenfold more shame and misery than I have suffered in the mines; and in thy dying hour may none be near to give thee a drop of water for thy thirst! The wife of thy bosom shall betray and desert thee, and whatsoever thou touchest shall be poisoned, so that all may avoid thee and fly from thee, and none shall ever have power to release thee from thy father's curse!"

Again there was a heavy peal of thunder, that seemed to rumble across the whole sky. But even this could scarcely increase the terror the old man's words inspired in the simple and superstitious minds of his awe-stricken hearers. All fell back in horror, leaving the space clear round the little group, Vlad erect, with outstretched arm, hurling his malediction upon the head of his now terrified son, who had fallen on his knees, and with his hands extended was apparently trying to ward off the curse. At last, exhausted, the old man sank upon his daughter's shoulder, just as the storm broke with violence overhead. Fierce gusts of wind enveloped them both in a cloud of eddying dust, that only subsided under

the downpouring rain, and before the air was clear again, father and daughter had vanished from the spot. Radu alone remained, cowering on the ground, forsaken by all, for the man upon whom rests so heavy a curse is shunned and avoided by his fellow-creatures as if he were stricken with the plague. Ileana had been taken into the nearest house. Frantic with disappointment, she raved and tore her hair, pulling out and scattering on the ground the gold threads that had been her pride that morning, stamping on them in her grief and rage, and altogether making such a display of her distress as highly to impress the onlookers, who all proclaimed that as a salve to her wounded feelings she fully deserved that a rich husband should be found her as speedily as possible. She had had a lesson, poor thing, of the danger of choosing a husband for his handsome face alone! But what was to be expected, if you found no one good enough for you in your own village, and must needs take up with a young fellow whom no one had ever seen before, and of whom no one knew from whence he came, nor to what people he belonged. It was not surprising that the good-looking young man whom all had envied so for his good fortune should turn out to be a homeless vagabond, and his father actually a convicted criminal! But, oh, the shame of it! And it was to be hoped that well-to-do parents with an only daughter would be wiser in future than to let her make her own foolish choice, and throw herself and her fortune away

on a stranger! Would it not have been far better for Ileana had her father given her a good beating at the outset, and then locked her up to cure her of her folly? Thus all the gossips chattered, well content to have so fruitful a subject of discussion.

Radu meanwhile had sought refuge in the church porch, for the door of the church itself had been ruthlessly shut in his face. He was wondering what would become of him, and whither to wend his steps, since it was evident that no one would have any dealings with him. He was aroused from his unhappy musings by the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps, and a young man came up in breathless haste. The new-comer started at sight of Radu, then apparently taking heart, addressed him thus:

"For the love of God, do not betray me to those who seek me! They are after me even now, for I have made my escape from prison, and know not where to seek shelter. You have a compassionate face; point out to me some hiding-place, so that I may not fall into their hands."

The fugitive was no other than Sandu, who little thought that he was speaking to Neaga's brother, and that but a short while ago Neaga herself had stood close to that very spot.

"Have no misgivings," he went on. "I am no malefactor. I did not intentionally commit the crime for which I was condemned."

"But what help can I give you?" asked Radu sadly. "I am myself an outcast, and know not

which way to turn. A wild beast would as well be able to help you as I. Yet stay! Take the little path behind the church, that leads right up into the mountains. In a few minutes you will be in a wild, pathless region, where the steep, high rocks will surely afford you shelter from your pursuers. I know no other counsel, but this perchance may serve you. Lose no time!"

And Sandu did not tarry, but fled, without wasting another word, in the direction pointed out, with all the speed of which a man is capable who knows that he has bloodhounds on his track. Radu, for his part, made his way back to his own dwelling under cover of night, there to collect his few belongings, in order before daybreak to effect his departure from the village, and wander out once more into the world alone.

. . . . . .

It was the hour of sunset. Solemn stillness lay upon the whole mountain region. A young shepherd, in his gay woollen shirt and high conical lambskin cap, was watching his flock grazing on one of the grassy slopes. At last he broke the silence by winding a blast on his horn, the Bucium or long alpine-horn, whose sound carries so far.

Voices of other shepherds answered him straightway from the surrounding hills, and then one of them took up his little rustic flute and began playing an air—one of the sweet, plaintive melodies that bring tears to the eyes of exiles in strange

lands, and even call up, it is said, such home-sickness in the hearts of the young recruits in the plains below, that they have ere now been known to desert at the sound of the well-known strains, drawn by an irresistible longing to revisit their native hills.

High up in the mountain fastness, perched like an eagle's eyrie against the perpendicular wall of rock, was one of the small monasteries that are scattered here and there throughout Roumania. A young monk, clad in a long flowing black robe, stepped outside the monastery, and then proceeded to pace around it, striking the Toaca the while. This is a wooden instrument of simplest form, consisting merely of a long lath held in the one hand, on which repeated blows are struck by a little wooden hammer, at varying distances and at measured intervals, thus giving rise to a sort of cadenced melody. This method of summoning to prayer dates from the days of Turkish rule, when the ringing of bells was strictly prohibited. Having made the round of the monastery and chapel, the monk entered the belfrey and pulled the solitary bell, at which signal the rest of the brethren left their cells and made their way towards the chapel. They were for the greater part venerable men, with long white beards, and white locks flowing from beneath the high beretta, over which hung a long black veil.

A little later, two strangers were to be seen toiling

slowly and painfully up the steep mountain path. The one was Vlad, grown very aged and feeble, and leaning for support on Neaga, who carefully guided his halting steps.

"Alas, child! I am weary unto death," he sighed. "Let me rest here awhile, for I can no further. What was it I heard spoken of rejoicings that were taking place here?"

"Nay, father, a little further on, at the great monastery, where they expect the Prince. I thought if we could but get so far, there might surely be something for us to earn there."

"Ah, no! for me the days are over in which I could hope to earn aught. Let me but sleep here undisturbed!"

He sat down on a flat stone, leaning his head against the rocky wall, whose grey stone was dyed crimson in the rays of the setting sun. Neaga knelt before him, vainly endeavouring to find a more fitting resting-place for his weary limbs. As she gazed into the worn and deeply-lined face, so startling a change seemed to come over the drawn features, such an ashen hue spread itself over the sunken cheeks, that she started up in alarm, and looked around for help.

"Father!" she exclaimed, wringing her hands in despair, "are you ill? Speak to me, father! Tell me what ails you!"

Again she looked round in the hope of seeing a stream or well. In the monastery she would surely

find water, and she flew towards the gate, reaching it just as the young monk once more made his appearance at it.

"Reverend father," cried the girl, falling on her knees before him, "I implore your assistance! For the love of Heaven, come with me! My father is dying over yonder, and I have none to help me!"

"Neaga!" was the startled cry that broke from the young monk's lips.

She sprang to her feet, and started back with an expression of horror on her face.

"And who are you?" she asked.

"I am Radu, your brother!"

"I have no brother!" And she turned to go.

"Have pity, Neaga! Be less hard and cold!" he cried, following her.

"It is Fate that is hard, not I!"

"My heart is dead within me!" he went on, still following.

"There are other dead hearts in the world!" she replied, in the some cold tones. "But if you would still be in time to help him, hasten, for I know not if he be not already dead!"

"Dead! with his curse resting on me to all eternity!"

He rushed up to where the old man lay, and flung himself down before him, clasping his feet.

"Oh, father, look up, I implore! Take away your curse from upon me. It has done its work—I am

an outcast and a wanderer, shunned by all men, and am doing penance to the end of my days in prayer and fasting. Grant me your forgiveness, father. Do not die without taking your curse from off me!"

Vlad opened his eyes. "Who is it that disturbs my dying hour?"

"A poor sinner, but yet your son."

"Unnatural wretch! what wouldst thou?" said the dying man. "Go, and leave me to die in peace!"

"Have mercy, father!" Radu prayed again. "In this world I am punished; I have neither wife nor child, nor hearth nor home of my own. I ask none of the happiness that falls to the lot of other men, and will spend my whole time praying for the souls that have sinned. I ask but thy forgiveness, and to have thy blessing ere it be too late."

A wave of blood rushed into the pale face, on which the seal of death seemed already set, and the old man raised himself with a last effort.

"Never!" he exclaimed. "Upon the son who disowned me shall for ever rest—"

"Oh, father! father!" Neaga interrupted him, in tones of agonised appeal.

"—My blessing," he said, relenting, and had no sooner spoken than he fell back dead.

Radu drew a deep breath, as if a weight were removed from his soul, while Neaga flung herself across the body in an agony of grief.

Then Radu fetched other monks, and together they bore the body into the little chapel, with solemn chants. Radu remained all night to keep watch and recite the prayers for the dead, while Neaga alternately knelt by his side in prayer, or wandered out into the moonlight, as if the more fully to realise the immensity of her loneliness.

In the midst of her sorrow, the thought that she was now so utterly alone in the world assailed her with redoubled force. What was to become of her, a woman without kith or kin, with none on earth to care for her? Radu had done well and wisely, she thought, when he became a monk, and she wondered if some friendly convent would not open its gates to her in her forsaken condition. But no, that would utterly cut her off from all hope of ever seeing Sandu again, when at last he should be set free! She must remain free herself on his account. Better for her to make her way on foot to the town—the great town where the Prince resided. There she could surely find work by which to earn an honest livelihood, and she would find means of petitioning for Sandu. She would get the papers written that should plead for him, and then stand herself at the Palace gates, and hand them in to the carriage to the Prince or Princess as they passed, until, tired out by her supplications, they would grant his release.

Several times in the course of her musings she had thought she heard the sound of footsteps near her on the mountain path. Now she could no longer be

mistaken; there was someone close at hand. Was it one of the monks, or a wayfarer like herself—a fugitive, perhaps? She looked up, her heart beating violently. Was it a ghost, or were her senses leaving her? Could it be really Sandu who stood before her in the moonlight—Sandu himself, paler and thinner, indeed, but still her Sandu—looking at her with the same loving eyes she had last seen when he was dragged from her side to prison?

"Neaga!" was all he said, and she screamed and fell into his arms, more overcome by this unexpected joy than by all the pain and grief, the sorrow and privations, she had undergone. She had quite broken down at last, and she leant her head on her lover's bosom and sobbed like a child, the brave, proud, strong-souled girl, who had borne so much uncomplainingly. But she soon recovered herself, and plied him with questions. How had he escaped, and when, and whither must they now flee?

In fewest words he told her all—how he had managed to evade his gaolers, and to make his way to the mountains, where, since then, he had lain hidden all this time, concealed among the rocks by day, and at nightfall creeping out to seek food, and wander on to some fresh hiding-place, always choosing the roughest paths and most inaccessible regions. Chance had brought him to this neighbourhood, and he had recognised Neaga and her father wandering up the mountain path that very day, and had followed them from afar. But he had seen

soldiers, too, in the distance, apparently seeking some deserter or runaway—perhaps himself, and it would no longer be safe for him to tarry here. If he were caught now, he would probably be shot down at once. There was only one real plan of safety for him—to cross the Danube into another country. Neaga was true to him, he saw; would she fly with him and share his fate?

She had only one moment's hesitation.

"My father lies there dead, and is yet unburied. Can I leave him?"

"He is dead, and has no further need of you; but I need you still. Come, or it will be too late!"

Casting one last look behind her towards the chapel, Neaga set forth with her lover on a path beset with a thousand dangers, accompanying him with a fearless heart into a foreign land, into poverty and exile, ready to affront all perils and hardships for his sake; and in spite of everything, feeling nearer to real happiness than she had ever been in her life before.

Radu had spent the whole night in prayer. He missed Neaga from the chapel, and began towards morning to wonder where she could be. At daylight he went to look for her, but she was not to be found. He feared at last that she must have strayed away, and slipped over the precipice, and he searched for her body for many days, but no trace was ever to be found of her, alive or dead—she had vanished utterly.

The young man mourned for his lost sister, and prayed for her soul, together with that of the father of whom he could now bear to think at last with peace in his own heart.

On the second day a party of soldiers arrived at the monastery in pursuit of a convict escaped from the salt-mines. Radu was sent for to speak with them, since it was supposed that as he had kept two nights' vigil, no one could have passed without being perceived by him. And as he could tell them nothing, they plunged further into the mountains, in the contrary direction to that taken by the fugitives. Thus did the blessing of the dying man at once bear fruit for Radu, who was made the unconscious means of favouring his sister's escape.

As Neaga and her lover reached the banks of the Danube, a herd of buffaloes were just being driven into the stream. Without a moment's hesitation they each sprang upon the back of one of the nearest of these animals as they swam from the shore. It was a picture worthy of the pencil of an artist—the wild-looking animals, about a hundred of them in number, struggling through the foaming waves, above which rose the black heads and curled horns, looking still blacker by the contrast, and on their backs the herdsmen in their white lambskin caps, standing upright and guiding their course with long poles, and the beautiful girl in the midst of them, with one hand lifting her skirt out of the water, which splashed the whole time over her bare feet, and her head turned

continually towards her lover, to see if he were close at hand, for ever fearing that a shot from the bank might reach him before they could reach the further shore. But at last it was reached; even this peril was surmounted, and they stood safe and free on Servian soil.

Many years had gone past since these events. The monk Radu had become Staritza, abbot of his monastery, for he had won the good-will of the whole community by his exemplary piety and his indefatigable zeal in all good works. He had his own little dwelling, apart from the rest, and he was sitting outside it one day sunning himself in the little wooden verandah that ran like a cloister round the whole of the monastery, when he saw strangers approaching from the path below. Foremost came two children, dancing along, full of health and spirits. Their mother, a tall and stately woman, followed, holding a third child by the hand, and the youngest, almost a baby, was carried by the father. Only when they had stood some minutes face to face did a flash of recognition come over the abbot's mind, and he cried out:

"Neaga! my sister Neaga!"

And now he heard her whole story, now he learnt that it had been Sandu who had inquired the way of him in that dark hour when they both were outcasts, with whom no man would have dealings. He heard, too, how Sandu had been pardoned at last, and was returning to his own country and his native village,

with wife and children, and with the money he had saved by industry and economy during his exile.

Thus peace and happiness had come at last to the convict's children, and Heaven's blessing was upon them to the end of their lives.

THE GIPSY'S LOVE STORY

(TOLD BY THE DAUGHTER OF A BOYAR)

MOTHER GAFITZA, as she was called by everyone, whom I remember from my earliest childhood as housekeeper on my father's estate, presided over the fortunes of the household with most praiseworthy energy and in a highly efficient manner. My mother placed implicit confidence in her, and left everything in her hands. It was she who distributed their work to all the serfs, both men and women; they were entirely under her control, and the orders for rewards or punishment came from her also. Kitchen and larder, pantry, store-room, linen-closet, cellar, and orchard all belonged to her domain; and whenever any of us children happened to fall ill, Mother Gafitza was always the first doctor to be consulted, for she possessed an endless stock of marvellous old prescriptions and domestic remedies known to be of infallible efficacy, and it was firmly believed that her judicious administration of these had saved our lives on more than one occasion. But perhaps in our eyes her talent for preserving fruit exceeded all her other virtues. The delicious home-made jam—"dulceatza"

—is such an important item in every Roumanian household, special skill in its preparation is naturally much appreciated. On every possible occasion, at all times and seasons, the dainty little glass plates of dulceatza make their appearance, and no one drinks a glass of water without taking a spoonful between every sip. No sooner is a visitor announced than a tray is brought in laden with preserves of all sorts—apricots and cherries, strawberries and citron, finely-sliced orange-peel preserved in syrup, grapes, rose-leaves, and violets — a most heterogeneous yet tempting assortment; then, a greater delicacy still, there are the various kinds of jelly or marmalade made of raspberries, maize, roses, water-lilies even—of every imaginable flower or fruit, in short, whose perfume promises corresponding fineness of flavour. The greatest pains and attention are bestowed on this particular branch of domestic economy, to excel in which is the just pride of every Roumanian housewife.

Our serfs were all gipsies, of course, and in order to obtain the finest specimens of these for the indoor service the prettiest children were always being hunted up all over the estate, and their parents induced, sometimes by persuasion but more often by force, to part with them, to be brought up under the exemplary but severe rule of Mother Gafitza. Among about half-a-dozen of these gipsy girls of really remarkable beauty, certainly the loveliest of all was Cassandra. Her skin was so white, it was

difficult to believe her to be of unmixed gipsy blood ; she had features of extreme delicacy, teeth like ivory behind ripe crimson lips, and a profusion of coal-black hair, while her lightly-built and supple form, with its slender hips and tiny hands and feet, had all the willowy grace, the nameless charm which the Romany race must have brought from its home in the far East, and which it has retained throughout all its wanderings.

We had Lautari too—gipsy musicians—on the estate, and first and foremost among them was a very handsome young fellow, called Didica. It was he who played the violin and sang to it at times, whilst the others accompanied him either on the cobza (a very big mandoline, a favourite national instrument), or on their pipes and dulcimers. Didica was a born rhapsodist, and many were the new songs and Horas he had composed, improvising both words and music. His extraordinary talent had already won him such a reputation that he was in the greatest request all over the country, and we were constantly asked to grant him a few days' leave, in order that he might go and play at Jassy, or on some other estate. For a time he had done that willingly enough. It had been pleasant to go about from place to place, leading the free and roving life the gipsy loves, playing at every feast and merry-making in the district, receiving many compliments on his proficiency in his art, and reaping a rich harvest besides, not merely of fair and flattering words, but also of a more

substantial nature, in the silver pieces with which the minstrel was rewarded. But a change had come over Didica. He never wished to be absent now. Cassandra's beauty had caught his eye, and he had fallen madly in love with her. And Cassandra too had a heart, even though it were only a gipsy heart, and that heart had yielded itself up entirely to the handsome singer's fascinations. Whenever he played or sang, he fixed his eyes upon her with such ardour that she felt herself turn hot and cold by turns. And if she danced, then his violin seemed to play for her alone, and to follow every one of her movements. Whatever money was flung to him was at once spent on some present for her—strings of glass beads or glittering ear-rings. At last they both summoned up their courage, and after much anxious discussion, and with considerable perturbation, yet with a fair share of hopefulness, the young man boldly presented himself before Mother Gafitza, and then and there made the solemn and formal demand for Cassandra's hand.

But Mother Gafitza, our house's special Providence, had in her wisdom decreed otherwise. Mother Gafitza had other views for the fair Cassandra, and she made these known to the discomfited suitor, speaking her mind plainly, as was her wont.

"A nice idea, truly," she said, turning to the poor girl herself, who would have given her own trembling support to her lover's prayers; "a nice idea, that

I should give you to a wandering fiddler, a mere strolling minstrel, a man who has no settled occupation nor fixed abode, but is to-day here and to-morrow there, like a bird on the wing! No, no, my little one, that will never do! Have I not recommended you to the gracious lady herself, and has she not been pleased to signify that she is well satisfied with you, and likes to see you about her, and will keep you altogether in the house, in her own special service? It would look well indeed that I should propose to our mistress to let her own favourite waiting-maid marry a fellow who has never learnt to do aught else than to scrape his fiddle for the idlers to dance to, and who would next be wanting you to be off with him to scour the country at his side! No more of that, my children; put it out of your minds. As for you, my girl, I have found a husband for you, a good and worthy man, and a well-favoured one too, with a respectable calling—Costaki, the cook. You will have him, and no other. He came to me and asked for you for his wife, and he has my promise, and went away full of gratitude, having kissed my hand and the border of my sleeve in the gladness of his heart. I have given him my word that you will be his wife, and his wife you shall be, so there is no more to be said about it."

Cassandra wept and prayed, but all in vain. Then she and Didica took counsel together, and he went once more to Mother Gafitza, and besought her so

earnestly that she seemed to take compassion on them, and promised that she would herself plead their cause with her mistress, and say all she could in their behalf. So the artful old woman professed to seek my mother with that intent, but spoke not a word on the subject, and came away with a gloomy look, saying her orders were to enforce obedience with the utmost severity.

But Cassandra turned her back on Costaki, the cook, and absolutely refused to look at him or speak to him.

Much aggrieved at the manner in which he was treated by his betrothed, Costaki complained of her unkind and disdainful conduct to his patroness, who in her maternal solicitude gave immediate orders for the punishment of the offender. And Cassandra received due chastisement for her obstinate self-will, according to time-honoured custom and tradition, against which it had never occurred to anyone to protest, until I, having completed my education under West-European influences, returned home from France with a host of new ideas considerably at variance with prevailing institutions.

I happened to pass by one day when the wife of our old coachman Stoica was being flogged, and in the first heat of my indignation I rushed off to my mother (for of my father I stood in too great awe to dare to appeal to him), and announced my intention of at once quitting the house should a scene of such revolting barbarity again take place. The next

morning I was summoned to my father's presence, and sharply requested to refrain from interference in matters I could not possibly understand.

"Who, I should like to know, has put all these crazy modern notions into your head? Have you never heard that a gipsy who has not yet tasted the stick is as worthless as a mill without a wheel? And tell me, if you please, how you propose to manage the whole crew without distributing a few blows among them now and then?"

My answer was prompt: "By setting them free, father!"

But I had not yet come back to disturb existing ordinances with my new-fangled ideas and prejudices, and what was occurring now everyone took very much as a matter of course. Poor Cassandra herself felt that it was of little use to struggle against the very forcible arguments employed to convince her. That same evening she was standing with Didica under the walnut tree in the meadow where they had so often met before, and she leant against the trunk, sobbing bitterly.

"Didica," she said, and the tears streamed down her cheeks—"Didica, they will beat me to death if I do not give you up! But whatever happens I love only you—I shall love no one else as long as I live!"

Didica ground his teeth, then took the weeping girl in his arms and pressed her passionately to his heart. When they parted, he wandered about restlessly for the remainder of the night. One

moment he would fling himself down by the water-side, and stare into its depths; the next, he would spring to his feet again and race madly through meadows and fields; then again he would lie stretched at full length on the ground, with his face buried in the grass, cursing his hard fate that he was no free man, and might not love and be happy like other men, but must submit to see his whole life's happiness torn from him, and the girl he loved given to another. It was too cruel! It was so horribly unjust, too, that just he, who seemed to be there for the amusement and happiness of all—for was he not the life and soul of every gathering, of all their dances and revels?—that he must be deprived of all joy and gladness! Never had the thought of serf-dom, the consciousness of his condition, galled him before. Its full significance only came to him in the hour when he realised that his heart's beloved, the girl who had given her heart into his keeping, could be given away herself like a dumb, soulless creature, at the good-will and pleasure of her masters. And there was no help for it—none! He could not even incite her to rebellion, adjure her to hold out any longer, for fear of bringing down still worse treatment upon her. Oh, it was too hard! Didica rolled on the grass in his despair, and tore his hair, and beat his head on the ground. He felt that he hated the whole world.

Two days later the wedding of poor pretty Cassandra took place with Costaki, our middle-

aged but still good-looking cook. She who had always been so gay and light-hearted, and whose lips seemed only made to smile, now wore so sad and dejected an air that it astonished all who were not in the secret of her unhappiness, and my mother most of all. Once more before the fatal day Didica came to Mother Gafitza, to beg her at least for this one occasion to have other Lautari sent for. He could not play. For this once she must let him off, and take others in his stead. But Mother Gafitza was a woman of much determination of character, and when she had once made up her mind to a thing, it had to be done. She had said that Didica would play at the wedding, and play Didica must. It was quite understood, and the master and mistress expected it, and what would they say if they suddenly heard that Didica refused to play? She would not answer for it what they might do in their surprise and anger. No, Didica had better come to his senses quickly, and put a good face on the matter, and play his best, otherwise worse things still might happen. It was lucky indeed for him and for Cassandra that they had so good a friend in her, to warn them from the consequences of their own folly.

Didica rushed away, and flung himself down upon a heap of straw in some out-of-the-way corner, where he lay concealed, struggling with his grief. Only on the wedding-day itself did he make his appearance again, looking like a ghost, with deep-sunken eyes. But when the moment came for the music to strike

up for the dance, and he put his violin to his shoulder and drew the bow across the strings, it was as if something demoniacal passed into him, and guided his long lithe fingers. He played as he had never played before. There was a fierce mockery, well-nigh a fury of pent-up passion in the wild, reckless gaiety of his improvisation, that made it seem like the agonised cry of some lost human soul, vainly striving, in the delirious exultation of simulated mirth, to stifle the voice of its own despair. From time to time the dancers paused in wonderment at this strange music, then they yielded themselves up once more to its intoxication, and the dance swayed on more madly than before. One person alone was apparently unmoved by the witchery of the strains—the bride herself. According to custom, she had to dance every dance with the bridegroom, and she moved through all the figures with her wonted grace, but with no more life and animation than a statue. Only once did her eyes meet Didica's, quite early in the day, when, just as he was beginning to play, he lifted his and looked straight across at her, and she looked back at him, and in that one heart-broken glance the two poor young creatures bade one another a last farewell, for their whole lives. After that Cassandra showed no sign of any sort of feeling, but took her place in the dance as was required of her, and threaded its mazes as if in a dream, whilst all around her everyone seemed to be carried away by the frenzy of the musician. When

evening came, Costaki took his young bride home with him, accompanied to their door by the gay congratulations and somewhat free jests of the mirthful assembly, which however brought no smile to Cassandra's grave lips. As they took their leave, Didica suddenly beckoned to another very pretty gipsy girl called Smaranda, and disappeared with her into the night and darkness, never to be seen or heard of more.

And Cassandra lived on, sad and serious, as a good and faithful wife to Costaki, and bore him many children, but from out her own life all happiness had departed for evermore. She was the great favourite of my mother, and all her duties were well and punctually performed; but who can say what sad thoughts may have slept in the depths of her mournful dreamy eyes, or guess the secret sorrow never revealed by the beautiful silent lips?

THE CRIPPLE

IT was Christmas Eve everywhere, even in the court-yard of the old monastery of Margineni, which had recently been turned into a State prison, and now lay plunged in impenetrable silence and impassable snow. For a whole week the snow had fallen continuously —fine driving snow—beneath which human beings and cattle were lost and buried, and which now covered the ground to such a height, nothing remained save here and there a solitary telegraph-pole that had not been blown over by the wind, to point out where once the road had been. Nought else was to be seen far and wide on the unbroken expanse of snow, and nought was to be heard save the howling of the wolves at night; wherever a hare had passed, the trail would stop short suddenly and sink into the snow, since there was no escape here even for the hares. There had been sledging inside the quadrangle of the monastery, and there the snow was piled so high that the sentries, who on account of the bitter cold were changed every half-hour, literally disappeared behind the towering white walls. The stars glittered; it was an icy night, perfectly

still with the intense cold. The thermometer had sunk to about fifteen degrees below zero, and everything was frozen so hard, it looked as if the whole world had been changed into stone by the touch of some magician's wand, and were waiting to be released from the spell.

Inside the guard-room things looked more cheerful; here an immense fire blazed—and very necessary it was, since whenever the door opened to let the sentries pass in and out, such an icy breath of air entered at the same time, everyone felt for the moment chilled to the bone. The soldiers, as they came in, went straight to the fire, stamping their feet and blowing on their fingers, and then gladly stretching out a hand to take the glass of grog which the others had kept hot for them. They talked hard, to try to shake off the feeling of drowsiness which crept over them in the sharp cold, and many a joke was made, little in keeping with the melancholy character of the place. For there was no Christmas joy for the prisoners; for them there was no warm fire, no better food, nothing told of the festival; the day had been a day like any other, and this night, the Christmas night, was just a long night like any other in winter. No sound reached them save the monotonously recurring challenge of the sentries, and the distant yelping of the wolves; and as for warmth, there was none indeed, since the cold penetrated through the open galleries, into which the snow had drifted, and lay collected in big heaps that

no one took the trouble to sweep away. It was dark as the tomb inside the prison, and round about it too, for inside the sparsely-scattered lanterns the oil had frozen thick, the glass sides were quite hard-frozen, and the light they gave grew feebler and feebler. It would have been a night on which to make one's escape, had one not been quite certain of perishing miserably outside.

The soldiers went on laughing and joking over their grog, and gave their prisoners no further thought, beyond just wishing them in a very warm spot, from whence there is no such easy return, in order that they might be free of the trouble of looking after them.

"A pretty task," said one of them, "to mount guard over the treasures inside there, as though they were so many golden ducats or precious stones! And they are not worth the powder and shot we should have to send after them if they tried to get away!"

"It would be far better to send them to the salt-mines at once, or string them up as they do in other countries, instead of shutting them up here for us to guard in this infernal cold! They are much better off than we are!"

"Nicolai, at all events, need not envy them," laughed a third. "His thoughts are at home with his wife, and he knows nothing of what is going on here. Look at him, sitting there as solemnly as a wooden figure, without a word to say! Nicolai, you

lucky fellow, have you not won the prize so many were after? What more do you want? What ails you, then?"

"I hardly know myself; but my heart is as heavy as if some terrible misfortune threatened me!"

"Nonsense; it is rather another piece of good fortune you may look out for now. By this time your young prince must surely be there, and you will have the news in the morning before we are out of church, I bet you! Why make such a long face and torment yourself with needless fears? Your pretty hostess will get through it as well as any woman ever did. Why, she is as healthy as an apple, and as lively as a mouse, and as agile as a kitten! And beautiful she is—how beautiful! Ah, Nicolai, you are indeed to be envied!"

In the doorway, hidden by the shadow of the soldiers, stood a silent figure. It was the young officer, left in command of the guard, who had been listening for some minutes to the conversation of his men, with an expression of such deadly hatred on his face one would have thought that Nicolai must feel it, and that his uneasy sensation of impending evil might very probably arise from the consciousness that a bitter enemy had his eyes fixed upon him to wish him ill.

The officer was a handsome young man, but far less handsome than the soldier Nicolai, whose features were so finely cut, and his whole form of such admirable proportions, he was a perfect

specimen of manly beauty, the pride of his own village, and a delight to the eyes of all who saw him by the side of his beautiful wife, the fair young hostess. All this passed through the officer's mind as he listened. Apparently he had never known until that moment that Nicolai had succeeded in winning the hand of the much-coveted village beauty, to whose charms he also had not been insensible. He ground his teeth with rage as he recalled many a stolen kiss that he had enjoyed in the days not so long ago when he was quartered in the neighbourhood, and thought to himself that the fresh red lips which had bestowed them were now the property of Nicolai alone. And the girl had seemed to care for him; she had certainly not turned a deaf ear to his love-making. Who would have suspected that she could so soon forget, and choose rather to be the wife of Nicolai, the common soldier, than to remain faithful to his memory? Nicolai his rival, his successor! It was not to be borne! He had hard work to control himself sufficiently not to fall upon the unsuspecting Nicolai then and there, and run him through the body. His jealousy made him frantic. That she should have consoled herself—that she should have forgotten him—he could have forgiven her that, he thought. But to have fixed on Nicolai—to have taken him as her husband—that was the unpardonable offence! What could she have seen in the fellow that she should want to marry him? he wondered. It was odious, and ridiculous too, and

again his eyes shot out vindictive lightnings in the direction of Nicolai. Suddenly a diabolical thought came into his mind, and his features were absolutely distorted by the expression of relentless cruelty they now took. Had anyone seen him at that moment, they would not have recognised him—the handsome face was positively hideous under the influence of the passions that convulsed it. But no one saw it; the soldiers laughed and sang over their grog, and never troubled themselves about their officer, whom they all believed to be asleep in the inner room.

When it came to Nicolai's turn to relieve guard, the young officer smiled to himself, and before the next round came he had spoken a word into the sergeant's ear—a word to which the other only nodded in silence, but with a peculiar look at his superior, as if he would have warned him had he dared against the order just given.

But whatever the sergeant might think to himself, he could not disobey orders. The relief-guard made its rounds outside the huge gloomy building, and went past the anxiously expectant Nicolai without word or sign, without even slackening pace, as if he had not been there. He heard them return to the guard-room, and thought they had forgotten him. But when the sentinels were relieved again the same thing happened. At the third round he called out to them that he was nearly frozen, his hands were already so numb, he could no longer hold his musket. Again they went past him as though they had been

deaf and blind. Nicolai stood there at his post, and stamped his feet, and beat his hands together, to try to bring a little life into them again, but all to no purpose. The cold grew every minute more intense, and he became more and more drowsy and sleepy. But he was indignant, too, at being treated thus. It was not a simple mistake or oversight, as he had believed at first. No, it was purposely done, leaving him here for hours exposed to this cruel cold. It must be a foolish practical joke on the part of the sergeant, he told himself. But that was impossible ; this was no night for playing such a joke—it was his life that was being endangered, that they must know very well. And none of his comrades bore him any ill-will—there was no one, Nicolai thought, who could harbour a grudge against him. The whole thing was simply incomprehensible. Besides, neither the sergeant nor any of the other soldiers would dare, on their own responsibility, to risk a comrade's life. The order must come from above; it must have been the officer who gave it. But why? For what motive should he wish to rid himself of one of his men? All this passed like lightning through Nicolai's brain, one thought succeeding the other with the utmost rapidity, and suddenly, at this point, a bright light seemed to flash upon him. The explanation he sought was there. The figure of the young officer had no sooner risen before him than he recalled the circumstances in which he had heard of him before. The tales occurred to him, which he so often heard

whispered, but had refused to heed, of the attentions paid the pretty girl of the village inn by the handsome young officer, whilst in the neighbouring garrison. It was true, then, the idle talk, to which he had always turned a deaf ear, of the love-passages between those two, in the days before he, poor credulous Nicolai, came upon the scene, to inherit the other's leavings? His blood boiled at the thought; in the fever of his jealousy he hardly noticed the extent to which the cold had seized upon his limbs, and that his hands had no longer any feeling in them. Mad at the thought of his wrongs, furious with those who had, as he was now convinced, played this infamous trick upon him, in plotting to send him here to die—to have him out of the way—he cursed them both in his despair, he prayed to live but to be avenged upon them; and this desire of vengeance was the last feeling that still survived in him as little by little he lost consciousness completely.

In this condition—insensible—and with his hands and arms completely frost-bitten, he was found next morning by the watch at last sent out to relieve him. By his side they found his musket, which his poor frozen fingers had allowed to fall upon the hard crisp snow. With warmth and friction, life returned by degrees into the stiff, benumbed body, and he slowly recovered consciousness. But no amount of rubbing could bring back life into the hands, on which the cold had so thoroughly taken hold that by

the next day they had both turned black ; and when the unfortunate man was packed into a sledge and driven to the nearest hospital to be well nursed and cared for, it was soon seen that as to his hands, there was no hope of saving these—both had to be amputated. For months after this Nicolai lay there in frightful pain, and in danger of losing his feet as well, for the frost had attacked them also, but in the end they were saved. During those long months in which he lay on his bed of pain in the hospital not a groan escaped his lips—he never complained, he hardly spoke ; as to complaining of what had happened to him, of what use would that have been ? He had best hold his peace. Once he roused himself to beg that a letter might be sent to his young wife, telling her that he was ill in hospital ; but they must be careful not to let her know that he had lost both hands, and would henceforth be a helpless cripple. The shock would be too great for her, he said, since she had not so very long since been confined, and was now nursing her first baby. They did as he asked, though it seemed strange that he did not send for his wife. Everyone grieved to see this fine young fellow reduced to such a pitiable condition, and there was much wondering as to how he could have met with this misfortune. An inquiry was set on foot, and the officer on duty was questioned; but he only shrugged his shoulders, and suggested that the man must have been drunk and have fallen asleep at his post—he had probably slept so soundly

that he had not heard the challenge of the relief-guard going their round, and had therefore been overlooked by them. They had found the fellow half dead at last, as they had reported to him. The sergeant, too, when called to account, could give no other explanation; what he may have thought to himself—that was another matter! But all were truly grieved, and shook their heads over Nicolai's hard fate, condemned to be a wretched useless cripple for the rest of his days.

It was a lovely spring morning when, after all those months of silent suffering, Nicolai was released from hospital at last. They hung his military cloak round his shoulders, to hide the poor unsightly stumps in which his arms ended, and they gave him a bag containing a little bread, and set him on his way, advising him to hail whatever carts or waggons might come along, and obtain a lift from them, since he was certainly still too weak to reach his home on foot.

He had not consented to let his wife be sent for to the hospital, fearing, he said, the effects of the shock on her, should she suddenly learn what had happened to him. But his fears took in reality a very different form. The whole time in the hospital he had brooded over his wrongs, and his suspicions had tortured him night and day. He had had time enough, indeed, in the long sleepless night hours to dwell on these, and they had attained gigantic proportions. It was bad enough to be maimed and

disfigured as he was, suddenly in all the prime of his health and strength to have become so pitiable an object; and had this been all he would perhaps well-nigh have lacked courage to show himself to his beautiful wife, with her infant at the breast. But worse still than the actual misery of his condition, from which there was no escape, there was the hideous doubt as to the cause to which he owed it. For it had been no accident, no negligence nor mistake, of that he was convinced. The officer who was in command on that fatal night was his enemy—had been his rival in his wife's affections, and had taken this vile means to rid himself of the husband who now stood in his way. That was clear and evident enough—Nicolai's mind was fully made up on that point, and the vengeful feelings roused in him never slumbered. But this was not all; there was the further question as to whether this hideous piece of treachery had been designed and carried out by the officer alone, or whether his wife had also been a party to it. That was the maddening doubt that racked poor Nicolai's brain. Was it possible that she whom he loved so dearly could have betrayed him, could have lent herself to this infamous plot? It was incredible; and yet how else account for what had occurred? Would the other have gone the length of committing this crime, in order to have Nicolai out of the way, unless he had felt quite sure of the reception he would meet with afterwards? How far, Nicolai wondered, had she been faithless to him already?

The poor fellow's physical sufferings were sufficient in themselves, and would have won him the compassion of all who saw him toil along the hard, dusty road, without the aggravation of moral tortures. In that bent, weary figure, dragging itself painfully along on limping feet, who would have recognised the handsome, stalwart young soldier of so short a time ago? The horrors of that one night—the bodily suffering and the mental strain he had since endured, had aged Nicolai prematurely. None could have guessed him to be a young husband hurrying back to his wife's side, and eager to embrace his first-born—rather did he resemble a poor worn-out old man, tottering with feeble steps to the grave. If one looked closely into his face, one could indeed still perceive traces of his former good looks, but the sunken eyes and hollow cheeks, and the anxious pained expression so utterly changed his aspect, that all who saw him asked themselves if even his wife would recognise him should she happen to meet him unawares. Nicolai himself was half impatient for that meeting, half in dread of the new misery it might hold in store for him. His dark suspicions had attained such a pitch, it would scarcely have surprised him to learn that the guilty pair had been turning his absence to good account, and that if he hurried back he might surprise them together. As this picture rose before him, he would forget for a moment his bodily weakness, his crippled limbs, indignation gave him strength, and the desire for vengeance lent wings to his halting feet—all

other feelings were swallowed up in this one fierce longing, and he would hurry along for a space, till the feverish and fictitious energy was spent, leaving him to break down by the wayside in a fit of unutterable despair. For the whole misery of his condition was then revealed to him. He realised what he had become—a poor helpless creature, the mockery of his former self, weaker than any infant—an object of pity and perhaps contempt to all who saw him. What power would he have to avenge his wrongs, to call his treacherous enemy to account for the ruin plotted against him? A pretty figure he would cut, in truth, bursting in upon the two like an avenging thunderbolt, as he had fondly imagined, to slay the intruder at his dishonoured hearth. How they would laugh and jeer at him, turning into ridicule his vain reproaches, his impotent attempts to overwhelm them with the sense of their shame. No, the poor wretch who could no longer enforce his words by action had best be silent under outrage—for him there is no justice, no redress. Stung by the burning sense of injury, Nicolai would rouse himself again, and totter a few steps forward.

Thus by fits and starts he toiled wearily homewards. Often he was assailed by the pangs of hunger and thirst, and that was ever fresh agony, fresh humiliation; for when he sat down by the roadside to eat a crust of bread from his wallet, the sight of the miserable stumps with which he must needs hold it took from him all desire for food; and

as for drinking, it was harder still. He would rush to a running stream, thinking as in former days to drink from the hollow of his hands, and then he would stand still horror-stricken as he remembered that he had no hands with which to raise the draught of clear cold water to his thirsting lips—he could only lie down beside the brook to drink like a dog as it flowed past, or quench his thirst at the cattle-troughs; and as he did so, a tear would fall from his eye and mingle silently with the water.

Sometimes softer thoughts awoke in his breast—thoughts of his child, of the child he had not yet seen, and then from the child they reverted again to the mother, and for the moment he could not believe her to be guilty. He recalled their happy married life, dwelling fondly on every incident that seemed to point to her affection for him; he pictured her, the fair young mother with her baby at her breast, and his resentment and his jealous suspicions faded away before the tender influences his own imagination conjured up. In such a softened mood was it that Nicolai arrived late at night at his own door. He paused, trembling with expectation, on the threshold. At this instant his whole soul was possessed by the one idea: his dread of the first impression his appearance might make upon his wife, the haunting fear lest the shock of suddenly being brought face to face with him in his disfigured, mutilated condition should be harmful either to herself or to the child she was nursing.

Full of this preoccupation, Nicolai opened the door very gently and peeped in. At this late hour there could be no customers left in the tavern; he would surely find her alone. He was right; the guests had all departed, and alone in the room, which a strong flavour of wine and spirits still pervaded, sat his wife. Nicolai thought she looked more bloomingly beautiful than ever, as she sat there behind her little table, busily engaged in counting over the money that had been taken during the day. The light of the one lamp still burning fell full on her fresh young face and rounded form, and Nicolai felt a pang at his heart as he realised the whole extent of the difference between them now, and the cry rose to his lips:

"Good God! what must I look like beside her!"

But he stifled the groan, and advanced noiselessly, thankful that the dim lighting of the room would not permit her to see him very distinctly when she should raise her eyes from her occupation. Her pretty head was still bent over the little heaps of coin spread out on the table before her when he stood still at a little distance from her, and very gently called her name.

She sprang to her feet with a joyful scream.

"Nicolai!" she cried, and rushed to meet him, and fell upon his neck.

He flung his arms around her, and held her fast for a long, long time. At least like this she could not see his hideous disfigurement. He must hold her thus, and break it to her gently, very gently.

"Florica! Florica!" he began at last, "I am still

so weak, so weak and wretched from all I have gone through, you must be patient with me. I have been ill for a long time, and you will find me changed. I am no longer the same that I was!"

His voice faltered; it was as if each word would choke him, and she raised her head in astonishment from his shoulder, and tried to free herself a little from his arms, so as to look better into his face. But he only clasped her the more tightly, and gasped for breath to continue his piteous story.

"You knew, Florica, did you not, that I was exposed for hours to the murderous cold of that frightful Christmas night? But you did not know the effects of what I suffered then. I had both hands frost-bitten! Have you any notion, Florica, what hands that have been frost-bitten look like?"

Again she struggled to free herself from his embrace, but the poor maimed arms locked her fast as in a vice, and she must needs remain still and listen. One by one, slowly and hesitatingly, Nicolai's words dropped from his lips, in short, broken phrases, like the efforts of a child learning to speak:

"I have come back to you, Florica; I have come home, but I can no longer work nor help in anything. I shall be a useless burden to you for the rest of my life, for I am now a wretched, helpless cripple!"

At these last words she did succeed in tearing herself away, and stood a few paces off, looking at him from head to foot. As her eyes fell on the

unsightly stumps, where once his hands had been, she uttered a piercing shriek, and fell senseless to the ground.

Nicolai hastened to her assistance, but, alas! what assistance could he give? He stood there irresolute, gazing with dry tearless eyes at the unconscious form, in bitterest anguish at his own inability to give efficient aid, and yet unwilling to summon help, since in that hour he felt there should be no third person present between man and wife. He bent over her tenderly, and tried to raise her in his arms; but his awkward attempts to lift her were of no avail. She slipped through his grasp, and he was forced to leave her stretched on the hard floor. In his embarrassment he looked around for any means of restoring consciousness, and a little uncorked bottle in one corner of the room caught his eye. This evidently contained some sort of cordial, so he took it down as best he could from the shelf where it stood, and tried to moisten his wife's lips with a few drops from it. But the maimed awkward arms were unequal to such a task; they had no control over the liquid as he poured it, and instead of a few drops, it was so much that it went down her throat. She awoke from her fainting fit only to choke and gasp for breath, clinging to Nicolai, and staring into his face with wild startled eyes, as if imploring him to save her. He looked back at her helplessly, not knowing what to do, and soon to his relief the terrible gasping grew less loud and frequent, and she

loosened her hold on him to totter to the table, where she poured out a glass of water and drank it down in eager gulps. This seemed to soothe the burning in her throat, and now, too, she appeared to come back to herself and remember what had happened. Like one awakening from a bad dream, she looked around her, and her eyes seemed to rest with contentment on each familiar object, as though these brought her the assurance that her fears were only imaginary, till suddenly she caught sight of Nicolai, who was watching her timidly, and the expression of blank horror returned to her face. He drew near, uncertain yet of the meaning of the look she gave him, and vainly trying to persuade himself that it was merely compassion and regret for his misfortune that he read there. But he was not long left in doubt; when he was almost near enough to touch her, she darted back with unmistakable aversion, and falling into a chair, buried her face in her hands, and broke into a fit of uncontrollable weeping, with sobs that shook her whole frame. Nicolai stood helplessly by; then, in his longing to comfort her, he leant over her once more, and made as though he would have clasped her in his arms. At this she started up, pushed him violently from her, and rushed out of the house, awakening the neighbourhood with her screams. The sounds did indeed arouse the village folk; they came to their doors, curious to know what had occurred, and soon they were streaming into the inn, all eagerness to behold the unhappy

Nicolai, who stood there speechless, transfixed with misery and shame to find that he had sunk to be pointed out as a show for an idle, gaping crowd. The neighbours meant no harm; they could not guess how it hurt him when they stared and shook their heads, murmuring that none could have thought the once handsome Nicolai would ever look like this! This was a change indeed for the much-envied husband of the pretty Florica, whom she had chosen after refusing so many suitors!

The most unfeeling of all was Florica's own mother. She was so utterly beside herself, the horror she showed was so violent and unmanageable, the daughter was obliged to control herself a little, in order to restrain her mother. The latter insisted that her daughter could not possibly remain with a husband whose appearance was so repulsive as positively to cause alarm. Not only would her own health suffer should she now, while nursing, have so hideous an object perpetually before her eyes, but her child would run a still greater risk should he be exposed to this danger. The elder woman drew the other aside, expostulating vehemently; then, followed by Florica, she retired to her own room, where their voices could still be heard raised in excited discussion. One by one the crowd of curious onlookers collected at the news of Nicolai's return had dropped away, leaving him alone. They had sat down to drink in order to continue their gossip, and then they went on gossiping, as an excuse to call for more

to drink. But even they could not help perceiving that the unfortunate man's strength and endurance were at an end. He looked more dead than alive, they remarked, as they left the inn, and returned to their own homes. Some among them were really sorry for him, but many more were loud in their expressions of sympathy for his wife, so young and handsome to be tied to this poor deformed creature. So the room was left empty again, save for Nicolai himself, who stood there motionless for a time, a very image of despair. He was aroused from his torpor by a sound new to him within those walls—a sound that came from a door on the opposite side to that through which the voices of his wife and mother-in-law still reached him. Nicolai knew well the room that lay beyond that door; it was the little chamber that he had always shared with his wife, and half-mechanically he lifted the latch and went in. There in its cot lay a baby—the splendid boy who had been born in his absence—a perfect cherub of loveliness, Nicolai could see, even by the feeble light that streamed through the open door. His whole heart went out in tenderness to the child he had not yet seen, and he sat down beside the cradle, almost forgetting his own troubles in this new-found joy. But it was not of long duration; he did at first succeed in quieting the baby, and the little thing lay there for a while, apparently quite content, with its big eyes fixed in silent wonderment on the face bending over it, when it suddenly began to cry again,

this time so loud that the mother heard it, and came rushing in. She ran to the cradle, seized up her child, and swept out of the room with him in her arms, without so much as bestowing a word or a look on her husband, who was evidently to be made to feel that he had committed a grave offence in going near the little fellow at all. This was the last drop that made poor Nicolai's cup of bitterness quite overflow. So even that source of consolation was to be taken from him—he might not even find comfort in his own child! He staggered back to the bed, and sank down upon it, weeping bitterly. How differently, when he last set out from home, had he pictured his return. Quite suddenly, from the heights of his happiness, he had been cast down to these depths. It was more than he could bear.

On the morrow, and during the following days, things were no better. Nicolai felt that he had become an object of the utmost aversion to his wife, and this unnatural frame of mind was encouraged and fostered by her mother. Both women were indeed as hard and unfeeling as possible. He must no longer share his wife's bed-chamber, they insisted; his presence would be bad both for the baby and herself, so a small portion of the big public-room was partitioned off, and there he had to sleep, so that no one might be disturbed by him. Neither would they let him take his meals with them; and as the poor fellow could not of himself put a morsel to his lips, he had to be fed afterwards by the maid who waited

in the inn. His degradation was indeed complete; his food was given him when the dogs had theirs—his own dogs, who had been the only creatures to welcome him home with their joyful bark, on that night when he stood outside the door like a criminal, not daring to cross the threshold. What made matters worst of all was that his house was so public a place—people were always going in and out, there was never any quiet, he could never be alone with his wife, to speak to her, to try to win back her affection. For it sometimes seemed to him impossible that she should turn against him like this, that she should positively hate him, on account of a misfortune that was no fault of his, for which she should only have pitied him. But they were never alone; he could never speak a word to her—there were always all these strangers taking up her time and her attention; it was that, he tried to persuade himself, that prevented her from being the same to him she had been formerly.

As the days and weeks went on the situation did not improve; it became, indeed, from day to day more intolerable. Florica now shuddered and turned away whenever she met her husband, as though the very sight of him were loathsome to her. Perhaps it was the mute reproach she read in his eyes which she could not face; but whatever the cause, she hardened her heart the more, and only followed her mother's counsel. It was as if she actually took it in ill part that her child did not

share her feelings towards his father. The baby was the one human being who took pleasure in the poor cripple's society, and showed neither fear nor disgust at the disfigured limbs. Manifestly, an attraction existed between the two, and father and child might often be seen playing together for hours at a time. This, however, was Nicolai's only solace, and the little one's innocent affection was all the dearer to him because it formed such a contrast to the treatment he experienced from the rest of the world. Indifference and a sort of half-contemptuous pity had taken the place of the wondering curiosity with which he was at first regarded. For a time all the dwellers round about flocked to the inn to look at the man who had been the victim of so strange an adventure, and to hear his story from his own lips. But that story had been told too often now to have retained any charm, and the crippled arms had been seen so often too, people ceased even to wonder or be shocked at their appearance. It was a hard case, of course, they all agreed, but of what use to grumble since it was so hopeless? There was nothing to be done—nothing at all; not even the wise women who so often help when the doctors fail could be of any use here, so Nicolai must just have patience and suit himself to his circumstances!

But no one saw what went on in Nicolai's soul—no one could guess that his patience was exhausted, that a terrible revulsion had taken place, or rather, that his first suspicions, which for a time had seemed to

slumber, had returned in greater force, and that the passive acquiescence in insult and injury concealed a deep resentment, proportional to his wrongs. Night and day he brooded over them—night and day he revolved plans of vengeance in his mind. The man who had wrought this evil on him should not go unpunished, of that he was determined, and since there was no justice in the world, he must undertake the work himself. A flush came over the pale hollow cheeks, and the sunken eyes glowed with a fire that was terrible to behold, as he gloated over the prospect. It was strange enough that none should have observed the expression of fierce resolve which his still handsome features now habitually wore. They were fixed and set as though he were bent on some desperate design. And that was indeed the case. But none heeded him. The world—the little village world—went on as usual, each one too busy and too much engrossed with his own affairs to pay any attention to the wreck of humanity amongst them. They saw that he grew daily more moody and sullen, but no one cared, and no one inquired what his changed demeanour meant. Students better versed in the mysteries of human nature than were these simple country folk would have been at no pains to discover that a tragedy was being silently enacted here. They would perhaps have perceived in the cloud on Nicolai's face signs of the storm raging within, and would have divined that the victim of the drama was preparing to play a different part in

its last scenes. On all holidays, at the village fairs and merry-makings, the contrast seemed the more striking between this one sad figure and the gay, laughing, singing, dancing throng. Holding himself a little aloof from the rest, with folded arms and closely-knit brows, beneath which the dark eyes gazed forth gloomily, as if perpetually fixed on some distant object, while the well-cut lips were set in the bitter curves of relentless hate—in this attitude Nicolai might well have stood for the statue of a Fallen Angel. He was, in truth, only waiting for his plan to ripen, biding his time that his vengeance might be sure, nor fraught with evil consequences for himself. Had he not suffered enough? It was their turn now—they should not triumph to the end, the heartless beings who had wrought his ruin. The blow he dealt must be swift and sure, and cunning must supply the place of strength, since he could not deal it with his own hands, as another might have done. This very consciousness of his physical inferiority, which so much increased the difficulties of the enterprise, was at the same time the strongest incentive to its accomplishment. Nicolai's own natural impulse would have been to face the man who had wronged him, and strike him down in the light of day. But that satisfaction was debarred him, and long-pent-up rancour had gradually transformed the kindly, honest nature of the man, awakening in him the savage instincts of more primitive days. So he brooded and brooded, till at last he had thought

out a plan, and then there was no more hesitation; his mind was made up, he must put it into instant execution.

He took his wife aside (he had chosen his moment carefully when he knew they would be safe from interruption), and quietly informed her that he was not only perfectly aware of her relations with the young officer, but that he was also convinced of her complicity in the treacherous plot against himself. What he knew, he went on to say, should soon be known to others; the whole neighbourhood should learn her infamy did she not at once sit down and write the letter he was about to dictate to her. At this unaccustomed tone, at this sudden reassumption of authority on the part of the husband she had taught herself to despise, Florica stared in blank amazement; then recovering herself, she resumed her scornful air, and affecting to treat the matter as an absurdity unworthy of her notice, she attempted to make her way to the door. But Nicolai flung himself before it, and the instant she was within arm's length, he had caught her and held her fast. She struggled with all her might to free herself, but the maimed awkward arms were as strong and muscular as ever, and she found herself powerless as a child in their grasp. She screamed for help, but there was no one within ear-shot—Nicolai had taken care of that. Paying no attention either to her entreaties or her threats, for she tried both in turn, Nicolai half dragged, half carried her to a chair, and forced her

into it. Standing over her, with his arms still holding her in the same relentless grasp, he repeated his order to take up the pen that lay on the table before her, and write at his dictation. She writhed and twisted, protesting her innocence, assuring him that she had never listened to the young officer nor to any man except himself; she appealed to the remembrance of their happy married life together and the love he had formerly felt for her, and implored him only to let her go, and he should have nothing to complain of in future. But Nicolai only smiled grimly, and held her firmly in her seat.

"You did not guess the strength that was in these poor stumps," he hissed in her ear. "You thought that because you chose to drive me from you like a dog, I had no choice but tamely to submit, and that things should go on thus for ever between us. You did not know that there was still strength in me to make my rights respected, did I but choose! But it is not a husband's rights I claim—I care for nothing, ask nothing but vengeance for my wrongs! Too long have I been a laughing-stock for your cowardly lover and yourself. The game is mine now; write as I bid you, or your shame shall be made so well known, you will never again be able to hold up your head in all the country-side!"

Florica struggled and wept for some time longer, but all in vain. That merciless iron grip still held her down, and to all her sobbing entreaties Nicolai simply replied that he cared not how long he stayed,

it might be all that day and night, it mattered not to him, but out of that chair she should not stir till the letter was written. Worn out at last, the miserable woman took up the pen, and wrote at his bidding, making an appointment with the young officer to meet him on the second night from this under the great elm-tree that grew by the roadside, not far outside the village.

The letter was despatched, and Nicolai paid good heed that no word of warning was sent after it. But indeed Florica seemed to have no will, no energy left, to make a sign. She was utterly cowed by her husband's violence, and simply awaited in a half-dazed condition whatever might befall, vaguely hoping that some unforeseen circumstance might either cause the letter to go astray or prevent him to whom it was addressed from keeping the assignation. But Fate did not interfere, and Nicolai's plan succeeded.

Among his former friends, to whom he now unfolded the story of his wrongs, it was by no means difficult to muster a certain number of lawless, reckless individuals, such as are ever ready to join in any deed of violence, and these naturally showed themselves far from ill-disposed to take part in the dark business he proposed. Accordingly, when at nightfall the young officer, smiling and exultant, rode up to the trysting-place, instead of the soft words and sweet looks by which he expected to be greeted, he found lying in wait for him a band of masked

men, who by sheer force of numbers speedily overpowered his desperate resistance, and bound him fast to the tree. Their victim thus defenceless, the ruffians proceeded with barbarous jests to hack off both his hands, next cutting out his tongue, and completing their work by such brutal blows on the head, but little life and consciousness were left in him. Nicolai had been looking on in silence, anxiously awaiting the next act in the hideous drama. He counted on Florica's presence at the close to make his vengeance complete. He knew that the unhappy woman could not be far off, that her remorse at the treachery to which she had been forced to lend herself, her horror and dread of impending evil resulting therefrom, that the vain desire to avert further calamity, must draw her to the spot. Nor was he mistaken; the ghastly work was scarcely over when, pale and trembling, Florica crept up, peering anxiously into the darkness. The perpetrators of the brutal outrage had withdrawn on a sign from Nicolai, leaving Florica to advance stealthily, fancying herself quite alone, until she stood beneath the tree. She stopped short, hearing a feeble moan, followed by another, listened, looked down in the direction of the sounds, and saw a dark shapeless object writhing on the ground at her feet. She stooped down—fearing to trust her eyes—over this unrecognisable, mangled form, and soon the whole horror of the scene was revealed to her. A piercing shriek rose to her lips, but was stifled the same

moment by a rough clasp, as two strong arms were thrown around her—her husband's strong, well-known, hated, unsightly arms—and the horrible mutilated stumps were thrust across her lips, preventing any sound escaping them, and almost choking her, while Nicolai's vengeful voice hissed into her ear:

"So we are quits at last! You thought to rid yourself of me, to have done with me for ever, and be free to receive your lover's caresses! You were but waiting, I know it well, for my back to be turned, in order to fly into the arms of him who has been the murderer of my happiness, my hope, and love—of all that makes life worth living! But you reckoned without my vengeance, you reckoned without the bitter hate born of my wrongs, without the strength of despair that has steeled my crippled limbs—above all, you reckoned without the help of those who are ever to be counted on when crime must wipe out crime! 'Tis true I am no longer your husband—I, the poor wretch, the outcast, driven from bed and board, worse treated than the dogs, despised by all, made a laughing-stock for every idle jester! But if I have lost a husband's rights, none other, while I live, shall enjoy them in my place, and any new lover whom you dare to encourage and entice shall meet the fate of the miserable man who has just gasped out his last breath at our feet. Ah! it was too soon for my vengeance. He should have lived longer, to feel

what I feel, to suffer what I suffer, to undergo the daily, hourly tortures of a life cut short in its prime, cut off from humanity, a horror to itself and others. He has escaped me, but you, at least, cannot escape —you are mine for evermore—my property, my slave! My wife you would not be, and I no longer claim to be your husband; but your master I am still, and intend to remain, and only Death shall set you free from me!"

He rushed away, leaving her standing there, and as he released her from his arms, a laugh—a wild, frenzied laugh—burst from the unfortunate woman's lips. It seemed to Nicolai that the sound pursued him through the darkness, and it was still ringing in his ears when he reached his home.

Next morning Florica was missing, and after a long and fruitless search, her body was at last discovered in the nearest river. Her mother was in truth inconsolable; but as for Nicolai himself, it was as if by another revulsion his old tenderness had suddenly revived now when it was too late, and he flung himself down upon the body in a perfect paroxysm of grief. But it was all in vain to call her by name, to assure her of his unchanging love, and implore her forgiveness—she lay there cold and still and unheeding—and Nicolai knew that he was left alone in the world, with his helpless child, himself just as helpless, and with, moreover, a load of remorse now added to his other sorrows. For he could not hide from himself that he, and he alone, was the cause of

his wife's death. It was all very well for others to talk of an accident, for them to say, in answer to the inquiries made, that Florica had been washing linen in the stream, that a piece must have slipped from her hold, and that in reaching after it she had evidently lost her balance, and fallen into the water. Justice might be deceived by this, but Nicolai could not deceive himself. He knew well enough that it was the horror of that night's work, the cruelty of his bitter taunts, which had goaded Florica to despair. He sank into a settled melancholy, not even rousing himself to take an interest in the inquiries now being set on foot concerning the missing officer. A diligent search was instituted by the authorities, but without the slightest result. From no one in the village or round about could any information be obtained. No one had seen or heard anything of any officer on the night in question. A riderless horse had indeed been found at some distance from the village, but that was all, and it gave no clue to what had occurred. So the attempt to investigate the matter was abandoned; there appeared to be no possibility of solving the mystery.

From Nicolai himself not a single word, good or bad, was to be had for a time. He would sit for hours with his child on his knee, or would wander away into the fields, where he might be seen day after day pacing restlessly, backwards and forwards, from the tree where the murder had been committed,

to the stream in which Florica's body had been found. The double crime rested on his conscience, and he began to wonder if he had been justified in the awful vengeance he had wreaked. Had he even been right in believing in his wife's guilt? He had no proof that she had ever betrayed him, he was forced to acknowledge now, when he thought the matter over quietly; and had she not to the last persisted in the assertion that she had ever been faithful to him? And the wild laugh of despair with which she had answered his gibes and threats was for ever ringing in his ears, curdling his blood. What if he had driven an innocent woman to her death? Nicolai brooded and brooded, and found no answer to the questions that were always presenting themselves. After a time his moody silence was broken by fits of loquacity, in which he would throw out strange dark hints of things he knew and might reveal, or would put questions to those around him still more calculated to arouse suspicions of foul play having taken place. Or he would mutter to himself, sitting with his head sunk on his breast, words so full of self-reproach, and so desperate and terrible to hear, people began to fear and shun him. Most of all had he become an object of terror to his former accomplices. Every one of his confused and broken utterances was to them an avowal of his guilt and their own, and the fear that he would betray them grew to such an extent, they resolved to silence him effectually.

It was scarce a year after his wife's death when Nicolai was found strangled in his bed. Here there could be no thought of suicide, it was evident that a murder had been committed ; but in this case little inquiry was made. Everyone felt as if this were indeed the last scene of a dark, dismal tragedy which had been played out before their eyes, without anyone being able to follow its plot, or understand its meaning. The chief actors in this terrible drama had now all disappeared, as utterly as if the earth had opened and swallowed them. And as for unravelling the mystery, that was quite beyond the bounds of possibility, everybody felt. So it was almost with a sigh of relief that the neighbours followed the unfortunate Nicolai to the grave, shaking their heads indeed over his untimely fate, and over the misfortunes that had pursued him during the last few years, but saying to themselves that it was well for him and for all concerned that his troubles were over at last.

Even in quiet country places events are soon forgotten when the people concerned in them are no more ; and Nicolai and his wife would soon have passed altogether out of mind had it not been that their little boy, by his likeness to both parents, for a time recalled them to the memory of those amongst whom they had lived. This child, sprung from that ill-starred union, and so touchingly and happily unconscious of the gloom that had descended on his early years, seemed indeed to have inherited the good

looks of both father and mother. He throve under the care of his poor old grandmother, whose sole joy and consolation he now was, and who for his sake carried on the business of the inn as long as her failing strength would allow. She had aged very much since her daughter's death, and seemed softened as well as saddened by the shock. At all events, her resentment towards Nicolai did not extend beyond the grave, for no accusing word ever passed her lips, though her suspicions also must have been aroused by his strange words and conduct; and the country folk always fancied that she, and she alone, possessed the knowledge of facts they ignored. Perhaps it was in truth a sort of remorse which had awakened too late in the once hard woman: the memory of her harsh, unfeeling treatment of her unfortunate son-in-law, the unavailing regret for the misfortunes she had helped to bring about. Be that as it may, the rest of her life was wholly devoted to her grandson, who grew up into a fine young man, handsome like his father, and in time to love and wed as his father had done; but not in other respects to inherit that father's tragic fate, which before another generation sprang up was wholly forgotten by all who had ever known it.

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

THEY were living quite recently among us, here in our own country. Mosh and Baba, literally "the old man and the old woman" (Gaffer and Gammer, as we might say). It was thus they were always known, for they were so old, no one any longer remembered their real names. They were just Mosh and Baba, the most aged couple on the estate of our great poet Alexandri—Mirceshti in Moldavia.

The old man had been a postilion in his youth, and a postilion of some repute, too. In the course of his long life he had saved quite a fortune, two hundred francs. Then after he had seen his only son happily married and settled in a village at some distance, he himself took a second wife, a widow, who had also only one child, a daughter, living with her husband in another village.

That was a long time ago, and they had been living happily together like this for many years now, he and his Baba, and had grown so old together, they seemed to have grown smaller and smaller, as if they were gradually shrivelling up and dwindling away. They were often to be seen on a fine sunny

day wandering about the woods of Mirceshti, and then when they grew tired they would sit down and rest close side by side on the stump of some old fallen tree, and talk till they fell asleep, and spend hours thus, chattering and dozing by turns. They had built themselves the prettiest little cottage, and they had a couple of diminutive oxen, about the size of a well-grown donkey, and a dear little pony not much bigger than a dog. And they were as happy and contented as the day is long.

Once, though, the old man met with an accident which had almost cost him his life. Out one day alone in the meadow, he stumbled, tripping up probably over some loose stones, and pitched forward into a little running stream. Lying there, face downward, too feeble to right himself, he must inevitably have been drowned, had not someone fortunately perceived him in time to come to his assistance.

It was only when he told stories of old times, relating his experiences as a postilion, that the old man would suddenly grow quite young again, and his eyes would flash, and the whole scene became living around him once more, with the noise of the carriage-bells and the trampling of the horses, and he would fancy he was once more in the saddle, his whip in his hand, scouring wildly through the country, by night and by day. How many memories he had, too, of well-known people, whose names at once called up the scenes in which they had played

a part, all the chief events in the history of the land for so many years! Alexandri loved to hear the old man talk, and the latter was never tired of relating to the poet his tales of former days.

"Ah, Vasili! dear friend and master," he would say, with a shake of the head, and with the affectionate style of address our country people use, "how many princes and statesmen have I driven in my time!"

His view of the transitory nature of all earthly things was summed up in those words.

But this peaceful existence was suddenly disturbed. One day the old man came up to the manor-house and asked to see its master. He looked so sad and troubled in mind that the poet in some anxiety bade him tell his business speedily. It was soon told. The old couple had resolved to separate! Alexandri could hardly believe his ears.

"What is the matter with you?" he cried in astonishment. "Have you been quarrelling with your old wife—you who were always such good friends? And so you fancy now there is nothing to be done but to spend the rest of your lives apart! Think of it, that at the best you could not have so very much more time to spend together!"

"That is just it, dear master! We have been thinking it over together that we cannot have very many more days to live, and that our children—for we each have one—might perhaps after our death dispute with one another over the goods we leave.

And so that this may not take place, we have resolved to part now in good time."

And nothing could shake the poor old couple in their resolution. The separation and division of property were carried out without delay and with the utmost simplicity. The two hundred francs—all in gold-pieces—were laid in a little heap on the table, and the old man proceeded to divide them, alternately pushing over a gold-piece to his wife and placing one for himself, saying as he did so: "For you! for me! For you! for me!" until there were none left. Each took one pillow, each a carpet, and so on, with all the rest. Then he gave the old woman the two little oxen, and kept for himself the pony, with the little cart; and all these arrangements being complete, the old folk betook themselves to the inn, there to take leave of all their old friends.

It was a touching scene. The neighbours crowded round them, vying with each other in their attentions and kind words for the poor old folk, and drinking their health—for the last time together. But all felt that the attempt at cheerfulness was a very poor pretence, for the old husband and wife could themselves do nothing but cry, and soon there was not a dry eye in the whole place. At last the old couple got up, and said good-bye to all in turn, asking each one's forgiveness, lest by any chance they should ever have given offence, so that none might harbour resentment against them.

Then they set out on their journey, for the first

short piece of it they might accomplish together. So they jogged on quietly side by side, as they had so often done before, until they reached the bridge over the Sereth, and here they stood still for a little while, without speaking a word, and then embraced with many tears, and parted, each going off in a different direction—the one to the right hand, the other to the left.

But although one may be able to carry out a fixed determination, its consequences are not always so easily reckoned with. The poor old man broke down at once so completely, he was in a few days nothing but the shadow of his former self. He never complained, but when people asked how he felt, he simply said: "I can no longer sleep now that I do not hear her breathing by my side!" And he wandered about like an unquiet spirit, as if perpetually in search of something he could not find.

They had not been parted a week when the news was brought him that his old wife was very ill. Without a moment's delay he harnessed his pony to the little cart, and drove off as fast as it would go. But when he reached the village, her coffin was already being brought out of the house. The old man followed it in silence to the grave, and then returning home, without a single word of complaint he lay quietly down on his bed, and was found there dead the next morning.

The little cottage in which Mosh and Baba had

lived so many years tumbled so quickly to pieces when it was no longer inhabited that before long nothing but the thatching of the roof was left to show where it once stood. For Alexandri would not allow that it should be touched by anyone after they had gone.

THE FALL OF VIDIN

(FROM THE JOURNAL OF ONE OF THE BESIEGERS)

I WAS commanding my battery in Calafat at the time, and felt horribly annoyed at not being ordered across the Danube, to join those of my comrades who were winning laurels on the other side. It was slow work waiting there, looking over at Vidin, and just to keep our spirits up from time to time bombarding the enemy, who replied by sending us a few bombs in return. And we grew the more impatient the livelier the business became for the others over yonder. At first we suffered a good deal from the heat, and then from the lack of provisions, which became scantier as time went on. A brilliant idea occurred to me. I wrote to my father, begging him to send me three hundred small bundles of rope. Astonished and somewhat alarmed at this strange request, for he could not imagine what I could possibly want with all this rope, my father arrived upon the scene with it himself, also bringing with him a bag full of money. Nor was his surprise lessened when I begged him to keep the money, since it could

be of no use to me under actual circumstances, whilst the bundles of cord I distributed among my men, who at once proceeded to make it into fishing-nets. With these hundreds of fish were caught every day, and we lived quite luxuriously for a time, until the frost set in. That put an end to our good fare, and empty stomachs were again the order of the day, while the account of the honours achieved by our countrymen at Grivitza left us no rest.

Early in December our colonel sent an officer with a flag of truce across the Danube to Izzed Pasha, the commandant of the garrison at Vidin, and I was sent along with him with a party of my men—marines they were—who were serving my battery. Only those who have themselves made the experiment of trying to cross the Danube when frozen can realise the difficuly of the attempt to pay a visit to the Pasha at that moment. With a trumpeter marching on ahead, and a white handkerehief fluttering in the breeze, we crossed the firm ice on foot as far as the little island that lies opposite Calafat. But scarcely had we set foot upon it than we were saluted by a volley from the further shore, followed by another, and yet another, in rapid succession. We were obliged to lie down flat behind a tiny earthwork that would not have reached above one's knees, whilst the trumpeter blew his most pacific signals; and high over the little rampart floated the flag of truce. But neither produced the smallest effect; the enemy continued

firing at us, as if they really thought such a handful of men could possibly have set out with the intention of storming the impregnable Vidin! We therefore sent back one of the sailors, who set out for Calafat, crawling on his hands and knees, and returned thence bringing with him the largest white tablecloth that was to be found there. This we displayed as ostentatiously as possible, and soon the firing ceased, and the Turks hung out signals too, and their trumpeters blew a blast, that was probably quite as peaceable and amicable a reply to our amicable summons. And indeed it had been by no means easy to keep up the feeling of being enemies all these long months, since before that we had always been on the best of terms with the Turks of Bulgaria. The next part of the business was to push off from the land in a small boat, and steer this clear of the great floating masses of ice, that were all the time bearing down upon us; and this was what might be termed very warm work, after the rather chilly time we had spent beneath the earthwork! With a great roar and crash the ice-blocks struck against the sides of our boat, spinning it round like a nut-shell, and threatening every minute to destroy it altogether. But the sailors were equal to the occasion. Without a word they sprang out upon the floating ice, and hacked at it with the short hatchets they carried at their belts, till they had cut a passage for the boat. The Turks had collected on the shore, watching our movements with the utmost interest, and directly we landed they

surrounded us, embracing the sailors, and carrying them off to the nearest coffee-house, to regale them there. So liberally, indeed, did they entertain the good fellows, that we found the perils of our return journey considerably increased thereby!

We had a few minutes to wait before being received by the commandant, and these we spent in the society of the interpreter, a doctor, and apparently a man of high culture, speaking French very fluently, and with great purity of accent. The Pasha himself was a handsome man, a dark-skinned Asiatic, still young in years. He received us with truly Oriental courtesy and grandezza. But when the interpreter translated to him our colonel's letter, in which the latter summoned him to capitulate, his eyes flashed, and an expression of scorn curled his lip. Then he answered with the greatest composure:

"Tell your commander from me that I have been sent hither by His Majesty the Sultan, and here I intend to remain. The sabre at my side was a gift from my wife at parting, and I have sworn that living it shall not be taken from me!"

A few days later a Turkish naval officer came among us as the bearer of the Pasha's written answer. Again I was sent to the island to meet the envoy, and conduct him to our quarters. This time six artillery horses, carefully rough-shod, were put to a sledge, in which I was borne across the ice like the wind. The island itself lying about four-and-twenty feet above the level of the river, and being at this

moment entirely covered with ice and frozen snow, the approach to it was up a somewhat steeply inclined plane, offering no very serious difficulties in its ascent, but giving an immense impetus to the speed of the sledge in descending. I had been obliged, according to precedent, to ask my companion to submit to the ceremony of being blindfolded before he stepped into the sledge with me, in order that he might see nothing of the works going on in our midst, but directly we had started, I could not resist the pleasure of removing the bandage for a few minutes from his eyes, to let him enjoy the glorious spectacle before us. The immense sheet of ice, smooth as a mirror, stretched far as one could see to right and left, and the steep incline down which the horses dashed at starting gave a tremendous speed to the rest of our course. We could literally scarcely breathe, flying at this furious pace through the sharp air; but it was a delicious sensation all the same, and a most animated scene, with a little troop of Calarashi (our cavalry) riding on in advance, and another bringing up the rear. In the course of conversation I learnt from the Turk that he had been commander of the *Podgoritza*, one of the enemy's ironclads recently sunk by our bombs in the attempt to relieve Rahova. As the mortars used on this occasion, which were chiefly instrumental in the sinking of the ship, had been employed under my directions, I was not a little proud of my share in the business; I fancy that my companion, however, looked at the exploit in rather a different light.

Izzed Pasha's written reply was, of course, virtually the same as the verbal one: an equally decided refusal.

As the number of our troops was not sufficient completely to surround Vidin, we were obliged to wait till the fall of Plevna should send us reinforcements. Thus a period of forced inaction set in, more trying to the soldier than danger or fatigue. At the same time our stock of provisions growing smaller and smaller, very short rations only could be served out. But the good humour of the men was proof against the pangs both of hunger and cold.

I remember one night being roused by a rattling sound, and going out to see what on earth it could be that was clattering in that fashion at two in the morning, with 40 degrees of frost, I found that it was occasioned by the grinding of the millstones, to the beam of which several of the Dorobantzi had harnessed themselves instead of the horse, and they were running round as hard as they could, to grind a little maize-flour for their mamaliga. In reply to my exclamation of astonishment that neither bread nor even meal should have been given them, but only the grains of corn, they asked me, laughing, if that were not the proper food for turkeys?—in joking reference to the nickname of "the Turkey-cocks," by which this corps is always known in the army.

Never shall I forget the silence of those long winter nights, sometimes only broken by the voice of the Muezzin calling to prayer on the minaret

of the mosque at Vidin, which came clearly and distinctly to us in the stillness across the Danube.

At last, on December 10, the long-hoped-for news of the taking of Plevna reached us; and close upon this followed that astounding march of our troops upon Vidin, in the most intense cold, and after a snowstorm of such violence as is only known in our country or in Russia. At the same time the unfortunate Turkish prisoners, thinly clad, and weakened by the long privations of the siege, were sent off to Nicopolis, strewing with their corpses the whole line of march from Plevna to the Danube. And when the survivors, ten thousand in number, reached Nicopolis, there was not enough bread in the whole town for the famished new-comers, and only the next morning did a steam-launch, laden with provisions, make its way through the floating ice to their relief.

By January 9 our army had completely invested Vidin. We at once commenced active operations, drawing the iron circle closer and closer every day. The third and fifth infantry regiments stormed the redoubt of Smardan, and this engagement proved one of the bloodiest of the whole campaign. No quarter was given. When we entered the redoubt, the bodies of four hundred Turks lay there, run through with the bayonet, swollen and disfigured, row upon row, as if they had been mowed down. It was a ghastly, a sickening spectacle.

That same day we opened fire upon Vidin, and for twelve days and thirteen nights the bombardment

was kept up continuously. We tried to spare the Bulgarian quarter, and directed our bombs incessantly upon the other parts of the town, in the midst of which, on January 18, an immense flame suddenly flared on high. A shell exploding had set fire to a great mosque, in which the provision of corn for the whole army was stored. Before long all the houses round about were also in flames. The red glare was so intense it lit up the whole sky, and at Poiana, twenty-two kilomètres from Vidin, on the other side of the Danube, everything could be seen as clearly as in the daylight, but with such a lurid glow that the inhabitants sprang from their beds in alarm, shouting: "The town is on fire!" It was a terrible yet magnificent picture, never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it; the gigantic flame, lighting up the vast expanse of snow for miles around, and in the foreground the ranks of soldiers, busily engaged in the attempt to extinguish it, or, in any case, to prevent it reaching the powder-magazine, situated close at hand. We directed our fire upon them the whole time—iron shells, that burst in the air overhead, and poured out a whole shower of shot on the little groups below. As each of these projectiles burst there was a brighter flash—a flame within the flame, so to say—and at the same moment the heart-rending cry of women and children. As fast as one company was shot down, another took its place, to meet the same fate.

Meanwhile, the moon had risen, and looked down

calmly and peacefully upon the scene, bathing in its silver radiance whatever escaped the ruddy glow.

I let the marines of my battery sleep in turns ; for my own part, I did not lie down for twelve nights, and was so tired out I used constantly to fall asleep after giving the word " Fire ! " so that I did not hear the report of the gun, although, Heaven knows ! it made noise enough. I had given orders to the men that the one who stood nearest to me should always wake me with a dig in the ribs, in time to give the word of command for firing off the next piece.

Our stock of provisions had, as I said, by this time run very low ; at last there was nothing left in our canteen but biscuit as hard as rock and a big piece of bacon, that was supposed to suffice for all of us for several days, but could not possibly last so long. But we managed by simply rubbing our biscuit against the bacon to give it some little taste, and then by wrapping it in a lump of snow and holding that in our hands till the snow melted, we softened it a little, so that it was just possible to eat. The conduct of my men was admirable. I knew they were to be depended on ; they had proved that often enough. On one occasion, whilst we were bombarding Vidin from our quarters at Calafat, two of them were occupied in loading the guns. With their iron hooks they had just picked up a bomb and let it slide down into the brazen mouth, when a live shell from the Turkish fortress fell inside the parapet, not five feet distant from us,

fizzing and hissing, as it spun round and round like a top. The danger was imminent that a spark from it might strike our cannon, and cause it to explode. But without a moment's hesitation one of the gunners flung himself before the mouth of the loaded gun, making his body serve as a screen. A second later the bomb exploded, enveloping us all in smoke and flame, but not a splinter from it struck the brave fellow, who, like the rest of us, escaped as by a miracle unhurt. I have seldom met with a finer example of cool daring and presence of mind, and I was glad to be able to send in his name and obtain for him the medal he so well deserved.

On another occasion there was an instance of audacious courage on the part of a Calarash, that took a somewhat amusing form. It was during the summer, and the intense heat made the Danube look most invitingly cool and refreshing as it flowed past. So apparently thought this good soldier, for he suddenly took it into his head to stroll down to the water edge, and pulling off his clothes, began to wash them in the stream. In an instant the Turks opened fire upon him—a perfect hail of bullets. His comrades called and shouted to him from above, for no one cared to go down to join him in such a mad escapade. But the fellow might have been deaf for all the notice he took either of the warning cries of his friends or of the showers of bullets falling around him; without even turning his head, he just went on washing his clothes calmly and unconcernedly

and having finished, spread them out very carefully on the grass beside the river to dry. Again we shouted to him to dress in all haste and hurry back, but the obstinate fellow, paying no heed to our remonstrances, next proceeded to take a plunge into the water himself, and striking out, began apparently to enjoy a good swim. To right and to left of him the bullets fell hissing into the water, but he viewed them with the utmost indifference, and let nothing disturb his enjoyment, now floating, now swimming, until he seemed to have had enough, and came out of the water just as deliberately as he had gone into it, climbed the bank, and having put on his clothes again, returned at the same leisurely pace, with an expression of extreme unconcern, and to all appearances quite unconscious that there had been anything at all remarkable about his exploit!

Vidin went on burning uninterruptedly for four nights and days. At last the townspeople could bear it no longer, and resolved to petition the commandant to capitulate. One of their number was chosen as spokesman, a very old merchant, who had been a friend of Izzed Pasha's father, and had known the Pasha himself from childhood, and who would therefore, it was thought, be sure of a favourable hearing. But when the old man made known that he had come in the name of his fellow-citizens to beg that the town might be surrendered, then the Pasha's eyes blazed with a light more threatening than the flames of the burning town.

"Such a proposal is an insult to me, and a disgrace to yourselves," he replied indignantly. "And it grieves me that a friend of my own should have been sent to me on such an errand, since, in order to show how all such petitions should be received, and to prevent their recurrence, I intend to have the messenger immediately shot!"

With the calm and resignation of the Mussulman, the old man let himself be seized and placed against the wall, and the sentence would actually have been carried out but for the tears and supplications of the onlookers, who fell at the Pasha's feet, imploring him to spare this one life, and vowing that they would henceforth bear without murmur or complaint all the hardships and perils that the siege might still reserve for them.

But their constancy was not much longer to be tried; on January 22 came the news of the armistice, and in accordance with its conditions the garrison was allowed to come out bearing their arms. Izzed Pasha had one personal request to make; namely, that his horse might be left him, and the wish of our brave adversary was, of course, respected, though I must own that many envious glances had already been directed towards the beautiful animal, which was a splendid Arab stallion, a glorious specimen of its race. Indeed, now that the siege was over, everything was once more on its old amicable footing, and the two armies fraternised as before. Our men set to work at once to help the Turkish

soldiers to extinguish the flames which our bombs had kindled.

I betook myself to a Turkish coffee-house, for I had never been inside one, and was very curious to see what they were like. On entering, I found a number of grave-looking individuals, seated on the carpets and cushions strewn over the floor, smoking and drinking little cups of black coffee. I did like the rest—clapped my hands, had my high boots pulled off, and ordered coffee and a narghilèh. Soon I saw myself surrounded by about fifty Turks, all most friendly in speech and manner, and many of them speaking excellent Roumanian. Encouraged by their affable demeanour, I told them of my great wish to see the interior of one of their houses. But on that point they were inexorable. All the houses, I noticed, looked like so many little fortresses, so closely bolted and barred, and not a woman was to be seen anywhere. But behind almost every little lattice window, high above the street, beautiful eyes were peeping, and one had quite the sensation of being riddled by their brilliant glances as one walked along. So complete, indeed, was the illusion of being still under fire, and so dangerous did the new weapons appear, it was difficult at times to refrain from that little movement of the head to one side, which had become an involuntary habit with one, to avoid being struck when a bullet whizzed past.

A FUNERAL IN THE CARPATHIANS

THE snowstorm is holding its wildest revels this night among the forests that line the passes of the Carpathians. Within one deep mountain-gorge the wind howls and moans unceasingly, the tall fir-trees shiver and sway, and the great blocks of ice, borne furiously along by the swift-flowing Prahova, crash with a noise like thunder against those carried by the Doftana, where the two torrents meet with wild uproar. The swollen waters, dammed within such narrow limits, rise, threatening to overflow their stony banks, then rush madly onward, at every bend in the river-bed dashing themselves frantically against the sharp corners of the rocks. At each shock the solid ground beside the stream groans and gives way, huge stones and masses of earth are detached, beeches and firs uprooted, and all such obstacles, once overthrown, are swept along by the angry tide, and whirled away with it in its impetuous course for a distance of many miles. From every hill-side cascades pour down—the foam upon them frozen ere it can disperse. Further down, the storm makes cruel havoc of the work wrought by men's hands. A very few minutes suffice to destroy all that human skill and labour

have accomplished during many long months; the railway lines are torn up and twisted like wire by the violence of the wind; the newly-constructed bridge across the river totters and tumbles to pieces, as if its solid masonry and the iron girders that support it were nought but so much lath and plaster. From time to time a fiercer gust catches the trees, and forces them to swing round with a mighty effort, till the firm roots, however deeply embedded in the soil, are wrenched from it with wild upheaval, and lie naked and exposed to the wintry sky. In this manner many a stately pine, that has weathered countless gales, is now at last laid low, and measures its length upon the snow, its dusky-green branches forming a momentary blot upon the immaculate whiteness, until the fast-falling flakes have buried it completely beneath the soft colourless pall spread uniformly around.

The little villas and chalets, only built to be occupied during summer, and now standing empty upon the mountain slopes, are all shaken to their foundations, as if they too were in danger of being uplifted by the hurricane. One of these does appear, in spite of the season, to be inhabited, for there is light streaming through a window in the basement upon the snow outside, casting a red reflection there which grows stronger every minute as the darkness deepens.

Inside the room, the light, flickering a little in the draught which the closed window cannot wholly

exclude, sheds the same pink glow over a motionless form and face of marble whiteness. The perfect serenity of those waxen features lends them a well-nigh unearthly beauty, while at the same time it renders it still more difficult to believe that life has utterly ceased to animate them. But one may look and listen in vain for any movement; no feeblest pulsation of the heart now bids the youthful rounded bosom rise and fall, not one faint breath dilates the transparent nostrils, nor does the lightest tremor of the long dark lashes cause their shadow on the pale cheeks to vary. Nothing moves, nothing changes. But the stormwind rages round the little dwelling, and its wild song sounds like a veritable hymn of despair in the ears of the other occupant of the little room, the pale silent man, seated at the table, leaning his head on his hand, with his eyes fixed on the bier and on the body lying there in the majestic calm of death. His own features are well cut, his eyes dark blue, and he has soft light-brown hair, in which his fingers bury themselves convulsively. He presses his lips tightly together, as if no word should ever pass them again, as if pain and sorrow had done their work on him, and sealed up for ever the sources of love, and life, and gladness. Not once does he turn his head at the noise of the storm, however frantically it may beat and rattle against the window-pane, nor does he seem to notice how it makes the flame of the candles flicker where they stand, two at the head, and two at the feet of the still white figure.

At the further end of the narrow passage is another room, plunged in darkness save for the occasional flashes of light that make their way through the stove door, and also through the badly-cemented tiles of the big earthenware stove, in which an immense fire blazes, its loud crackling mingling with the noise of the storm. Before it crouch two children, a little boy and girl, shivering as they nestle close to one another.

"Do you hear, Hugo, how the wind is singing?"

"Yes, Lucie; it is carrying our mother's soul to heaven."

"But I thought the angels always did that. They should come very gently, and carry her away on a soft little cloud."

"Perhaps, Lucie, in a strange land like this the angels would not know where to find her. I daresay they went first to look for her at home, and as she was not there, they sent the storm across the ocean to fetch her."

"But does the storm blow right up to heaven?"

"Can you not see that by the clouds?"

"But will there be other angels up above us here to take her? Will they know her?"

"The angels know all the souls they are sent for."

"And they take them up to God? And He knows them too?"

"Of course He knows everyone."

"What does He look like Himself?"

"Why, you know; you have seen Him in grandmamma's Bible."

"But I have forgotten; tell me all the same."

"Yes, you do know! He has a long white beard, as long as the clouds, and very big eyes, and He is wrapped in a big cloak. Do you not remember how I always wanted to paint the cloak, and grandmamma would not let me, for she said I could not tell the right colour."

"Oh, it must be blue, of course."

"And why then blue?"

"Why, like the sky, Hugo."

"No, quite fiery, like the sun, when it sinks into the sea."

"Are you quite sure?"

"No, I cannot be sure, of course; I only think so."

Outside, the wind, after a momentary lull, raved and shrieked more fiercely than ever.

"Oh, Hugo, I am so frightened!" said the little girl, pressing so close to her brother that the golden curls on the two little heads were mingled in one shower.

"Why, Lucie, what is there to be afraid of?" said the boy, trying to speak boldly; but his own voice trembled, and he looked round anxiously.

Then they were both silent again for a time, staring hard at the fire, and not daring to turn their heads. The little girl's eyes were grey, the boy's dark blue, the deep gentian blue of the Southern sky. Both children had dark eyebrows and lashes, and fair hair,

the boy's curls hanging just to his shoulders, while the girl's fell far below the black ribbon that tied her pinafore at the waist. At last she spoke again, without looking up:

"I have been in to see her, Hugo."

"And I kissed her, Lucie; but she was so cold—oh, so cold!" And the big blue eyes seemed to grow bigger still, and were moist with tears.

"Why is one cold when one is dead?" asked the girl.

"Because one does not breathe."

"Is it breathing that makes one warm? I breathe, but I am very cold!"

A world of anxious thought was in the childish grey eyes, and their colour seemed to change to the dark green of deep-sea waves.

"Oh, Lucie dear, you must not die too!" cried her brother passionately, flinging his arms round the fragile little form, in a fresh outburst of grief.

And the two poor little things went on crying together, as they had already cried so long, in the dull aching pain of their first great grief, and as yet scarce-comprehended loss. They were tired out too, and the loneliness frightened them, but they did not dare to stir outside the dark lonely room, for the passage was darker and more dreary still. And the storm continued, and even increased in violence, so that in the end they could no longer hear the sound of their own voices when they spoke to one another for consolation. And no one came to see after them,

they seemed to be quite forgotten! At last there was a sound that made itself heard through the pauses between the gusts of wind, the sound of a scratching at the door, accompanied by a low whimpering.

"Ah, there is Sultan!" cried the boy, running to let in the magnificent wolf-hound, their faithful companion, who seemed to understand and share in their sorrow and desolation. The dog walked up to the children, and rubbed his nose against each little cold wet cheek in turn, as if endeavouring to console them. They flung their arms round the neck of the good friend who seemed alone to remember them, and buried their faces in the soft warm coat, no longer feeling quite so miserable and forsaken. Now and then a fiercer gust of wind would make them look up, and they would listen half terrified, while Sultan pricked his ears, and sniffed, and waited expectantly; then as the storm subsided again, the dog began once more to whine and moan, and the children's tears flowed afresh.

The maidservant who should have been looking after them was sitting by the kitchen fire, waiting for the cook, who had been sent on an errand to the little town of Comarnic, and ought to have returned before dusk. The girl had thrown her apron over her head, and was rocking herself to and fro, wailing and muttering to herself in a confused jargon, a sort of mixture of Roumanian, German, and Hungarian, that showed her to be a native of Transylvania. She

thought now of her dead mistress, now of the cook, who must, she felt sure, have been overtaken by the snowstorm, and was probably lost in the snow! As for the children, she had forgotten about them altogether.

The fire burnt low, both in the kitchen-grate and in the stove before which the two children sat with their good dog beside them; in the room where the lonely mourner kept watch beside the body of his dead wife it was already icily cold. He, however, did not feel it; nothing that took place seemed to matter to him now. Those who knew him well would have been struck by the change in his appearance which a few hours had wrought. His features were haggard and drawn, and he had aged visibly; even the hand, on one finger of which the wedding ring shone, seemed to have already grown thinner. It was as if the intensity of his grief had plunged him in a sort of stupor, in which, while actually unconscious of impressions from without, they mingled with the vague thoughts and reminiscences pursuing one another through his brain. In a waking dream he saw himself once more in the old West-Indian plantation on which he was born, the noise of the storm recalling to him the last great cyclone he had known there, and the devastation it had caused throughout the island. He had seen people flying from their tottering houses, and themselves caught up by the wind and whirled along by it for some distance through the air, while the dwellings they

had but just deserted were swept away, disappearing off the face of the earth as completely as if they had never been. The sea had risen too, a huge wave breaking over the land and leaving a big ship stranded on a field of pine-apples. Trees of every description—palms, tamarinds, mangoes, and pandanus were all mown down like grass, and the ground itself rocked under the feet of the fugitives, and gaped wide open in places. He had rushed out, however, anxious for the safety of his betrothed, the love of his youth, Clarisse, the companion of his childhood. His heart still beat wildly as he remembered the unfeigned joy with which the lovely Creole girl had welcomed him, her little scream of delight to see him standing there in safety, and the good-humoured scolding of her faithful old negress, that he should cause her young mistress unnecessary alarm by venturing out while the hurricane was at its height. . . . Then came other pictures; war had broken out, and when it was over, it left both families, his own and that of Clarisse, wellnigh ruined. But he had been studying engineering in the meantime, and was very soon able to offer a home to his beloved. . . . He remembered the pride and happiness with which he returned to claim his bride, and their wedding in that land of luxuriant flowers and eternal summer. . . . The past, that happy past, rushed upon him in such a tide of memories that the present was for a moment forgotten; a softer expression came over Paul Delorme's features, and he smiled.

Night wore away; at last the maid remembered the poor children, to whom she had not given a thought for so long. Shading the light with her hand, she pushed open the door and found them both fast asleep, stretched on the floor, close beside the stove, their little hands tightly clasped together, and the dog at their feet, keeping guard over them. Their cheeks were still wet with tears, and they looked so touching in their childish innocence and beauty that the woman stood still a moment watching them, scarcely liking to disturb their slumber. The boy's likeness to his dead mother almost gave her a pang, and she began to reproach herself with her neglect.

"Poor little dears!" she murmured; then taking their cold hands: "Come, children, it is long past bed-time," she said, trying to rouse them.

"Yes, mother, I am coming!" replied the boy in his sleep; while his little sister gave a deep sigh, and got up without a word. Very softly they went past the door of their father's room.

"Ought we not to say good-night to father?" said the little girl suddenly, when they had reached the stairs at the end of the passage.

"He is in there with her, Lucie!"

"Yes, that she may not be alone!"

They took one another by the hand, turned slowly back, and opened the door of the death-chamber in much trepidation. Their father did not change his attitude; he only looked up, and saw the little ones standing there, as if half afraid to enter. Their eyes

sought the still white figure in the middle of the room, and they were comforted as they looked at her, for they fancied a smile was on her face.

"Good-night, father!" at last said the little girl, taking courage to come closer.

He started as if he now only became thoroughly aware of their presence, then put an arm round each of them.

"Good-night, Lucie, my little Lucie! And good-night, Hugo. Be good children, both of you, and go quietly upstairs to bed. Leave us alone."

They understood that they were not wanted, that they only disturbed him. So with one more longing, wondering glance towards their mother, they stole away, to creep into their cold little beds and cry themselves to sleep there, since she would not come this night to lean over them, and kiss and tuck them in, murmuring blessings on her darlings' slumber.

As the door closed, Delorme let his head fall forward again in his hands, and a groan burst from his lips. The children had roused him from the dream of bygone days, which had for a moment lifted him out of the atmosphere of present sorrow. Now it all came back with redoubled force. Like a wounded man, who has been enjoying a temporary respite from pain, but to whom a footstep on the boards or the lightest touch at his bedside suffices to bring on a fresh paroxysm, so the sight of his children had brought him back to the terrible reality. A new frenzy of passionate

and hopeless love and sorrow rent his bosom. He started from his chair and paced the room frantically for a time, then flung himself down beside the beautiful inanimate form, covering with kisses the cold lips and eyes, the folded hands and the magnificent hair, unbound and flowing in long loose ripples beside her. The floodgates of grief were unlocked now, and the strong man sobbed like a child. Worn out at last, he threw himself upon the couch in a corner of the room—but there was no rest for him, he could but turn from side to side in the maddening pain, that was like a spasm at his heart, and seemed almost to choke him. In spite of the cold, he felt as if he were stifling, and rushing to the window, threw it wide open. Driving snow entered the room, and the lights were instantly extinguished by the wind. But he could not bear to lose her from his sight during these last few hours that were theirs to spend together, and he closed the wooden shutters with an effort, and lit the candles again. It seemed to him, as it had seemed to the children, as if her lips were parted in a smile. Was he going mad, he wondered, that he should no longer control his senses, or was all that had taken place within the last few days but a horrible dream, out of which he would awaken? He refused to believe that she was really dead, and that soon they would be coming to take her from him, to carry her away and lay her in the earth, in the dark cold grave. He felt as if he had but to rouse her, to lift her from the

bier, and warm her back to life again in his arms. She had lain there but so short a time ago, sleeping so peacefully, quite out of danger, as he thought; and he had not stirred for fear of waking her, and she had slept on and on, until it seemed to him that her breathing grew feebler and feebler, and as if at last it ceased altogether. And he bent over her in deadly alarm, and listened in vain for the beating of her heart, and pressed his lips to hers, and found them already cold as ice. He shivered, and pressed his hands to his forehead, to shut out the recollection of that moment, then recommenced his restless pacing to and fro. . . . All the scenes of his married life passed rapidly through his mind; he recalled how he had suddenly received the offer of a post in Roumania, to superintend the construction of a railway there; he remembered how, in the midst of his own satisfaction at the prospect, he had felt some hesitation even to mention it to his delicate young wife, who well might shrink from the thought of the long voyage to a distant land with two small children; but how, to his delight, she had acquiesced without demur, simply saying, "Very well, dear," as if there could be no question at all about the matter. And how brave she had been, how active and untiring in her devotion to her little family, how thoughtful for their comfort, how cheerful and uncomplaining in fancying all the fatigues, the hardships even, of their wandering life! How patiently she had borne the loneliness and all the

discomforts of the long severe winter in this solitary mountain spot—the little wooden chalets with their whitewashed walls and scanty accommodation, and above all, with the clumsy attendance of rough, untrained servant-girls, contrasting sadly indeed with the beautiful tropical home of former days, in all its warmth and brightness, its luxuriant vegetation, and with its troops of black servants, always at hand to obey one's slightest sign. But she had never murmured, never uttered one word of complaint; her sweet lips ever had a smile of welcome for her husband, though it suddenly flashed on him now that she had possibly suffered more from the climate and from home-sickness than he had ever dreamt of; and that in the cold, wintry landscape she had probably pined in secret for the lovely gardens, bathed in perpetual sunshine, in which her youth had been spent. It was with a feeling akin to remorse that Delorme remembered now the childish delight she had shown when he once brought her back a little basket of peaches from Bucarest, and how she had quickly turned aside to hide from him the tears that were fast gathering in her eyes. How thoughtless, how careless he had been, he told himself. He blamed himself for everything that had occurred, for not having taken better care of her. One of the children had been restless in the night, and it was in getting up in haste, and going to their room barefoot, that the anxious mother had caught the cold which carried her off. A pang

shot through the watcher's heart—a pang so sharp, of such intolerable self-reproach, he stretched his hand out towards the pistols hanging on the wall above his writing-table, took one of them down, cocked it, and put it to his temple. But the thought of his children came into his mind to stay his hand, the picture of their touching helplessness as they had stood before him but a short while since. How could he possibly leave them alone in the world—his poor little motherless darlings—doubly orphaned as they would be by his act. His hand sank, and with a sigh he put the pistol back on the nail on which it hung, and sank into his chair again, firmly resolved to bear the torture of his loneliness for their sake. Suddenly a heap of snow falling from the roof shook the window violently, striking against it in its descent. It was a night, indeed, to rouse the dead, but *her* it could not rouse for whom he would have given his heart's blood, could it but have called her back to life.

"Clarisse!" he murmured softly, and he felt so strange a consolation in pronouncing her name that he went on repeating it to himself, though he could not even hear the sound of his own voice, drowned as it was in the raging of the storm.

In this manner the long, long night passed. Towards morning the storm subsided, and a deep stillness set in, a stillness that seemed like something tangible, and that was only broken by the heavy thud of the falling snow, wherever great masses,

dislodged from the roofs and trees, came with a dull crash to the ground. There was such a depth of snow that no path was visible, and in many places it seemed impossible for any sort of vehicle or even for people on foot to make their way through. Already the bell of the monastery in Sinaia was to be heard, ringing to call people together to the funeral. The monks were discussing with the foresters and woodcutters the best means of transporting the corpse in such weather from the house in Isvor, where it lay, to its last resting-place in the burial-ground at Poiana Zapului—a whole hour's journey. In the actual state of the roads it seemed no easy matter, but some of the peasants fancied that with buffaloes to clear the way it could best be done. So two buffaloes were brought to the door of the house of mourning, where Paul Delorme stood waiting on the threshold, apparently quite calm and self-possessed, and showing no sign of astonishment to see the strange-looking creatures, with their shaggy black coats and thick bent horns, standing up to their knees in the snow, and staring as if they themselves wondered at having to play a part in the funeral procession. Delorme listened with such apparent indifference while the matter was being explained to him, the peasants looked at him with curiosity, wondering if the stranger understood their words; but without any further remark he simply signed to them to enter the house. One of the monks, attired in his vestments for officiating,

followed Delorme, who led the way to the room where she lay, and sprinkled the bier with holy water, reciting the prayers for the dead in a low voice. Paul felt that his self-command was on the point of giving way, and with one last look at the dear dead body lying motionless in the coffin, he hurried outside before it was fastened down, fearful of breaking down altogether. But the children were watching and listening, and they asked the maid what it was that was being hammered. She only began to cry, without giving them any answer.

"What are you crying for, Maritza?" asked Hugo, and the tears came into his own eyes as he spoke.

At that moment little Lucie, who had stolen away unperceived, came flying back, pale and trembling.

"They are putting mamma into an ugly box, and shutting her up in it!" she cried with indignation. "Come, let us stop them!" and she seized the servant by the hand, trying to drag her away. The latter refusing to accompany her, the little girl ran back alone to the room where the men were driving the nails into the coffin, and tried to snatch the hammer from one of them.

"My mother is inside there!" she cried in Roumanian, and her grey eyes grew dark.

"No, my child," said an old peasant, crossing himself, "your mother—the saints be with her!—is not there. She is in heaven with the blessed ones. Come, I will show you the way she has taken flight.

Inside there are nothing but the old clothes she has done with and cast away."

He took the astonished child by the hand and led her into the other room, and pointing through the window, said :

"Look up there where the clouds are dividing a little; it is through them your mother flew, to go to Heaven!"

"Let me go with her! let me go with her!" sobbed the little one.

The coffin was lifted out, and placed on the shoulders of the men who were to carry it. The buffaloes were driven on ahead to make a path; close behind them walked the long-bearded monk in full canonicals, next came the choristers and acolytes singing and bearing incense; then the coffin, followed by the tall figure of the solitary mourner.

Dark clouds wrapped the mountains as though in a mourning cloak, through which the fir trees, laden with snow, peeped here and there. Down below—a dark streak in a white world—flowed the Prahova, bearing along its heavy masses of ice. It was a long and tedious way, and the bearers of the coffin were constantly obliged to set their burden down, and pause for a moment to take breath. Then the mourner would pause too; and the wind, though only blowing gently now, seemed to him to penetrate to his very bones; for he was already chilled through and through by his long vigil. So slow was the progress of the mournful little procession, so difficult

was it for them to make their way through the drifted snow, and the many obstacles with which the storm had covered the path, so frequent were the halts they were forced to make before they could struggle onward again, it was fully four hours before they reached their destination. Beside the open grave the monk again recited the customary prayers, while a few women and children from the village collected out of curiosity, and stood, wrapped in their sheepskins, watching the ceremony.

Delorme remained until the last shovelful of earth had been thrown in; then he himself covered the grave with branches of fir, and heaped snow over that again, as if he were doing all he could to cover his heart's beloved up warmly before leaving her. After that he turned away as quickly as possible, tearing himself away from the spot, and setting out resolutely on his homeward way at such a pace that the effort brought a tinge of colour into his pale cheeks.

Before Delorme could reach his home a little crowd of his workmen came hurrying to meet him, pouring forth with extreme volubility and in half-a-dozen languages at the same time their different accounts of the mischief wrought by the storm. Out of the babel of Roumanian, Italian, German, and Servian words, it was at least clear to the listener that the devastation had been immense, and that no time must be lost in trying to repair it. Along the whole line of railway work was at a standstill, embankments had given way, and iron bridges were

overthrown, while the swollen and angry Prahova still struggled to burst the barriers that hemmed it in. He must go with them at once to see what was to be done. He thought at first of riding out to the furthest bridge, but he soon found it was impossible to get through on horseback, and indeed his presence seemed required at so many points at once, and evil tidings kept coming in so rapidly, it was difficult for him to know which way to direct his steps, and where to begin.

When at last he reached home, late that afternoon, tired in body and mind, he found the children playing outside the house; they had made a coffin in the snow, and the one was going to lie down in it, while the other shovelled in the snow. Shocked and angry, he scolded the maid for her negligence in leaving them alone to play at such games, but she excused herself on the ground of having been busy in the kitchen, the cook not having yet returned, and she reminded her master timidly that it was now two days since he had taken any food. Delorme told her to prepare a trifle for him, and in a few minutes the two children appeared, carrying a small tray, and disputing as to which of them should serve him. He smiled at them mechanically and stroked their curly heads, but their thoughtless prattle was more than he could bear, and he rose from table quickly, and went back to his own room, in which everything had been put straight during his absence, and the furniture rearranged

in its former order, so that there was nothing left to tell of the coffin that had so recently stood there. Delorme sat down before his writing-table, and tried to look through some papers, but the tension of the last few days, the want of rest and sleep, was beginning to tell upon him; he found it impossible to fix his thoughts on any subject, and flinging himself on the sofa, he was very soon asleep.

Every now and then either Lucie or her brother crept in on tiptoe, to see that their father was sleeping quietly, and then crept out again, taking care not to disturb him. The snow had begun falling again, and now lay so deep around the little house, it looked as if it must very shortly be completely snowed up. The children knelt at the window for hours, watching the flakes as they fell, and laughing to see their fantastic shapes upon the window-pane. Then suddenly, in the midst of their forgetfulness, the thought of their mother would come back to them, and the bright eyes grew sad, and the childish hearts were filled with sorrow almost to bursting.

Twilight had already deepened into the shades of evening when Delorme awoke. His limbs were stiff and cramped, his head throbbed violently, and there was besides a feeling of oppression on him, a dull sense of pain, as of some undefined ill for which he could not at first account, until consciousness fully returned to him. It was the voices of his children that brought him back to the present hour, he remembered what had taken place, he realised the

whole extent of his loneliness, the cheerlessness and barrenness of the life that henceforth lay before him. It seemed to him impossible that he should resign himself to it, and he turned his head involuntarily towards the wall where his pistols hung, scarce able to resist the means of escape they offered. Every minute the longing grew stronger within him to free himself from the burden of existence, and there seemed to be nothing, absolutely nothing, to hold him back. The children—yes, there were the children, he told himself; but somehow, he felt that he no longer cared even for them—they were a trouble to him, and nothing more; they were not even capable of sharing in his grief. And as for his work, it had become not merely indifferent to him, but positively distasteful—the result of these long months of labour was all thrown away, had all been destroyed in a few short hours, and he had not the heart to begin it over again. What was there left to him? All joy, all interest, had vanished out of his life, and why then should he cling to it? No, he would hesitate no longer, and he put his feet to the ground, and was about to rise to carry out his resolution. But to his own surprise, his movements were slow and painful, his limbs were numbed, and seemed to refuse to obey his will, and he sank back in a sitting posture on the sofa, and waited for sufficient energy to enable him to rise and carry out his intention. But whilst he was still struggling against the physical torpor which opposed itself to

his design, the children's voices became louder in the passage outside, their hurrying feet approached the door, and almost with a scream the little girl burst into the room and hid her face on his knee, crying as if her heart would break.

"Papa, papa!" she exclaimed, between her sobs; "tell me it is not true, papa, what Hugo says!"

Her brother stood in the doorway, with rather a guilty look upon his face, and the father wondered what had happened.

"What is the matter, children?" he asked in a tired voice, for they had come upon him inopportunely with their childish quarrels, and he had no wish to be called upon to decide anything.

"Hugo says," the child sobbed out—"Hugo says that we shall never see her again! But it is not true—oh! say it is not true, father dear!" She had jumped up on the sofa beside her father, and flung her arms round his neck. "Say no, papa! say no quickly!" she went on. "Tell us that she will come again! She is sure to come again, is she not?"

Her father's silence only made Lucie's importunity the greater, for, quite incapable of any answer, Delorme contented himself with merely stroking the fair little head. But even that hurt him, the golden curls seemed to burn his hand.

Hugo had drawn slowly nearer.

"We never saw the little brother again whom the negroes carried away," he said thoughtfully.

"They had put him in a box, too, and he was quite cold. I remember all about it."

"Your mother is in Heaven, but she still sees you," Delorme began, but he could get no farther. He felt half ashamed of telling the children something in which he did not rightly believe himself. But he remembered how his own mother in his childhood had said the same to him when his father died, and that it had comforted him.

"But I want to see her! Shall I not see her if I am very, very good?"

"Yes, dear, if you are always very good, your whole life long, then—" but he could not finish the phrase, something rose in his throat and choked him. Ah! if he could but believe that one might merit Heaven by duty faithfully accomplished here, by one's sufferings on earth! The children were so startled to witness their father's emotion they grew graver still, and could only stare at him with wide-opened eyes.

"Father!" said the boy at last, laying a hand upon his shoulder.

The room was quite dark now, and the silence made the little ones nervous.

At the boy's touch Delorme started.

"Is it not your dinner-time, children?" he said, trying to pull himself together.

"Yes, and yours too, papa, Maritza says."

"Mine?" He was on the point of refusing, when it occurred to him that *she* would think it wrong

if already on the very first day he left the children to themselves. Had he not promised her to look after her poor little ones, whom she had found it, oh, so hard to leave!

"Very well, let us go to dinner, then," he said, taking a hand of each.

In the other room the table was laid, and the lamp was burning brightly. The logs crackled cheerfully inside the stove, and her needlework was lying where she had left it, as if she might at any minute walk in and join them. It was a sad and silent repast, this first meal without the beloved presence of the wife and mother, the centre and soul of the little household. And when it was over, the poor children stood looking helplessly at one another, not knowing what to do next. When she was there she had always showed them a picture-book or told them stories, till it was time for them to go to bed. Now they were as desolate as shipwrecked travellers on a barren coast, or pilgrims in a desert land with none to guide them.

But in the bosom of the smallest girl there is something maternal lying dormant, a helpful and protecting spirit, that wakens to life in such emergencies, inspiring her to say and do the right thing. Little Lucie's brain was busily pursuing a new train of thought that had suddenly arisen there, and that in a very few minutes seemed to give her the wisdom and experience of years.

"Papa," she said, "let us take the lamp over

into the other room for you to see to write by."

Her brother took the lamp and accompanied her, and she came back the next minute.

"It is quite warm and bright in there, papa; do come!" and her father rose obediently and followed her.

Once inside the room she began again: "Now, father dear, take me on one knee, and Hugo on the other, and tell us the story of the time when you were a little boy—quite little, you know—and of how you climbed the big palm-tree!"

The child was unconsciously forging chains around her father, which were to bind him to life. He had to lift them both on his knee, and their queries had no end. Hugo dimly perceived his sister's drift, and followed her lead.

"Yes, yes, father, the story of how you climbed the palm-tree!"

"And how grandmamma was so frightened!"

"And you pretended to be a monkey!"

"And how you threw the cocoa-nuts down!"

"And about the old negro who always carried you about!"

The babble of the childish voices fell soothingly on Paul Delorme's aching heart, like balm upon a burning wound. An interruption came at last in the shape of Maritza's head appearing in the half-opened door to remind them that it was bed-time.

"But you will come to see us when we are in bed,

papa, and you will hear us say our prayers? Shall Maritza fetch you when it is time?"

"Yes, I will come." And though he had no sooner given the promise than he regretted it, he made up his mind that it must be kept; and half an hour later, as he bent over each little bed in turn, and felt his children's arms clinging to his neck, it was clear to him that, come what may, the bullet he was bent on lodging in his brain must wait a while.

Lucie had been cheerful as long as her father was in the room, but the sound of his footsteps had no sooner died away in the passage than she buried her face in the pillow, crying bitterly. All at once she felt two big paws on the side of her bed, and a dog's cold nose rubbed against her hands. It was Sultan, trying to console her, and asking to be noticed. The child patted the good creature, who required no further encouragement to jump on to the bed, and curl himself up at his little mistress's feet; and tranquillised by his companionship and the sense of security it gave her, Lucie too was soon fast asleep.

A little later Hugo awoke and feeling anxious about his sister, whose sobs he had heard, stole quietly out of bed and came over towards her to see if she were still awake. Groping in the darkness, he felt the dog's soft coat, and the next minute his hands were being vigorously licked. "Ah! it is you, Sultan!" said the boy in a sleepy tone, and made his way back to bed again, quite satisfied since his sister was so well guarded.

Delorme had thrown himself down on the sofa again without undressing. Not once yet had he been inside the bedroom—*her* bedroom; he could not make up his mind to cross the threshold. In the morning Lucie, going in to wake him, found both beds undisturbed.

"Maritza," she said to the servant a little later, "we must make up papa's bed for him downstairs."

The maid stared at the child in wonderment, but obeyed without a word. The change was effected during Delorme's absence, and he found his bed transferred to his little sitting-room on his return.

In this last storm the winter seemed to have spent its fury. Soon the snow melted everywhere, and the mountain torrents—Pelesh and Prahova, Doftana and Urlatoare, were swollen to fast-flowing streams, that dashed against the rocks, foaming and thundering, and washing along with them for a little way, the uprooted trees that had lain embedded in the ice, leaving them stranded at another spot, as if to deceive them into the belief that they too might once more clothe themselves in the fresh verdure of spring. Everywhere the hardy mountain blossoms—cyclamen and hellebore, yellow ranunculus and blue gentian, delicate lilac-tinted primulas and alpine anemones, lifted their graceful heads above the moss, shaking the dew from their petals. The new leaves which the beeches put forth shone like little mirrors set in frames of silvery down, whilst the young seedlings, pushing their way through the dead leaves, showed

nothing but just their two broad silvery leaves, with the beech-nut perched on the top, like a field-marshal's hat. The ground was thickly covered both with these and with the fir seedlings, which also looked as if they were hiding away their tender green under their little plumed caps.

Presently the shepherds began to make their way up to the mountain pasturages with their flocks. It looked like endless caravans winding along the slopes; the young lambs pressing close to their mothers' sides, their thick white fleecy wool redolent of wild thyme scenting the air where they passed. Behind them marched the shepherd lads, their coal-black locks hanging down from under their high sheepskin caps, and their dark eyes gazing dreamily before them, as if the rest of the world mattered nothing to them. What may go on in the plains below, who rules down there, who joys or sorrows, toils, fights and struggles, loves or hates; all these things are of less moment to them than is the sighing of the breeze through the branches. It is enough for them that they, the mountaineers, are free and unfettered as the wind itself. Up here on the open mountain side Dame Care has no place. She haunts the dwelling-places of men in close crowded towns, in the dark narrow streets, where it is scarce possible to breathe.

The gladness of awakening spring finds no response in the heart of the lonely man who stands beside a grave in the quiet little cemetery shut in among the

mountains. His eyes are fixed hungrily on the grassy mound, as though he would reproach the earth itself with hiding his beloved away from him. Yet though his wound bursts out afresh each time he visits the spot, he cannot tear himself away from it. But now his work in these regions is at an end, the damage done by the storm has been repaired, the railway is completed. Nothing longer holds him here. Whither, then, shall he wend his steps? what new undertaking will claim him next? . . . On the writing-table in the little room he has just left lies an open letter—a letter inviting him to take part in the engineering works now being planned for the Caucasus. It means a new wide field of activity and enterprise, with affluence and an honourable reputation to be earned. But he is weary and dispirited; body and soul cry out for rest. And Delorme's fingers close mechanically on another letter lying in his breast pocket, that which the last mail has brought him from his mother, full of love and sympathy, imploring him to return at once to his childhood's home, to find comfort and solace there in his bereavement. . . . He has come to the grave to seek counsel there. He asks himself what *she* would have wished. And it seems to him that he hears her voice, repeating her last words to him: "My children! my poor children!" How can he hesitate? *They* must be his first thought now. For their sake he must struggle on, must take up the burden of life again, cost

what it may, nor shrink from the world's stress. His choice is made. Not the sunny tropical island, not the easy indolence of that happy clime, not the refuge from his loneliness and sorrow offered him by maternal affection amid the scenes of his youth, but the bleak and rugged Caucasus, the struggle that must daily be renewed with Nature and the elements, the satisfaction born of man's well-earned triumph over those wild forces, an arduous but honourable career, and for his children all the advantages that wealth can bring.

"Clarisse!" he murmurs, bending over the grave, and pressing his lips to the grass, "I will be true to them, for your sake, to whom I belong in life and death!"

Gay smiling faces looked out from a carriage that passed rapidly along the road skirting the cemetery. Its occupants caught sight of the sad lonely figure, and their mirth was swiftly checked. He, however, neither saw nor heard them, plunged in his mournful thoughts, and the dog that stood beside him let its head droop, as if it understood and shared in its master's grief. It was a picture of indescribable melancholy which the strangers carried away with them, a dark shadow across the loveliness and brightness of that glorious spring day.

A few days later, Delorme, accompanied by his two children clad in deepest mourning, was setting forth again into the world, to make a new home for them in a distant land, and leaving in the one where

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