The Fire Spirits

BY

PAUL BUSSON

THE FIRE SPIRITS

A Romance

by

PAUL BUSSON

Translated by J. Eglington

Edited and Introduced by

John Pelan

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FIRES ON THE MOUNTAIN

If you've been following Dancing Tuatara Press since our inception, you'll have no doubt noticed our efforts to restore to in-print status those books that comprise Karl Edward Wagner's list of the thirty-nine best horror novels—or, at least, those books which require such attention. The Wagner List ranges from titles that are common as today's newspaper to books so scarce that the number of known copies can actually be enumerated. We know for a fact that less than fifty copies of H.B. Gregory's brilliant take on the Lovecraft mythos from the Judeo/Christian standpoint were actually distributed. We don't *know* the number of copies of either Paul Busson's *The Fire Spirits* or Philip George Chadwick's *The Death Guard* that made it into circulation, but one can ascertain from reviewing the catalogs of specialty booksellers over the last forty years that both books can be rightfully called extremely scarce.

The present volume was one of two fantasy novels by Paul Busson that were translated into English for William Heinemann Ltd. Originally published in Germany in 1923, *The Fire Spirits* was translated into English by J. Eglington. The Heinemann edition appeared in 1929, an inauspicious year for luxuries such as books. The first novel translated, *The Man Who Was Born Again*, appeared in 1927, and, based on the ease with this book is found, one can deduce that there was likely a substantial print run with somewhat disappointing sales, resulting in a much lower print run for the second novel. In his *Guide to Supernatural Fiction* Everett Bleiler considers *The Man Who Was Born Again* "a key work of expressionistic fantasy", whereas Wagner and I both consider *The Fire Spirits* to be far and away the superior book.

Before going much further it's probably a good idea to look at the context in which Karl formulated his rather eclectic choices and evaluate whether or not *The Fire Spirits* really deserves such extravagant praise. The Wagner List, as it's come to be known, ran in *Twilight Zone Magazine*

during the mid-1980s. Well known as a writer and as the editor of the annual *Year's Best Horror Stories*, Karl Edward Wagner was a "student of the game", and devoted many, many hours to learning as much about the field of horror literature as possible. The lists that he came up were the result of frequent trips to England (often in the company of Ramsey Campbell and Steve Jones) and scouring the book stalls for interesting-sounding titles. Some of the tricks of the trade that he taught me and have served in good stead included searching by publisher. Assuming that Publisher X has done one or more book(s) that you find of interest, it therefore follows that the same editor may well have acquired other titles along similar lines. An obvious example would be Philip Allan under the editorship of Charles Birkin, which produced the famous "Creeps" series and related titles.

Armed with this and similar tricks of the trade, Karl not only put together a magnificent collection of rarities, but was also able to assemble his three lists of thirteen titles each, broken down into the sub-categories of "Supernatural Fiction", "Non-supernatural Fiction", and "Science Fictional Horror".

The most frequently asked question is: "Did he really consider these novels to be the best that the genre had to offer?" In a word, "no". Karl told me that the column in which these lists appeared was essentially a bully pulpit to call attention to works that otherwise might be overlooked by modern readers, as well as providing a reminder to not neglect the classics. Books earn the sobriquet of "classic" for a reason, hence the presence of *Frankenstein* on the list. Then there's the matter of continuing discoveries after the appearance of the list. Karl told me that given the chance he would make some revisions, but wouldn't tell me what those revisions would be. Speculating on possible revisions makes for an interesting guessing game. For example, I consider *The Shadow on the House* to be Mark Hansom's weakest novel, but it was the only one that Karl had read when preparing his list. So, would he have replaced it with a supernatural novel such as my favorite, *Master of Souls*? If so, then what book gets bumped from the listing of supernatural tomes?

In any event, to bring us back around to *The Fire Spirits,* we find it unusually odd because the number of historical fantasy/horror novels is a very small one, and tends to weigh very heavily on one or two periods in history with scant attention to many other important eras.

Since the 1980s and the advent of "steampunk" this landscape has changed somewhat, but in the pre-WWII time period historical horror novels could pretty much be counted using only one's fingers. On the horror side of the equation there's H. Warner Munn's Werewolf Clan cycle and Chandler Whipple's *The Curse of the Harcourts,* both starting during medieval times and progressing to the present. In fantasy, James Branch Cabell would be the leading figure with his multi-volume opus, *The Biography of Manuel*, also spanning similar eras, though later volumes in the story do a fine job of portraying the 16th and 17th Centuries. The setting of *The Fire Spirits* is rather unusual in that the action is set in Napoleonic Europe, in the Tyrols to be specific.

The novel begins with Peter Storck coming to the Tyrolean village of Sankt Marein in search of answers regarding the disappearance of his uncle, who vanished from his home without a trace. The Tyrolean region is in the midst of upheaval, with the traditional reins of power long held by the Catholic Emperor of Austria being handed over to the Protestant King of Bavaria. The tension caused by this transition is never far from the surface and figures strongly as the plot develops. Having not read the original German, I can only go by the translation provided by J. Eglington for the Heinemann edition. The book is heavily character-driven, with a number of interesting personalities being introduced in the first few chapters.

On somewhat of a disappointing note, I have been told by friends who read German that a significant amount of plot development and some very evocative scenes have been cut from the English-language version and they consider the complete German text to be far superior. As I can't begin to speculate as to when another translation might be done, we're best served by enjoying the translation that is currently available to us. Based on this version alone, I would have to say that not only is *The Fire Spirits* one of the scarcest titles on the Wagner List, but also one of the very best.

The reveal as to what the mysterious lights—called "the fire spirits" by the locals—actually are is extremely well done and, while it hardly comes as a complete surprise, it definitely does put a nice twist on things.

In closing, let's look at the other volumes that are included with *The Fire Spirits* on Karl's list of Best Non-Supernatural Novels:

1. The Deadly Percheron by John Franklin Bardin
2. Psycho by Robert Bloch

3. Here Comes a Candle by Fredric Brown
4. The Screaming Mimi by Fredric Brown
5. The Fire-Spirits by Paul Busson
6. The Crooked Hinge by John Dickson Carr

I can't complain about any of the first six selections

7. The Sorceror's Apprentice by Hanns Heinz Ewers
8. Vampire by Hanns Heinz Ewers

Okay, one volume by Ewers to call attention to the Frank Braun Trilogy would have been fine, but including all three is a missed opportunity to have called attention to two other books. That, and *Vampire* is pretty much terrible. I believe that the publication of Karl's lists predated the publication date of *Blood Meridian: or, An Evening Redness in the West,* so that omission is excusable, however, including *Vampire* at the expense of (as an example) Jim Thompson's *The Killer Inside Me* or *Pop. 1280.*

9. Fully Dressed and in His Right Mind by Michael Fessier

An odd, but totally deserving selection.

10. The Shadow on the House by Mark Hansom

I've mentioned that I consider this to be Hansom's weakest novel (which is still pretty good), but any other Hansom novel would have been more deserving.

11. Torture Garden by Octave Mirbeau

A bizarre and exotic book to be sure. Does it invoke the feeling of "horror"? Maybe for some folks, but not for me.

12. The Master of the Day of Judgement by Leo Perutz
13. The Subjugated Beast by R.R. Ryan

Both of these are brilliant selections. At the risk of including too many Ryans, I'd have liked to see *No Escape* listed. More of a melodrama than anything else, but absolutely unforgettable.

And in closing, here is another bookscouting trick I learned from Karl that's very easy to do in these day of internet searching. We've mentioned the obvious, other books by the same author, and the not-so-obvious books from the same *editor* or *publisher*. Here's a final thought: How about authors who appeared in the *same magazine*? I realize that this is perhaps just a variant on the same editor angle, but I can certainly attest to it working. Early on, when the boom in fantasy started to take off in earnest and it was no longer possible to simply buy every book labeled as "fantasy," I had to shift gears and put some limits and definitions on just what it was that I was collecting and I made the shift to focusing on material in book form that had originally appeared in John W. Campbell's *Unknown* and *Unknown Worlds*. The concept proved to be very workable and easy to expand to the broader scope of *authors* who had appeared in either incarnation of the magazine. Interests have waxed and waned over the years, but looking over my bookshelves, it's still pretty easy to detect these original roots in large selections of work by de Camp, Pratt, Hubbard, Sturgeon, Gold, Kuttner, Rice, van Vogt, and others. Feel free to drop us a line as to the parameters of your own collection(s), and I'll get Fender Tucker (our CEO) to include the most interesting ones in a future edition of *The Rambler*. In the meantime, please enjoy this entry from Karl Edward Wagner's list of the 13 Best Non-Supernatural Horror Novels.

John Pelan
Gallup, NM
February 2015
With snow on the ground and lizards in the house!

THE FIRE SPIRITS

I

THE SOUTH WIND BLEW in noisy gusts, driving the white dust in whirls along the Brennerstrasse, from the Abbey of the Premonstratensians as far as the projecting house with the gilded roof-tiles, and twice compelling Peter Storck, much to the delight of some street Urchins, to run in pursuit of his carefully brushed beaver hat. Over the little town, the stupendous mass of the Nordwand rose sheer with its dark green woods, Alpine meadows and grey rocks. Under the bridge, the waters of the Inn shot down between the piers, gurgling and churning.

The young man presented a somewhat odd figure, and people looked a little peevishly at his liver-coloured cloak with its several capes, his yellow-lined top-boots, his white neckerchief and fashionable tall hat. Market was in progress under the open arches of the Arcade, but little business was being done. It was early in the season and everything was scarce; and the butter-dealers from the Durer Valley, the cheesemongers, the milkmen, butchers and sausage-men were asking higher prices than the townsfolk were able or disposed to pay. Visitors like this young man, who looked as if he had plenty of money, were needed to make business more lively!

Peter Storck took no notice of the way in which he was stared at, nor did he even understand the remarks which reached his ears. He was listless and jaded, having been detained on business for a good while by the officials in the Bavarian Government House, the yellow building which had formerly been the Imperial Courthouse. At last, however, his pockets bulged with documents, stamped and countersigned.

He loitered idly in front of the small semicircular window of a druggist's shop, contemplating the sticks of shellac wrapped in silver paper, the brown tablets of glue, the carboys of indigo, madder, verdigris-green, yellow and dragon's blood. In another window were good beaver-skin caps; women's hats heavily embroidered in gold; silver-mounted pipes of maple wood; buckskin purses; belts ornamented with porcupine quills; lace pictures, with

saints in gilt. Two Bavarian soldiers, sturdy and good-humoured fellows, stood beside him looking at a coloured engraving which represented the "solemn nuptials" of the Emperor Charles the Sixth—a long train of state carriages, cavalry and infantry, coiled like a serpent.

Passing on, Peter Storck came out again on the river and continued his walk for a little beside its turbulent waters, sitting down at last on some boards. All at once it seemed strange to him that he was sitting there, in the pale March sunlight, watching a four-horse wagon carrying wine up into the country. The brass ornaments on the horses' collars jingled, badgers' skins and red cloths flapped in the wind, and the driver, in a blue smock, kept cracking his whip. Peter took his pipe from his pocket, and examined idly its tassels of apple-green and peach-rose, the colours of the Franconians of Würzburg, a body to which he had been admitted two years previously as the son of a countryman. These gay emblems had at the time cost him a whole forenoon's delay at the police court in Vienna, and the officer had recommended him not in future to make a display of these student badges: Prince Metternich had strictly forbidden such things . . .

But what had become of his uncle?

Once again he took from his pocket the communication which he had received from the Bavarian High Bailiff in Landeck, setting forth that his uncle, Martin Storck, of Sankt Marein in the Upper Inn Valley, owner of Zeitlanghof, had suddenly disappeared and, save for certain goods and chattels, had left nothing behind him but a note, in which with his own hand he directed that the house, including furniture and lands, was to pass as a free gift into the possession of his nephew, Peter Storck, resident in Vienna in his own house, Zum Alten Blumenstöckel. Nothing so far having been ascertained as to the destiny of the missing man, the aforesaid Peter Storck was authorised to take over the house for the time being, failing which it was to be sealed up by the authorities, no compensation being allowed for loss and damage. Although, in the opinion of the inhabitants of the district, Herr Martin Storck had met with an accident during a mountain excursion, account must nevertheless be taken of the possibility of the return of the owner . . . The prolix document from Landeck contained, moreover, an inventory of the property, and especially of the articles of furniture which had been found in the house, as drawn up by the notary after his uncle's disappearance.

All the formalities which had given him such endless running about in Vienna and afterwards in Innsbruck were now over and done with; his passport was in order; in fine, nothing stood in his way for the rest of his journey. He was free at last to go to his uncle Martin, who had played so great a part in the dreams of his youth. Only, his uncle was no longer there!

II

THIS UNCLE HAD OFTEN been spoken of in Peter's family; but whenever the growing boy was present, the subject had always been approached with strange precaution. Often, failing to take into account a child's gift of observation, his elders had pointedly and abruptly turned the conversation when he appeared, making signs to one another to be careful. Peter knew only that this uncle, a brother of his father, had, like the latter, migrated from Franconia to Vienna, had suddenly fled into the solitudes of the Tyrolese Highlands, and had never returned. When he asked questions, he had always been put off with a rebuke. It was not till he was in his seventeenth year that fuller knowledge had come to him of the story of the mysterious hermit; and at the same time an event had occurred which transformed his whole nature, and in a strange, hardly explicable way, altered the loving and tender relation in which he had hitherto lived with his mother.

It began with the arrival of one of his mother's relatives, Frau Genoveva Schnäbele of Augsburg, who had just become a widow, and had travelled by river from Passau with the intention of going on to Vienna and of seeking there forgetfulness of her trouble. To the young man, whose soul was ripe for the ardent idealisation of first love, the beautiful and shapely young Schwabian, with her dark hair and gold-pale complexion, appeared a goddess of unearthly loveliness; and indeed even hardened and experienced men might have found something more than merely piquant in her lively good health and in the elegant fulness of her figure. At supper, when the new arrival first sat at table in his parents' house, chatting with roguish gaiety, Peter scarcely dared to raise his eyes to her. His father, in high spirits and manifestly delighted by the visit, incited his son to various acts of gallantry; and when at length she expressed a wish to retire, it became Peter's duty to carry before her to her room the tall, silver double

candlestick. He was taking leave of his fair cousin with an awkward bow and shyly wishing her good-night, when she said, covering a yawn with a charming movement of her hand: “I have not had a real sleep since I got into the boat at Passau; so my cavalier will perhaps be so very kind as to take off my shoes for me!”

Peter, overwhelmed with delight in rendering her this sweet service, knelt down at once, and in nervous and eager haste untied her daintily fastened ribbons and drew off her shoes. As he felt within his hands the warm and pretty little foot, and for an instant retained it, his eyes from some new emotion filled with tears, and his cousin, with a little cooing laugh, allowed her fingers to stray through his hair, saying: “Oh, dear! so he is a real little man already!” Whereupon, abashed and stumbling to the door, he went from the room to bid good-night to his parents and to kiss their hands respectfully, as was the custom. As he raised his face, he noticed that his mother was gazing at him with so anxious a question in her eyes that he was startled. Soon after this he was in his bed on the top floor—only a wall between him and Frau Genoveva. All was still, save for the thrumming of a distant guitar, which, so at first he thought, hindered him from going to sleep. But he became aware presently that he found this faint noise a disturbance only because, with the most strained attention, he was endeavouring to catch any sound of undressing, or any movement of the bed, in the heaven of the adjoining room. Nothing stirred, however: only a soft, whispering rain began to fall, and the distant musician seemed at last to have laid aside his instrument. Yet sleep would not come. Unable to rest and tortured by an inner fire, Peter tossed from side to side in his narrow bed, and lay at last on his back, his eyes wide open, as though he were in a fever. Suddenly he caught his breath. The door opened softly, and something stole into the little room and sank light and warm on the edge of his bed. A hand felt for his breast, in which his heart beat wildly, hair tickled his cheeks, moist lips were pressed full upon his mouth, and in an indescribable anguish of pleasure the virgin youth surrendered himself to unearthly sensations, drank intoxicating fragrance, and sank finally out of an agony of bliss into unconsciousness. In the early dawn he woke and saw the sleeper by his side . . . A faint creak of hinges drew his eyes to the door, which was opened a hand’s-breadth, and while he was struggling to regain full consciousness, he thought that he recognised for one moment through the chink of the door the face of his mother, wearing an expression of such

horror and despair that an intense pang of dismay shot through him. The apparition, perhaps only a phantom of his dream, had already vanished, and the woman at his side, waking up, jumped out of bed, blew him a kiss and fled into her room. Peter rose immediately, washed himself shivering in ice-cold water, dressed, and going softly downstairs asked the maid to give him breakfast, leaving word that he had gone out for a stroll in the Prater as he was in the habit of doing. When, after an aimless ramble, he returned, wondering whether he would be able to command himself sufficiently when he met this woman again in his parents' presence, he found his father and mother alone and in a very ill humour. His deadly anxiety lest the portentous event of the night should be seen written on his face vanished as he learned what had now happened. His father grumbled angrily over his son's late appearance, when the soup was on the table; his mother sat pale and with clenched hands, as though bowed beneath reproaches. The second course was brought in, and the maid had hardly left the room when his father began to find fault with the cooking, muttering that he was not properly attended to in his own house, and in the same breath he added that it was "unheard of" that a message had not been sent to him in his office about their guest's sudden departure. It was absolutely incredible that she should have left so unceremoniously, merely because a distant relative in Linz was ill! How then had the news come? His mother, bringing out the words with an effort, answered that a peasant boy had brought a letter, and that on receiving it her cousin had decided to pay at once a visit to Linz which she had already promised, especially as the boy had said that a boat was going up the river at noon. "Of course she is coming back again," his mother added, casting down her eyes. His father, still grumbling, occupied himself with the leg of a chicken, and bent over his plate, and at the same moment his mother suddenly looked up and directed a burning and bitter look at Peter, who now, with a sinking heart, understood that he had not been dreaming that morning when he thought he saw her, and that she had turned the beautiful Frau Schnäbele out of the house.

III

WHEN THE FIRST ANXIOUS HOURS had passed and the terrible expectation of impending trouble had ceased, Peter tried shamefacedly to

approach his mother, and through many little attentions and services to win back her lost favour. But he met only with cold aversion and indifference. His mother never uttered a word in any way relating to the occurrence, but never again were the old relations between her and her son restored. Her increasing coldness was a bitter sorrow to him. Later on, he accustomed himself to their altered life together, at first defiantly but gradually becoming himself indifferent. And when his father, shortly before he succumbed to a stroke, had sent him to the High School in Würzburg, his separation from the now harsh woman caused him little regret. It was only when he stood by her death-bed, and the dying woman, no longer able to speak, raised with a great effort her waxen hand and laid it as if in forgiveness on his head, that his long-buried grief for the loss of her love had at length freed itself in a flame of remorse which had seared his heart. Thus when, at the age of five-and-twenty, he had become owner of the house Zum Alten Blumenstockel—having just taken his degree of Doctor of Laws—he had reached a maturity beyond his years.

On the fateful day of Frau Genoveva's disappearance, it had happened that he learned something more about his uncle, Martin Storck, of whom his parents would tell him nothing, never, in fact, breaking their apparent rule of silence on the subject.

Well, on this day, his parents being out all the afternoon with some friends, Peter, tired of having nothing to do, went into the kitchen to talk to the old maidservant, Ludmilla. She had been his nurse from earliest childhood, and bore the lad a devoted affection which occasionally led her into defiance of her master and mistress. On this day the old woman, looking up from her knitting, fixed on the son of the house a long and searching look and muttered: "The very look of the Captain! Just like Herr Martin!" Peter was strangely moved, and as it seemed to him that the old woman knew something more about his vanished uncle, he besought her, with the childish importunity which she had never been able to resist, to tell him the truth at last, since no one else would do so; though, as he urged, he ought to be told about a brother of his father. Old Ludmilla was frightened and refused point blank; gradually, however, yielding to the temptation to tell the story, she ceased to resist, and beginning in a whisper and constantly turning towards the door to listen, she narrated to him the history of his father's elder brother, making him promise over and over again that he would keep it to himself, and, in God's name, would not betray a single

word of what he heard to his father or his mother—which Peter very readily promised.

He thus learned that his father's brother had entered the Imperial Army, attaining the rank of Captain of Horse in a regiment of Cuirassiers. The proud and chivalrous officer, physically as well as in character unlike his brother, who showed a tendency to obesity, had chosen for his mistress or for his bride an actress of the Kärntnertor Theatre, a foreign woman of great beauty. He was in the habit of visiting her every evening, when they would lose themselves in blissful talk about their future happiness, until one night he discovered, hiding behind a curtain, a diminutive gentleman, who, when pulled out into the room, put on airs and declared very loftily that he had brought the lady some camellias—they lay, in fact, on the table—and that no one could raise any objection to this attention. To the officer's inquiry whether the hour did not seem a little late for such a visit, the arrogant coxcomb answered with an impatient gesture that he must refuse to receive lessons in etiquette from a German. The little man's saucy smile, the heavy scents which exhaled from his silk coat, and above all the self-accusing distress of the lady, combined to put the Cuirassier into such a raging passion that without a word he took the foppish creature by the collar and flung him down the steep door-steps into the road, so that he lay there motionless, like a heap of clothes, bleeding and moaning piteously. The noise attracted the police, who were much concerned when they ascertained that the injured man was a prince belonging to the French Embassy. A few days afterwards a note from His Majesty the Emperor Leopold was delivered by hand to the Captain, informing him that he was summarily expelled from the Army. The popular officer's comrades tried to obtain the reversal of this arbitrary decision and prevailed on their Colonel to implore pardon from the Monarch, though all were aware that the Emperor specially favoured everything foreign. So that what actually happened was expected. The Emperor declared angrily that he would never pass over a case in which an officer of no social standing had acted in violation of the respect and deference due to a person of rank, and that anyone who pressed him further on behalf of Martin Storck would, as an accomplice, share his punishment. The Colonel thereupon withdrew.

That same day, about noon, the Captain had rushed into his brother's house, and there, with a fierce laugh, had torn the gold tassel from his sword, flung it on the floor and trodden it under his feet, exclaiming loudly

that he showed by this action what he thought of the badge of an unjust and base-minded tyrant. His brother, greatly horrified, besought him to be calm, and to recollect himself: “You seem to forget,” he said, “that I too am in the service of the Government, and that I cannot in my own house listen to such treasonable language!” Herr Martin at first stared, as though he had not heard his brother correctly, then he spat on the floor and shouted in a fury: “Very well, then, I spit on all of you, miserable slaves of an infamous despot! If you, hitherto my brother, mean to prove yourself a Judas Iscariot, do it quickly, and reap the reward of your grovelling thoughts!” Thereupon he walked out of the room, clanking his spurs, followed by his weeping sister-in-law; but in the adjoining room, which he had to pass through, he had caught sight of little Peter in his cradle, and taking him out of his pillows had pressed him to the breast of his white tunic, saying: “May you live to see better times and better men, little Storck! I breathe my soul into you in this kiss!” The mother had almost fainted with fright; the child, however, crowing with delight at the bright gold buttons, reached out his little hands to his uncle. “I take this for a sign, my little man!” the officer exclaimed, and having laid the child carefully back, rushed away. It was not till many months had passed that his brother and sister-in-law heard that he had settled in a lonely and gloomy region of Tyrol, and there lived the life of a hermit. The foreign actress, when soon afterwards it became evident that she was with child, vanished from Vienna, and no one knew where she had found shelter.

The old woman’s story, associated in his mind by secret threads of feeling with the moving experiences of that morning, had made a deep impression on Peter. Henceforth he was dominated by the thought of his uncle, whose fate appeared to him to be invested with a romantic glamour, like that of some noble and unhappy knight. In his waking dreams he imagined all the details of that love tragedy: the tall cavalry officer in his white doublet with facings of black velvet; the beautiful woman weeping and wringing her hands; and the quaking Frenchman, reeling from the avenger’s fist of steel. Often, too, with his inner eye, he beheld his uncle, in black cloak and with dishevelled locks, a deep, indelible furrow between his dark brows, standing on a jagged cliff with lightning flashing and thunder rolling, fearlessly challenging the powers of Heaven and Hell.

In the gay company of the Würzburg Franconians, with their green and rose-coloured badges, these images began to fade from his day thoughts,

only to return more frequently still in nightly visions, and in these, with ever-increasing distinctness, Peter recognised himself in the wrathful lover, while the actress now appeared in no other shape than that of the woman who had visited him on that long past night. Always, however, at the end of the dream, a veiled and terrible phantom appeared, frightening him horribly and never quite distinguishable, up to the moment when his thumping heart woke him, gasping for breath. For a long time these visions continued, until they too grew dimmer and finally ceased.

IV

THE LETTER FROM THE BAVARIAN HIGH BAILIFF had greatly excited him, and without delay he had travelled by the mail coach from Vienna to Innsbruck in order to discover as quickly as possible his vanished uncle, or at least, with due honour, to bear his body to the grave, should a fatal accident have befallen him.

Here by this river, in which were reflected the very mountains enfolding Sankt Marein, his heart glowed within him as he thought of the idol of his youth. He felt as though secret and indissoluble ties united him with the lonely man and as though he must needs hasten to the aid of this fugitive from a world full of lies and meannesses. Moreover, his longing to learn the full truth became stronger as he neared his goal, and the thought that he should have to wait for the rest of the day and a long night for the departure of the mail coach grew almost intolerable.

Harsh voices and a noisy clatter caused him to look up. A Bavarian battery with a team of panting and sweating horses rattled by, coming, no doubt, from practice. The gunners were singing, the young lieutenant was making his bay curvet; the wind brought from the horses a strong odour of leather, sweat and cart grease. He rose and followed the little procession, in the whirling dust, back to the town. A golden glow burned in the western sky.

Small and congested as was the town, he lost his way and strayed into various passages. Two peasants were leaning against a wall smoking, and surveyed him with dubious looks as he approached. He inquired the way to the Golden Eagle, but the grey-haired man whom he addressed returned a black look as he heard the stranger’s accent, and turning to his companion

said loudly: “Bavarian spies ought to know a deal more than the way to the inn, but they’ll get nought out of us!” And the pair stolidly turned their backs on him and walked on.

After a short further search he came on the large inn. The courtyard was slippery with blood, and he had to take care not to collide with the numerous tubs and troughs.

A pig had just been killed, and dark red sausage-meat was being packed through the filler into the casing, which lay on the ground in loose heaps. Busy hands were also engaged in stalling chopped liver into the tin mould and drawing lengths of casing over the mouth. Carefully picking up the skirt of his cloak, Peter climbed the spiral steps and entered the tap-room.

Next to it was the private room, which he was about to enter, but it was occupied by a large party of Bavarian officers, of various ages, good-hearted and simple fellows, who were making themselves jolly with the beer of their country, which they had brought with them in a large hamper standing in the corner. Peter accordingly took a seat outside in the tap-room, at a small table near the window. Except for himself, there was only one guest in the room, a gigantic peasant with a wild beard and swarthy skin, who sat at the next table, over which hung the silvered emblems of some guild; beside him a closely-packed wallet was laid against the wall, and a staff with a long sharp point, and a heavy bundle of iron rods lay on the floor. The waitress, a pretty but sulky girl, set on the table before Peter a pewter oil lamp, picking out the wick with a hairpin. She asked him sullenly if he wanted anything, and pointed to some sausages, which he ate, as the dish was before him, and he drank some red wine. When he had eaten, the corpulent host came up to his table, raised his cap politely and sat down beside him, while from the neighbouring room rang out the piercing voice of a man, who seemed to be singing a spicy song, to judge by the roars of laughter which resounded at intervals.

The landlord had brought the Arrivals Book, with a brown stone inkpot. Peter dipped the badly cut quill and wrote his name, the innkeeper’s eye following his hand. When the word “Vienna” was reached, the innkeeper’s great round paw was laid confidentially over Peter’s fingers.

“What, from Vienna?” he whispered. “Maybe one of the gentlemen our Emperor sends here to find out how things are looking in Tyrol?”

Peter shook his head; the whispering was repugnant to him, and he said aloud that he had come to look after some business for his uncle at Sankt

Marein in the Upper Inn Valley.

A chair was suddenly upset and dashed on the floor, startling both host and guest, who rose to their feet. The man with the wild beard at the next table had for some reason jumped up: his wide, bright green hat slipped from the table, and the nails of his boots struck the iron rods with a clang. From his black wide-open eyes a look flashed on Peter, in which were to be read amazement, rage and curiosity. It was only for a moment, and the man bent grumbling to pick up his chair and set it in its place, then tilted his hat and wiped with his coat-sleeve the silk round the brim. So that it seemed as if the wicked look in his eyes had only been annoyance at his own awkwardness.

The innkeeper paid no further attention to the incident: something else was interesting him. He was confident that this elegant and handsome gentleman, with light side whisker, and youthful but shrewd countenance, was, for all his denial, a secret emissary of the Emperor, and might have some reassuring intelligence. He began then once more his questions: Had our good Emperor clean forgotten this poor country? Could he spare a few of his soldiers to clean out the Bavarian rascals? Was the gentleman a Catholic? That made it all right! A good thing if gentlemen in Vienna would see for themselves how things looked here, and what this poor people had to put up with!

Once more a roar of laughter in the next room followed an unintelligible stanza. The innkeeper clenched his fist.

“They must have put some stuff into that beer they are fuddling themselves with, the savages! How can any innkeeper stand it, when customers bring their own drink?

“Are the Bavarians really so bad?” asked Peter incredulously. “I knew some when I was at Würzburg, and could see little difference between them and Austrians. At all events they are better than the French; we have had *them* in Vienna.”

The innkeeper laughed disparagingly.

“The little Frenchmen, is it? They won’t come back here! They have had enough since the year ’96; we helped them to get out then. And the Devil will have his tail in the game if we don’t do the same with these Bavarians!”

Peter pointed slyly to the portrait of the Bavarian King on the wall, and to the blue and white banner which adorned the wall over the bar. The

innkeeper pushed his cap to the side of his head and scratched his iron-grey hair.

"What would you have?" he grumbled. "Am I to have my licence taken from me? They will shut up my house and cellar if I don't put up with the rubbish. And I must live!"

The waitress hurried into the next room with a fresh supply of sausages, shutting the door behind her with her foot; a scream was heard, as a stout arm had seized her, and she came out, very red, slamming the door on the laughter which followed her.

"I had no notion that the Bavarians were so detested here," observed Peter, somewhat amazed. "In general they are good folk!"

"Good!" gasped the innkeeper, and his face went purple. "Is that what Vienna people mean by good? But I have often heard it said, there's no longer any religion in Vienna. Good! They will not allow the Midnight Mass at Christmas or the Sanctuary lamps in Holy Week! And there is no one left now in the Abbey. Satan surely is their lord and master, or why should Christians punish the sacristan for ringing the hell? They have called away the Capuchin and Franciscan Fathers to Altötting and locked them up, as if they were priests who had sinned; and you might often see the poor people and the cripples weeping at the barred doors where they used to be given bread and soup. And now they are putting our young lads into uniform and turning them into soldiers, which is a scandal and has never been heard of in Tyrol since the world began!" Loud calls from the little room interrupted him, and he raised his unwieldy body. "The officers wish to pay," he said, and picking up his tablet and chalk went into them.

Meditatively, Peter sipped his sour red wine, glancing again at the shaggy giant, who from time to time shot a rapid glance at him. A jingling of coins was heard in the next room and then a rattling of sabres: the blue-coats streamed through the door, and a young lieutenant stopped, a little unsteadily, in front of the peasant.

"Eh, countryman," he cried, "what have you in the wallet?"

The peasant made no reply. His eye, just now so alert, had become dull and lifeless.

"Leave him alone. Craiksheim!" stammered a fat captain. "The beast is d-dead-drunk. Come, brother!"

They clattered out laughing and tramped down the steps. Peter helped himself to another glass of wine and lit his pipe.

At this moment a young girl came into the room, looked round for a moment, and then came straight to the peasant, who rose respectfully and only sat down again when bidden more than once to do so.

Peter felt at his heart a faint, lingering pang.

Never had he beheld any woman of a loveliness so perfect. The young lady, for such she was, held a wide-brimmed hat under her charmingly rounded arm; a rich crimson shawl was drawn about her shoulders, and from beneath her dark blue dress appeared one little foot, in a patent leather shoe tied with ribbons. Her face, pale as ivory within the frame of her black locks, had an indefinable expression of gentleness; and Peter, as he gazed at the large dark eyes, the smiling mouth, the small but perfectly regular nose, found himself thinking of the radiant forms of Greek sculpture, and felt an impulse to kneel in adoration. Never before had such an experience befallen him. He was suddenly ashamed of his pipe, which fell from his hand, and incapable of clear thought, he fixed his gaze on this unearthly apparition.

The girl meanwhile was talking in low tones to the peasant, who listened with a peculiar air of awkward tenderness and devotion, and, from the vigorous nodding of his head, appeared to be assuring her that he fully understood what she was saying. He took a package carefully from her small hand and at once concealed it in his breast. She rose to go, and the bearded head bent over her hand.

She came by Peter's table, and as she passed raised her eyes and looked him full in the face. For an instant her dark absorbing look met his gaze, a richer golden tinge seemed to suffuse her cheeks, and then, as quickly as she had come, she had vanished.

Peter sat for a long time in a kind of disability, striving to hold in his mind the entrancing image. For a moment he had been on the point of starting up and hastening after her, but reflection had immediately saved him from this folly. The turmoil of excitement declined into a dreamy melancholy. He felt as if Fortune had just then passed his way and bestowed one look upon him, a gift to last him his lifetime. The thought that next morning the mail coach would carry him away into the unknown, and that he would never again see this lovely creature, filled him with the sweet sadness known only to youth.

It appeared that the peasant had only been waiting for the strange lady, for no sooner had she gone than he paid for his refreshment, stood up, hoisted easily on to his shoulders the heavy wallet, grasped his pointed

staff, and then, as if it were a trifle, lifted the heavy bundle of iron rods, which clashed together as he raised them. With heavy tread, speaking to no one, he walked slowly out of the room.

"A fine ram!" said the innkeeper with a grin. "There's some stamina in that fellow! Here, girl, show the gentleman his room!"

Peter rose to his feet.

"Who was the lady?" he asked in a low tone.

The innkeeper shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't oblige your honour," he said. "Never saw her before. A nice one, eh?" He made a grimace and clicked his tongue.

In the small vaulted room a tallow candle flickered in its copper holder. Peter took the snuffers and cleaned the wick. A Madonna, with seven bare swords in her bleeding heart, watched faithfully above his high bed; a faint, musty smell came from the pillows. The wind continued from the south, and struck the house, wailing up the chimney and rattling the windows. A dull roar came up from the river.

Sleep stole upon him in the sounding darkness, bringing with it a medley of scenes and people. The Emperor Franz drove by, a look of ill-will in his long, wrinkled countenance, and his thin lips took a haughty sneer as he said: "Oh, a *neveu* of that everlasting malcontent Captain Storck?" and he smiled maliciously. "We shall know what to do with you, young man!" The innkeeper was at the carriage door in his green velvet waistcoat: "May it please your Majesty—most humbly!" There was a thrumming of strings and a toper's hoarse bass: "Move a little closer, dear! I can see you better here!" Thereupon the black peasant appeared and barred the way, which led, as Peter knew, to the beautiful girl. He tried to pass, but the huge, hairy hand of the giant gripped him . . . He lay groaning, and started up with a stifled cry as he heard the rain of the wild March night beating on the window panes. After that he fell into a dreamless sleep.

Next morning, penetrated by the cold and filled with a strange uneasiness, he climbed into the mail coach. The postillion cracked his whip, the wheels ground forward.

The beautiful girl remained in Innsbruck.

V

WHEN AT THE END OF HIS JOURNEY he descended from the coach he was stiff with cold and shaken by the jolting of the wretched springs. Sleet was falling, and the whole country lay white and still, buried beneath the soft snow, which had followed the warmer weather.

Peter was surprised to see the number of people collected in front of the inn, and they took no notice of the arrival of the coach or of himself. A group, with horrified faces, drew his attention. A nun, quite young and pale as death, in white cap and black robe, was writhing in horrible contortions, supported with difficulty by two Sisters from the convent. She stretched herself up and then flung back her body, so that her white cap almost touched the ground and the heels of her heavy shoes. Froth gathered at her mouth, her eye-balls were turned up, her hands were clenched convulsively.

An insane woman, perhaps; certainly a case of serious illness.

Horror-struck, Peter saw that a priest stood in front of her, a thin man with austere countenance and deep-sunken eyes. His full fox-coloured beard blew out in the cold wind; his close-cropped hair formed a circle of fiery red round the brown Capuchin cap which covered the tonsure; the wind lifted the cowl on his back. He wore a crumpled surplice, and from his shoulders hung his purple and gold stole.

The scene was startling and uncanny. Many of the women were on their knees, heedless of the snowy slush that soaked into them; the men, their hard faces losing self-control, stared with wide-open eyes; children screamed. The Sisters, their teeth chattering, held on to the sick woman with all their strength.

Peter stood rooted to the ground in presence of this surprising spectacle. What was the invisible power which shook and twisted so cruelly the body of the poor nun? From the blue lips of the white, distorted face the tongue lolled out, and the lacerated mouth seemed to be endeavouring to frame sentences. Shrill and piercing cries came from her, the eyes protruded, a convulsive shudder ran through her limbs. Then a man's deep voice broke hoarsely from her: "Tarach ziach zo! Yoho! Little God! You little dough-manikin! Rogue, rogue! I'll smash you!"

A young peasant had to hurry to the aid of the Sisters to save the nun from doing an injury to herself or to them, as she hit round her in the midst of her torment. Saliva tinged with blood slobbered over her chin, and her lappeted cap fell to the ground, allowing her dark close-cut hair to be seen.

“Stop a little, you rogue! Master God from the bakery!” the voice broke from her again. “You have no power over me and mine!”

At this point the Capuchin raised one of the ends of his stole, embroidered with a cross in gold lace, and laid it on the nun’s head. His voice rang loudly over the breathlessly attentive crowd:

“Adjuro te, diabole, ut hanc creaturam Veronicam . . .”

“Down, down!” the hoarse voice bellowed from the possessed one. “Alopech, alohach, Sabbathei! Have done, brother—”

Her head rocked to and fro, then hung forward, and she closed her eyes. She swallowed, and uttered a groan. All at once the tortured countenance smoothed itself, a little mournful smile played for an instant about the mouth, she recovered her natural bearing, and Peter heard one of the Ursuline Sisters saying in a low, exhausted voice:

“Glory and praise to God the Lord, it will leave her in peace for this day and will not stir again!”

“How do you feel now, Sister?” asked the clergyman.

“Oh, I am tired—ready to die!” she answered feebly. “I think he will destroy me yet, the wicked fiend!”

“Have no fear!” cried the priest, and his eyes glowed with exaltation. “He must and shall go out of thee, the filthy hell-goat! Did he not yesterday, whining, promise me that he will come out of you on Sunday at noon, if I do not again come near him with the little box in which there is a holy thread from the cloth that wiped Our Saviour’s face? He is not the first who has had to yield to me, and I tell thee, Sister Veronica, that on next Sunday, by God’s grace, thou shalt be delivered from the devil that inhabits thee!”

The nun bent low to kiss the monk’s hand. The Sisters led her away, their feet scarcely supporting them; as they moved, their brass medals clinked against the crucifixes of their rosaries.

“Pray!” cried the Capuchin, with a voice which resounded above the motionless throng. “Watch and pray, for Satan goeth about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.—Our Father who art—”

A murmur of many voices rose.

Peter drew his cloak about him, shivering; the door of the inn was three paces behind him. Unnoticed, he disappeared within the entrance hall.

VI

AS HE ENTERED THE LARGE GUEST-ROOM, which was separated from the bar by a wooden lattice, he saw in it only the post-boy who had driven him and at another table a thick-set gentleman with a bulldog appearance. A yellow moustache, like that of a walrus, hung from his lips, and two blue eyes glared at the newcomer out of wreaths of tobacco smoke, to which heavy clouds were added continually from the stem of his meerschaum.

Peter addressed the lad. “Can you tell me,” said he, “where I should look for the High Bailiff of this district?”

But before the postillion could answer, a deep gruff voice came out of the smoke-clouds:

“The High Bailiff of this district is before you, in his body, as he lives! Who is it wants me? What does he want of me?”

Peter approached the table politely, mentioned his name and produced his papers. The grumpy official examined these attentively, then waved his hand to a chair. “Sit down!” he said.

Peter took a seat. The Bailiff put two fingers in his mouth, whistled sharply, and an elderly waitress trotted in.

“Beer for the gentleman and pen and ink for me!” he ordered shortly.

“So you are Herr Storck, who is taking over the house up there? What, eh? From Vienna? How could anyone from Vienna stay here longer than three hours? Besides—Von Pflederer is my name!”

Peter pointed civilly to the written directions he had received, which he said he had followed, and he asked for further particulars.

The Bailiff at first made no reply, but stirred his quill in the dried-up ink which had been set on the table, folded the document, and wrote on the outer margin in thin strokes: “Seen. Approved, v. Pflederer.” Then he fetched out of his coat pocket a brass seal, spat on it, rubbed the face for a moment on his boot, and stamped a watery black mark on the paper.

“Well!” he said, and look a long gulp from his glass. “If you show that scrawl up then to the innkeeper of The Rose, he’ll hand you over the keys of Zeitlanghof. Understand? Up in Sankt Marein, I mean. How long do you mean to stay?” he asked, and looked sharply at Peter.

“Until I know what has become of my uncle,” said Peter.

“Eh? What has become of him? Why, the old gentleman had a fall, certain! He was always tramping about the mountains by himself!”

“If he was not murdered . . .” Peter rejoined, and his voice trembled. The thought had suddenly occurred to him.

“What, by whom?” the official laughed, irritated. “There is never anyone murdered with us. Who do you suppose would have done it? Your uncle was always good to the wooden-headed peasants. He never carried money about with him. What am I to think of you, sir?” He suddenly turned on Peter, his face growing fiery red. “Do you suppose we trouble ourselves about nothing in these parts? That we make no inquiries if a man disappears without a word to anyone? What, eh? Do you wish to see the Report? Two Commissioners went up there, the people themselves helped in the search; two avalanches were dug away. We have done our duty, young gentleman! Make a note of that!”

Peter made haste to assure him that he was convinced that the Bavarian officials had done everything they could. Nevertheless—he considered it his duty, so far as he himself was concerned, to do everything that might possibly throw light on his uncle’s disappearance.

“That is to say, in one word, that you are cleverer and more capable than the district officials? It all comes on me! Spare us the labour, Herr Know-all! Drink, drink! I can’t look at a man letting the fine cream go off his beer! There! You will have to look round for some shaver to carry up your valise. The devil’s own road it is! And the people up there! They have skulls as hard as stone, they are slyer and shyer than wood-foxes, they are closer than the Treasury at Munich! It’s a martyrdom to have to do with the peasants hereabouts.—Now, then, is it really only your uncle’s business?” He looked searchingly at Peter out of half-closed eyelids.

“I was not aware—” began Peter, nettled at his tone.

The Bailiff knocked out his pipe in the earthenware saucer on the table, cleared his throat, spat out on the floor, and then said, turning his ear:

“No little commission from Vienna in the pocket? Nothing at all about setting the brave, loyal Tyrolese against the Bavarians? Well, it’s a wonder to me if there’s nothing of that sort!”

“Neither have I received any commission of the kind you mention, nor should I have time or inclination for it,” replied Peter with some anger. “I will take this opportunity to say to you, Herr Bailiff, that I have learned with the Franconians of Würzburg not to put up with affronts!”

The countenance of the Bavarian all at once brightened. He broke into a loud, jolly laugh and clapped Storck heartily on the shoulders.

“Ha! Ha! The Würzburg Franconians? Apple-green and peach-red? How then is Laurenz Bartenstein and his big dog? And Kroplf? And does Thomann swill as much as ever? Glory be to God!—I fought Slepf, the Franconian’s brother, in Erlangen. Yes, by Heaven, you are all right! Hello! Beer here, lame one!

The waitress ran.

“You have plenty of time,” he said reassuringly, noticing Peter’s mild impatience. “The climb won’t take you more than three hours, and I will see about a porter. As to what we were talking about just now, I revoke and unsay everything, in general and in particular! You see, I have to do a bit of spying myself! All sorts of queer fellows climb about here with letters from Vienna and so forth. The pious Tyrolese don’t like us. Between ourselves, we have made a mess of it, putting our fingers into everything. They don’t understand any joke about their churches or their parsons or their bells. You saw just now that fool of a nun, eh? What do you suppose I should have done? Arrested that Father with the red goat’s-beard? Sent him off to Munich? Shut up the convent, which contains, I believe, about ten women? Sent in a full and particular report of the whole affair? Yes, and then bring down on top of myself the whole of the Upper Inn Valley! No, thank you! What is it to me? So far as it concerns me, they may cast out devils to their heart’s content. I don’t interfere. And if others had behaved in the same way we should long ago have had peace and quiet, and no one in the country would be crying for the Austrians and their bad money!”

Peter ate and drank, and in the Bailiff’s company he grew more light-hearted than he had felt since the horrible scene at his arrival. The Bailiff continued his candid comments on the bungling manner in which the Tyrolese had been treated, and roundly abused the wiseacres of Munich, who sat at a green table and sent out orders, instructions and regulations which almost always worked mischief. In consequence of the new stoppage of trade with Tyrol, the great linen and cotton manufactory at Imst had closed down, and hundreds of poor people in the Upper Inn Valley were without bread. When they sought work over the frontier, the Munich Government prohibited emigration, so that they roamed about begging and starving: some of them even turned robbers, and formed into gangs in the mountain woods. Discontent was spreading everywhere, and the garrisons were not strong enough. He did not know whether any ass read his (the Bailiff’s) representations, but nothing that he recommended was ever done.

—Yes, it was a poor life to have to sit there, drinking bad beer and writing till his hand was cramped, and all for nothing! Well, he would not detain Herr Storck, or it might be dark before he reached his journey's end. Herr Storck must not forget to visit him sometimes. They might make out a Lenten feast with a fat roast goose, stuffed with apple and chestnut. "What, eh? And I meant to tell you, Bartenstein's brother is a lieutenant in the Kinkel Regiment."

They parted on very cordial terms.

The Bailiff accompanied Peter to the door of the inn and even undertook to look after his valise until the porter should take it. The waitress stared with open mouth, and two peasants who were passing forgot to raise their hats: no one had ever seen the Bailiff so friendly with anyone as with this young gentleman in the seven-caped cloak.

"One thing more!" said the official, lowering his voice. "My authority hardly extends so far as up there. Who could look after all those villages and places in the wilderness? So far as my knowledge goes, it's a drearier place to live in up there than here. They say there are devils wandering about, and in the night you hear the wretched souls weeping on the glaciers. In any case, Herr Storck, I expect you will be down here again very soon. Well, God be with you!"

He stood for some time nodding his head and emitting clouds of tobacco smoke.

VII

PETER went down the narrow street through the soft snow, and following a track across the fields began the ascent at a guide-post painted with blue and white stripes. A pair of red-breasted crossbills whistled softly in the budding blackthorns. On sloping patches of yellow clay free from snow rose greyish-green juniper bushes. The path wound upward under lofty trees loaded with heavy, white burdens. Sparkling drops hung in the tassels of the larches and pines. A hawk, with a shrill hunting-call, struck out from a broken tree-top, sending down a shower of fine spray. Masses of snow thudded down one after another in the sun thaw. From a distance was heard a melodious murmuring like an organ, and as a bend of the path brought him nearer, the sound changed to a wild roar. The narrow path led

along low precipices, from which he looked down on the bright green water and milk-white foam of a torrent. Sparks of mica glistened silvery-blue in the rocks.

Peter took a short rest, breathing more quickly than was his wont, and gazed down at the rushing stream as it seethed amid the wild disorder of the broken rocks, spouting and bubbling. Dead stumps of trees, hoary and splitting, rose out of hollow basins, and from them hung green dripping moss, filled with shining pearls. The fierce torrent kept grinding the stones to smooth balls; polished and smooth they lay, half-buried in the silt of the bank: black, yellow-veined marble, dark red porphyry, snake-green serpentine, and here and there sparkled golden spangles of ore. Mountain ash trees, young and slender, and solitary fir trees growing out of the bank from seeds dropped by birds, trembled beneath the shock of the stream, which had half washed away the soil from their roots. Steel-blue and emerald, a brilliant metallic flash, a kingfisher shot past.

For some time the path kept close to the tumultuous torrent. Snow detached itself maliciously from under his foot and a stone was loosened, thudding down the slope, and as it disappeared with a splash, struck a hidden rock with a sharp sound. The path rose, leading up through a pine-wood, and came out into a dreary and treeless waste, filled with stumps of trees each wearing its cap of snow.

Here Peter had a somewhat startling experience. Under a solitary tree, the only one remaining in its neighbourhood, a man sat motionless, almost unnoticeable in his colourless garments. He was old, with head completely bald and a beardless face. Peter saw him very plainly, and looked straight into the dark and piercing eyes of a severe clear-cut face, with small, aquiline nose and firmly compressed lips. Hard and forbidding as the well-formed countenance appeared, Peter found in it an attraction which he could not explain: he felt as though he had seen this old man before, perhaps in a dream. Beneath the cloak of rough hairy cloth over his shoulders could be seen his short leather breeches and brown, naked knees. The sinewy hand grasped a short alpenstock fitted with a long, bright iron point, and resembling a javelin rather than a staff. Strapped shoes protected his feet. The strange dignity of this figure seemed to forbid any kind of approach.

Peter nerved himself and took a step forward towards the stranger. It was laughable, but Peter had really to summon up his courage to ask this silent

man a question about his route.

No answer whatever was returned. Only the eyes seemed to be alive, and to gaze, full of scorn and haughty surprise.

Peter supposed at first that the man was deaf, and he repeated his question in a louder tone.

Something like a smile of mockery played round the old man's tightly shut lips. All at once he rose lightly to his feet, turned his back abruptly and vanished amid the tree-stumps. His gait was almost youthful and his carriage erect.

The young man gazed after this strange being, amazed and annoyed. He felt that he had been treated with intentional discourtesy, nay, with absolute contempt. It was not a friendly reception to meet with, half-way on his journey! The blood rose to his cheeks as he continued his walk.

But a still greater surprise awaited him when he had passed this bare region and entered a deep, thick wood.

A loud "Halt!" brought him to a stand. A small fire glowed red through the snow-hung pine trees, and round it some disconsolate-looking fellows were squatting. They wore tattered green soldiers' coats braided in black, and two of them, who appeared to be on guard, put up the rusty barrels of their muskets at the newcomer. He heard the cocks click.

"Stay where you are, anything Bavarian!" cried the larger of the two men, who wore a filthy cloth over his left eye. "Stay where you are, Bavarian swine! The Devil will get your Lutheran soul if this goes off!"

Peter held out his passport unconcernedly, and while they were endeavouring to decipher it others came forward. When at length they discovered that the stranger was from Vienna they were manifestly embarrassed and lowered their weapons, and one of the men who seemed to be the leader handed him back the document.

"We don't want to annoy your Honour," he said rather tamely. "We have to think of our own skins, for if they get hold of us I daresay we shall have to hang. If your Honour could spare us a few pence it might get us a glass of spirits or a drop of wine. It's cold now in the nights and there isn't much to eat either."

The traveller whom they had held up gave liberally, when he observed their frozen fingers and pale faces. The men thanked him civilly. He learned that they were deserters from the Günter Battalion of Light Infantry, which the Bavarians had raised in Tyrol, contrary to the ancient law of the country.

On the march out, three hundred of them had broken away and were now fugitives. Some had fled into the Engadine.

"Yes, sir," said the man with the bandaged eye. "They lay hold of us like dogs they are going to kill. Patrols come round to every house and search it through, running their bayonets into the hay. When they get a poor fellow they bring him before the commission and he has to throw from a dice-box on the table; if he throws high, he is forced into uniform straight away. The people in Axams didn't like this: they rang the church bells and hunted out a whole battalion of Bavarians. But the hounds came back, and now they have to pay double for it in Axams."

One of the men laughed. "The letters that are being handed round say that a new time is coming in Tyrol—"

"Shut your mouth, jackele!" shouted the man with the bandage. "Who told you to talk about that?"

The man reddened and was silent.

"Look at this," said the other, pointing to his bandaged eye. "I was hiding in the hay when one of those devils prodded me."

Peter went over to him and raised the bandage. Matter was exuding from the swollen lids, and the shrunken eye-ball was still bleeding. He shuddered, and drew the cloth over the wound.

"The eye is gone," he said.

"Well, better the eye than the country!" answered the man. "Now then, make way! The gentleman may pass!"

Peter shook hands with the poor fellows and went on.

VIII

SO THIS WAS THE STATE OF AFFAIRS in Tyrol, the little country lost to Austria, though people in Vienna troubled themselves very little about it. The city on the Danube had recovered rapidly from the hardships of the French occupation. Money was still very scarce, but never had life in Vienna been more brilliant and animated than just at this period. In the beginning of the previous year, on January 1, 1808, the noble Hall of Apollo had been opened, with its fountains, parterres and Moorish apartments, where fashionable Vienna ate from solid silver plates. Strangers were enraptured by the polite attention with which they were everywhere received, and dreamed of the beauty and amiability of the Viennese ladies.

All laughed, drank, danced on polished floors, enjoyed facile conquests, found delight in the cruel baiting of animals, in fairyland displays of fireworks and dazzling theatrical representations. What mattered the poor little backward country which the Emperor, by grace of Napoleon, had relinquished to the King of Bavaria for the sake of a long desired peace? The few persons affected by the shame and distress of the Germans, and who passed the nights in sleepless dismay, were neither distinguished nor influential. Besides, it was advisable to keep to oneself any expression of discontent.

And he himself, Peter Storck? Had he ever bestowed a thought on the fate of the people here, or regretted the humiliation of a country robbed and enslaved by foreigners?

He sighed deeply. A startled jay flew on some distance in front of him, surprised by the man in the cloak who was talking to himself. A black squirrel sprang up a tree over his head, and a drizzle of snow fell on the traveller.

His thoughts had become gloomy, and he must have climbed a good distance when he noticed that he had reached the top and that the path now ran nearly level. Huddled together in the hollow of a valley, and still visible in the growing dusk, he saw the grey roofs of Sankt Marein, weighted with stones. A pointed church-steeple stood out against the darkening sky.

The first house he came to was a spacious white building, and at the end of a long iron bar over the door swung a sign, a gilded rose.

This then was his journey's end for that day, and he was glad of it.

IX

AS HE REACHED the dark entrance his ear caught a hum of voices from a half-open door. A crowd of peasants sat at the tables drinking wine and spirits. It was no doubt the fact that it was Sunday which had brought so many to the inn. The entrance of a well-dressed stranger excited immediate attention at all the tables, and sharp glances were directed at him from under wide-brimmed hats.

A large good-natured-looking man with a fair beard and with an almost childish look in his fine blue eyes was moving from table to table pouring out wine from a large bottle, but stopped abruptly and gazed apprehensively

at the new arrival. An oil lamp threw a full, steady light round the room, and in two iron holders on the walls crackled chips of pinewood.

"What can we do for you, sir?" asked the innkeeper, coming towards Peter. "I can't put you up, I'm afraid, and there isn't even a chair to sit on," he added, in a not very friendly tone.

Peter gave his name, and asked whether he was addressing Christian Lergetpohrer, the landlord of The Rose. The innkeeper's face brightened and he answered in the affirmative; then turning to the peasants he said in very rough dialect: "Folks, you need have no fear—this is Herr Storck, who was written to in Vienna." He reached out his hand towards Peter. "There's a place for you, sir, and a good bed is ready for you until you wish to take up house in Zeitlanghof. I shouldn't advise you to do so this evening; to-morrow morning we can go up and I will hand you over the keys and everything else."

The peasants had risen to their feet; some of them slowly removed their hats and whispered together. A seat was found for Peter, who was very glad to be able to stretch his legs under the table, tired as they were after his climb.

"Notburga! bring the gentleman something to eat and a pint of wine!" his host called out into the passage.

Peter did not feel altogether comfortable amid the reek of greasy clothing and coarse tobacco. He looked round and met inquisitive, suspicious, almost hostile eyes; faces which seemed carved out of wood, immobile, obstinate, watchful.

A younger man, at one of the tables near him, was the only member of the company who looked at him with open friendliness and seemed to wish to make his acquaintance. He appeared to be in bad health: his sunken cheeks had a sharply-defined flush and his eyes a feverish brilliance. Peter, however, had no time to pay much attention to him, for a strange figure started up at the end of the table, a little old man, bent double and with white hair, his face a mass of wrinkles and with a sharp beak which gave him the look of a sparrow-hawk; he thrust forward his forefinger, and crowed out some unintelligible gutturals.

The innkeeper interpreted.

"Old Josele of Patsch wants to know if Herr Storck belongs to the true Catholic faith."

It was the same question that his host of The Eagle had asked at Innsbruck.

Peter answered affirmatively, and a general murmur of satisfaction showed him the importance attached to this acknowledgment.

“Many Bavarians are Catholics too,” a deep voice interjected.

“But the gentleman is from Vienna, Mesner; you might know that,” the innkeeper corrected the speaker in the dark coat. “You don’t think they haven’t the right faith in the Emperor’s capital?

“It’s only that you can’t tell for certain,” the man said by way of excusing himself.

A stoutly built girl, with a face of severe beauty, golden-haired and rosy-cheeked, entered and set before Peter some cold venison on a pewter plate, a large piece of grey barley bread and a measure of red wine. She glanced at him with her clear blue eyes and wished him a good appetite, and a slight blush passed over her face when his hand by chance touched her bare arm. He saw at once that this girl must be the innkeeper’s sister. He would have been glad to have a few words with her, but she left the room at once.

He was hungry and did ample justice to the simple fare. Meanwhile, it did not escape him that all these people appeared to be waiting for something, that they were speaking about this with reference to himself, and that some doubt still remained in their minds concerning him.

Only the innkeeper and the unhealthy-looking young man at the table beside him seemed to have full confidence in him. He noticed plainly that they returned reassuring answers to questions which manifestly related to him. At length Christian Lergetpohrer seemed to wish to put an end to these questions. He went forward into the middle of the room, ordered silence with a movement of his hand, and in the deep silence which immediately followed said in a firm and clear voice:

“Men, there’s no one here who has not known his Honour the Captain of Horse, Herr Martin Storck, and a good many of you owe him thanks for great benefits received from him, though he has now gone away from us, no one knows whither. If it be God’s will we shall yet know; meanwhile we must pray for him. The gentleman here is his brother’s son; he’s a good Austrian, he’s of the right religion, and he intends to live in Zeitlanghof. There’s no need to conceal our plans in his presence as if he were a spy, and anyone who says anything to give offence will be shown the door of this house. I want every man to understand that! So now, Voglsanger, do you

read out the letter to us all here, but very slowly and distinctly, so that everyone may hear it and understand it well. This letter has been brought here from Sterzing with peril of body, and several copies of it have been made by the school teacher in Ried, and at this hour it is being read in all places. Now, all attend carefully!"

Voglsanger, an energetic peasant with bushy whiskers, rose and glanced over the company, until his eyes reached Peter, on whom they rested searchingly for a moment; then with solemn deliberation he drew from the pocket of his jacket a small red handkerchief, in which was wrapped a folded letter.

There was breathless silence in the room as he began to read.

DEAR HERR FOREST-KEEPER!

With the name of God I begin my letter, writing as well as I can, and I hope that you and all our kinsfolk in the Upper Inn Valley are in good health and happiness. And it is known to you that the game in our preserve has got the upper hand of us and works greater damage every day. Therefore we propose with the divine aid to hold a great hunt in the month of April, and hope that there will be good sport. Many guests have been invited and a distinguished gentleman is expected amongst them. We will get the game under control again, if we set about the hunt properly. We are awaiting the day with high hopes, guests from many valleys have promised to attend, all good shots, and with entire friendship we invite you also to come.

There are no new tidings, except that some unknown persons have robbed the Royal Bavarian Powder Factory of many sacks of good gunpowder. If you have too few hop-sticks, three hundred of them are lying in readiness for you. Also you can have scythes when the time comes for cutting. At the beginning of April keep an eye on your fishing preserves and on the mountains. Many greetings to you in the name of God and the Holy Virgin from

Your faithful friend
TEIMER,
Tobacco-dealer in Klagenfurt.

Voglsanger folded the paper carefully, placed it again in the red handkerchief and concealed it in his pocket. He looked round expectantly.

A joyous and excited murmur ran from table to table. “Teimer?” The name passed from mouth to mouth, and it seemed to have a good sound. Questions were asked in earnest whispers.

“Has everyone understood?” Voglsanger’s voice rang out again.

“Yes, we have understood,” said one of the company. “Any child can understand what is meant by the hunt and the game. But that about the fishing preserves and the mountains I can’t get hold of!”

“Bah, you simpleton!” laughed the innkeeper. “It means that at the beginning of April everyone is to be on the look-out for signals on the river and the mountain.”

“Ah, that! Then it’s quite clear!

Peter very soon began to understand what these close silent men had in their minds; even for him, uninitiated as he was, the meaning of the letter was not difficult to understand. A rising was contemplated, with the simple means available. It was quite clear that “hop-sticks” meant guns, and the information given about the robbery of gunpowder had reference to the distribution of ammunition. Yet how could these poor peasants, this thinly-populated country, offer resistance to the trained Bavarian army? He was filled with anxiety and sadness, and would have liked to dissuade these people from a project as senseless, he believed, as it was perilous, but common sense told him that no good would come of his trying to do so. As it was, confidence in himself was by no means what he read in the looks directed at him.

Nevertheless he ventured cautiously to enter into conversation with his immediate neighbour, a grave and thoughtful-looking man. This man, like the innkeeper of Innsbruck, at once plied him with questions, all showing an almost fervent expectation with regard to the Emperor in Vienna. Peter answered as well as he could, endeavouring to inspire confidence, and felt strangely moved when the other observed thoughtfully: “My dear sir, my own opinion is that a beginning is easy; but as for the end, nobody can guess that!”

A wild din of voices interrupted him and a fist banged heavily on the next table.

“You’re a rogue, Federspiel!” someone shouted.

The pale man, who had more than once looked at Peter in a friendly way, started to his feet. His breath almost failed him as he cried:

“You won’t say that twice, Hornauss!”

“Yes, ten times and twenty times! Anyone who talks like you—”

The innkeeper intervened and separated the antagonists. “What’s this?” he cried. “Who wants to look at my house from the outside?”

“Federspiel—the runaway student!” shouted several voices together.

The young man again rose. His sunken face was ashy pale. With a defiant movement he threw back his long hair and said:

“Anyone who likes may hear what I said: ‘Better the Bavarians than the French.’ For the Bavarians are Germans like ourselves, and if we fight them, brother fights brother!”

The effect of these words was extraordinary. Amid shouts of fury glasses were brandished. A huge fellow in a green coat leaped over the table and went for the speaker, foaming with wrath. Others who were calmer threw themselves between. The old man from Patsch, gasping with rage, spat out the tobacco he was chewing at the young man, who stood calmly, with feverishly brilliant eyes, his arms crossed on his breast, Peter, touched by his appearance, felt a strong inclination to go to his help; the innkeeper, however, had already interfered, and his voice rang out above the shouting and stamping of the excited company.

“Federspiel!” he ordered, “you go now! Speeches like that do no good. Go home at once!”

The student nodded.

“Yes, I’m going,” he called back. “The main thing is I have said it. Some of you will think over it!”

And without further delay he walked haughtily to the door.

“Go down to Pflederer!” screamed after him the old man, his quavering voice breaking into falsetto in his boundless rage. “You will get a few Bavarian pennies if you tell him everything!”

At this insult the young man turned his face quietly towards the room. “Does anyone believe that of me?” he asked almost sadly.

No one answered.

“Go now, Serafin!” said the innkeeper gently.

Federspiel turned, shrugging his shoulders, and went out, closing the door behind him. The men seemed sorry for their outburst. The shouting died down, only the shrill tones of the old man continued for a little.

“He meant well!” Peter observed to the man next him.

“That may be!” returned the other in a low tone, glancing sideways. “Only he forgot that our German brothers, as he calls the Bavarians, are at

the present time nothing but Napoleon's constables. We cannot act otherwise. The game is begun and it must go on to the end. But I should like, sir, to give a piece of advice to you: take care of what you say! You don't know the Tyrolese dialect and you are a townsman. The peasant is not disposed to put his confidence in strangers such as you."

Peter stared in surprise, and looked into a pair of shrewd honest eyes. "You may be right," he agreed. "And are you not yourself a peasant?"

The other smiled.

"I don't set myself above my countrymen, and you need not hesitate to call me a peasant. The rank of the peasant is an honourable one. But when the peasant has any enterprise on hand it is not well to perplex him, and that is what Herr Federspiel has done. No doubt it is lamentable that Germans should fight against Germans, but I reflect within myself that some day they will find a common cause, even though we may not live to see it. In general, we must not measure the destinies of a people by our own short life on this earth. A people lives long and has time.—Once again, Herr Storck, be more reserved! Say little, and listen all the more readily to what others say! Let me introduce myself: I am Josef Zangerl of Prutz, Head Musketry-corps Commandant. We shall see one another again. Now I must be off, I have a long road before me!"

He grasped Peter's hand firmly and stood up, and his example was followed at once by many who, like him, had come up from the Inn Valley. Peter saw no one pay: the drink had been free.

The room was gradually emptied. The last guest to leave came out of a dark corner and walked slowly past Peter.

His heart quailed within him. Never had he seen anything more hideous than the face and figure of this creature. A dark red shooting-jacket, patched in many places, hung loosely over the meagre body, and the legs moved like sticks within the folds of the breeches and blue stockings. In the pallid face glittered deep, sunken eyes, and above the lips, from which the teeth protruded, was a hole where the nose had been eaten away. Sparse, clammy hair hung on the yellow skull.

Peter shuddered as this horror glided past him. A current of air came in by the door through which it vanished, causing the lights to flicker low.

"Who was that?" Peter turned to the innkeeper.

"I paid no attention to him," answered the latter indifferently. "There were a good many there I didn't know." He went out to close the front door.

Peter remained alone.

X

HE WAS NOW SITTING in the midst of the little place which for so long had been his uncle's home. This first day had brought him many adventures, and instead of the tedium of which he had been a little afraid during the journey, exciting and surprising experiences had followed one another in rapid succession. And now fate had carried him into the midst of a secret conspiracy, the flames of which would soon rage far and wide. For a moment he thought of giving a warning somehow or other to Pflederer, who had shown him kindness, but he remembered immediately that this would be an act of treachery and a shameful breach of confidence. As he sat, sunk in these thoughts, the agonised face of the possessed nun rose up before him.

He looked round the empty room. A wild goat's head, with great horns magnificently wreathed, seemed by its workmanship to belong to the days when the Emperor Maximilian, the Last of the Knights, had been accustomed to hunt the noble mountain game in these parts. The endurance of nature, the thought that the "Penniless Monarch" had listened, as he himself was now listening, to the low murmur of the stream, moved him strangely. Like a dream of things that had never been, a memory suddenly occurred to him of the gay and brilliant life of Vienna, the golden radiance of the thousand lights in crowded halls, the silken rustling of the women's scented dresses, the sweet sobbing of the violins and flutes in the mirrored chambers. Here it reeked of bloodshed and hatred. The air seemed heavy with memories and sentiments bequeathed by vanished centuries; fixed, unalterable loyalty and immovable obstinacy united the hearts of these people in grim devotion to a master who knew nothing about them. It was touching to see the toil-worn, furrowed faces light up when his name was mentioned, and to notice their look of awe when the talk turned on matters which concerned their religion. And now these sober, enduring peasants were about to revolt and shed their blood for the man who wore the crown in Vienna—the arrogant being to whom men and peoples were but counters in the game of power.

The innkeeper came in and closed the door behind him. “You have come at a bad time, Herr Storck,” he said. He filled Peter’s glass and then his own, threw some more wood shavings into the brasiers on the wall and sat down beside his solitary guest.

“In the morning, then, I am to hand you over Zeitlanghof,” he said with a nod. “Everything there is just as the Captain left it.”

“If he comes back he will himself thank you,” answered Peter. “If—!”

“He won’t come back.” The innkeeper shook his head sadly. “It’s certain they have destroyed him.”

“Who?” Peter cried.

“I daresay you’d laugh at me.”

“It surely is no laughing matter,” replied Peter excitedly. “I told the Bailiff down there that my uncle might have been murdered, but he wouldn’t hear of that. However, I won’t rest until—”

Christian Lergetpohrer raised his hand. “What does the Bailiff know?”

“Then tell me what you know,” Peter entreated.

“I? God help me, I know no more than the other folks. They haven’t much doubt that the old gentleman fell a victim to the Fire-spirits.”

“Fire-spirits!”

“That’s the name here for the poor souls who have to burn in everlasting fire for their sins. On two days in the year they are allowed to have relief from their suffering and cool themselves on the ice of the glacier. After that they have to go back.”

“You really believe that, Lergetpohrer? But listen—”

“Oh, I know very well what you city gentlemen think of such things. But it’s the fact. Anyone can see the Fire-spirits at the proper time, coming down slowly from the glacier, and burning all over. There is nothing to laugh at, Herr Storck! They collect just below the ridge between the Schellbock and the Black Hen, looking like little flames, and disappear in the Klamm. And anyone who is bold enough to get in their way they hurl down over the rocks and he forfeits his life.”

“Well, I can’t believe all that!” Was the man in earnest? Peter saw nothing but seriousness in his host’s honest face.

“Can’t believe it? Well, how if you see it with your own eyes?”

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

“There aren’t many days now between this and the equinox, the time when they appear. You can see them very well from the study at

Zeitlanghof, and your uncle used often to wait there for the lights in the mountain. I'll remind you when the day comes round, and you'll be able to see for yourself the burning men going down."

"Pray do so," returned Peter. "But what have the Fire-spirits, as you call them, to do with my uncle?"

The innkeeper bent close to Peter, and said in a low voice as if afraid of being heard: "He spied on them, and they don't allow that!—But we have had enough of them for this evening, and you must be tired. Besides, we have to go up to the house in the morning."

"Is there no one in it?"

"No. The old gentleman's housekeeper went away."

"Do you know of anyone who would give me some help?" asked Peter.

The innkeeper scratched his head. "No. Unless Notburga would suit you for a while. You would have to speak to her."

"Can you get on without her?"

"For the present, yes. The wench is here, and I have a young cousin here too. In summer, of course, I would need Notburga too."

"It's a good while till summer. I will speak to her."

When the tall girl came to leave a light for him on the table, Peter asked her if she would care to keep house for him for a while.

"Why not?" she said, and looked at him calmly with her clear eyes.

"Well, I hope that we shall get on well together." Much pleased, he took her hand. "It's a bargain, then?"

"It's a bargain. Good-night!"

He was left alone. The candle flickered and threw an unsteady light. And once again he saw clearly before him, as he had seen it constantly during his long walk, the figure of the beautiful girl, the Greek goddess who had visited the gloomy tap-room of the Golden Eagle at Innsbruck and talked with the shock-headed peasant. He sighed deeply.

"How could I ever leave you, gracious one!"

But as he stood gazing at the small yellow flame the sleep of exhaustion began to steal over his eyelids. The stream murmured a slumber-song; a fresh smell of pine-wood came from the light furniture of his room.

He undressed himself quickly, resisted for a few moments the thronging scenes and faces which rose up out of his memories of this strangely full day, and then quite suddenly sank into the soft abyss of sleep.

XI

IN THE EARLY MORNING LIGHT he opened his eyes, refreshed and wide awake. The sky shone blue in the little window-square, and the first rosy beams of the rising sun lay on the snowy trees and roofs. But already the white covering was melting away. All night the tinkling of falling drops had sounded through his dreams.

He went to the window and drew back the bolt. Some weak obstacle pressed against the side which he wished to open out: it was a stick, with a split at the end, in which a paper was fastened. He drew out the paper carefully, and the long stick fell in the snow outside with a soft thud.

But this message, or whatever it was, could not possibly be meant for him! In large, shaky letters some quite incomprehensible words were written. He read again and again:

"Chi ca va via divieite stue vagnir mazans."

He tried to vain in get any meaning out of this scrawl. Was it meant for him? That was hardly possible. Had it been put there during the night? The manner in which the paper had been placed directly against his window was curious. Perhaps someone had wished to play a prank on the newcomer? In any case, it was nothing of importance. He took the paper, folded it and concealed it in his pocket. He would ask the innkeeper later on about it.

The icy water in the basin freshened him, and in excellent spirits he applied himself with a hearty appetite to the steaming bowl of soup which Notburga set before him on the table. Presently Christian appeared, ready to go with him to Zeitlanghof.

Peter drew the paper from his pocket and related how he had come by it. The innkeeper inspected the writing, turning it every way, but he too could make nothing of it.

"They speak a language like that in the Ungadine," he said. "Father Archangelus, in the Valley below, might be able to read it. I daresay someone wanted to play off a joke and mistook the window. Our lads write all kinds of fooleries. Or else the paper was lost, and someone fixed it on the stick for a joke. It couldn't have been meant for you, for who would write you a letter when you have only just come?"

There seemed, in fact, to be very little use in racking their brains over an explanation. Peter replaced the incomprehensible missive in his pocket and thought no more of it, for his host was now leading the way to Zeitlanghof.

Peter saw for the first time in the morning light the little village, with its poor but clean, white-washed courtyards, and shingle roofs on which heavy stones from the bed of the stream were laid to prevent the wind carrying away the boards and cross-beams. At the far end of the street was a tiny church or chapel, with a grass-green pointed tower, in a wall-engirdled graveyard. An ancient crescent-shaped charnel-house rose close to the church in the midst of the crosses, beneath which the weary folk of Sankt Marein rested for ever from the heavy toils of a peasant's life.

Right opposite the inn, the clear stroke of a blacksmith's hammer rang from a wide, sooty opening, a blue flame shot up, and golden sparks leaped in the darkness inside. A red snake writhed on the anvil, curved into a ring and took the shape of a horseshoe.

"Already at work, Gervas?" Christian called.

A deep growl came in response and a surly face looked up, surrounded with bushy hair and beard, the whites of the eyes showing in the blackened skin. It was he! By heaven, it was the man who had upset the chair, whose eyes had blazed with hatred when Peter had told the innkeeper at Innsbruck the object of his journey; the man with whom the lovely girl had whispered so confidentially in the Golden Eagle! And now again his sooty eyes flashed with a malignant light which forbade any approach.

Peter, however, as they passed on, could not forbear to ask about him. "Him?" said Lergetpohrer. "That's the smith, Gervas Fentor. A sulky fellow! Good at his work, but never goes to church."

"I saw him at Innsbruck," continued Peter, "And there was a young lady with him."

"Dark and pretty?" The innkeeper's eyes twinkled. "Then it must have been the young foreign lady who lodges in the smith's room in summer."

"She comes to this place?" asked Peter, seized with a spasm of delight.

"Yes, she's always here in summer."

Fortune smiled on him again! That which he had not hoped for even in a dream was going to happen! Could there be a better opportunity for making her acquaintance than in this little mountain village, where one person could find another at any moment without difficulty, and where, among

these taciturn and laborious peasants, they would inevitably be thrown together?

All at once this wild and rugged region appeared magnificent and sublime, a fitting background for the girl's beauty. White with snow, the mighty peaks rose in stainless nobility over the woods into the blue March air.

"The Zeitlanghof!" exclaimed his guide, indicating a red-tiled roof in the midst of fir-tops. "You don't know the mountains by their names yet, sir?" He pointed with his hand. "That one to the left of us, that looks as if there were a little man on the top, we call the Hockauf; the sharp point beside it is the Schellbock; and the height beyond that again, that stands out so darkly against the snow, is called the Black Hen. Right over that, with the sharp ridge, is the Haberer—there's wonderful edelweiss there in summer. Behind it lies the Varrauntser Valley, and at the back of the Schellbock you get a glimpse of the Feuerreiter, and the peak close to it with the top broken off is the Urtoz, where they say the heathen gods once lived. You can't see the Wild Man and the Grieser, but they are there close to the Urtoz. Away beyond are the Swiss mountains. Serafin Federspiel will bring you up the Schellbock some day if you ask him about it."

Beautiful as the mountains were in their giant pride, their aspect had an overwhelming and gloomy effect. It seemed to Peter as if the valley, its houses and people, were oppressed by them, and his eye, accustomed to wide spaces, felt itself checked and baffled by close and relentless barriers.

Entering by a wooden trellis, green with moss and broken, they passed through a dark enclosure of pines and fir trees fenced with yews, and came out in front of a sombre grey building, from the door of which the green paint was peeling.

"The Zeillanghof!" said Christian, and looked for the key. Peter stood still, as if a cold hand had touched his skin: the sullen house had a disagreeable decoration. Beside the door, in good preservation, a figure was depicted on the plaster of the wall. It was a skeleton-figure, in a ragged dark-red summoner's uniform. The right foot, in a torn stocking through which the bone protruded, was set forward nimbly as if he were stepping to a dance. The finger-bones held a pipe to the thin lips, and a black hollow gaped in place of the nose; dull, sunken eyes looked out from under the cap, cocked jauntily forward with its ragged leathers. A rusty sword rose half out

of the broken scabbard. And beneath the armed fifer was the inscription, adorned with flourishes:

"My fife's shrill call
Doth summon all
To dance their last.
For thee too, friend,
'Tis so forecast."

Christian Lergetpohrer, paying little attention to the figure which he had so often looked at, tried the keys, until the door opened with a groan, and then led the way into the passage.

At first there was not much to be seen: a living-room, kitchen and larder, and a trap-door into the cellar. Here the innkeeper came to a stand.

"By the old gentleman's permission," he said, pointing to the ground, "four large muskets are safely hidden down below there, also a big gun from Landeck Fort, and powder and shot."

"Tell me nothing about that!" Peter checked him. "Whatever happens, I don't want to have anything to do with it, good or bad."

"Right!" assented the innkeeper. "What lies still lies well."

In the upper storey, in which was a musty smell, the first door would not open, and only yielded to their united efforts. The air in the long-closed room was fetid, and the innkeeper threw open the windows.

In the room was a broad low four-post bed, with a canopy painted blue, with golden stars. Otherwise there was little furniture: two chairs, a wash-stand, and a press painted with tulips and bright-coloured birds. A Dutch oven stood half in this and half in the next room, into which a small door opened. Another door opened on to the balcony, which ran all round the house.

In the large room the air was still heavier with the smell of old paper and dried herbs. This was the room which his uncle had for the most part occupied, for two other rooms were almost empty and the plaster was crumbling from the damp walls.

Here there was a large heavy writing table, and a book-case festooned with spiders' webs. An armchair stood close to the door-window opening on to the balcony. A fluffy carpet striped grey and red lay over the tiled floor. There were some chests, and guns were hung on the walls. Things of value were scattered all about: lachrymatories of iridescent Roman glass, stone

axes, pieces of crystallised ore, whole bundles of dried herbs, blown wild-birds' eggs—a thousand objects which the life of one man had brought together.

"Everything is just as the Captain left it." The voice rang strangely in the spacious room. "There is still the top floor, but there's only useless lumber up there. Well, I hand over house and keys, Herr Peter Storck, and God bless the new master!"

He made the sign of the cross on Peter's forehead. Before he turned to go, he went to the bookshelf, groped behind the books, and at length drew forth a fairly large cardboard box, the contents of which jingled as he took it up.

"I put this out of the way, Herr Storck, when the Bavarian Commission was coming up here. It contains two hundred and sixty Austrian ducats which they would certainly have carried off. I think I have saved you some trouble.—And now I will go and send up Notburga: she'll put the house in some kind of order, and will look after the larder. We will settle our account later on!"

Peter thanked him. He felt somewhat uneasy. The possession of this considerable sum of money gave him little pleasure: he was glad indeed that his uncle's store had not fallen into the hands of the Bavarian authorities, but on the other hand the money was for him only an embarrassment. For he could not think of disposing of his uncle's property before he *knew* more about the old man's fate.

The haunted feeling which one experiences in handling the belongings of some beloved person who has recently been forced by death to abandon them stole upon Peter when the innkeeper's footsteps had ceased to resound through the house. Not knowing where to begin, he walked about the spacious apartment, took down one or two of the books and turned over the mildewed leaves. In the window-niche he discovered a small finely-painted portrait of a lady; but the face, framed in dark locks, had been cruelly mutilated; it had manifestly been slashed through by a blade, and the cut had left the expression of the delicately painted countenance unrecognisable. On the lower edge of the gold frame was an inscription in ink: "In rosa vermis—" Beyond doubt, this was a portrait of the actress for whose sake the cavalry-officer had sunk into poverty and solitude. And despite the blind rage which had wreaked itself on the little picture, the deceived man had not been strong enough to deprive himself entirely of this

memorial. Peter raised his eyes and looked long and sadly at the snow-covered mountains, thinking how often his uncle's gaze must have turned in the same direction: from this face, which in spite of the injury done to it must have remained recognisable for him, to the mighty warders yonder in their inexorable fixity, enthroned above woods, meadows, precipices, and this poor village with its humble folk.

The hall door opened, and steps sounded on the ground floor. Presently Peter found himself engaged along with Notburga in the task of restoring order, and his melancholy reflections were forgotten.

XII

NEXT MORNING HE WAS AGAIN at the inn, and while there he remembered the old man who had crossed his path in so strange a manner. He questioned Christian, who knew nothing of such a person; but a peasant who was listening remarked that he thought he had caught sight of him once in the distance. He might be a pitch-gatherer who put up in old Blasi's den in the wood. Another peasant joined in the talk. He too had caught a glimpse of the man a long way off; but the smith knew him well, and he stopped with the smith's brother, the charcoal burner Romanus. He had not been long in the neighbourhood, and was called the Rover, from his being seen in different places, but he never came near anyone. A rogue, for certain; there were more owls like him in the mountains, but they never did anyone any harm.

"The folks from the Valley say Teimer will be here in three day," remarked the first speaker, turning the conversation to more important matters, "and Father Archangelus said that as soon as the snow's gone we shall hear the drums beating and the fifes playing."

"By the Lord, men!" cried Christian, clenching his fist, "I shouldn't like to be a Bavarian then!"

"You may be right," said the other, in whose sugar-loaf hat nodded a white feather. "But it'll be a stiff business!"

"Must it happen?" The words escaped Peter. He was thinking of the soldiers he had seen, happy-go-lucky and jolly, and of the fat bailiff smoking his pipe down there in the inn.

“Yes, it must happen! Sooner or later it will have to happen!” exclaimed the peasant who wore the white feather, growing angry. “You gentlemen don’t know much about what happens to us peasants. They got hold of two lasses in the Valley the other day, stripped them and whipped them naked before the crowd, the hell-hounds, till they bled! And all because the girls had rung the church bells for Feast day, which is always our custom. One of them rushed into the water for the shame of it. Two old women were looking on, and will swear to it that the Holy Mother herself came down out of the sky in her blue cloak and drew her out of the river by the hands, and took her up to Heaven!”

“Did you hear, Josele?” asked another after a pause. “They are wanting now to get their teeth into our Judge Stockl in Landeck? He stands in with the peasants too much, they say.”

“And are they doing nothing to the parson Baracher, who has kept faithful to the Bishop of Coire?” asked Christian fiercely.

“Down with all gentry!” A harsh deep voice came from the door. It was the smith, Fentor.

“Out of sorts again, Gervas?”

“A glass of brandy, landlord!” he growled. He tossed the liquor down his throat and at once went back to his work. A little old man had slipped in behind him, with snow-white hair and stubbly beard, which were in curious contrast with his shiny black coat of mail: for the material of the old patched coat was almost invisible beneath a gleaming crust of pitch. A pungent smell of larch resin came from him, and at every motion the scales of pitch cracked audibly.

He drew close up to Peter and asked almost in a whisper whether the gentleman would give him leave to scratch the trees at Zeitlanghof and tap them for pitch.

“Be careful there!” Christian called out. “He’ll bring your whole wood down, the tree-butcher!”

The tiny man turned red as a crab and danced like a little devil with rage, muttering venomous curses. Then he bowed very humbly to Peter and began to beg pressingly: they were only black pines, and everyone knew that it did these trees no harm to drain the pitch into little troughs. This was how he, Blasi, earned his bread; he knew no other trade and had learned nothing else since he was a child. Peter took pity on him, despite the

warning of the innkeeper, who wanted to have his joke, and he gave permission to tap the trees until further notice.

"I can let a vein like a cupper," tittered the old man. "I never do a tree any hurt, for I love a tree better than I do a man."

"I believe you there!" laughed Christian. "You are good to the trees and say to yourself, 'On one of you I shall hang some day!' "

A roar of laughter rewarded the jest.

The old man turned his piercing little eyes to the laughing innkeeper, and said with a curious emphasis:

"What, I? You think so? I? And for all that you have the halter round your neck already, landlord!"

"Eh?" cried Lergetpohrer as he slowly rose. "Fly away out of this over the smith's roof, you old rascal!"

"It's written on your face, I'm thinking, when your wind will go out of you!"

With a horrible titter he vanished before the innkeeper's hand could reach him.

The old man's words had left an uncomfortable impression. Old people saw and knew more than others, and Christian passed his hand over his neck as if he were actually feeling for the cord which was to squeeze the life out of him. As if to forget the incident, they began to talk again eagerly about prospects in the immediate future, as to which all felt a secret anxiety. Peter for the first time heard the name of the Austrian General Chasteler, pronounced as it was written, on whom the hopes of the country seemed to rest as much as on a certain horse-dealer and innkeeper of Passeir, who with Teimer and Kolb were working in secret to arm the Tyrolese.

"Kolb is a thorough fool!" Josele exclaimed angrily. "Have no faith in him, folks! He doesn't know what he says or does. I know him through and through, the clown! Zangerl of Prutz, that's a man you may depend on; he knows what he's about!"

"Kolb is not at all a fool!" retorted the man with the peaked cap. "He knows how to speak better than that Andreas Hofer they are running after—just because he has grown a big beard and understands how to bully people, as he does when he is selling his cattle!"

"You wait till Teimer comes," said Voglsanger, who up to this had been silent. "Till then hold by Zangerl. Zangerl is our Commandant and he has the stuff."

A thin man rose excitedly with his hands spread out. “The blacksmith was right. There are too many gentlefolks in the game. Pshaw, you peasants! will you never learn what the gentry really think about you?”

The man with the feather in his cap nudged him, pointing with his pipe at Peter: “This isn’t the time for saying everything,” he said.

Peter, feeling that he was growing red, rose and went out.

“Do you intend to drive away my best customers?” Peter heard Christian beginning angrily. “You with your glass of brandy—”

Peter was depressed as he went up the road. He was not accustomed to such speeches from peasants. In Lower Austria they were more polite, and did not make so free when a gentleman sat at table with them.

The snow was rapidly melting, and slipped in watery masses from the trees and roofs. A tepid wind blew from the south, and the birds were singing, full of the joy of Spring. A rivulet, the stream of a day, was finding its channel along the road. He almost laughed now at his quickness in taking offence: the whole affair seemed to him all at once not very serious. These peasants, who had so long been clenching their fists in secret and threatening bloodshed and insurrection, nevertheless lifted their hats when a Bavarian official strutted past them. Except for some unimportant riots during the recruiting, nothing had happened. And this affair too would not go beyond words. What could these poor mountain folk, with their scythes, pikes and a few old blunderbusses, do against the disciplined army of the Bavarian king, whom the victorious Napoleon had taken under his wing? The country was in a ferment, but what one saw was impotent discontent and pothouse conspiracies.

Worse than the danger of a rising appeared to him the increasing poverty in the Upper Inn Valley, the closing of the great manufactory in Imst, and the crowds of unemployed who wandered about the country begging.

XIII

WHEN HE WAS ONCE MORE in his study he resumed his examination of the contents of the writing-table. Perhaps he would find something which would throw light on his uncle’s secret life. Even Lergetpohrer could not say how the old gentleman had actually employed himself the whole livelong day. Often, indeed, he had been on the mountains; for the most

part, however, he had spent his time in this solitary room, going little among the people. He had done many quiet acts of charity, the innkeeper said, but always through his housekeeper, who appeared on his behalf in cases of urgency and always gave it to be understood that her master did not wish to be thanked.

Peter drew out all the drawers of the large table. These were mostly empty, but in one of the lowest drawers lay something. He drew forth a book and a leaf of paper, which he held up to the light. The book was bound in pigskin, fastened with brass clasps, and had been much used. The dusty separate leaf was written over in pale ink, and had plainly been taken out of a writing-book. Only after some trouble was he able to make out the old-world script, abounding in flourishes:

> "—in such manner lurk the erring Souls of dead Men, when as they be not able to slip and creep into a new Dwelling-house. Yea, truly, doth each man's Soul watch faithfully and guard his own, by no means suffering such a Guest. Yet some there be that let the Soul slip and go forth of them, the while their own Body remaineth behind in a faint. So as in a trice the foreign lurking Soul doth slip into the forsaken Corpus, and take possession of the same, as per exemplum the Fox intrudeth into the Badger's hole, if so be the Badger be not at home. This Body doth then become his own, the while the proper Soul remaineth without and knoweth not where it is. Thus have I myself well known a Basketmaker's son in Basel, a good lad (his Friends judged him) that fell into a sleep, and wakened a very Rogue and Devil, more wild than a Turk, without religion even as a Moor, the same a few years after was wedded to the Rope-maker's daughter in Mullen. What meaneth this? He was even One that was able to let his Soul go forth of him. Another I have heard of, a Councillor of Milan, by name Scottus, the same—"

Shaking his head, Peter laid the sheet aside. Judging by the strong bluish paper, it was extracted from some very old book; the edges were worn and discoloured. He opened the clasps of the book and read the embellished title-page:

TREASURY

of new and rare Curiosities, in the most wonderful operations of Nature and Art | wherein are to be found various strange and curious Secrets | assured Remedies | and Instructions in important matters | of the Sciences and Arts |

Hamburg, for Gottfried Schultzen,
1689.

His inquisitiveness was roused by the high-sounding title, and turning over the pages of the thick volume he discovered an immense number of directions on the most varied subjects. There were precise instructions on the making of artificial marble, information as to the best time for blood-letting and purging, remedies for gout, cooking-recipes, the secrets of alchemy, and much more. Had his uncle, then, been attracted by these superstitious and childish ideas? From the descriptions he had received of the vanished man's way of life this appeared quite possible, especially when he remembered the joyless solitude of an ageing person. In this gloomy house, upon which the rain and wind beat, many mental tendencies might become predominant which in the busy life of the city would have remained obscure. In one of the chests lay retorts, tubes and flasks, also various powders and alembics containing fluids, which pointed to experiments in chemistry.

The discovery dispirited him, and threw a shadow-over the exalted image he had formed of his uncle. His loyalty, however, resisted the thought that his hero had grown weak and crazy.

How noble in his imagination had been the proud and handsome cavalry officer as he stood in his white uniform confronting the wretched little Frenchman and the trembling lady! And now, was he to see henceforth in his mind's eye an old man, coughing, carefully pouring liquid substances into glass tubes, and endeavouring to capture nature's secrets in musty old tomes. He flung the book impatiently into the drawer again. No, it was not possible! His uncle, the proud Martin Storck, who had upbraided the almighty Emperor as a pitiful tyrant, could never have become like that!

There was a mutter of thunder in the mountains. On the plot of grass in front of the house yellow primroses were coming out, and white bell-flowers. A cock crowed. Notburga was standing outside, strong, fresh, beautiful, feeding the hens and surrounded by small, chirping beggar-birds; for since her arrival they had been keeping poultry. A large grey cat was

rubbing herself ingratiatingly against the end of her apron. The torrent sounded joyously; a vapour was rising from the fields.

When she had come back into the house he went down to the kitchen. She was already at the hearth, and her cheeks were flushed. Her firm bare arms gleamed, and sparks of light shot through her golden hair. Her black bodice crackled as she moved, and the kerchief on her breast rose with her breathing.

She looked at him kindly.

He came close to her. The neighbourhood of her warm body fired his fresh young blood. Involuntarily he touched her bare arm.

Was she blushing? Her lips remained parted, and a look of helplessness came into her face as she turned to busy herself at the hearth.

"You mother—!" he thought to himself, and could not have said why the word occurred to him. "Do you like being here, Notburga?" he asked aloud.

She grew very red now, and nodded.

The cat came and purred round her. She caught it up, and it snuggled comfortably into her arm as she stroked the soft fur.

"Is the cat yours, or does it belong to the house?"

"I brought her up here with me," she answered. "I weaned her with the bottle, so she is my baby."

He petted the kitten, which struck his hand in play with its gentle paws.

"You have hands like wax, sir—" said the girl suddenly in a deep voice. "Children have hands like that."

He caught her by the shoulders and looked into her clear blue eyes. "You are fond of children—?"

She closed her eyes. A low murmur came from her lips, almost like a stifled sob. Her firm breast was pressed against his arm.

"No!" he said to himself, turning away, and walked slowly from the room.

Yes, it was the warm springtide in his blood, youth, and the many days he had passed without the society of women. He remembered a girl in Würzburg who had climbed the stairs once to his student's room, and not again afterwards. She had soon married. That girl, and Frau Genoveva Schnäbele—these had been the only women in his life.

XIV

RESTLESS, HE WENT OUT of the house and watched the toiling folk. They were turning the first fine day to account, carrying earth in baskets up to the fields on the mountain slope, patiently replacing what had been washed away. In the ermine mantle which clothed the heights, the dark spots were growing larger every hour.

A young man approached who seemed known to him, a lank figure, with a heavy musket slung behind him, stepping lightly down the path. A twirl of chamois hair and two feathers from the tail of a blackcock, set off his wide, yellow-green hat. He stopped and saluted.

"Herr Federspiel?" inquired Peter.

"That's my name. We have seen one another down there at The Rose? You all turned me out there—"

"You spoke courageously," said Peter, in a friendly tone. "Only, not quite at a happy moment!"

The hunter supported himself on his pointed staff, and fixed his clear blue eyes on Peter.

"You think so? I believe myself that a man should say openly what is serious and sacred to him. Even though he has to suffer for it."

"I should be very glad to talk to you sometimes," said Peter. "May I accompany you some time when you are going up the mountains?"

"Whenever you please," smiled the other. "I know all the ascents, and it is not advisable for a stranger to go alone."

He waved his hand pleasantly and went on. Peter looked after him and felt sad, for he saw that the health of the young man was even more delicate than he had at first thought. The hollows in the neck, the flush on the cheeks, the peculiar lustre of the eyes, and the dry cough which attacked him as soon as he passed on, told enough.

After the simple but excellent meal which Notburga had prepared for him, he could no longer endure the confinement of his room, and took the road to the mountain alone.

The slippery path led up through a deep wood. Black traces in the slushy snow showed that this was the way by which the charcoal was brought. The kilns, when the smith's brother lived, must be somewhere near. A guide-post, from which the paint had worn off, leaned over the path. There was an odour of resin; the wind had freshened, and blustered in the tree tops, and cold drops fell from the branches.

After a while the wood became less thick, and the cart track was no longer so steep; finally it came out into a clearing almost on level ground. There was a smell of burning, and the pungent odour of the sap running from the charred wood was perceptible, though the wind blew towards the fire.

Two round kilns surrounded by trenches, with a thin smoke curling up from them, came into view. A giant in leather breeches and a sooty shirt, through which his shaggy breast could be seen, was thrusting a mighty beam into the nearest kiln; the formidable muscles of his arm stood out in huge knots. The second fire was tended by a stout lad with dark hair, who was singing loudly. In the open ground stood a wretched hovel, warped by the wind and thatched with bark. Near it a half-naked girl, not yet mature, with white skin and chestnut hair, was kneading dough in a trough with her thin arms. Beside her, squatting on the stump of a tree, was a strongly-built, dark-skinned woman, evidently the mother of the charcoal-burner's family; and in front of this woman, quite naked, stood a little boy of about four years, holding with both his hands one of her enormous hanging breasts, and drinking the warm milk with deep gulps.

The woman was the first to see the stranger, and pushed the child from her, so that he rolled over on the grass with a short, shrill cry. The giant at the kiln turned immediately and saw Peter. His eyes kindled and he stared angrily, the hair bristled over his low forehead, and with a bellow of fury he swung his pole in the direction of the newcomer.

Peter saw, not without dismay, that the monster was approaching him, with a heavy, rolling gait. He held his ground, however, and looked boldly at the half-savage creature. This proved to be not without effect, for the hairy fellow, with a kind of grunt, lowered his ponderous weapon and stood irresolute, looking in the direction of the woman for counsel. To judge by the senseless sounds he uttered, the gift of speech seemed to have been withheld from him.

The woman, with a laugh, called out something to him which to Peter was unintelligible, and the lad, taking hold of him by the sooty sleeve of his shirt, pulled him away. The charcoal-burner, mollified, resumed his circuit of the kiln, the heart of which glowed fiery hot, taking care that the bright flame did not break out on the surface.

The lad hastened to the mother and stood still beside her. She concealed her breast in a filthy cloth and took the crying child, whom she had just

thrust from her, onto her lap. The girl at the wooden trough wiped her doughy fingers in the grass and drew her tattered chemise over her white body.

Peter searched his pockets for some silver coins and brought them over to the mother. She simpered, jingled the money in the hollow of her hand, then seized his hand, pointing to the hut with an inquiring look. He did not at once understand and looked at her perplexedly, whereupon she pointed to the young girl, and from her to the dark interior of the hut, from which came an odour like that of a wild beast's cage. As the young man still showed no sign of comprehension, an expression of startled surprise appeared in her broad, freckled face.

"Me?" she said and stood up.

Overcome with disgust Peter took to flight. A burst of laughter followed him. But when he had reached the trees which bounded the clearing, the little girl glided to his side, showing her white teeth as she laughed.

"Would you rather have the wood?" she asked, and looked at him consentingly.

He shook his head, incapable of speech. There she stood beside him, hardly reaching to his breast; under her short red petticoat her naked legs appeared. Her face was pretty, though not yet fully formed, and her amber eyes seemed to know everything. Her small breasts rose under her chemise.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"I'm Sylvana," she answered. "You don't like me?"

"How many years old are you, Sylvana?" She held up all the fingers of both hands, then closed them, and spread out again five fingers. "That many!" she laughed.

But when he wished to take the path which led up the mountain, she sprang forward in front of him, causing him to swerve in his walk. There was something like fear in her face.

"You must turn back, pretty gentleman!" she said, fawning on him like a cat. "You can't go further!"

He found himself laughing involuntarily at her seriousness and at her uplifted finger. In sudden good humour he put his hands in her shock of brown hair, gently bent her head back, and said:

"And why?"

But in her face was nothing that suggested a trick.

“Don’t go to-day!” she repeated. “They’ll destroy you up there! Go another time, to-day they don’t allow it!”

“Who?” he laughed, shaking her a little.

“The Fiery people—” she whispered, looking round timidly.

Ah, she too believed in those wretched souls who, after cooling themselves on the ice of the glacier, were constrained to return to their torture.

“The Fire-spirits?” he asked.

She nodded eagerly, and pulled him back by the coat.

“Well, I will turn back with you then, Sylvana,” he yielded. “Some day, however, I will have a look at those Spirits of yours.”

She looked at him as if she desired to say something, but clapped the palm of her hand to her mouth and tripped on beside him.

“Why don’t you like me, then?” she questioned.

Peter felt once more annoyed. The manner in which she offered herself was repulsive to him. He stood till.

“Go now, Sylvana,” he said.

“Give me something!” she simpered craftily. “You have so much money!”

He gave her a few more coins. She uttered a jubilant cry and ran back, leaping along the path.

XV

WHEN PETER REACHED HOME, he found Notburga’s brother with her.

“God be thanked!” said Christian, rising from his seat. “I was mortally anxious about you. You have been up the mountain?”

“Yes, but the charcoal-burner’s daughter made me turn back!”

“Then that sinful creature for once has done somebody a good turn,” nodded Lergetpohrer. “Do you know what day it is? It was on this day that the Captain was lost on the mountain, and now you went off by the same road!”

“Holy God!” exclaimed Notburga, making the sign of The Cross. Fear gleamed in her eyes.

“But it was last autumn that my uncle—” began Peter.

“Autumn or not,” interrupted the innkeeper, “day and night are equal to-day as they were then. Have I not told you that it’s only on these two days of the year that the Fiery people are out?”

“I didn’t think of the day,” Peter answered. “If I had remembered, I would not have turned back, but gone on up to the Klamm and waited there for the spirits.”

“Well, your life has been saved!” The man’s tone was solemn. “Before the night had passed you would have been a dead man.”

“All the same, Christian Lergetpohrer, whatever you may say, I mean to get to the bottom of what has happened to my uncle. And now that you have reminded me of the day, I will go up there without further delay!”

Notburga uttered a cry and clasped her hands in entreaty.

But the broad-shouldered peasant did not yield to him, and quietly barred his passage as he turned to leave the kitchen. “So long as I live, Herr Storck shan’t go!” he said calmly.

“What?” cried Peter, with rising anger. “By what right do you allow yourself—?”

“It’s Christian duty!” returned the innkeeper. “Enough trouble has come of such foolhardiness. However—see the Spirits you shall, and this very evening!”

“See? Where?”

“From the study, as I once told you. Even if you insisted on going up to the Klamm now, it’s too late.”

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

“Very well. For the present I will content myself with having a distant look at them. But you may be sure they won’t show themselves when I’m there. Notburga must give us her company—”

“Not for the Emperor’s golden throne!” exclaimed the girl in alarm. “I don’t want to see them, the souls from Hell!” And in spite of Peter’s expostulations she was firm in her refusal.

Slowly Peter ascended the stairs, Christian treading heavily behind him. Was it not all a dream, ridiculous and at the same time uncanny? The dusk began, and grey shadows deepened in the corners of the study. The outline of the ridge between the Schellbock and the Black Hen stood out distinct and dark against the pale blue spring sky, in which the first silver star was sparkling.

The master of the house silently produced a telescope, which he had only just discovered, and threw open the glass door on to the balcony. Below in the village a stable door was shut, a dog barked. Soon all was silent. The people in Sankt Marein went early to bed.

The two men sat at the open door, close to the writing table. Steel, flint, tinder and sulphur threads lay beside the plain brass lamp, but Christian would not have it lighted. The glassy eyes of a stuffed owl shone dimly; the wind blowing through the open door stirred some scattered papers. Blackbirds, disturbed by a cat, uttered a shrill cry and then were silent.

"Christian," began Peter after an interval, "I take you for a shrewd and intelligent man. How can you really believe that spirits—"

The innkeeper raised his hand. "Have patience, Herr Storck, till the time comes. Otherwise you may easily do me an injustice. Wait, until you have seen for yourself this night's doings!"

Peter Storck began gradually to feel tired of watching: he rose, and walked up and down the room. There before him sat a man, in full possession of all his faculties, who had calmly undertaken to show him Spirits. As if it was not known to everybody that the power of imagination and a hankering after the supernatural can make marvels out of a piece of rotten stick shining with phosphorescence. What darkness lay in the souls of these mountain-folk! There was certainly no use in trying to reason them out of any belief which they clung to with all the obstinacy of peasants. The folk everywhere had the disposition to give bodily shape to the energies of nature, to create goblins, dwarfs, mountain-spirits, nixies and wild hosts. Here they had these Fiery Spirits, the souls of the damned. All unawares, he was overcome by a violent fit of homesickness, a longing for the little circle of his friends in Vienna whom he had left uninformed as to his whereabouts; for conversation with cultivated people, with minds freed from such follies. Meanwhile it was best to exercise patience, and to wait, though no doubt to no purpose, and not to set himself too much in opposition to the superstitions of these people.

"There's the first!" At this moment Christian spoke. He sat motionless, his hands resting on his knees, but his sudden excitement had made him speak.

"Where?" cried Peter.

The other raised his hand and pointed straight in front of him. "Just under the Saddle. They're coming, poor souls! Now I see three of them—no,

four!”

With an odd shudder, which he tried in vain to check, Peter Storck made out quite clearly four, five restless, yellow-red points, sinking down slowly from the ridge of the mountain towards the Klamm. Hurriedly drawing out the telescope, he leaned it against the doorpost and looked into it. His hands trembled.

“There are a good many now,” said the deep voice beside him.

He had now one of the little flames under his glass; there was not much more to be seen, however, than with the naked eye. Flames they were, sure enough, little fires, rising, gliding towards one another, forming into clusters and then separating. Twenty, thirty, more even, could be counted. They emerged into view, moved unsteadily, passed out of sight, reappeared a little lower down, and descended towards the Klamm. Against the blackness of the mountain the lights could be seen distinctly. They could be seen: there was no mistake about it. There they were, the Fire-spirits, moving as men move down a declivity, joining together and separating alternately. Peter laid down the glass; his eye was pained by the strain of gazing. Even without the glass it could all be clearly discerned, and however his reason might resist, it was not only wonderful but inspired awe.

“Do you believe me now?” asked the innkeeper, and his hand drew a circle in the direction of the mountain.

“Lights or flames I see sure enough—” said Peter, hesitatingly.

“Those are the unfortunate Spirits—may God give them everlasting rest!”

A thought occurred to Peter. “I have it, Christian! they’re smugglers!” he cried, feeling relieved. “Smugglers coming from Switzerland over to this side.”

The innkeeper dismissed the suggestion with a motion of his hands.

“Herr Storck, you must think us pretty stupid! Or, I should say, you don’t know the mountains. If you did you wouldn’t talk like that! Anyone who knows the mountains knows that there is no way of reaching the Schellbock or the Black Hen or the Saddle from the Varrauntser Valley on the Swiss side. The mountains are like the walls of a tower, and as for a road—”

“A great deal is possible to good climbers when there’s a big prize to be won,” Peter still argued.

"When you have been up there you won't talk like that," said the other with a laugh. "And as for smugglers, there are plenty of them hereabouts, but there's only one way for them to take and it's not an easy one: under the Haberer, through the Wet Walls, and over the Glui."

"That may all be true," returned Peter. "But how is it that none of you has had the pluck to go into the thing thoroughly?"

"There goes the last of them down into the Klamm!" cried Lergetpohrer, following the light with his finger until it vanished. "No pluck? We have plenty of that in Tyrol, as you will see for yourself before long! Others besides you have wanted to get to the bottom of it. There was a man who used to live here—he wrote his name Romedius Schabselsen, but he was never called anything but the Shuffler on account of his passion for cards. This same Shuffler was equal to most things! For a pint of wine he went into the churchyard one St. Andrew's night, brought back a rotting skull out of the charnel-house, and threw it down on the table before the boys—they all cleared off in a fright. In the year '93 he shot a bear's cub up yonder in the mountain, and when the old one came out from behind a rock with a horrible bellow and gripped him, he got his knife into her and killed her. After his trick with the skull he had to sulk for six weeks in the lock-up at Landeck, but the bear cost him his left eye, smashed two of his ribs and scratched him badly, so that he was at death's door. After that, I was looking on myself when with his one eye he brought a stray sheep belonging to Hornauss down from the Red Wall—that is, I wanted to look, but I had to turn away from the sight of him climbing and hanging on to the cliff. It was this same Shuffler who took an oath that he would make the Fire-spirits dance to a tune from his fife. He had a bet with the lads that he would do it for a keg of red Terlaner. It's just ten years this day since he went up. 'Have you got your fife with you?' the boys called after him. 'I have so!' he said, 'and a gun with a consecrated bullet in it!' So up he went. No one wanted to sleep that night, but kept looking up at the mountain wondering what would happen. The night was quiet, and when the first Spirits appeared, the fife was heard distinctly. It was playing 'I love you well, you dear brown bucks,' but only for a minute. Then all was silent. One man said there was a cry, but except for him no one heard anything."

The innkeeper paused for a moment, rose and went to the window, saying: "We'll close it. There's a cold air coming in."

He drew the bolt, and it seemed to Peter as though the man were afraid that something might enter besides the night air.

"What happened to the Shuffler?"

"They went up in the first grey of dawn, and after a long search they found the poor fellow at the bottom of the Klamm. He was half under water, and all his limbs were broken. Blood was running from his mouth."

"Was he dead?"

"Not quite. He was still able to get out a few words. They learned this much, that he had seen two devils, and made off, with the devils after him; they hunted him to the Klamm rock, and he had to throw himself over. His gun and his fife were found at the top. He had thrown them both away when the devils came after him."

"And then?"

"There's not much more. It was all over with him, and he couldn't tell much. His body was like a sack of bones, so the men said who carried him down."

"And he said they were devils?" asked Peter incredulously.

"Yes, he said so. Two devils. Since then no one has gone up, until the Captain. And he hasn't been able to tell us more."

"But he was never found, Christian, he was never found!" interjected Peter. "And for that reason—"

"His body might have been carried a long way down; there was a heavy flood at the time.—But I must go home. Good-night, Herr Storck, and leave the poor lost souls to themselves!"

He rose and took his hat.

"Once again," said Peter resolutely. "I mean to get to the bottom of this affair. I must and will find out what has become of my uncle."

Christian shrugged his shoulders, and went slowly and carefully downstairs. Peter heard him exchanging a few words with his sister. Then the house-door closed heavily.

XVI

IN ORDER TO ESCAPE from the tingling silence and darkness, Peter made haste to stir the fire, and lit the oil lamp from the spurting blue flame of the sulphur thread.

The quiet light cheered the room. But he could not banish from his mind this last strange experience; and the vague feeling of uneasiness which many people feel in the solitude of night began to steal over him. Again and again he saw before him the wandering lights. A death-watch ticked somewhere in the room. He knew quite well that it was a little beetle which produced this faint noise in tapping with its plated head; nevertheless he shivered. The dull roar of the stream, and the organ-tones of the wind in the trees, could not drown this weak, warning sound. Every object on which his eye rested seemed to remind him of the transiency of things: the dead birds stuffed with tow, and forced into a deceptive semblance of life by means of wires; the crystals lying in dust; the dried plants—all seemed to be waiting for something in sinister silence.

He walked about the room, and took up from the writing-table a green box which he had not previously noticed. In it were little brown pellets; he smelt them, rubbed them, and held one of them in the warmth of the lamp. A heavy smell rose from the pill: laudanum. Perhaps his uncle had made use of anodynes. The box might stay where it was. His eye was caught by a volume of the works of the great Paracelsus. He opened it at random and read the sentence: “I rejoice that I am a German born!” Then he thought of Federspiel, and how good it would be to have someone here to whom he could unburden his mind. At last he threw himself into the comfortable arm-chair in front of the writing-table.

Yes, there he sat alone, just as his uncle had sat, growing old in solitude. His own life appeared to him to have been from the beginning a failure. His first experience with women—his seduction by the sensual widow of Augsburg—had robbed him of his mother. Never again after that hateful morning had he been able to approach the woman who till then had meant everything in his life, a life which his cold and stern father could never enrich with the warmth of affection. Thus a chill had been cast on his first youth, and this had only begun to pass away in Würzburg, when the Franconians had received him into their friendly brotherhood. His only experience of a woman’s love had been the one-day affair with the smart young woman in Würzburg, Soon afterwards, he had had to leave his companions; in Vienna, indeed, he had become one of a cultivated circle of young people with whom he had been happy; yet something had always been wanting, something after which he yearned. Surely it was that he still

longed for the mother whom he had known in his childhood, and who had passed into the realm of shadows estranged and cold.

It might—it might happen that the lovely girl from whose dark eyes a spark had fallen in his heart, would come to this place. Had Christian not said she would do so? The pure features had been treasured loyally in his memory; and whenever Frau Genoveva's rosy-cheeked, mocking face intruded itself on his mind, the sweet, melancholy countenance of the Unknown prevailed over it, and could not be confounded with the smile of the woman who had bidden him untie her shoes and robbed him of the bloom of his youthful innocence.

He sighed deeply, feeling older than his years. No, these brooding thoughts led to nothing. And eager for some distraction, he opened the drawer in which lay the curious old book.

As he began to read, the thought kept haunting him that in its antiquated characters some revelation might be hidden, and the suspicion grew stronger when he noticed that the first lines of the preface, emphasised by the type itself, were, moreover, indicated on the margin by a light red mark.

The prominently printed lines, in fact, almost seemed to convey a promise:

> "The benevolent Reader need not fear that this book, by its title, promiseth more than its matter will substantiate."

This was all that was marked with the red stroke. What followed, in praise of the superior characteristics of the book, was unmarked. He turned over the numerous pages eagerly, and, of all its childish though often curious recipes on every possible subject, found only eight with the red mark on the margin. He set to work at once, took some sheets of paper and transcribed the marked passages, quite incongruous though they seemed in juxtaposition.

To cause Sleep or Waking

> Take a live Toad, and cut off the head in one stroke, then dry the head in such manner that one Eye be left closed, the other open; the open Eye causes Waking, the other which is closed causes sleep, if the Toad be carried next the Body.

To Soften Glass

Take a Buck's blood, the juice of Plantain, and Grape vinegar very strong, and boil the Glass therewith.

To hinder Meat being taken from the Pot

When it boils, throw in some green Vervain.

To make a live Crab red

Spread over it some very strong Brandy, and afterwards set it on to a Dish with boiled Crabs; that will make a merry jest.

His eyes began to suffer from the unwonted toil of description, and he was nearly giving it up. The lamp hummed a slumber-song, and the rustling and whispering outside made him feel sleepy. He took down from the wall one of his uncle's silver-mounted elm-wood pipes, filled it with tobacco and lighted it. He now felt quite comfortable. As he mused, his eyes wandered towards the dark window, and he started suddenly, straining his eyes to see more clearly. For a moment he thought he saw, in the pale illumination from the room, a motionless and sinister face, the face of the old man whom they called the Rover, whom nobody seemed to know. No doubt it was a phantom of the imagination, such as comes when one is worn out with fatigue, but he rose hastily and drew the curtains. He exerted himself, in spite of the unknown powers of the mountains and of his own reluctance, to finish his task, and began once more to write, not allowing himself to be put out by the ill-cut quill which scratched unwillingly over the paper.

To make a thick cream on Milk

Take a red Snail, and hang it by a thread as far as the middle of the Vessel, while the Milk is in it, and all above the Snail will turn to Cream.

To Change Silver to Gold

Take Orpiment and Vitriol in equal parts as much as you please, let them mix together into a powder, the which applied to Silver in flux yieldeth good Gold.

To Renew old Pearls

Bake them in the Oven with bread and they will show clean and fair.

A good Device

Take Sulphur 3 parts, Quicklime 3 oz., Salammoniac 5 oz., red Vitriol 2 oz., mix together and distil in a glass Retort, thus is procured 11 oz. of red Oil, into which Oil lay Silver Plate for one month, leave it to stand until it be eaten to Lime, then it turneth to Gold.

For Freckles

Take two dozen of fresh Eggs, leave them in hot ashes to harden, mix them with 1/2 lb. pulverised White-lead, set under the Press, and distil the moisture in *balneo Mariae.*

Though he searched the book through, he could find no more red marks. He looked over the pages he had written, then threw them on the table, annoyed with himself for having taken so much useless trouble. Was there the least probability of extracting any sense out of this tomfoolery? The lamp was burning low: it occurred to him that he had eaten nothing that evening . . . A peculiar grey mist seemed to fill the room. The door opened of itself: a pleasant-looking old man with white hair and beard put his head into the room smiling, then approached Peter with noiseless steps. He recognised at once his vanished uncle. “I began to think you were dead, dear Uncle!” Peter murmured, and the old man answered in a scarcely audible whisper: “Not dead, not dead, Peterkin, there is no death! Why then are you not looking for me? You have the book in which the way is marked out for you!”

“I can’t find it,” groaned Peter, “I can make nothing of the book.”

The old man smiled and threatened with his finger. “Look again, look carefully, young man! He—he!” The laugh had an evil sound; his uncle raised his yellow hand and struck the table with his knuckles.

It was his pipe. It had fallen on the floor with a harp sound. “I was dozing,” said Peter, shivering, and he gathered together the papers on which he had been writing. The wind in the stove made a sound like a subdued laugh: there was an uneasy, desolate feeling as of death in his uncle’s study. An irresistible longing to hear a human voice assailed Peter.

He took the lamp and went downstairs. Shadows danced before him over the ground floor; outside in the garden a night-bird uttered a cry of complaint. Was Notburga still awake? He felt for the latch: the door of her room opened.

She was sitting up in bed, frightened and with wide-open eyes. A thick coil of gold-gleaming hair lay over her white round shoulder from which the coarse nightdress had slipped.

“The master—!” she said.

Peter set the lamp on the table.

“Are you vexed with me, Notburga?” he said timidly. “I didn’t know—It was so lonely upstairs—”

Something stirred under the patchwork coverlet and crept out purring. He put his hand gently on the confiding animal.

“You have company, at any rate,” he murmured, and the blood mounted to her cheeks. She lowered her eyes and crossed her arms on her breast.

“Leave the room, sir,” she said, “and I’ll get up and warm your supper. I waited, but you didn’t come down.”

“It’s not supper—“ He swallowed something in his throat. His heart thumped in his breast. A smell like that of new-mown hay seemed to cloud his senses.

He took a step towards the bed and sat on the edge. Without knowing what he was doing he put his hand on the girl’s cool arm, and shuddered violently as he touched the naked flesh. She shrank a little. Her lips moved; her large blue eyes, clear as a child’s, looked away beyond him. She resisted his hot hand weakly; her whole body trembled. Suddenly she threw her strong arms about his neck and drew him to her, stammering—

“It has to be, it has to be—!”

He felt her firm breast against his, and her kisses, moist and surrendering, like a child’s. “Oh, my darling!” she cried—

When he came to his senses, remorse instantly assailed him like a violent physical pain. A terrible thing had happened. He had abused the confidence of this child-like girl, come upon her in the night, and desecrated her virgin

innocence for the sake of a moment's pleasure. She was quite still, with a dreamy lustre in her eyes, and smiled forlornly as with a melancholy feeling he ran his fingers through her heavy golden hair. Thoughts which he was unable to control rushed upon him. "Notburga—" he faltered, but could say nothing more. She laid her hand very gently on his lips and said: "Say nothing now or I shall have to cry." He took the lamp and stole away.

When, tortured and sleepless, he lay in his uncle's canopied bed and stared fixedly at its foot, still unable to control his thoughts, his eyes fell on some letters carved in the wood of the bedstead. He brought the light close and read the lines, ornamented with old-fashioned flourishes:

"His bosom's thought
No wise man sayeth;
Who then can guess
The game God playeth?"

Though he had now for some time been sleeping in his uncle's old bed, he had not yet noticed this curious old saw. The discovery had been reserved for this hour, when he lay stung with shame. More than once he started up thinking he heard a low sound of sobbing, which seemed to come up through the walls and the door. But it was only the wind, wandering round the house and bearing on its wings the Spring.

XVII

WHEN HE WAKENED OUT of an uneasy slumber, the remembrance of what had happened weighed heavily upon his soul. He felt just as he had felt long ago, when he had left his home so that he might not meet his mother. What would happen now? Notburga, however, when she brought the steaming soup to his room, appeared just as usual, except that she kept her eyes lowered a little and returned at once to the kitchen and the hen-house. He availed himself of the opportunity, and went down into the village.

Something had happened. People were standing about in groups, talking gravely to one another. Hornauss was leaning against his ruminating draught-oxen; he spat, and with a greeting to Peter as he passed, said: "The time is nearly up! Old Pflederer, the cunning fox, is already off through the

Scharnitz." Peter looked with admiration at the broad-shouldered peasants. Old Josele, the chin and cheeks of his tanned face bristling with a silver stubble, was talking to a curly-headed lad who had come up from the Valley: two peasant-women, prematurely old, who had left their work, looked gloomily on, their hands folded, in an attitude of resignation. Christian Lergetpohrer came running out of The Rose in his shirt-sleeves, and called the men by name. "On Saturday, lads, the others will be here, and after early prayers we are all to be at the Helmoos, every man with his gun or whatever he is carrying." Dubious glances were directed at Peter, in his fashionable blue coat and townsman's hat. Should they talk so unguardedly before him? Hornauss, however, made room for him, shouting: "Come here and listen to the news the boy has brought!" Once more the young messenger had to go through the whole recital: how there was blood in all the rivers, and how at night little rafts with lights burning under paper shades came floating down to all the Valleys. Teimer was now in the neighbourhood, and all supplies were to be brought in to the Helmoos; even those who could not carry arms were to bring scythes, clubs and flails, and whatever else they could find, to help the musketeers. After that, all were to collect wood, pitch and straw to kindle fires in the mountains. The messenger had to repeat this all over again before they sent him on, with his notched staff, to the next valley.

Trouble, then, was really brewing in Tyrol. With conflicting feelings, Peter escaped from the crowd and went to his house.

"The fools!" said a voice beside him. It was Federspiel.

Jubilant shouts came up from the village; the excitement and joy at the prospect of the fight were growing.

"You will join them, I suppose?" Peter looked questioningly at the hunter.

"Who, I? Fight my German brothers? The heart will dry up in my body first," exclaimed the young man, shaking his fist towards the village. "It's the old story: this poor mountain people places its hopes in the Emperor in Vienna, who would probably laugh if he saw the childish faith in their peasant faces. No, say nothing to me, Herr Storck! The Bavarians have behaved badly and made some stupid jokes about things that the people here think holy—or, rather, their asses of officials have done so. But is that any reason why these rocks should reek with German blood, and for no object but that the foreign rascals may look on and laugh?"

A dark branching vein stood out on his forehead.

“Perhaps you aren’t enough of a peasant, Herr Federspiel, to understand the people here thoroughly?” said Peter, trying to soothe him. “It’s the same with myself.”

“What? I no peasant?” laughed the other bitterly. “Is it because I studied two years in Innsbruck? I’m nothing but a peasant, blood and soul, and my heart is firm and true to this country and the people in it. But must I therefore lend a hand in bringing misfortune on them? Germany is in chains, and is this little country going to succeed in doing what a powerful nation, acting at the proper time, failed to accomplish? Great God in Heaven, it was not necessary to bleed the oxen and send down the blood on the rivers! The rivers will soon be red with better blood, and the fires that will be kindled will be from our own wretched hovels!—Well, I am going up the mountain, where I shall not have to listen to this shouting. Up there on the Schellbock are peace and quiet—”

“May I go with you?” asked Peter, seized by a longing for the mountain excursion.

“Come along!” nodded the hunter. “Only take off that long coat and put on other shoes. I’ll wait out here.”

Storck quickly changed, and asked Notburga, without looking at her directly, to put up some bread and bacon for him, saying that he might not be back till the evening. She came out with him in front of the house, and with some anxiety said: “I hope you will be careful—”

He laughed, embarrassed. Federspiel approached, and made a somewhat wry face when he saw a brand-new outfit of thick cloth and strong shoes.

The road led up through the wood, turning right and left to make the ascent easier.

“You have quite given up your studies?” asked Peter, as Federspiel walked on in front of him.

“Had to, when my mother died. And the pay too that I might have lived on in case of necessity, I lost when they caught me and another man settling a little transaction with daggers. I belong really to South Tyrol, but my mother came from here, and when she died I came in for the little house near Josele’s. That’s where I live now, if it can be called living.”

A fit of coughing rent his narrow chest.

“Then we are companions in destiny,” said Peter.

The hunter stood still, and thrust his pointed staff into the soft moss. “Companions in destiny! You think so?” he broke out fiercely. “Have you

had to look on while your sister was raped to death by French ruffians, like my little twelve-year-old sister? Were you ever tied to a tree in front of your house, shouting till you hung down in a faint? Oh, Lord God, Lord God!" He struck his forehead with his clenched fist and turned away; then he shook his head slowly, coughed again and walked on.

Peter was struck dumb by this wild outburst. "Forgive me—" he implored. "I didn't mean to remind you—"

"There's nothing to forgive." Federspiel again stood still. "You didn't know. But don't think that I sat behind the stove and wept. I was only a half-grown lad, but I went after them. I only found one of them. He was lying drunk in a stable at Brixen. I waited for him there a long time, thinking what I would do with him. At first I wanted to cut his throat, then I thought: 'Stick him in the stomach, he will suffer longer!' At last I ran my jack-knife into his two eyes like a flash and cleared out of the stable. But no more of this, Herr Storck, no more! I am ill, I know it well, and I should not get so excited. My blood rises quickly. And the two others—I never could find them! The cries of the man I blinded I still hear in my dreams—"

He walked on silently.

The road became steep and rocky, and Peter found it difficult to keep up with the long, light stride of the practised climber. Gradually they left below them the high woods. The trees became smaller, clambering upward as if kneeling in the sharp thin air. The naked grey rocks of the mountain appeared more and more through the soil. Tracts of mountain-pine extended along the mountain side, and hardy fir trees, bending towards the slope, braved the stony desolation. Amidst these were green patches of short, slippery grass. Huts came into view, half fallen to ruin, and open cattle-sheds; dried dung, through which had grown the withered grasses of last year, lay about between the scattered blocks of stone, upon which lichens were thriving, bright red and sulphur-yellow. As the two men reached the first hut there was a sound like a shrill whistle, and a heavy scurrying over the boards of the floor: then all was silent. "Marmots," said Federspiel.

They sat on a bare rock and ate. The fragrant gentian-schnaps from Federspiel's flask burned on Peter's lips.

A solitary fir tree had rooted itself boldly here, and had grown up defying the storms; it was dead now, withered by the cruel exposure. Wood-ants had raised a little hill around the trunk. Even in death unbowed rose the stubborn tree, to which a crucifix with bleeding wounds was nailed.

“If you don’t mind a little risk,” said the hunter, breaking the silence and collecting his things, “I will show you the Chamois’ Garden.”

And without waiting for an answer he rose and strode forward with even steps. Below them lay the untrodden Alpine meadow. Soon they were in the midst of an impenetrable green thicket of mountain-pine, and passed by a narrow goat-path between branches wreathed like serpents. When they had ascended to the slopes of rubble, over which rose threatening the naked walls of the mountain, Federspiel unlaced from his knapsack his sharp-toothed climbing-spurs, and helped Peter to put them on. He tightened the straps and tested them.

“And you?” asked Peter, somewhat overpowered by the mighty solitude and silence.

“I shall have to be more careful than usual,” was the light-hearted answer. “It’s worth a little trouble to look down into the Chamois’ Garden.”

The path was easy for a little, climbing along under the precipice. Then it suddenly ceased, and instead of it a strip of grass sloped upward. Federspiel without hesitation took this way, mounting steadily. Peter followed. The sharp iron spikes gripped firmly into the ground.

When Peter, after an interval of breathless climbing, saw beneath him on one side frightful abysses and on the other only the smooth wall of the precipice, a slight giddiness seized him. His knees began to tremble and his footing became insecure. The hunter in advance of him seemed to divine the sensations of one who was a stranger to the mountains. “Don’t look down and be careful,” he directed him, without looking round. Hermit-crows, black birds with yellow beaks, nested here and precipitated themselves into the air with a piercing “K—yak,” soared up again in circles, mocking at the abyss and at human helplessness. They passed close to Peter in their hate, almost touching his face with their wings, in scorn of the clumsy stranger who, anxiously enough, was clinging to the face of the rock and seeking, with sweating brow, a hold for hand and foot. Quite unaccustomed as he was to climbing, he had again and again to direct and assure himself by the example of his guide, to whom indeed the path was familiar, and whose terse directions were always clear and helpful. It seemed they were never coming to the end, when suddenly they reached more level though still difficult ground; stones rattled down and vanished into the void; a larger fragment, detaching itself from under Peter’s

unpractised foot, went rolling down and was swallowed up by the abyss. No sound told when it struck in the depths below.

Gradually, however, progress became easier; a broad gap had still to be crossed, then came a “chimney” which presented difficulties. The last help he required was a hand from the hunter, who with a strong pull brought him to the top, exhausted. Breathing heavily, Peter stood on the broad plateau of the Schellbock summit, glad to have attained his goal.

When he had recovered, and his heart began to beat more normally, he gazed about him. The prospect was overwhelming in its magnificence. On every side rose up green and stone-grey cones, or jagged crests pitilessly rigid. Valleys lay far below, deep and light green; glaciers caught the blue of the sky or changed to green in the bright sunlight. Below them lay the Black Hen, flat and insignificant, and between it and the Schellbock the Klamm cut deep into the mountain. The stream frayed its path through rock and wood, disappearing into the secrecy of the ravine. Close to the low ridge of the Gluipass rose the flaberer, grey and ancient; and to the left the wedge-shaped Hockauf closed the view. Only a part of Sankt Marein could be seen beyond a rocky promontory, but Peter was able to find his house and the study window, which shone in the sunlight like a golden fire. From the sharp ridge connecting it with the russet-hued Feuerreiter rose the immense mass of the Urtoz, with its giant’s head and square shoulders; and beside it spread out the Wild Man, girdled with the ice of the Rauhes Kees, while further away the cone of the Grieser floated in the blue light. In the extreme distance, one looking over the shoulders of another, shone the Swiss mountains in eternal snow.

Federspiel, smiling, gave him time to enjoy the noble prospect, telling him the names of the mountain-crests, which here had quite a different shape from that which they took from below. Then, kneeling, he crept forward to the edge of the summit, working himself along cautiously. Peter followed him closely, and they peered down into the depths.

“There it is—!” said Federspiel in a peculiarly soft and even tender voice, as he pointed below.

Over the great perpendicular wall of the Urtoz in front of them, a silvery waterfall fell into a small round lake in the midst of a meadow far below, so green that it shone like an emerald. The soft curtain of water allowed the entrance to a cavern to be seen behind it, opening gloomily into the precipice. Out of the lake thus formed, the water issued as a stream, which

flowed in the direction of the mountain-wall on which they lay, and disappeared at its base. Certainly there was a subterranean channel here by which the water escaped, and perhaps it was the same stream which rushed through the Klamm and down by Sankt Marein.

From their giddy elevation they could see a fine misty spray rising from the water, and broad clumps of large dark green shrubs all round in the vivid green of the meadow, in which small dark spots were moving.

"Do you see the chamois?" whispered Federspiel in delight. "They have their winter coats on still, dark brown . . . I can count thirty-two. They have a garden of their own down there, and they're safe!"

Peter made out clearly the white marks on the cheeks of the dark animals as they fed peacefully. They alone knew the way into this green paradise, which certainly no foot of man had trod.

"The trees down there have foliage even at this time of the year," exclaimed Peter in wonderment. "And how is it that trees can grow at such a height?"

"Not a breeze stirs down there, and there's no frost. Do you notice how warm the air is, coming up? The water is steaming. And the trees—yes, I have thought a good deal about them. The strange thing is, they will shortly have red blossoms, or leaves, in the midst of the green foliage. And what a lot of them, growing there close together! Some day I'll find a road down there. Where the chamois can reach a man should be able to reach too," he said, more to himself than to his companion.

They lay for a long time on the hard stone, gazing into the awful but alluring depths, until Peter, again attacked by giddiness, closed his eyes and caught the arm of the hunter, who drew him back gently from the edge.

"There, rest yourself for a while, Herr Storck. Take half an hour's sleep; you won't feel right till you do so." And as Peter did not refuse, he made a pillow for him of anything he could find for the purpose.

Peter found himself once more in his home in Vienna, Zum Alten Blumenstockel, where Ludmilla, now white-haired and stooped, kissed his hand and besought him not to go away again. She had been terribly anxious about him. Some visitors had been a long time waiting. She opened a door in the wall, which had not been there when he went away; there was a little garden outside, and a vine, amid whose bright green leaves and tendrils hung purple clusters, beneath which his brother Franconians were sitting, serious and silent: Laurenz Bartenstein, with his huge hairy dog; the jovial

Kropff; Thoman, and Stepf as tall as a tree; and in the midst of them all the beautiful, dark-haired young lady. “At last you have come, brother!” said Bartenstein solemnly, with a motion of his hand in the direction of the young beauty. “The bride is ready, the guests will be here directly.” As he spoke, a brilliant light broke out in the arbour, so bright that his eyes were pained. He raised his hand to protect them and woke up. The sun was at its height and shining straight in his face.

Federspiel stood up at once and they descended slowly. They spoke little, each occupied with his own thoughts.

“Thank you, Herr Federspiel,” said Peter, as they reached the enclosure of Zeitlanghof. “If you will allow me, I shall be glad to join you often in your walks.”

“You need only tell me,” nodded the other, “We are both in much the same situation. Solitude sometimes palls and we long for someone to talk to.”

Peter felt some uneasiness as he entered the house. It seemed to him necessary that he should speak to Notburga about what had happened and could not now be undone. But he had not courage to do so at once, and he waited in his room until she came in with his supper and set for him his stoneware plate, jug of wine and bread. Then he allowed himself another respite, and it was only when she returned to remove the things that he asked her to wait, as he had something to say to her. She looked at him and blushed deeply, then without speaking shook her head and left the room. He heard her distinctly closing the door of her room and bolting it. He sat on, ill at ease.

But nature was stronger than his disquietude. He was very tired, and going early to bed fell at once into a dreamless sleep.

XVIII

NEXT MORNING HE WAS ROUSED by shouts from beneath his window. Still half-asleep, he put his head out into the cold morning air. The innkeeper of The Rose was standing in the path below, calling: “Up, up, Herr Storck! We are off to the Helmoos. Everyone must join us who is a good subject of the Emperor!” He uttered a loud huzza, which was taken up by jubilant voices round the house.

They were in earnest then, these men! Peter dressed quickly, drank a cup of milk and ran down to the door. Christian was waiting, looking somewhat magnificent in his wide green hat, dark red coat, black leather breeches and snow-white stockings. His heavy brass-mounted musket was slung over his shoulders by a wide embroidered bund, and at his side was a long dirk. “There’s going to be good sport to-day!” he cried as Storck appeared. But immediately a shadow passed over his good-humoured face: “How’s this? No gun or weapon? There are a good many muskets in the house. Aren’t you marching with us?”

Peter answered evasively that he wanted first to know what it was all about and that he himself was not a Tyrolese. The innkeeper looked at him

thoughtfully for a while, but said nothing further, and led the way up above the village and along under the Schellbock to the Helmoos.

Many had joined in the expedition. All along the road marched little bands of armed peasants, coming from the various valleys to the gathering-place: fine, sinewy youths in peaked caps, old white-haired men, and raw lads with ruddy cheeks, who never ceased shouting and huzzaing.

"Teimer himself is there and is to speak," said Christian excitedly. "Zangerl is up here too, and I saw Father Archangelus yesterday. There's to be a message read from the Archduke, and our people who have been with the Emperor in Vienna are back. The hour is come, they all say. Meanwhile they are picking off the Bavarians. Pity Pflederer got away!"

"Thank God!" Peter was on the point of exclaiming. He had retained a friendly feeling for the fat, good-humoured Bailiff.

Gradually a low thudding sound became audible, and Peter recognised the beating of drums and the shrill noise of fifes. As the wood opened out in front of him a scene presented itself which left an indelible impression upon his mind.

About a thousand peasants of every age, assembled from all the neighbouring valleys, in festive costume, dark red, green and grey, were standing round the trunk of a large tree, on which, with folded arms, stood a stranger, in a threadbare coat and top boots. At one side of him, Peter saw Zangerl of Prutz, the man who had warned him in The Rose to be careful of what he said; and at the other, the red-bearded Father who had exorcised the possessed nun. A huge fellow, seven feet high, a jovial giant, was grasping a pole from which flew an old silken flag. The faded cloth blew out merrily in the morning air, with all its bullet-holes and rents, showing the red and gold eagle. Four youths, with heavy drums painted green and white, and two with fifes, were standing close to the flag. The drum-sticks were resting.

The space was crowded with weapons. Beautiful muskets, passed on from father to son, shone with brass mountings and mother-of-pearl inlayings; billhooks, long-pointed pole-axes, clubs, gleaming scythes, flails furnished with nails, were uplifted, as if impatient and thirsty for blood. A formidable yet restrained energy seemed to quiver through this host of armed peasants; the spirit of revolt was ready to break forth, and long-hoarded wrath seethed and hissed. The extreme tension relieved itself in shrill, piercing shouts, re-echoed from the mountain side.

Peter himself was affected by the deep excitement of men prepared for anything that might happen. He was alone, and kept intentionally in the background; in fact, little attention was paid to him. All eyes were fixed on Teimer, who continued to stand motionless; and Peter, looking for the first time on the tobacco-dealer from Klagenfurt, whom the people seemed to know well, recognised in the man's calm eyes the resolute energy and unconquerable will concealed in an insignificant form. This former student from South Tyrol, before he had uttered a word, conveyed to Peter that something terrible yet great was in contemplation.

Teimer nodded curtly to the senior amongst the bandsmen, who were standing beside the fluttering banner, and at once the drums began to beat. The drum-sticks danced on the hide, the wooden fifes were raised to practised lips. They seemed to be striking up a May melody. But it was a strangely inflaming air, and it called for blood. "The Spingeser! The Spingeser March!" the crowd called rapturously. Hats flew in the air. "Hurrah for Tyrol!" was the cry.

The shrill notes struck sharply and the crowd marked time; trumpets brayed; the red eagle on the old banner spread out its pinions, with the golden clover-stems.

Teimer raised his arm. There was a dead silence.

"Men of Tyrol, countrymen!" his high voice rang over the wide open space. "By God's help we will now make an end for ever of Bavarian misrule, and hunt the foreign swine out of this land, never to return! You have seen the first signal on the water. As for the second, the mountain fires will be kindled through the whole country for everyone to see, and at that signal each company, under its appointed officer, is to march without delay on Innsbruck. Our good Archduke Johann has written this to me, and each of you may read the writing with his own eyes. 'You shall not long remain Bavarian!' Those are his words."

He flourished a folded paper. Huzzas rent the air, two or three muskets went off, and there was a long reverberation through the wood. When silence was restored, the clear voice from the tree-stump was again heard:

"Brothers! There is something more that the fires will tell! General Chasteler is advancing from Oberdrauburg, and Speckbacher is coming up from the Lowlands to win Innsbruck for the Emperor! Now, let every man take with him a piece of bacon or what he pleases, bread, brandy—whatever he requires. Powder and shot, however, is the main thing, and if

any of you is a good marksman but wants a gun, I will give him directions where he is to find one. Dear countrymen, this enterprise, in which the whole Tyrol is now engaging, will be a grim business! Blood is going to flow, and our hands must not falter in taking life; it is on human bodies that we must point our weapons! We must be hard as the rock! So the Bavarians have been, and they have had no pity for man or beast. Wipe them out, I say, slay them where you find them! There is no Fifth Commandment for those who must butcher for God's glory. If there be innocent men amongst them, the Lord God will deal with them according to His grace. We are but men, and must help ourselves as we can. Remember how we had to resist the French in the 'nineties when they broke in like wild beasts, abused our little children and desecrated with their filth Christ's Holy Body in the churches. It is horrible even to think of it. And now, brothers, the hour has struck, and we have to make it plain to them that this Tyrolese land of ours is not to be passed from hand to hand as boys in the lane pass apples and pears. We have to bring it home to them that there is to be an end of their infamies for ever. Remember our honoured priests whom they have hunted out; remember our poor folk, on whom they have closed the factory, and who are now wandering about in beggary; remember the women they have violated, the unhappy girls in whose living bodies the blood is corrupted by the French evil; remember the lads whom they have forced into their shameful uniform! Hew off the thievish claws which snatch at our holy things; smite the mouths which daily blaspheme God; mutilate these beasts with your clubs, so that henceforth they shall leave our women alone; give them hot lead in their bellies so that at last they may be full! Hold together firmly, and do not delay, for the hour has come! Hurrah for our Catholic faith! Hurrah for our Emperor! Hurrah for our country, Tyrol!"

The words kindled a fierce flame of enthusiasm. The drums once more began to tap, and the scream of the fifes danced above the din, persistently keeping up the Spingeser air. Then, like the bellowing of an organ, a song rose up, half solemn and half sportive, in which with an almost comic effect expressions of anger were intermingled, uttered nevertheless in bitter earnest: stanzas of the battle-song which in former days had fired the South Tyrolese to the assault:

"Lynx, marten, wolf and fox—
Pick them off with well-primed locks—

Crick, crack, crack—pound! pound!
Round and round!”

Peter was as if spell-bound: he heard the snapping of the locks, the whistle of the bullets, the groaning of the victims. Yet it was a simple and homely song.

The assembly slowly broke up. He hurried on before the others in order to reach the road, pretending not to hear a shout from Christian, who was pointing him out to Teimer.

XIX

FEDERSPIEL WAS WAITING in front of the house. His face indicated depression. Peter drew him in through the garden gate.

“We can’t hold out long,” muttered the hunter between his teeth. “Disaster is near.”

The painted skeleton-figure leered at them as they entered, his foot thrust forward in its dancing-shoe, the fife to his thin lips.

Notburga was not in the house; no doubt she had gone to the village, where the women were listening anxiously to the uproar amongst the men. They knew what it meant when the dusty drums were taken down and the fifes began to call.

Peter was relieved not to have been observed as he entered the study with his companion. It would not do for everyone to know that he had formed a friendship with this man, who was almost an outlaw. He went to the window and closed it, for there were still shouts and noises in the wood.

“What is going to come of it?” he asked in a troubled voice.

The former student looked out sadly on the landscape.

“What’s going to come of it? Who knows? Great misery certainly, famine, horrors of every kind. One might suppose that it would be all the same to the poor peasants whether they have an Emperor in Vienna or a King in Munich. When you come to think of it, Munich might be the lesser evil—”

“You are Bavarian heart and soul, and that is hardly right when the country is rising,” said Peter.

“Herr Storck,” answered Federspiel, looking at him steadily, “neither am I Bavarian nor do I intend to be Austrian. I’m a German, nothing more. As

to the ruling house, we won't quarrel. One is the same as the other to me."

The native of Vienna was not used to language of this kind, which seemed to him to breathe a spirit which would upset everything, and he thought involuntarily of the day on which he had seen in Vienna a cart-load of prisoners in chains, so-called Jacobins. It had been said that they were destined to perish miserably in underground cells which could be flooded with water, on the Spielberg at Brünn.

"Be careful!" he warned Federspiel.

"I'm not afraid that you will betray me," returned the other carelessly. "They can't throttle the idea of freedom, or shut it up in a dungeon. My wretched life counts for little; freedom will outlast the power and stupidity of tyrants . . . Do you know what the Emperor said in Vienna when he had to give up Tyrol? He laughed: 'Well, you are at least going to let me keep Laxenburg?' That was all."

"I cannot and will not believe it!" cried Peter, and his cheeks flushed. "The Tyrolese know what they are fighting for!"

"The Tyrolese! Remember some day what I, Serafin Federspiel, tell you on this day of April, 1809: If this rising fails, and the brave people who are sacrificing themselves fall into the power of the enemy, the Emperor in Vienna will not stir a finger to help them, even if it should only cost him a word!"

"Herr Federspiel, I will not listen to such speeches," exclaimed Peter, but as he spoke he remembered what had happened to his uncle in Vienna, and swallowed the rest of his retort.

The other smiled to himself and said: "As you please! Truth always tastes bitter. I suffer from the gift of seeing things as they really are. And I have no wish to mock, for it is bitter enough to me to see young lads and strong men going to their deaths, while I can do nothing to stop them."

Tears all at once filled his eyes, and Peter felt sorry for his loss of temper. What, after all, was the Emperor to him? And was there not in this very house the shade of one who had suffered grievous wrong from sovereigns?

"We will drink a glass to the success of the cause!" he said, as cheerfully as he could, and ran downstairs to fetch a jug of red wine.

"A health to all good Germans!" and he touched glasses with the hunter.

To change the subject, he related to Federspiel his adventure with the dumb charcoal-burner and Sylvana.

“And you went into the wood with her?” laughed the other, his good spirits returning. “She lets herself be picked up like a young bird.”

“It was only as I tell you,” said Peter.

“What does it matter? A lot of the young fellows when they feel a little restless go up there privately, and many of them are satisfied with the big woman. I confess that I myself am no better than the others. What is one to do in this solitude? Even if people hold up their hands and talk of Sodom and Gomorrah, like the foxy Capuchin . . . It may seem a dreadful thing to some people, but in reality it is nothing. It is Nature herself, unconscious, instinctive, naked, and therefore sinless, neither beautiful nor ugly! Would you tell the bucks to abstain in the rutting season?”

Peter found nothing to say, but changed the conversation, which seemed to him to lead nowhere, and began to talk of the evening on which, with Christian Lergetpohrer, he had seen the Fire-spirits descending the mountain.

The other did not answer for a while, but lit his pipe thoughtfully and drank from his glass.

“Would you like to know my opinion of these fiery ghosts?” he asked, with a searching look; and when Peter eagerly assented, continued: “With reference to your uncle.”

“You think then that he was murdered by the Spirits?”

“He may have been,” returned the hunter.

“You believe it? Murdered by ghosts?” Peter laughed excitedly.

“Not by ghosts, but by men,” said Federspiel, pressing his thumb on the glowing tobacco.

“By men!” echoed Peter, breathlessly.

The hunter laid his hand on his friend’s arm to reassure him.

“Listen to me, Herr Storck. I too was looking at the lights, and next morning I went up and searched the place. And I found behind a stone the remains of burnt pine-torches. And that fiery spirits require torches, I don’t believe!”

“Then they were smugglers after all,” cried Peter, “and I was right. The innkeeper wanted to prove to me—”

“Because, like myself and everyone here, he knows that the smugglers—whom I have often come across—can only carry up their goods by the Glui Pass. Do you suppose that with a hundredweight on his back any person

could climb up the precipices which you saw from the Schellbock? They're not smugglers."

"Who are they, then?" urged Peter.

"Other people. I can't tell you. But if you will give me your help we shall probe the matter. It will give us a great deal of trouble: all the more, as the spirits are to be seen only on two days in the year. The next time is the twenty-first of September. Who knows whether we shall be alive then? In my case, it's by no means certain." He smiled sadly as Peter made a deprecatory gesture. "The mountains keep their secrets well.—Listen! drums! I will go now, as I don't want to run up against them."

"Tell me what your supposition is—"

"I will say nothing definite in advance, Herr Storck. There's no sense in guessing. I suppose you have been told about the Shuffler? His dying words were that incarnate devils had come after him and driven him over the precipice.—We know nothing, Herr Storck, and must have patience."

He went down the stairs slowly.

Immediately afterwards Notburga came into the room. Her beautiful face was white.

"They say down in the village that the men are going to march out."

"Yes, Notburga—" Peter confirmed the rumour.

"And you?"

"I'm not a Tyrolese!" he said, almost embarrassed. She bent quickly, caught his hand and kissed it. A hot tear fell upon it.

"Thank God, I am not forsaken—!"

"Forsaken—?" He looked at her with wide eyes. A soft light came into her face.

"I am with child—" she whispered, folding her hands.

"You are not mistaken?" he asked, startled.

She laughed and cried together, put her mouth to his ear, faltering out senseless words of endearment. Then suddenly her face flamed, and with a cry of shame she fled from the room.

Peter sat stupefied. A sound of bells rang in his ears—the pulsation of blood pouring through his veins from the violently beating heart. A child!

XX

OUTSIDE THERE WAS A TAPPING of drums and a shrilling of fifes as the peasants returned.

As it grew dusk a red, flashing star seemed to rest on the summit of the Schellbock, another flamed over the Haberer, and a third on the Black Hen.

The signal-fires were ablaze. The hour had come. Tyrol had risen: a small, intrepid, warlike people dared to oppose the will of the man who held the world in his hand.

In the early morning, amid a din of shouts and musket-shots, the peasants marched off. Peter remained indoors. From the window he saw the smith's brother, the dumb charcoal-burner, coming down the mountain; his furnace-pole lay over his shoulders, hardened black, and furnished with long iron spikes.

When all was again quiet, Peter went down to the village. Josele's old wife was standing in her kitchen garden, pouring milk on the ground from a brimming bowl. The thick liquid trickled slowly into the black soil. Peter looked on amazed.

As she looked up from her strange employment she noticed him and seemed startled.

"Pity to lose the good milk!" said Peter with a smile.

The old woman beckoned energetically to him to come nearer, her wrinkled face twitching. "No one is to know," she whispered, "no one at all! Be sure, gentleman, you won't tell the priest!"

"What does this mean?" inquired Peter.

" 'Tis an old custom indeed," she said impressively. "It has come down to us like many another thing. But it isn't well to forget it. The young folks nowadays don't know it, but—I know it, know it well! The beautiful lady comes at night in a golden chariot drawn by two white cats, and they know where the old woman lives. 'Tis for them the milk is. The lady takes care of me when there's thunder in the sky, and she'll look after my man down there in the fighting."

Peter stood amazed in the presence of this bent and aged woman who was bringing a drink-offering to the sun goddess Freya, preserving faithfully a venerable custom. The weary body of this old sacrificer was already bowed to the earth, and with her the grave would close over the last tradition of the goddess. It seemed a solemn thing to him.

"You're a young blood, gentleman," the woman said, looking at him keenly, "and I think you ought to be away there between Nauders and

Finstermünz, where the men are waiting to be led to the fighting. I won't spare you that!" And nodding and muttering she went into the house, carrying her empty bowl.

Peter turned away, shamed and dispirited.

In the days that followed he was oppressed by the feeling of solitude. Notburga kept carefully out of his way, and this resistance provoked him so much that he began to long for her.

However, she had all at once completely changed; she wept and resisted with energy his endearments, and flamed into anger when he tried to compel her. She seemed to him more beautiful, now that she avoided him, than she had been on the night when she had surrendered herself and had been his. Her healthy and energetic person inflamed him; he wrestled with her, overpowered her and took advantage of her weakness. She lay sobbing in his arms, with dishevelled hair and mournful eyes.

"It should have grown in purity—" she wept.

"What do you mean by that?" Her incomprehensible words irritated him.

"The child. Now it is stained with sin—"

He laughed derisively. "And the first time—was it no sin?"

She rose with flaming cheeks, drawing the torn linen of her chemise over her bosom, as if ashamed of its beauty.

"I wanted a child. That's no sin. But now when I carry it under my heart, where it lives already like a little creature—"

Deeply abashed, he let her go. And now, when his excited blood flowed more calmly and the intoxication had passed, he was seized once again by repentance. He tried to make amends, murmuring tender words and stroking her wonderful golden hair. However, she appeared not to heed him and continued to weep softly. At length he left her, disappointed in himself and grieved in his soul.

It was late when she appeared again, calm and with much dignity, as if aware of the noble stock of which she came.

XXI

THE DAYS PASSED, uniform and empty.

On a Sunday, Christian returned, in tatters, his hands blackened with gunpowder. He looked aged and altered. A smell of wine came from his

mouth. Hornauss was with him.

The people crowded into the inn, and almost thrust Peter from the bench on which he sat opposite the innkeeper. Christian had to relate how, on the eleventh day of April, the men of the Upper Inn Valleys had decided to give battle on Mount Isel. Houses had gone up in flames, and the balls from the Bavarian guns had hummed and crashed through the wood. Speckbacher and Straub had got the Bavarian devils into such a fix that they had to show their tails at Innsbruck, which was now in the hands of the peasants.

At intervals, Christian tossed the red wine down his throat as if it were water, laughed excitedly, and sometimes appeared to choke. Hornauss produced a flat gold watch with an enamelled cover; the bright rococo figures of a shepherd and shepherdess dancing within the gold frame contrasted oddly with his brown, cracked claws.

"Look at this, you women folks! I might have had two of them. It's honourable war booty, though the innkeeper with the big beard from Passeir won't allow it. Ha! We hunted the Jews of Innsbruck out of their holes, the Bernheimers and Nathans, and got back the chalices, albs, pyxes and stoles that they bought from the church-robbers. Oh Lord! how they shook and stuttered! some of them stowed themselves away in their sooty chimneys! And in Count Lodron's house we beat up some slips of the nobility and made them dance with us, though the little dears turned away their pink and white faces from our breaths! Tobacco and brandy out of peasants' throats stunk in their dainty nostrils! But they had to dance!"

"You filthy villain!" cried his wife, clawing at him, "you had to dance too, I suppose, you pig!"

"Keep quiet, old witch!" spluttered Christian. "And you there, young fellow! keep your hands away from my gun, there's a nice bullet in the barrel! It was a little dwarf like you, a little snivelling Bavarian drummer, that I sent hopping into eternity with that same blazer!"

He roared laughing, his eyes starting out of their sockets, and then the wild laugh turned to a convulsive sob. He controlled himself, however, looked round despairingly, and stammered as if in great uneasiness: "Nothing can happen to me, nothing! Father Flavian in Hall gave me absolution. No guilt is on me now!"

He struck his fist on the table so fiercely that the glasses shook, and stared distractedly in front of him.

"He was quite young, the little chap, so young!" he groaned.

Hornauss quickly availed himself of the opportunity and drew the attention of the listeners to himself, entering on a discursive narrative of some drunken fellows who had robbed the banks; of the town rabble who had followed hard on the assailants, carrying empty sacks; of Bavarian sentries who had been blown to pieces; of the citizens who had slunk about in alarm and exhibited little pleasure at the victory of the peasants.

He was in the middle of his story when some lads came up from the Valley with a message. They had been bidden by Teimer to say that the fighting was by no means over. The Bisson Corps was advancing down the Brenner, a good deal knocked about but in fair order. Every man was wanted. The innkeeper, so recently a temperate man, staggered off once more down the road, Hornauss following, still abused by his shrewish wife.

Peter feared to be alone with Notburga, who had been in the inn with the others and whom he had seen stealing out of the room, weeping at her brother's unusual appearance and speeches. To himself it was a torture that he should seem to be skulking in these days of battle. More than he realised, Federspiel's talk had influenced him; moreover, he felt as if his uncle, broken and prematurely aged, were beside him, whispering in his ear: "Is it for the tyrant who brought me to poverty that you mean to fight?" He had never been able to forget the mean spirit of his own father, who in a conversation with his mother, understood much later by Peter, had said of the vanished brother: "He was insolent to everybody and has got off very easily!" His soul had revolted at the despicable subserviency of the official, who had been horrified at his brother's presumption in daring, though only a common citizen, to use violence to an "aristocrat." And now—probably with no further result than that these arrogant people would recover their old privileges—was he to march out with the credulous peasants; perhaps even shoot the brother of his best friend Bartenstein, who was serving in the Kinkel Regiment as a lieutenant?

While he walked slowly toward the Wood of the Damned, and strove by various arguments to exonerate himself from blame in not taking part in the fighting, it gradually became plain to him what it was chiefly that held him back: horror at the realities of war . . .

First of all, there was Christian Lergetpohrer, the innkeeper, Notburga's brother, and the fearful change that had come over him. Then the horrible story of the little Bavarian drummer-boy, whom Christian had shot on Mount Isel, had left a dull feeling of oppression in his spirit. He

remembered also the story that Hornauss had told: Quite a young lad, whose name was unknown, had followed his father into the fight, and a bullet from a Bavarian musket, a German bullet, had smashed in his jaw, tearing it almost away, so that his tongue hung out of his neck like a worm writhing in torture. Mad with agony, the young fellow, before anyone could go to his assistance, had leaped into the roaring Sill and disappeared . . .

As he approached the clearing in the wood he heard a burst of laughter and the clapping of hands. Cautiously he drew nearer. A strange picture presented itself in front of him.

In the middle of the green plot, on which were round bare patches where the fires had burned, stood Sylvana, arrayed in a gold-embroidered garment of crimson velvet. In her hand she held a silver bracelet with a stone in the clasp, on which she was gazing with much satisfaction. The charcoal-burner sat with the upper part of his body naked, sharpening a broad knife. In front of him, tied to a stake, a fine black dog was crouching and whining in abject terror, and the youngest of the family, encouraged by the mother, was whacking at it with a long switch. The elder son looked on, laughing loudly and clapping his hands at the howls of the helpless animal. The woman was cutting up leeks on a board, apparently as seasoning for meat. The man, having tested the edge of the knife with his thumb, rose to kill the dog.

Peter could not bear it. He sprang forward between the dog and the lifted paw of the giant, who turned on him with a savage snarl.

“Sell the dog to me!” cried Peter, taking some silver coins from his pocket and making them jingle.

The man, however, only laughed and, now mollified, pointed to a woollen shawl on the grass, on which lay several glittering objects: rings, silver spoons, the star of some order bent out of shape. He grinned and moved his hand with a gesture which indicated: “I want for nothing.”

But the lad, glancing quickly from his father to the stranger, sprang forward and caught at the skirt of Peter’s coat with a filthy hand: “Let me have the blue coat and you take the dog!”

Without hesitating, Peter flung off his coat and threw it to the young fellow, while the father looked on in bewilderment. The lad flew to the stake, untied the string and gave the end of it into Peter’s hand. The dumb giant laughed with satisfaction, slapped his knee and pointed at his freckled son, who had at once put on the coat and was walking about with trailing

skirts. The woman also laughed loudly. The animal crouched in terror between Peter's legs.

"Am I pretty?" cried Sylvana jealously, dragging the purple garment behind her like a train. "Do you like me now?" And she smiled at Peter seductively.

"You are very pretty!" he said hurriedly, "and I like you very much!"

Hereupon she laughed gaily and danced round him.

Slowly, and drawing after him the quaking dog, Peter reached the shelter of the wood. He heard the woman beginning to scold and asking what there was to eat now. Her words were not without effect, for the man suddenly came after Peter with long and awkward strides. All at once, however, he stumbled heavily. His son had put out a leg and tripped him, and now ran from the raging giant, screaming and brandishing Peter's blue coat.

Peter went on quickly. The dog seemed to know that he was its saviour, and pushed a wet nose into his hand. Peter stood and patted the animal's thin flanks, and its tail wagged. At this moment a small fir-cone hit him sharply on the cheek.

He looked round, startled. He was already a good way into the wood and no one was in sight.

He walked slowly on. A cone flew past him again, this time close to his head. He turned quickly, and a small white object vanished behind the trunk of a tree.

"Sylvana!" he cried, and could not help laughing.

She appeared immediately, wearing a clean white chemise and a skirt of rough cloth. A large and strange flower was stuck into her hair and shone with a red glow.

"You like me now, then?" she smiled, rubbing up against him like a cat; the dog gave a low growl.

He ran his hand through her tumbled hair, not quite knowing how to answer this pertinacious child, who could rouse in him no feeling but one of amazement.

She took his hand, placed it on her breast and looked up at him with a roguish air. Once more he could not help laughing.

"Don't laugh!" she pouted. "I don't need to run after anyone. But you are so elegant and my skin is as white as yours. Look!" And without the slightest shame she drew the chemise from her shoulder with a quick movement. "If I like, I can make you feel quite silly!" she tittered, and bit

his hand with her sharp teeth so that a drop of blood started. Greedily she passed her red tongue over the slight wound.

Peter withdrew his hand; the dog growled angrily and showed his teeth.

"Look, he knows already that he belongs to you!" she laughed again, slapping her bosom. But suddenly, as if anxious or surprised, she opened her eyes wide. "I'll come to you sometime!" she whispered, looked sharply down the road, and in a trice had vanished amid the trees.

Peter looked after her, somewhat out of countenance. A slight noise made him turn. In the narrow cart-road a few steps in front of him stood the beautiful young lady whom he had seen with the smith Fentor in Innsbruck.

Involuntarily he raised his hat and moved out of her way, ashamed of his shirt-sleeves and uneasy at the thought that the lady might have seen him with the half-naked girl. His heart throbbed in his throat. It was she; she had really come to Sankt Marein. He was suddenly filled with a sweet sadness.

She cast upon him a single glance through half-closed lids, as if she felt inclined to laugh at the remarkable politeness of this man in shirt-sleeves. And then she had passed, with light and buoyant steps, noble in her every movement. The ribbons of her straw hat stirred in the breeze . . . She disappeared.

Again something cold and moist touched his hand. It was the dog, looking up at him with an inquiry in its intelligent eyes and licking the hand which held the string.

She was here, she had arrived! And Notburga bore his child under her heart . . .

The dog helped him over the embarrassment of seeing Notburga again. With her overflowing instinct of motherliness she immediately took possession of the poor animal, which may have belonged to some Bavarian officer. Peter named the dog "Butz," after the Fire-spirits of the mountains. The animal showed unfailing gratitude to its rescuer, but its love was given from the first to Notburga. It often climbed the staircase to Peter's rooms, out of politeness, or because he allowed it to sleep on his bed.

In general, however, the master of Zeitlanghof paid little attention to the new inmate. The pale, enchanting countenance of the mysterious young lady had taken absolute possession of his thoughts. In his dreams, on the night after his meeting with her, he saw with a new vividness her slight and supple form, her face pale as mother-of-pearl. On the next and every succeeding day he crept round the smith's house, where she lived. He was

not ashamed to question the barmaid of The Rose, and was stupefied when he learned that the fair stranger had arrived previously to the day on which, with Christian, he had watched the movements of the Fire-spirits. But she was no more to be seen now than at that time, and the white curtains of the little window in the upper room were always closely drawn. Would he ever be able to speak to her?

XXII

HE NOW SAT MORE FREQUENTLY in the tap-room, so as to have a pretext for his comings and goings. More than once the dusky face of Gervas Fentor emerged from the darkness of the forge, threatening and hostile, as though he kept guard over the fair creature who dwelt in his house. From the tap-room window, Peter was able to overlook part of the road in front of the forge, and this kept him constantly in the gloomy room, which reeked of drink and stale tobacco. Except for himself, there was usually no one there but a couple of ancient peasants, who sat by the hour with glasses in front of them, talking of the fight at Mount Isel. More recent intelligence arrived sometimes, announcements of new successes which sounded glorious enough. General Bisson had been captured at the head of his column in Innsbruck, after he had vainly treated with Teimer for an armistice, or at least for an honourable withdrawal. On April 13, thousands of his soldiers had been forced to surrender, the decorations had been torn from the General's breast by the enraged peasants and his white hair had been plucked shamelessly. Teimer himself had been seriously threatened and would certainly have been killed if a priest had not come to his help. And Andreas Hofer had to run about the streets, endeavouring to restrain wild men from robbery and rape.

The old men shook their heads gloomily, keeping their pipe-stems between their toothless gums.

Peter, who had been only half listening to their talk, suddenly sprang up and rushed out, the old men staring angrily after him. He had caught sight of Julia.

He noticed with much delight that the smith was equipped for the march. He stood beside the girl, with his knapsack and gun, talking to her with respectful intimacy. It seemed to Peter, who remained standing in the

shadow of the inn porch, that the two were conversing in a foreign tongue; then he thought he had been mistaken, for Fentor called out to a man who was coming down the village street, armed for the fight, to make haste, as it was a long way to Mittenwald, on the Bavarian side.

The two men at once trudged off down the road, a pair of giants. When they had disappeared round a turn of the road, Peter issued from the concealment of the inn doorway.

Julia vouchsafed him a side glance, and walked up the road leading to Zeitlanghof, Peter following in her wake, racking his brains to find some excuse for addressing her. She herself appeared to have something of the same wish, for in front of Josele's dwelling, where Peter had been present at the mysterious drink-offering of the old woman, she turned abruptly and looked at him. Displeasure and scorn were expressed on her face. For a moment he was intimidated and felt inclined to remain where he was, but as this was no longer practicable he advanced with a little hesitation and raised his hat.

She stood before him, drawing her shawl over her breast with her right hand, and gazed at him through dark eyelashes.

"Why have you lately been stealing around the house where I live? Is it the custom in Vienna to annoy ladies in this way?"

Her voice sounded deep and soft.

"In a solitude like this," he said, remembering a phrase of Federspiel's, "it is surely not altogether to be wondered at if one is impelled to act somewhat unusually by a desire for a little conversation with one's equals."

"Equals in rank?" she asked ironically.

"Mademoiselle!" he returned. "I am not ashamed of the family to which I belong. But if you think your own is better and more distinguished, I ask you to excuse my presumption, which I assure you is due entirely to an honest interest in you!"

She looked at his flushed and distressed face, and her expression became gay and almost roguish as she exclaimed:

"What a child you are, Herr Storck!"

The words were like a caress. He drank in eagerly the foreign intonation of her voice. Oh! she was beautiful, beautiful as a queen, and the joy of speaking to her, of being near her, was an intoxication.

"Pardon me really, mademoiselle, for my importunity in obeying a natural and intelligible longing to make your acquaintance. I live all alone

in that gloomy house up yonder, seeing no one but peasants, whose language I hardly understand—”

She answered with a charming movement of her hand: “Well, we know each other now, and there is nothing to hinder your chatting with me occasionally. Only I don’t like being spied upon, Herr Storck! If you attach any value to my modest conversational powers, then cease to be inquisitive about what I am doing or not doing. With this stipulation, I shall be glad myself of a talk with you sometimes. But you must excuse me just now!”

She nodded, and went into the old peasant woman’s house.

As he lingered, overwhelmed with surprise but on the whole happy, he heard steps behind him, and the clash of iron on stone. It was Federspiel.

“Ah, Herr Storck!” he said, glancing at the door through which the stranger had disappeared. “It’s a long while since we have seen each other.”

“Where have you been hiding?” Peter asked, hardly able to turn his eyes away from the old wooden door. “They have had a great success on Mount Isel and in the affair with the Bisson Corps—”

The hunter threw down a blackcock, with plumage of shimmering blue, and Peter noticed the minute drops of blood running from the small wound in the breast.

“Great success? It only means worse trouble. Napoleon is not going to have another Spain on his hands.” There was a vivid flush on Federspiel’s thin cheeks. “I have been up there in the solitude. I had a fight with myself; a grim fight, Herr Storck! Ten times I had made up my mind to run down after my own people and help them, but in the hut up there I took out the axe and said to myself: ‘My friend, if you are going to raise your hand against Germans, then better cut it off and let it fall to the ground like an accursed and useless thing!’ And as I came out of the hut in the grey light I heard that blackcock singing his bridal song. It had to die, to ease my mind a little!”

“All the same—they have had a success, and they will do better still, for all your croaking about more trouble,” said Peter hotly. “I don’t like fighting Bavarians; my father was half a Bavarian, and I have known many good fellows, Bavarian heart and soul, and it might happen by some devil’s chance that a bullet of theirs might hit me or a bullet of mine one of them. Nevertheless, I can’t shut my eyes to the way the Bavarians have been treating this unfortunate nation, and it would be good to teach them a

lesson, now that they are in league with Napoleon. But you—you always see the wrong side of everything—"

"No one likes to hear the truth, and I should not care to put it up for sale in the public market," answered the former student. "I too detest those who have trampled on my German countrymen. But that does not make me blind. The day of vengeance is not yet, and what is happening is happening too soon. The Tyrolese have to do with a man who has the powers of Hell behind him, a demon who will drown them in their own blood."

"Ah, well," returned Peter, angered by his obstinacy, "events will have to prove that! Is it not a joy to see the spirit and intrepidity of these mountain people? And as to what you say—well, the country meanwhile has got rid of its oppressors, and it's a question whether they will get it into their hands a second time so easily."

Federspiel struck at a stone with his stick and made no reply, but after an interval he said in a low sad voice: "I see clearly, Herr Storck, that you have inherited to the full the failing of our people: to judge according to the feelings of a lucky moment and to pay no attention to the judgment of cold and sober reason."

"Very well!" cried Peter, losing his self-restraint. "Assume that you are right, Herr Federspiel! In that case, sooner or later, in place of the slaughtered Bavarians, French troops will break into this gallant Tyrol. How will you feel then? Your declaration that you will not fight Germans will hardly then have much application!"

The hunter stood erect, cold anger flashing from his eyes.

"In that case, Herr Peter Storck," he said firmly and slowly, "I will be ready to give my poor life for the German cause, even though it should be useless. But that you should speak as if what is a very serious feeling with me were only an excuse for not fighting—that, Herr Storck, hurts me!"

He lifted the bird and tried to pass. Peter was instantly filled with repentance and stepped in front of the hunter. "Forgive me!" he said; "I don't know what made me say anything so hateful. Forget it! In the first place, what account can I give of myself?"

"It is already forgotten and done with," said the other, smiling sadly. "You are excited. You are full of vague joy and also full of painful uncertainty! A hunter sees clear and far, and I know who it is who has gone into the house before which we are standing! Well, no offence, and *Auf Wiedersehen!"*

Storck shook his head without speaking.

"They were up there again, some of them—" said Federspiel, pointing with his staff towards the Black Hen.

"Fire-spirits—?"

"Yes. Where I found the remains of torches. They have cleared them away. I will come to Zeitlanghof some evening soon, if it suits you. It's risky talking here!"

XXIII

DURING THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, Peter, in spite of his fervent longing, did not venture to go near the smith's house. Torrents of rain fell, and it was this, no doubt, which confined his fair acquaintance to the house, for he did not once meet her on the short road down into the village. He was not comfortable in his own house: the musty rooms seemed gloomier and less home-like than ever, and he found the long evenings, during which he sat listening to the logs crackling in the Dutch oven, very depressing. Federspiel, too, did not visit him: perhaps he was still a little resentful. Notburga went quietly about her work, and it often seemed to him that she had been weeping. A vague feeling that his own indifferent demeanour towards her might be the cause of her secret tears led him to question her, but she shrank from him and spoke of violent toothache, a natural symptom of her condition. Sometimes, however, she remained standing in his room as if she were expecting some sign of affection from him, then would sigh and leave the room. One evening, after a long and embarrassing silence, she came over to him and caressed him awkwardly, overwhelmed with shame. With the cruel thoughtlessness of youth, he pushed her gently from him and sent her on some errand. And in order to avoid being alone with her, but still more in order to have a view of the forge, he was now very often in The Rose, where every evening it was growing more lively and noisy.

Men under arms from all the neighbouring valleys repaired thither, ordering meals, drinking hard and indulging in rude jests with screaming women. More than once, when he went in search of the absent barmaid, he found her outside with men; and one day he came upon Christian's cousin, the young girl who had hitherto been so carefully looked after, in the embrace of a rough-looking fellow. On the same day a wild crowd had

invaded Sankt Marein, militiamen on their way back from the Bavarian frontier; they drove cattle in front of them, amongst which were two fine Dutch cows. They had nothing but abuse for Zangerl, who had tried to stop them from plundering Schweiganger, an estate of the Bavarian king; and above all for Andreas Hofer, who had forbidden all robbery under penalty of death, and to whom Hornauss had been obliged to give up the watch he had looted. They heaped curses on the foreigners of South Tyrol, who refused to join them and paid no attention to the Archduke Johann, now advancing with the Imperial troops.

The few weeks during which this vagabond life had lasted had turned honest peasant lads and smallholders into a mob of wild and disreputable mercenaries, and these men, following in the wake of the militia, which was kept in fair order by the leaders, engaged in marauding adventures, appearing in isolated places as unwelcome visitors. Some of these wild men visited Zeitlanghof, and seemed inclined to use force, demanding admittance to the "aristocrat's" rooms. Notburga's quiet demeanour, however, appeared to subdue them, and they contented themselves with a drink from the cellar before going on to the Scharnitz Pass.

On the evening of that day, a terrible storm raged over Sankt Marein, rattling among the shingles and bending the fir trees until they groaned. It whined in the stove, the windows shook, and the furniture about the study creaked.

Peter went out on the balcony, letting the wind blow in his hair, and gazed at the clouds flying across the last glimmer in the sky. He heard a shout over his head, "Yo-ho! ho!" black horses rushed past, whips were lashed, hounds bayed. The Wild Huntsmen were out, in pursuit of the phantom maidens, who crouched in the shelter of a tree on the trunk of which some pious woodman had carved three crosses.

In swept the clouds, the storm shouting behind them, and left the heavens bare to the night. The stars sparkled.

Filled with an eager longing, Peter stretched out his arms. His heart burned with love for Julia, who, lonely like himself, must be sitting in her little room in the smith's house. Courage! courage! Enough courage to go down through the night and knock softly at her window, as peasant lads would do! He thought of letting himself down by one of the wooden pillars supporting the balcony and so leaving the house, unnoticed by Notburga. But he remembered in time that the hazard was too great. A thoughtless

action might bring to nought all his hopes for ever. No, Julia was not one at whose chamber window one might knock in the night!

He closed the door and lit the lamp. A warm smell of oil diffused itself. Once more he caught up the mysterious book with the red markings, and the leaf on which stories of possessed persons were written in laded ink. Butz, who was reposing on the threadbare carpet, growled suddenly and barked towards the door. Federspiel entered.

"It's you?" exclaimed Peter in delight, and replaced the book in the drawer. "You have come at last! Here's a glass for you, and you'll find some good Terlaner in that jug; and there's tobacco in the porcelain jar which I had from Voglsanger."

The hunter took a chair and filled his pipe. His face was serious.

"Well," said Peter moodily. "I notice that you have something on your mind, my friend. Well, out with your prophecies of evil!"

"I am no prophet!" returned Federspiel; "but bad news has come in. The Bavarians have seized the Strub Pass, and Ueroy is hanging the peasants on the trees along the road at Kufstein. And that ass Chasteler is going to attack him."

"Why, good heavens!" exclaimed Peter, vexed in spite of himself, "is he to do nothing? Can you say in advance that he is going to fail? At all events, he has the heroes of Mount Isel with him . . ."

"Let us not quarrel, Herr Storck," Federspiel answered gently. "I only answered your question. Who can tell what the result will be? We are out of the way here, in a corner of the world, and only hear something occasionally, so we may easily be deceived. I wanted to talk to you about another matter: something which relates to the Fire-spirits."

"Anything new?" Peter gazed at him in suspense.

"Something worth making a note of, anyway. Well, listen. Since Anderl's father went off to join Hofer the boy has been following me about. A good lad, except that he's too pious for my taste, but I'll make a hunter of him. Well, a few days ago, before the stormy weather began, I took him with me up the Schellbock. You know the road. We looked down into the Chamois' Garden when we reached the top, just as you and I did that morning. And as we were peering down, the lad said all at once, hoarse with excitement: 'Serafin, there's somebody down there!' And upon my soul, there down in the Chamois' Garden was a man, walking right through the herd, and the chamois were feeding quietly just as if they were tame!"

He puffed at his pipe and nodded, smiling at Peter's amazement.

"No, no, we weren't mistaken! It was a living man, walking quite at his ease through the herd, and he disappeared into the cavern behind the waterfall."

"And who—who was it?"

"That's the question. The boy said it was the Rover, and I think it was. Of course, I may have been deceived by the distance. I have never seen the old man close!"

Confused impressions crowded on Peter, feelings of fascination and aversion, when he heard the name and remembered the old man whose strange appearance had left with him one of his most vivid recollections of the day of his arrival in Sankt Marein. He had the feeling that this mysterious stranger was connected in some unaccountable way with the disappearance of his uncle, and that it was from him that he must obtain the answer to the riddle for which he had travelled into this remote region. Yet how could the old man have been able to reach the Chamois' Garden?

"How he got there I can't say!" said Federspiel, as if divining Peter's thought. "But there is certainly a way there and I am going to find it!" he added.

"Who can this Rover be?" Peter asked. "I saw him once—it was the day I arrived here."

"No one knows him and he goes near no one," the hunter answered, "People suppose him to be a pitch-gatherer from some other place, because he goes to Blasi's hut. Strange fowl like him come to the mountains every year in search of ore or herbs and so forth, and then disappear. He must be someone of that sort. He turns up everywhere. It is for that reason they have given him his name. He must certainly be a good climber in spite of his age, when he is not deterred by the walls of the Schellbock. However, I will find out how he does it. If I could only once look into that old man's eyes!"

"He looked me in the face on that first day. But what has all this to do with the Fire-spirits?" Peter asked.

The other appeared somewhat disconcerted.

"Yes, you see—I can't say. It's only a feeling of my own." He emptied his glass as if he wished to conceal a slight confusion. "It's an idea that occurs to me. I know nothing more myself."

He rose and held out his hand.

"Say nothing about this to anyone, Herr Storck. Absolutely no one!"

When Peter was going to bed and was on the landing, he heard a low voice singing: it was a sad folk-melody. The singing came from Notburga's room and rose up through the house in the quiet of the night. He was touched as he listened, and could make out the words:

"The hills and valleys mourn,
Where often, night and morn,
I roamed apart;
Thy face hath made me sad,
That made me love thee, lad,
And broke my heart!"

"Julia! Lovely Julia!" he murmured. The girl singing down there seemed strange and remote to him.

XXIV

NEXT MORNING THE SKIES were blue, suffused with golden sunlight, and the birds sang madly. He called to Notburga, with forced cheerfulness, and took the road up to the Schellbock with the intention of finding the place where Federspiel had found the remains of torches. Presently, however, he was caught by the delight of wandering under the ancient trees. Dew-drops hung on the ferns and grasses, and the sunbeams, striking through the green twilight, broke into rainbow colours. On the lowest branch of a larch tree, coated with grey lichen, sat a ball of feathers. It was an owl, which at the approach of a human being withdrew the film from its large amber-coloured eyes and gazed with thoughtful gravity at Peter. He clapped his hands, happy as a child in the beautiful morning, and the light-shunning creature made a clicking sound with his curved beak and flew off noiselessly. Peter ran after it, saw it perch again, and approached cautiously; but the night-bird had observed him and at once flew further on. The entertainment continued, until suddenly a clear soaring note caused Peter to pause in this playful hunt.

He stood still and listened.

A melody, such as he had never heard, sweet yet melancholy, rose up out of the deep wood; some strange instrument like a flute was playing unearthly music, luring him towards it. Listening intently, the young man

advanced in the direction of the singing, and was almost startled when at length he beheld white forms moving.

He stole on from tree to tree, lost in amazement. Were nymphs and dryads dancing in this forgotten place? He stood still again, peered forward, crept to the nearest of the century-old tree trunks, and saw—

In the midst of a small clearing, a stream gushed out of the green moss and formed a crystal basin. And out of the ice-cold water, completely nude, scattering a shower of drops which sparkled in the sun like diamonds, rose Julia.

Peter put his hand to his lips, fearful lest a cry might betray his transport. The perfect and chaste beauty of the virgin form, the stainless ivory of the white skin. The more than mortal symmetry of the shapely limbs, made him tremble. The vision reminded him so vividly of the sublime forms of Greek art that it seemed hardly real.

As he stood lost in blissful contemplation, which was remote from all base sensuality, he became aware that she was not alone. Near her, in the soft moss, the little Sylvana lay naked, laughing at a chafer which had lit on her bosom and was feeling about with its long tentacles. And on a block of dark stone sat her brother, the upper part of his body gleaming naked, his legs tucked under him, in hairy breeches of reddish-brown goat-skin, and he held to his pouting lips a shepherd's pipe formed of reeds fastened together and cut obliquely.

Julia stood erect, her pure countenance raised towards the sun, twining the dark hair which fell in a heavy silken mass to her slender loins. She said something to the little girl, who leapt up from her sport and turned to her with submissive attention. The boy also raised his eyes questioningly to the white maiden and ceased playing, then, moistening his lips, began another and more solemn air, which rang forth tremulously.

The child raised both her hands with a graceful gesture above her head, and began to move her feet slowly in short, deliberate steps. The sobbing of the pipe almost caused Peter to burst into tears, so strongly was he moved by the lovely attitudes of the dancing child. A mighty longing as if for some lost Paradise, a yearning for the shattered innocence of his childish years, overcame his spirit. He saw no longer the severe beauty of his beloved. Enthralled, his eye followed the heavenly movements of the young girl as she danced to the music of the pipe. Sylvana was forgotten, lost in feelings he had never yet experienced. She threw back her hair and, with lips half-

parted, raised her childish face to the blazing sovereign of the blue sky, stretching out her round arms in prayer, the palms of her hands spread upwards. The priest-like movements of her supple body expressed such fervent and boundless adoration that Peter folded his hands, forgetting himself wholly. It was as though he had been changed into a motionless tree whose roots were deep in mother earth and which, in the lustre of the noontide, was dreaming itself back through the centuries and witnessing things invisible now to any mortal eye. He stood rigid, until suddenly a loud flourish from the pipe roused him; Sylvana laughed and spun round in a mad whirl, and Julia sprang towards her trying in vain to catch her. The game brought him into danger, for once the little girl came quite close to him. He stole away slowly, keeping himself hidden behind the trunks, out of sight of the merry sport, until the ringing voices were drowned in the twittering of the birds and the silent and lofty trees spread over him their twilight.

It was long before he recovered calmness, so moving had been the experience; nor was he able to fathom its meaning. For a long time he wandered about, and when at last he came on the road he found that he was close to the charcoal kilns. He must have been roaming in a dream for many hours, and he noticed now for the first time that he was fatigued.

The charcoal-burner was away, and his sturdy mate sat alone in front of the hut, feeding the child as on the former occasion. When she saw the stranger, a broad grin spread over her face, and in a dialect which he could hardly understand she asked him what he wanted.

To give some reason for his being there, Peter inquired whether he could obtain charcoal for Zeitlanghof. But the woman shook her head, pushing the child away, and pointed to the black, burnt-out kilns.

A sharp pinch on his arm made him turn round, it was Sylvana, who had stolen up behind him. He now understood why the woman had received him with a grin. She supposed, no doubt, that Sylvana, whose stealthy approach she was watching, was better known to Peter than he would acknowledge. Irritated, he rubbed the painful spot, and rebuked the girl sharply. The charming scene of the dancing was quite forgotten, and he saw only a pert little wench in front of him.

However, she clung to him coaxingly, and looked at him with begging eyes.

“Give me something, handsome gentleman!” she whispered.

“I have nothing,” he answered, still vexed.

“Oh, yes!” she smiled, and her white teeth shone. “You have a green box with pills in it on your table—give it to me!”

He remembered. On his table in Zeitlanghof there was actually a green box containing laudanum pills. How did she know that?

“Who told you so?” he asked her, looking into her eyes.

She was confused. “I know you have. Give it to me!”

“The pills are poison, remember that! You may have the box, so far as I am concerned, if you will tell me how you come to know about it.”

She hung her head sullenly. “Someone told me—”

“Who? Notburga?” he asked.

“She! She wouldn’t speak to me. You will give it?”

“No!” he said. “It’s not a toy to play with.” She shrugged her shoulders and turned away with a grimace.

A man was crossing the clearing and stood in amazement, watching the group. Peter at once recognized old Hans, one of the old peasants who had stayed at home, who was carrying over his shoulder a sharp axe. The old man took his pipe out of his wrinkled mouth.

“You up here?” He stared open-mouthed at Peter.

“Ordering coal,” explained the latter, annoyed at being found in this place. The charcoal kilns had a bad name in Sankt Marein.

“Oh, well!” wheezed the old man, and walked along with Peter, who inwardly cursed the unwelcome encounter, for he had been supporting himself with the hope of somehow or other finding an opportunity through Sylvana of meeting Julia, and perhaps of learning something which might throw light on the mysterious gathering by the spring in the wood. Now, however, there was nothing for it but to accompany the peevish old man to the village.

When they were in the wood he asked casually what sort of people they were at the charcoal kilns.

“People?” croaked the peasant. “They aren’t people, they’re heathens. Not a one of them has been baptised or goes to the Sacrament or keeps holy days. The old one and the young one too are no better than bitches. Burnt out the whole nest of them ought to be, before the Lord punishes us all together for leaving them to live in sin.”

Peter made no answer, a host of thoughts crowding in his mind. Riddles were accumulating. The old dumb Rover in the inaccessible Chamois’

Garden, the strange rite at the spring, the girl's request for the laudanum pills.

"Is there a spring in the woods hereabouts?" He had to repeat the question till the old man heard it rightly.

"Ay, there is, sure enough!" he answered, looking round apprehensively. "There's one just under the Schellbock, left of the Klamm. But I wouldn't advise any Christian man to go there. The spring is poisonous, and there are more like it in the mountains. My own father's father saw four or five devils there once in the shape of women dancing stark-naked in broad daylight."

The spot, then, had always been the scene of secret dance festivals? Perhaps it was a coincidence: the peasant's forefather might have surprised a few women disporting themselves in secret, and might have thought it the work of the Devil. No doubt, in this remote region it was deemed a sin to bathe naked in the open. The story, nevertheless, was a strange one, and he felt still more depressed.

His spirits were not improved when the old man, just as their paths separated, took his pipe from his mouth and suddenly remarked: "You are young and strong. Aren't you going to help to hunt the Bavarians out?"

XXV

THAT EVENING the village was the scene of wild excitement.

From Josele's grass-plot, at one side of Zeitlanghof and overlooking the village, part of the Inn Valley could be seen. Here, as Peter came out of his front door, all the people left in the place were assembled, listening in dismay to the pealing of the bells in the Valley. Notburga had burst into his room, speechless with fright. Some great misfortune must have happened, she stammered, for the sky at sunrise had been red as blood.

Peter came upon weeping women and old men wringing their hands in the torture of their own helplessness. The clamorous appeal of the bells rose distinctly on the wind, which was blowing up from the Valley: they sounded like a call of rage and fear. And in the extreme distance, beyond doubt over Innsbruck, the sky was lit up with the glare of a conflagration. A messenger who had been sent down to the Valley and returned panting from his haste, reported that nothing certain was known, but that distant guns and bells had been heard, and that the alarm had been taken up by the bells in the Valley,

when the blood-red appearance of the sky was observed. Some believed that the town of Hall was in flames, others that Innsbruck was threatened with fire: all surmised that a serious battle was in progress and that horrors were happening. Reluctantly and with a heavy heart Peter at last went to rest; but first he tried in vain to console the weeping Notburga, who was in mortal anxiety for her brother, and, pale as death, kept running through her fingers the beads of her rosary.

Next morning news arrived which dismayed everyone, and Peter remembered with shame the rebuke he had administered to Federspiel. How well-founded had been the hunter's fears! General Chasteler, imprudent and precipitate as usual, had engaged the enemy in the open valley at Wörgl. The Tyrolese marksmen, taken by surprise and quite unaccustomed to fighting without cover, had been cut down in whole companies by the Bavarian dragoons. Chasteler himself had much trouble in getting away. A desperate resistance had been offered to General Wrede in the Zillertal by Speckbacher, but in vain. The peasants taken prisoners were promptly hanged, and their dead bodies swung hideously in the wind. Churches were completely wrecked, vestments trodden underfoot, and the sacred chalices were used by the soldiers for brandy. Irresistibly the Bavarians pushed on to Schwaz, whose defenders, thrown into confusion and without leaders, withdrew from the town. The soldiery, furious and half-mad, poured into the streets, which for centuries had maintained an aspect of quiet prosperity. A frightful massacre began, scenes of butchery, burning and violation. The wretches defended themselves and sold their lives dear. Boiling water scalded the plunderers, heavy stones crashed on their helmets from the roofs. The doors of beautiful houses, in flames and filled with looters, were nailed up, and shrieks were heard as men were suffocated. A frenzied rush was made on the soldiers, but the Bavarian bayonets were more than the townsmen could withstand. Many were tossed up writhing, but not unavenged. Manure forks were thrust into drunken faces, and prongs came out clean through the back of blue uniforms. Stout farm-lads, knife in hand, ripped open the bellies of horses, who trampled in their own entrails. But all was of no avail. Time was against the ruined town. The minutes ran, the flames devoured, the shouts became fainter, and the fury was extinguished in exhaustion and horror.

"Schwaz is burned to ashes," Anderl reported in a hoarse voice; he had been dispatched for news by Federspiel. "And our men ran away!"

“So it says in the prophecy!” the old quavering voice of Josele’s wife was heard. “The first part has come true:

“Schwaz burnt down,
Innsbruck overthrown,
Hall no longer known.”

With a titter—or was it a sob?—she hobbled off into her house.

“They say there’s nothing left, man or beast,” continued the lad. “Father Archangelus says it’s a punishment for sin. The men say there’s only one thing to do now: march to Innsbruck and kill the gentry; it’s from them all the trouble comes. Zangerl tried to stop their talk and shouted to them that they were snivelling peasant swine, but Falschlunger of Pfunds held a loaded musket to his head and told him to hold his mouth or it would be all over with him too, and that it was better that they should have the money than that the Bavarians should pocket it. It was when they heard there’s no hope for us in South Tyrol, and that Teimer was begging for an armistice, that they got wild.”

Sankt Marein had never yet heard such sounds of lamentation as on this morning. Peter was glad when the evil day drew towards an end. Butz tried to comfort him, fawning, but he drove the poor brute away. His heart was sore for this brave, unhappy people, who now, as a result of defeat and disaster, seemed likely to be distracted by internal strife. He sent the lad to Serafin Federspiel, who had disappeared on hearing the bad news; but the hunter sent back a message that on this day he could not talk to anyone, and besides was ill. So Peter remained in his study, alone with the dancing shadows and the creaking walls.

XXVI

THE NIGHT WAS CLEAR. The complaining cry of some bird came up to him, then was silent, sounded again at a distance, and died away. The moaning of the wind and the dull roar of the stream blended in a deep organ note: a requiem for the dead, who had suffered so cruel an end! Unalterable and eternal, the rugged mountains rose under the sparkling heavens.

In this solitude his thoughts became tumultuous as he passed in review all his experiences since he had come to live in this place. The scene which

he had witnessed at the forest-spring was a delicious trouble to him; but there was also a gloomy fear within him. What was it that seemed to envelop him here? Amid what kind of beings was he living? What was the secret that this remote region sought to hide from him? What spirits haunted the slopes of these wild and unknown mountain heights? What passed in the souls of the silent folk who lived here, year in year out, in poverty and hardship, and who now were filled with the frenzy of war? He thought again of the old woman with her strange saying about the three Tyrolese towns, and saw her once more offering her sacrifice to Freya. Could he have looked nearer, would he not have seen little curling horns in the hair of the boy with the Pan's pipe, and goat's hoofs? From what forgotten and unspeakably fair childhood of mankind had come that melody which the boy breathed on his pipe? Riddles were rife in this place, supernatural beings dwelt in these woods, manifesting hostility toward anyone who plucked at the veil which hid them. His uncle surely had come to grief in his search for knowledge and disappeared in his struggle with the dark powers who had here unlimited dominion and could endure no intruder. A face, with an expression half playful and half threatening, seemed to shape itself out of all that he had experienced, and a restless impulse urged him to solve, by every means in his power, the riddles which lay on his path like glittering snakes.

Steps sounded on the road below and heavy, dragging feet approached the house, came to a stand, and scraped irresolutely in the gravel. He went out through the open balcony window and saw a dark figure leaning against the garden fence.

"Who is that?" he called down.

"Christian Lergetpohrer," a dull voice answered from the garden. "I saw the light in your room."

"So you have returned?" cried Peter. "Come up and have a glass of wine with me!"

"I can't, sir," the innkeeper groaned, and sank to the ground. "Come down, if it's all the same to you. The moon's coming up and the night is clear. In your room up there, among the books, I can't breathe."

"Notburga will be glad—"

"Say nothing to her! It's only yourself I want to talk to."

Hurriedly, disturbed by the man's strange tone, Peter went downstairs. The door-window to the balcony might remain open all night to freshen the

room. As he came into the garden, the moon was rising pale and clear over the Haberer, shedding a milky gleam along the valley. A silvery light stirred in the trees and brightened the tops of the neglected hedge.

"Christian!" Peter said gently, "is anything the matter with you?"

He looked at the large, strong man, sitting on a stone by the garden gate. His musket lay beside him on the grass, and the barrel gleamed in the dim light. "You haven't been home yet? Have you only just arrived from the Valley?" he asked anxiously, as he received no answer.

The innkeeper raised himself and looked round bewildered.

"Ah, yes, it's you, Herr Storck? Yes, yes, I've been at the house. I looked in at the window, and the little one was sitting on a fellow's knee; he was playing cards with the others. Now I know how they have been carrying on in my house. The wench looked as if she was all bruised, and the little one was sitting on the fellow's knee. I know everything! This is what happens when the peasants have to run about with pikes and muskets pretending to be soldiers. Everything has to go, everything!"

Peter sat down beside him.

"About Schwaz, Christian—is it really true?"

The innkeeper nodded. "I wasn't there myself—we had to retire. But I saw enough. Innsbruck is in the enemy's hands, the blue and white flags are floating from the windows, and the trees are bowed down with peasants; *they* are blue too—in the face, and put out black tongues—"

"All is lost, then, Christian?" Peter grasped the man's hand, deeply moved.

"Lost? I don't think that," said Lergetpohrer, passing his hand over his forehead. "There's a report that Andreas Hofer is bringing up some stout, hardy fellows from Passeir and Sarntal and Meran. Down where we are posted, Teimer is shouting the soul out of his body for the Oberland men to march again on Innsbruck, and I think he'll soon be up here calling everyone to the Helmoos with drums and fifes! When the pipes call, the sound gets into the shins even of the old folks, so long as they can pull a trigger or lift the butt of a gun. So there may be a turn of luck yet, Wrede and Deroy needn't be too cocksure." He uttered a deep groan. "But it isn't that, it isn't that! It's not for that I'm here, no, my God!"

"What's the matter then, Christian?" Peter asked sympathetically.

The innkeeper looked anxiously round, as though there were somebody behind him, then collapsed, and whispered close in Peter's ear: "It's the

little chap I shot . . .”

“What little chap?”

“The drummer, the Bavarian drummer-boy, at Mount Isel.”

“Are you so tormented by that?” said Peter, moved by compassion. “But, my friend, this happened in battle for your country, no blood-guilt rests on you for that!”

“In battle?” A hoarse sound came from Christian’s throat. “How in battle? They had set fire to Husselhof and the drummer-boy was standing there making his drum-sticks hop. I thought to myself, ‘You little dirty sniveller, my musket will reach as far as you!’ Then I whistled the Spingeser song—as you know, it’s about another little drummer-boy; and so, whistling all the time, I took an easy aim at the helmet on his little head, and crack! I got him! He cried out like a young animal and his feet kept twitching. They had put such big army boots on the little beggar that one of them flew off. Jesus and Mary!—Still, Herr Storck, it was in battle! say again it was in battle—!”

Peter freed his hand from the man’s painful grip and said: “Of course, Christian, in battle!”

“Wasn’t it? Father Flavian said the same, and he gave me absolution and a scapular. Nothing can happen to me now before God’s judgment-seat. Except for this my sins haven’t been great—all my life—not many—”

He was seized by a spasm and uttered a low cry. “But why, then, doesn’t he leave me in peace? What is it makes him stand beside my bed at night with his drum, and whirl round laughing? What am I to do for him? I vowed myself to the Black Virgin at Absams, but he won’t leave me. How can he have all that power, a little scrub of a chap with rosy cheeks and curly yellow hair?”

A violent fit of sobbing interrupted him. Peter tried to soothe him, but the innkeeper started up suddenly and tottered off down the road.

“Christian!” Peter called after him, but there was no answer.

XXVII

HE TURNED BACK TO THE HOUSE in deep despondency. He waited for a moment outside Notburga’s door to listen. Thank God! she was sound

asleep, and he heard her quiet breathing. He went slowly upstairs, extinguished the lamp and, tired to death, lay down half-dressed on the bed.

In the middle of the night he awoke.

Somebody had touched him. There was a tickling sensation on his cheek. He lay quite still, listening. Warm breath was on his face, someone bent over him, and two soft lips gently touched his mouth.

He put out his hands and felt a woman's body, her bosom, dress, and hands that trembled as they struggled with him. "You, Sylvana!" he cried.

Whoever it was freed herself and glided over the creaking floor and through the door into the study. Then all was quiet.

He sprang hurriedly out of bed, following the shadow. A slim form appeared, framed in the door-window, then rose over the railings of the balcony. The ivy mantling the wooden supports rustled. Quick steps sounded underneath. What could it mean?

"Sylvana!" he called out into the night.

A low laugh answered. Then again all was silent.

He went to the writing table and lit the lamp. "Little witch!" he muttered as he looked about. "Wood-sprite!"

He then discovered the meaning of the nocturnal visit. The green box containing his uncle's laudanum pills was gone; stolen. And he himself had left the balcony door open. The child had thus climbed in by the wooden pillars and by the same way had left the house.

There was not much really in the incident, and at another time he would have laughed at it. But his talk with the innkeeper had unnerved him. Clearly this man would never get away from what he had done.

It was only when he lay down again that the horrible possibility occurred to him that the childish creature might taste the poison. However, he had told her that there was poison in the box, so she had been warned.

XXVIII

AFTER A NIGHT OF DISTURBED DREAMS he walked down to the inn.

As he stepped on to the tiled floor the barmaid met him, her eyes swollen with weeping and her left cheek inflamed and red. Christian was alone in

the taproom; he was puffing at his pipe, staring fixedly, a glass half empty in front of him.

"We're getting into order again here," he said, as Peter greeted him. "I threw those blackguards out, and the wenches must be sore still from the weight of my fist. A box on the ears is a good thing for driving out the devil of lewdness, don't you think? Sit ye down and have a glass!"

He laughed harshly, and with a sweep of his arm inadvertently knocked from the table the fine polished glass, which broke in fragments, the wine running in a red stream over the floor.

"All over with you too?" he laughed, addressing the fragments as he picked them up. "My father is gone too, and his father before him, who drank out of you! Wait, Herr Storck, you mustn't go thirsty on account of this." He staggered as he lifted himself up, and a smell of drink reached Peter.

After a word or two further, Peter went off, with an unpleasant feeling on his mind. He could not talk with Christian, who seemed for the time to have found consolation in excessive drinking.

"Stay!" the innkeeper called after him.

Outside, Hornauss ran up against him, and before Peter had time to question him, exclaimed with an oath that he had had enough of this vagabond life, he had lost his beasts, and everything in his house was in pieces. A peasant was no soldier. Once was enough for him at any rate, and Teimer might talk himself hoarse for all he cared; he would not go out again. That cursed tobacco-dealer would be up here again to-morrow, he could never get enough out of them. And the Sand innkeeper was no better, keeping honest men from sharing in the loot they had won by hard fighting!

Peter escaped from the angry man, and looked into Fentor's deserted forge, where the fire had long been extinguished and the anvil was turning rusty.

But as he reached the last house in the village his heart stopped beating. Julia was coming towards him, smiling at him. Beside her, bent and servile, was the old resin-gatherer Blasi, his black-crusted coat gleaming.

"You are late in making your appearance out of doors?" she said pleasantly, her beautiful voice sounding like a violin. "We have been in the wood already, old Blasi and I."

The pitch-gatherer grinned. "We got a tub of pine-sweat," he bleated.

“Pity you weren’t with us. It was so beautiful up there! But I suppose you are not an early riser?” The girl smiled again at Peter.

He was beside himself with delight at her friendly manner. Yet he did not dare to let his eyes rest on her long, lest the memory of her body, which he had beheld without a veil, should rob him of self-control. He only managed to say that if at any time his company would be agreeable to her, he hoped she would let him know beforehand. He wished devoutly that the old man would take himself off, with the pungent odour from his coat and its clashing scales of pine-pitch.

But to his annoyance it was the contrary that happened. As he looked at her shyly, Julia suddenly coloured, bowed and left him standing there, resuming her whispered conversation with Blasi. He was a good deal disconcerted, and there was nothing for it but to continue his aimless walk in the opposite direction.

It was clear to him now that he was deeply and beyond redemption in love. Had not everything else become indifferent to him? Scarcely once had he bought of Federspiel’s strange discovery of the Rover, walking among the chamois in that inaccessible hollow filled even in the winter with green branches. Even the innkeeper’s misfortune, which had moved him so deeply the day before, seemed now of less importance, and the tragedy of a people battling heroically though doomed certainly to failure, awakened in him now no special emotion. Vienna itself, for whose gay brilliance and cheerful society he had so often yearned, had faded to a dim memory. And he had forgotten his dead uncle, whose mysterious fate called to him for expiation.

But she had blushed under his look! What blissful hopes that kindled! She no longer regarded him with indifference, and now perhaps was only struggling with her pride. Why should anything else trouble him? His place was where her little feet touched the earth, where the breath from her red lips mingled with the air. Federspiel might send down message after message to him by Anderl, telling him that there was good sport on the mountains. And the poor peasant girl who had hung on his neck . . .

He walked on, lost in happy thoughts. Thin wisps of grey cloud, foreboding rain, were closing in over the sky which had been so clear on the previous day. A gloomy and threatening mist hung round the Hockauf.

His eye caught a brilliant patch of red on the path in front of him. He stooped and picked up some blossoms, in shape like very large Alpine roses, resplendent purple blooms such as he had never seen. The brightness

of their colour contrasted with the long dark green leaves. How had this newly broken branch been brought to this poor and stony soil, which allowed only a meagre growth to the most humble and hardy plants? It seemed as if it had come from some conservatory of rare exotics.

He turned back towards the village, gazing at the magnificent flowers with delight. On the thin dark leaves there were sticky exudations: he tasted the sap, which was sweet like honey.

Looking up, he noticed the pitch-gatherer once more ascending the path along which he had come with Julia, often stooping as if searching for something and even feeling in the grass that skirted the road. With a sudden impulse, Peter quickly concealed his find in his pocket.

"What are you looking for, Blasi?" he cried. The old face immediately folded itself into a thousand wrinkles.

"I lost a rare herb hereabouts." His eye fixed itself inquisitively on Peter's bulging pocket.

"Ah!" Peter answered coolly. "Perhaps it's farther up."

Blasi darted a look of malice at him and was seized with an attack of coughing, which set the incrustation of resin on his coat crackling. He nodded in the direction of Peter's pocket, saying: "No good in my looking now!"

He went on, however, peering right and left. It seemed strange how anxious the old man was to recover the flower.

"I hope you'll find what you've lost!" Peter called after him with a little mockery in his voice. But the old hunchback, tottering along, only threw up his hands angrily and made no answer.

Peter went straight to Federspiel.

XXIX

THE HUNTER WAS LYING on his bed smoking, in spite of the frequent spasms of coughing which rent his sunken breast. The little room was adorned with sundry horns and antlers, and a great bear-skin was stretched on the floor, with the paws and wedge-shaped head.

As his visitor entered, Serafin sprang suddenly from the couch, and stared in amazement at the strange flower in Peter's hand.

"Do you know it?" asked the latter.

The hunter took the beautiful blossom carefully in his fingers, smelt it, bit a piece of the leaf and shook his head. “I never saw such a splendid flower in my life,” he said. “Where does it come from?”

“It must be from some place here,” said Peter. “It was lying on the road to the Hockauf, not far out of the village.”

Federspiel examined the plant attentively, and reflected.

“It can’t have grown here,” he said decisively. “I know every flowering plant over a large part of the district, and I should certainly not have missed it. In fact, no one would pass it.”

Peter struck his forehead: “Sylvana! I once saw Sylvana with a flower like that in her hair—”

Federspiel shook his head doubtfully, looked at the flower from every side and then laid it on the table.

“You must be mistaken. This flower certainly comes from the south. Perhaps whoever lost it had it from someone from Bozen or Meran.”

Something kept Peter from mentioning Julia, although he was now more and more convinced that it was she who had lost the spray of blossoms and had sent back the old man to look for it. Perhaps there was some place hidden away in the woods, like the spring, and known to Jidia and Sylvana, where the beautiful flower grew. The more he thought of it the clearer it became to him that he was not deceived, and that the flower was of the same kind as that which he had seen in Sylvana’s hair.

The hunter snapped his fingers. “I know how we can find out exactly what it is,” he cried. “Teimer is to be up here to-morrow, and he is constantly sending messengers into South Tyrol. Write to Herr Josef von Giovanelli in Bozen: he knows every plant that grows here or beyond the seas. Send him a specimen and he’ll tell you what it is. A little damp moss will keep it nearly fresh.”

Peter sat down at once and wrote a polite letter to the botanist.

When he had done so, it seemed to him all at once that he had acted like a fool. Was he not now provided with an excellent excuse for calling on Julia? What mattered it to him whether the plant had some learned name? The proper thing to do now was to visit the young lady and to restore to her, with a polite speech, her missing flowers. He remembered how his brother-Franconian Stepf, in Würzburg, had presented a lady staying at the inn with a handkerchief, craftily purchased by himself, which he pretended she had lost, and by this ruse had succeeded in being invited to sit down and talk to

her. The adventure might have been carried further, but that the postillion of the mail coach by which she was about to travel suddenly sounded his horn underneath her window, and put an end to his hopes.

"I will keep the smaller branch myself," he said, and quickly unwrapped it from the wet cloth which the hunter had provided.

As he took the road to the forge his heart beat violently. What was the Franconian motto? "Fortuna virtutis comes."

But his courage nearly failed him as he came in front of the forbidding house. He was risking a good deal, and it was very doubtful how he would be received. A young man visiting a girl in her own room—it was almost a sacrilege! Yet in this place they were both, as if were, alone among people whose judgment in matters of etiquette need not be considered. No, he must go forward now! Never again might his luck so favour him.

But as he set foot in the empty ground floor, and looked carefully about him, he found himself trembling. The recollection of the scene beside the spring in the wood worked like a poison in his blood, and lost suddenly all its chaste fragrance. What if his boldness should bring him further than he had dreamed? After all, she was a woman, and her white skin had reddened under his gaze. Must there not sleep too in her, unacknowledged perhaps, yet capable of being roused, wishes like his own? His eyes grew dim. But no hesitation now! The moment had come!

No one seemed to be in the house. A steep and narrow wooden staircase with worn steps, lighted dimly by a tiny window obscured by spiders' webs, led to the upper part of the house. The stairs creaked as he slowly mounted them

Now he stood on the landing. There were two doors; one stood half-open, and he could see a ladder leading to aloft. The other . . . He breathed heavily, and felt a tingling at the roots of his hair.

He knocked. There was no answer. Slowly he pressed the latch, and the door opened with a creak.

The room was empty.

He looked round him, disillusioned. On the table, in a blue earthenware jug, stood a whole bush of those strange splendid blossoms, shining like purple flames. A curiously-shaped golden fillet lay beside it, and over a chair hung a soft white garment. A narrow bed stood in an arched recess. The room was completely destitute of ornament, and its bareness and poverty were depressing.

He started violently, and the flower which he had brought with him slipped from his hand. There was a threatening noise on the stairs, heavy panting like that of an angry bull. Huge and black, Gervas Fentor confronted Peter, his hairy hand closed on a thick iron rod. He had, in fact, returned on the previous day, and from the window of the inn had seen the hated stranger entering his house.

"Dog!" he gasped. "I've got you now!" The terrible iron rod was raised to strike. Peter saw murder in the blood-shot eyes, and with his right hand he caught the uplifted arm of his furious assailant, inhaling as he did so a reek of food and tobacco. "This is a light for life!" he said to himself.

Next moment he swerved quickly, avoiding the blow. The plaster showered from the wall, which cracked under the parried stroke.

A voice was heard, Julia's voice, some word in a foreign language. The smith stood open-mouthed, something like consternation appearing in his face, and the thick weapon sank in his hand.

The lovely girl stood pale and erect before the two men. Peter looked at her and his lips moved: he wished to explain, but could not get out a word. In her eyes were fear and love, and also a gleam of anger. She pointed silently to the flower, crushed underneath the smith's nailed boot.

"Go—go this instant!" she cried, tears coming into her eyes, and she pointed to the staircase.

With sunken head he took a few steps towards it.

"I only wished to bring you the flower which you dropped on the road!" he said.

A low muttering reminded him that the danger was not yet past. Defiance woke in him. Was he to show his back to the smith? Run away while his beloved looked on?

She raised her hands in entreaty. "Go—do go!" she almost sobbed.

He turned and went down the stairs. He felt that he could never get rid of the shame he experienced.

Yet she had shown anxiety for him—!

In his house, and alone in his room, he wept like a child. Never would she be his. Dark and sinister powers watched over her, determined her actions, threatened all who would approach her. Yet who could they be? And what was she?

XXX

NEXT DAY THE WEATHER was again cold and cheerless. Teimer had arrived, as Christian and Federspiel had said he would, but he was not alone. Father Archangelus had come up with him, and Voglsanger, staff in hand, went from house to house inviting the men to the Helmoos.

The few men who had come back gathered in silence; Lergetpohrer, Hornauss, Fentor, Voglsanger, and a few more. The others present were old men already bowed to the earth, weary of the heavy labours of a long life.

The Helmoos had presented a very different scene on the day of that first enthusiasm. Many women were here now, horror-stricken by the recent turn of events. An old man was beating the slack drum-skin and a single fife whistled harshly and out of tune. The innkeeper, looking thin and ill, staggered up to the drummer and asked him to stop. The fifer then stopped also.

Teimer looked sadly at the people who stood round him. He was wasted by sleeplessness and constant journeyings. Only in his eyes the old fire glowed, the strong purpose of one who was wholly a man. With downcast eyes and smiling, the red-bearded Capuchin stood beside him.

Again there was a whistle from the fife, a disagreeable sound. Peter started, and the words occurred to him:

"My fife's shrill call
Doth summon all
To dance their last."

A shiver ran down his back and his teeth chattered.

A voice rang out like the note of a trumpet.

The monk had suddenly taken his stand on the trunk of the tree, from which Teimer had formerly spoken. The latter was silent to-day and looked round him full of care. The Capuchin held up his arms so that they stretched out of his wide sleeves. His powerful voice was heard easily over the whole clearing, and at once held everyone spellbound.

"What do I see?" he cried, so loudly that many of his hearers started. "What do I see? Dejection in every face, disinclination for strife, anxiety about your dear lives. And what do I not see? I do not see the glow of zeal in sacrificing yourselves for God and your holy religion. Yes, if you would

only put it into words, many here are saying to themselves: 'I'm not going to give up my dear sack of worms, sure as it is of corruption, before my time. I have house and holding, children and cattle. What concern is it of mine? If only I can save my skin and live in comfort with my wife.' Shame upon you! Shame! And you wish to be called Catholics and Christians?"

Someone laughed.

"Have the gentry sent you up here, parson?" a man shouted. "Then tell them we aren't such fools as we were a month ago. You are rogues, the lot of you, parsons and gentry both!"

A dead silence followed the interruption. A woman screamed, horrified.

The Capuchin turned a terrible eye on his adversary.

"This is as it should be!" He clapped his hands together in fierce delight. "Good! That's the right way to talk! Did you hear the voice of Satan? Did you hear him spitting out gall and filth against the Lord's priests? Miserable wretch, who hast surrendered thyself to Satan's stench! Hide not behind that tree! I know you well, Falschlunger Simon of Pfunds! Know that this day your conscience will drive you to me, your conscience, which already sees the fires of pitch and sulphur red-hot, though your bodily eye cannot yet discern them. Oh, how you will beg and whimper to me to take from you the frightful sin. Wait for me, Simon, when this meeting is over!"

Alone and deadly pale stood the man who had just now been so bold, avoided by the others, who edged away from the offender, and left an open space between themselves and him. He gazed at the Father in terror. The latter coolly took out his red pocket-handkerchief, blew his nose and continued his discourse:

"Now for you, brave marksmen and defenders of your Fatherland! Do not allow yourselves to be deceived by our blinded brother. All of you know that anyone who is called upon to give his life for the holy cause goes straight as a candle up to Heaven. Oh, what a good bargain such a man makes! A life which amounts only to a miserable little drop of time, a life filled with vexation, poverty, grief, sickness, harvest-failures, deaths of cattle, lamentation and suffering, this he exchanges for the entire, great golden blessedness of Heaven for all eternity, for an ever-enduring delight which no tongue of man can describe. Oh, thou good bargainer, who dost exchange a handful of worms' meat for a sackful of gold and jewels! Do not hesitate, conclude your bargain with your Divine Saviour! And if in His mercy He grants you also the life which you have offered to Him—rejoice!

Your heavenly reward is not lost, and you have gained twofold! For God the Lord holds to His promise and it needs not to be set down in writing! And now attend to me:

"To-morrow arrives Andreas Hofer with his faithful followers. Who then is this Andreas Hofer? An innkeeper. And what, you ask me, does an innkeeper know? Well, an innkeeper knows how to show the door of a Christian house to unwelcome guests. He understands how to pour out for each man his proper drink, he can reckon what each man owes him, he knows how to calculate, and lays his hand to nothing which does not bring profit. This is an innkeeper whom you may put your faith in. For God is with him and the Holy Virgin; with him are the blessed priests who have suffered the deaths of martyrs; with him are the souls of the innocent children who have fallen as a sacrifice to the Bavarian ruffians!"

The loud sobbing of the women interrupted him.

"Oh, holy tears!" he shouted. "Oh, precious moisture! Weep, beloved ones! Soon ye shall have reason to rejoice. Up and away, then, you men! Away down to the Valley to Hofer, to Innsbruck! The angels of the Lord will fight on your side with silver lances and golden swords. The rosy blood of The Lord Jesus will be your defence against the hosts of Hell! Think on all the suffering which has befallen you and your countrymen, women and maidens, the old and the weak, the children in their cradles and your innocent beasts! Then your hands will be like pincers of iron, your fists like smiths' hammers, your shots like thunderbolts. Away against that devil's brood, with dung-forks, scythes, pikes! Blaze away at them with your muskets that the saints in Heaven may rejoice! Clear this land of the heathenish, lascivious, swinish rascals! For God, Emperor and country!—Once more!"

A frenzied shouting and jubilation showed what a flame his words had kindled. The women, shaking off their fears, were the wildest in their joy, and many of them kissed the Capuchin's thin hand. Teimer smiled with satisfaction, and began to separate the young marksmen from the older men.

Falschlunger Simon stole forward slowly.

"Reverend Father," he stammered. "Pardon—"

The Capuchin smiled.

"Next time you must hold out better against the filthy devil," he said mildly, holding out his hand for the broken man to kiss. "And join the ranks at once! That will be the best atonement!"

XXXI

PETER WENT OFF UNOBSERVED; Federspiel had not appeared.

Next day Teimer came to him and promised to dispatch the parcel and the letter to Herr von Giovanelli. He drank a glass of wine in Zeitlanghof, and glanced inquiringly several times at Peter.

"You are standing out of it!" he said at length, with a slight scorn in his voice. "Yet you look to me as if you could very well carry a musket as far as Innsbruck!"

The blood mounted to Peter's face. "My uncle has disappeared in this neighbourhood," he returned, "and I must find out what has happened to him."

"That is your only reason?" asked the tobacco-dealer mockingly.

"No, Herr Teimer." Peter looked him straight in the face. "I don't mind telling you, as a cultivated and reasonable man, what holds me back. I have been a Würzburg student and I belong to a Franconian family. That is my reason for not fighting against Bavaria!"

The other nodded.

"And you are a Vienna man into the bargain. I know the Vienna people well. They always leave us in the lurch. Even the Emperor keeps in the background, and only orders the Archduke Johann to write notes to the Tyrolese. If the affair turns out a success, he says to himself, then I have done my part; if it's a failure, then I have known nothing about it. I should feel ashamed in your position, Herr Storck."

"You are my guest, Herr Teimer," said Peter rising, "and therefore—"

"I know. I'm a rough Tyrolese man." He buttoned his shabby overcoat. "But I will give you one piece of advice: do not tell anyone else that you are of foreign origin. The result might be unfortunate." He shrugged his shoulders and turned to go. He looked tired as, with a stoop, he advanced to the door, and Peter felt a sympathy for the brave man.

"Herr Teimer!" he cried, "don't altogether misjudge me! Believe me, that with all my heart I wish victory for you and your countrymen. Yours is the cause of freedom!"

The peasant-leader turned back.

“Freedom?” he said, and the corner of his mouth twitched. “It’s still a long way to that, even if we win. It would be more accurate to say that we are fighting for our ancient customs; and that is a good fight too. There—shake hands! I’m not appointed to be your judge.”

“Farewell! And once more—success!”

“God grant it!” the other murmured. “The worst of it is, the people are losing their resolution. I know it, though Hofer continues to believe that the cause has its old strength and energy. But Kolb, who is a madman, and Haspinger, who is a cunning fellow, between them are bewildering that simple straightforward man, the Sand Innkeeper, with their harebrained proposals. There are too many cooks to boil the broth, and the really able men, Speckbacher and the innkeeper of The Crown at Hall, aren’t enough by themselves to save the game! Things will have to go on as they are. Well, no offence, and thanks for your refreshing drink!”

He went off.

“He too has his fears,” thought Peter. “He’s of much the same mind as Serafin Federspiel.” And then he began to grieve again over his failure to see Julia.

But he was ill at ease as he thought of Teimer’s scant respect for him, in spite of the cold friendliness with which the Tyrolese leader had taken leave of him; nor could he hide from himself that his sympathies were with this brave man, wholly devoted to the cause of his people. Ought he to have avowed himself the friend of those Bavarians who had quartered themselves with such cruelty in Schwaz? Were these Federspiel’s German brothers?—they had shown themselves no better than the French. It was a sad affair altogether, and it was impossible to say what was right or wrong. Horrible in any case was the slaughtering and torture of a brave and honourable people, holding firm by its natural right to determine for itself to whom it should belong.

He was vexed, moreover, by the completely altered manner of Notburga, who kept deliberately out of his way, and hardly answered him when he addressed to her some simple question about her work. This relationship between them could not continue. Even the dog he had saved, and which had shown itself so grateful, now proved faithless, and remained always downstairs with the girl, as if to manifest disapproval of his master’s conduct.

Peter's depression was hardly relieved by the reports of victory which now began to come in. And yet the news from the Valley was encouraging. Hofer proved to have more ability as a commander than many had credited him with. He had hurled against the enemy every man, old and young, whom he could raise beyond the Brenner. The men of the Upper Inn Valley arrived in Schönberg on May 29. Their demoralisation vanished at sight of the fiercely hated foe, and they went into the fight with wild enthusiasm. So that in the second battle at Mount Isel they were again victorious. But in truth they had now shot their bolt. Teimer might beg, order, abuse, curse, yet the Bavarians remained unmolested in their disorderly retreat. Only a few men joined in the pursuit, and when the indefatigable Teimer left them for a little in order to bring up reinforcements, they began to break up. Tyrol was for the moment free, but was continually threatened and, moreover, in miserable poverty. The officials and teachers were starving, and beggars roamed about the country in threatening mobs.

On the other hand, the fighting men who returned to Sankt Marein bitterly abused Zangerl, who had tried to prevent them from making raids across the Bavarian frontier. There was a murderous fight with the men of Vorarlberg, who were celebrating the victory at Hohenems and made light of the affair at Mount Isel. Rumours, disseminated by the half-crazy Kolb, came flying across the Brenner: four thousand Austrian prisoners had broken out in Mantua, and the Archduke Johann was approaching with a gigantic army; in the battle of Wagram—a great victory—Napoleon's legs had been shattered by a cannon ball. That was it—they must have cannon! Oaks were cut up, hollowed out and mounted with iron hoops. Clubs were fitted with spikes, scythes sharpened, the lead from windows was melted down for bullets. Otherwise nothing further happened.

Abusive names were now frequently called after Peter, and more especially Federspiel, wherever they appeared. Peter began to avoid the village, and preferred to climb to the Wood of the Damned, where at all events he was alone.

XXXII

ONCE FROM THE BALCONY he saw Julia passing. He ran down just as he was, without a hat, along the steep road; but she had vanished. He

tried to overtake her, but something happened which arrested him.

At the sign-post beside the road sat the Rover, the old man who had met him when he first came to Sankt Marein, and neither then nor on the present occasion seemed disposed to avoid him.

The man's appearance was strange enough: he wore a round leather cap, over which ran crosswise little bands of iron, and a short scarlet cloak which concealed the upper part of his body. His eyes rested half scornfully, half enigmatically on Peter. Once more the young man experienced that disquieting feeling of mingled aversion and sympathy. In the old man's clear-cut face was something which unaccountably moved and excited him. Was the stranger laughing at him, or was there not a gleam of good-will in his stern eyes? Why should this outlandishly dressed solitary cross his path again, and gaze at him so challengingly or compassionately? How was it that while others only caught a distant glimpse of this strange figure, he himself had already twice come face to face with it? Peter was seized suddenly with an irresistible desire to compel this man of stone to speak, to see him angry or alarmed, to compel him to drop his mask and to do or say something natural, whether good or bad.

He stood still, crossed his arms on his breast, and gazed challengingly at the motionless seated figure. The thin mouth, however, did not open, the fixed eyes beneath the white brows did not betray anything of what was passing behind the lofty forehead—perhaps because Peter was completely ignored. What would happen if one were to seize this ill-boding old spirit of the roads by the shoulder and give him a shake? Perhaps he would be angry, perhaps cry out, spring up, but at least it would be impossible for him to continue this offensive indifference. Everything in Peter constrained him to unburden himself, to struggle, to shout. With angry eyes he took a step towards the seated figure, but at once the old man, with a quiet movement, put his hand on something that he carried under his cloak, drew it forth and laid it, bright and in readiness, on his knee. Peter saw plainly that it was a short sword, and that the lean, sinewy hand had gripped the handle. There was a look in the stranger's eyes which boded no good.

Peter laughed, and looked the silent man all over from head to foot. He was certainly a madman. Who else would wear a red cloak and a short sword? He was grimly amused.

"Pray, excuse me, Herr Julius Caesar," he said with a bow. "I had no desire to disturb you!"

The old man did not move, but looked at him as if ready to leap upon him. A chilly sensation caused Peter to shiver, and he passed on without looking round. This uncanny being did not appear to understand a jest. And yet something in the aged, wrinkled face, something hard to fix, aroused long-buried memories; a likeness to someone he had known, in Würzburg or in Vienna—long ago. What could it be?

He turned round again. The red cloak was still there motionless, and the sword still lay bared. It was a ghost—yes, a ghost out of the Roman past. Peter went on quickly.

Up at the charcoal station the lad was building a new kiln. A cow-bell sounded, as a child screamed and a woman scolded, further up in the wood. Not far from the wooden edifice that was being skilfully raised sat Sylvana combing her hair. She gave him a quick look and then turned her back on him.

Probably she felt guilty, remembering her nocturnal visit to his house, and the stolen box. God knows what she had done with the pills. His fears at any rate had been groundless.

"Hello, Sylvana!" he cried.

"Go to him, you stupid!" her brother called gruffly. "Has the gentleman got to run after you?"

She rose and approached with hesitation. "What do you want with me, then?" she asked, twisting her mouth awry.

"What have you done with the pills in the green box?" he asked in a severe tone.

She glanced at him defiantly and laughed.

"I? What's the box to do with me? You didn't give it to me!"

"And so you took it yourself—in the middle of the night?" he said threateningly.

"Somebody else perhaps—not I!" she snapped.

He seized her wrist and twisted it a little. "Will you tell me the truth?" He released her at once as he caught a glimpse of her teeth.

She rubbed her wrist, complaining that he had hurt her. "You can be very rough," and she turned away sullenly. He saw that he would have to treat her kindly to learn anything from her.

"Listen, Sylvana. You will surely not deny that you were in my house. You even kissed me—" he added in a lower tone. "At night, in Zeitlanghof —!"

“I was never in Zeitlanghof, and now leave me alone! I haven’t got your box—”

Unmistakably she was telling the truth.

“You were not at my house?” he asked in amazement. “Who was, then?”

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled. “Who can it have been?” he said, more to himself than to her.

“Another girl, I suppose.” She looked at him jeeringly. “Someone you like better.”

“Perhaps after all she is telling me lies,” he thought, “and will never own up to it. Perhaps if I promise her something—Sylvana,” he coaxed her, “if you will tell me the truth I’ll give you a nice present. You may pay me a visit, I have a lot of nice things.”

Her eyes at once grew large and round, and with a quick motion she flung back her dark red hair and sprang towards him.

“It wasn’t I. You can believe that,” she cried, looking him straight in the face. “I can’t tell you more—”

“Do you know who it was?” he urged.

“No! It must have been another girl kissed you.”

His thoughts began to range. Notburga? She certainly would not climb into the room by the balcony, and she had never had any wish for the useless box. Julia? Unthinkable! Who in all the world could it have been?

“If I come to your house,” she chattered, “you’ll have to tie up the dog. I’m afraid of the dog, for he knows me quite well. He smells where I come from and shows his teeth at me. You can come with me now into the juniper-bushes.”

She pressed up against him with a roguish look and tickled the hollow of his hand. A blue-spotted handkerchief hung out of his pocket; she plucked it out quickly and thrust it inside her chemise.

“Very well, I will come, you—”

“Sylvana!” called her mother’s harsh voice from the wood above, “drive in the cow!”

She bounded off at once, waving the handkerchief and looked back laughing. “I’ll come!” she cried again.

Peter went down the road in deep thought. Who could it have been who had kissed him so gently?

The Rover was no longer where he had been. A hooded crow, black and grey, started up with a hoarse cry, fluttered to the nearest tree and looked

sidelong at the man talking to himself. “I am growing crazy—”

XXXIII

A SURPRISE AWAITED HIM when he reached his house.

Notburga was standing al the front door, dressed in her best, a wide straw hat on her golden hair, holding in front of her in both her hands a large bundle.

“Good-bye!” she said, without further explanation, and letting the bundle slip to the ground, held out her hand.

“What does this mean?” he cried, startled, catching her by the arm. “You are going away, Notburga? But why—why?”

She lowered her eyes: “It will soon be noticed!”

“Then let them notice it!” he cried, in a sudden agitation. “Stay here, Notburga, as my—”

“Wife,” he would have said, but the word would not come.

She smiled sadly

“Ah, you nearly made a slip of the tongue!” she said, her cheeks flaming up. “That would only be a misfortune for us both, for you are a gentleman, and some day you’ll want someone else. Perhaps you are in earnest and would take me to Vienna with you, because you are good, but you’d soon be sorry, and well you know I’m right. Once for all, it is as it is, and there’s nothing you can do for me. And I don’t mean to stay with my brother; the things he says make me afraid, so I’m going away, and with the help of God I’ll get to my old cousin in the Engadine. She’ll help me when my time comes. If there’s a baby I’ll make them send you a message.” A forlorn smile passed over her lips.

“No!” he cried, holding her firmly. “I will not allow you to go like this. Come upstairs; I must talk to you seriously.”

She resisted him and set herself free.

“I’ve made up my mind,” she said quietly. “Christian—it’s almost more than I can bear to leave him when he’s so bad. But even if I should stay, he hears nothing now but the voice that speaks in him, and he hardly ever knows me now.”

“But why to-day—why so quickly, Notburga, without having said a word about it beforehand?”

She looked him full in the face, a sad anger in her gaze. “Do you wish to know?”

“Yes!” he cried, touched by her tone. Her voice trembled strangely.

“It’s because you took my virginity and then brought another woman into your bed. It has been a sore trouble to me that you aren’t good ” A tear ran down her cheek; she wiped it quickly away and said in a hard voice: “It’s not for you I’m crying!”

“Another woman?” Peter shook his head slowly. “No other woman was with me—”

She laughed harshly. “Women leave hairs.” Her mouth grew small and her eyes flashed. “And cats climb in by the open windows at night.”

“I don’t understand you, Notburga.”

“There was a long hair on your pillow—the morning after that night my brother came back—a woman’s hair—”

“It must have fallen from your own head, Notburga.”

“Then my hair turned black that night and fair again in the morning. And I was lying in your arms and at the same time was in my room downstairs crying about my poor baby.—Good-bye! There’s no more to be said and talking doesn’t mend matters.”

She took up her bundle and went off, leaving him standing there, and he heard her firm step outside on the road. After a few moments it occurred to him that the dog must have followed Notburga.

“Butz!” he called. “Butz! Come!”

The dog was already out on the road, but when he heard his master’s call, raced back, stood at the garden gate and looked at Peter with head turned sideways.

“Butz, come here! Come, good dog! ” he called, almost in a tone of anguish.

The black dog, which be had rescued from the charcoal-burner’s knife, uttered a short howl of grief, listened a moment to Notburga’s retreating steps, looked again at his master and then made off after her with long bounds.

Peter waited a little, feeling a hot moisture rising to his eyes, and walked slowly back to the house. The skeleton figure on the wall was playing on his fife, with foot set forward, leering—

Farewell! Even the dog had forsaken him.

After an interval he noticed that an old woman was standing beside him.

“I’m Hirlanda,” a muttering came from her toothless mouth. “The Lergetpohrer lass told me to come and help the gentleman if he wanted me.”

“Thank you,” said Peter shortly. He showed the old woman the kitchen and her room, gave her some directions and went off in deep depression.

It was not love that he had felt for Notburga, but it pained him that she should have left him, and a weight of guilt lay heavy on his heart. The house was more comfortless now than ever, and he walked straight to the tap-room of The Rose.

No one was there but Christian, who, with flushed face, was gulping down red wine.

“Notburga has gone away,” said Peter, sinking onto a chair. The innkeeper did not appear to understand him, and smiled mysteriously.

“Teimer will be raging with me for having left him,” he whispered. “But the little fellow, you know, the drummer-boy I shot at Husselhof, he said I was to stay at home. He’s a darling, the boy, with his fair hair, and his little feet are sore from his big army boots.”

He caught Peter by the sleeve. “Every night—”

A sob interrupted him, his eyes stared, and a rattling sound came from his throat. “He comes and sits on my bed. And even in the middle of the night it’s all bright round him. The bleeding—the bleeding from the little wound I made in his head is stopped altogether. It’s quite well now, you’d hardly believe it! Only he’s very cold—cold in the unconsecrated earth. They dug a hole for him, he says, at Sonnenberg, and buried him. I’d surely take him out of the ground and bring him to the churchyard, but when he comes like that out of the earth—Jesus and Mary!” Drops of sweat stood on his forehead, and he stared at the half-empty jug, muttering; then he leaned forward and struck his forehead on the table, and a rattling came again from his mouth.

Peter, horrified, went out of the room.

XXXIV

FEDERSPIEL VISITED HIM in the evening, and shared with him the coarse fare which the old woman left in the pan which she placed on the table.

“Lefèbvre is now in command,” said Federspiel. “They mean to move in from four sides. Napoleon sent him an order containing only one sentence: Show no mercy!”

“How do you know that?”

“A prisoner said so.”

For a while they sat in silence. “Notburga is gone?” the hunter asked.

“She has left.”

“And her brother is ailing in his mind—” Federspiel supported his forehead on his hand. “Because he shot a drummer-boy. They didn’t want the Bavarians, and now the French are coming—”

“I don’t know that they’ll be much worse than our German brothers,” Peter remarked bitterly.

Federspiel raised his hand as if in entreaty.

“Don’t talk about it, please! A fire is burning inside me—repentance! What is one to do? For God’s sake! what is a man to do when he has lost his holiest beliefs?”

“We shall have to help, Herr Serafin Federspiel,” said Storck, and his lips twitched. “Now especially, when Napoleon’s bloodhounds are out—”

The hunter nodded, and listened to the wind wailing round the house.

“Oh, Germany, Germany!” he sighed. “Be the issue what it may! I can do nothing else.” He shook his fist towards the moon, just rising over the dark outlines of the mountain. “If only the French would come! I’d be happy at last. I’ll give my bullets a turn in white arsenic, so that a touch will poison the whole blood, and they’ll burn away, with fire in their entrails . . . Perhaps among them are some of those who tied me to the chestnut tree . . .” A mad rage shook his emaciated body, and a hoarse sob burst from his throat. “I’m suffocating!” he groaned, and running to the balcony window, wrenched it open. The round disc of silver looked down on him indifferently. A terrible fit of coughing seized him, and it was some time before he turned again to Peter.

“I heard a strange conversation yesterday up at the charcoal burner’s.” His face was now quite calm and his voice thin.

Peter looked at him inquiringly.

“There are the tracks of a lynx on the Haberer,” he continued, sitting down again at the table. “But no doubt it has gone over again to the Swiss side. I was up there, and came down by the charcoal station. The young lady who lives at the smith’s was there—”

He paused as he noticed that Peter started slightly, and he smiled significantly.

“I knew you would prick up your ears at that. And, moreover, it’s something that has to do with the Fire-spirits.”

“Julia? The young lady?” cried Peter indignantly. “How do you come to have such absurd notions?”

But the hunter would not allow himself to be interrupted.

“Well, Fraulein Julia, Sylvana and her brother were sitting together among the young alders, and I pulled up, as I wanted to hear what they were talking about. Sylvana was saying to her brother: ‘You are only a Raven, nothing more!’ He grew angry and shouted at her: ‘I am a Hidden One (those were his words), and you are nothing at all; at most you are allowed to dance, for you are only a female!’ At this the young lady gave him a little stroke with a wand she held in her hand, and looked at him severely: ‘I too am a woman, Romedius!’ The boy bowed his head, lifted his hands and said: ‘You are the Sun-Maiden, holy one!’ Just at that moment a rotten twig snapped under my foot, and they all started up and ran off to the kilns.—What do you say to that, Herr Storck?”

“Sun-Maiden—!” stammered Peter, strangely moved by the word: “Sun-Maiden—!”

“It’s a secret language,” said Federspiel. “And it’s certainly the fire spirits who use these names. So we have a small clue in our hands, namely, that the young lady, the lad and the little thing have something to do with the Spirits—”

“It might be something else,” Peter objected; “some game—”

“Oh, no! They were altogether in earnest. It was awkward that the twig in the moss broke under my foot, I might certainly have heard something more.”

They talked for a long time over the incident, but neither could throw any light on it.

When Federspiel had gone, Peter once more applied himself to the old book, and tormented himself over it for two hours, until his eyes began to smart. And while deciphering again the separate leaf, which treated of Possession, he thought of poor Christian, whose bed was now haunted by the little ghost with the blue and white drum.

When at last he went to bed, he suddenly uttered a loud laugh. It had been the dog! In spite of reproof, the creature had often jumped on to the

bed, and one of the black hairs might have clung to the pillow, the hair which had brought so much grief to Notburga.

Yes, it would have been laughable if so much trouble had not come of it. The dog too had abandoned him.

XXXV

NEXT MORNING a large number of the musketeers returned to Sankt Marein. A shot had grazed Hornauss's hand, which was suppurating; Voglsanger had received a bayonet-thrust in his right thigh, and the wound had been dressed with a plaster of resin. He suffered agonising pains. Peter helped as much as he could, in spite of the abuse with which he had been assailed before the march-out.

The people looked on with delight and gratitude. Even Josele thought that the gentleman was helping finely, and that they would now have a field surgeon if they went out again. "However, the Bavarians won't trouble us now; they're done with!" And then, remembering that Teimer had given him a letter for Herr Storck, he handed the latter a paper. The seal had been broken.

"Did you open the letter?" asked Peter, somewhat annoyed.

The old man scratched his white head.

"Not I, Mister—can't even read. Father Archangelus thought it wasn't right to trust the gentry too much."

Peter turned away and read the missive:

"RESPECTED SIR,

> "The botanical rarity which you have had the goodness to send me has been a pleasing diversion to me in the midst of deep concern for our beloved Fatherland. So much so, that although occupied by many duties, I could not rest until I was able to determine the species. I have now succeeded after some trouble in doing so, thanks to the valuable help given me by my friend Professor Matthias Schopfer. The scientific name of the plant is *Rhododendron arboreum,* and its habitat is among the Himalaya Mountains. In Europe it is raised in hot-houses for the sake of its magnificent blossoms, as, for example, in the Imperial Conservatory at Schonbrunn in Vienna. The strange flower must have come from there. For that this arborescent plant of

Hindustan should grow in our Tyrolese mountains would be contrary to the conditions under which alone it can thrive. My friend Schopfer is of the opinion that you, esteemed sir, in sending it to me, have intended a pleasant jest, and have wished to test my botanical knowledge. Even so, I must express my thanks to you, especially since, in this very amiable manner, you have enriched my Herbarium with a valuable specimen.

"God grant that in more peaceful times I may have the pleasure, honoured Sir, of conversing with you at greater length on matters relating to our beloved province of the Vegetable World.

"With the most respectful greetings, I am always your obliged servant,

"JOSEF VON GIOVANEI.U."

The letter fell on the ground out of Peter's hand. A flame of jealousy was kindled within him, a devouring flame, which in a flash revealed to him the strength of his love for Julia. Who but some rich and passionate adorer would be in a position to send to the Upper Inn Valley, in fresh condition, a whole bush of these rare and valuable flowers from the Emperor's conservatories? He smiled bitterly at the thought. Yes, the beautiful Julia had certainly not waited until a certain Herr Peter Storck from Vienna had favoured her with his youthful inclination. She, no doubt, was accustomed to something more elegant than his awkward importunities, and one day perhaps, united to some exalted person, would allow her memory to dwell with amusement on the summer idyll at Sankt Marein, which had relieved the tedium of the little place. Oh, how blind he had been!

Stung with grief and shame, he walked down the village street, and wandered on to the wood which stretched along under the Helmoos, and even in the bright sunlight looked gloomy.

His life had become curiously complicated in this remote village, where he had expected nothing but quietness, one day like another. Not only had he found himself in the midst of a bloody insurrection, but riddle upon riddle, whole swarms of dark mysteries had beset him, and transformed his life into a series of adventurous experiences.

His vanished uncle, like himself, must have brooded over the dark problems suggested by inexplicable happenings. Was the explanation really to be found in that trashy old book and in the single page of manuscript

preserved by the old gentleman not less carefully than that last will of his which had summoned Peter to Zeitlanghof. If so, he despaired of discovering it.

Fatigued, and summoning up all his resolution to stifle these reflections, he sat down by the roadside. In the ground in front of him he saw an ants' track, a straight much-trodden little thoroughfare, which led the sagacious little insects from their high cone-shaped citadel of fir needles to various unknown destinations. An active, industrious life stirred at his feet. The small, black-brown toilers were dragging bits of wood, particles of resin, and stalks into their little kingdom; others, marching hurriedly forth, came to a rapid understanding by means of their antennae with their comrades who were carrying home objects of utility. Peter amused himself by blocking up the important highway with little obstacles, and, the spirit of childhood wakening in him, was delighted by their purposeful haste and by the readiness with which all the ants joined in the task of clearing the road. One little animal gave willing aid to the other, laying aside its load in order to help better, and taking it up again as soon as the road was free. A green-frog checked itself in the act of leaping and watched with gold-rimmed eyes the swarming activity, but was soon reminded by a sharp bite that its presence was not wanted and saved itself by a leap.

"Inquisitiveness seems to be unwelcome everywhere," said the clear voice of a woman at this moment.

Julia stood behind him.

A wave of happiness rushed over him; he started up and raised his hat.

"Julia!" he cried; then his face once more was drawn with pain.

The girl looked at him significantly and handed him a paper; he recognised immediately Giovanelli's letter, which he must have left lying on the road.

He took it, and said in some confusion: "You have read it, Mademoiselle?"

"I suppose one may read what is lying on the road without an owner," she smiled. "The gentleman who wrote the letter seems to be an extremely learned botanist."

"I wish I hadn't written to him!" returned Peter, gazing at her. "I should have spared myself pain."

"I don't understand—"

“I know now that there’s someone in Vienna who stops at nothing to show his regard for you—”

A swift flush passed over her face. “I know no one in Vienna—”

He pricked up his ears. “Those flowers were not sent to you then, Mademoiselle Julia?”

She turned her head aside and pursed her lips. “No!”

“And where then do such splendid flowers come from?”

Her face darkened. “Herr Storck,” she said, “you are far too curious. Is it not enough that I had to protect you from the smith’s fury? Do you know that you were in serious danger? At the present time, no one would have much troubled himself if a man had killed a stranger in defence of his household. You know very little about the people here. It’s not advisable to try to force oneself on their privacy.”

He caught her hand, raised it to his lips and pressed a kiss on the soft skin.

“I thank you for my life, Mademoiselle Julia,” he said earnestly. “Don’t be angry with me. I merely wished to bring you the flowers you had lost.”

She withdrew her hand gently and her eyes softened. “I know, Herr Storck. But it was partly curiosity.”

“I acknowledge it,” he said frankly. “There’s so much in you that is a riddle to me—!”

A shadow passed again over her face. “Leave things alone that don’t concern you. It will be better for yourself!”

He was somewhat put out by the serious tone in which she spoke, which seemed even to suggest some kind of threat. She certainly knew a great deal about the things which mystified him, and the hunter had no doubt been right in associating her with the Fire-spirits. The dance beside the spring in the wood— was there not a mystery in that, and one quite in harmony with the conversation overheard by Federspiel? Yet was it not foolish not to tell her what was on his mind? He could certainly only win her confidence by complete candour, and where there was confidence there was also perhaps inclination. And so, obeying the impulse of the moment, he told her all he knew; only he kept to himself what he had seen and heard of the dance by the forest spring.

She listened attentively and in silence, only once moving her head when he spoke of the mysterious disappearance of his uncle, Martin Storck; otherwise no change in her beautifully regular face betrayed amazement or

unpleasant surprise. They had sat down beside one another on the flowery slope, so close that he felt the warmth of her body. Her hands were folded on her lap, and her deep dark eyes looked far away into the Valley, which was filled with a golden haze.

“I meet with riddles in every direction,” he said. “You attract me, allure me! I should have no blood in my veins if that were a matter of indifference to me. The little wood-witch, the elfish child they call Sylvana; the strange old man whom people call the Rover—”

For the first time she seemed moved; this at least was betrayed by the tone in which she interrupted him.

“What do you want from the old man?

“I want nothing from him,” he answered, surprised. “But it often seems to me as if he crossed my path intentionally, as if he wanted something from me, for good or ill. I rather think, for ill!”

She made a quick movement. “I think you overestimate your own importance, Herr Storck! For him you are no more than a fly in the air, a leaf in the wind, a floating gossamer. The man of whom you are speaking stands far above everything that moves people like us!”

“You know him, then?”

“I know him, and I would not have you speak of him without reverence.” Her cheeks suddenly grew red and her eyes shone.

“So-ho!” he laughed, somewhat annoyed. “It’s God the Father himself then who favours us occasionally with his presence?”

Two upright furrows appeared on her clear brow, and her voice trembled with anger. “Young man, don’t be blasphemous! If we are to be friends you must give up that tone!”

He looked at her crestfallen, and his eyes fell before her gaze. “I have offended you—I did not mean it—”

For some time she made no answer, but tore a blade of grass into little pieces and bit her lips.

“I’ll never do it again!” he implored her like a boy. “I did not know the old man was dear to you.”

She nodded, and her face softened again.

“I am always alone,” he said in a low, complaining voice. “That may be the reason I trouble myself about things which really don’t concern me!”

“We are never alone,” she said, looking again into the sunny distance.

“Never—?”

“There are souls always round us, bad and good, souls of the departed—” The words escaped her lips like a breath.

He thought of the single sheet which had been laid with the old book in his writing table.

“The souls look about for a shelter.” She suddenly shuddered.

He looked at her, startled. “But we ourselves have souls—”

“Another can dwell in the same house,” she whispered remotely. “One may lose its own house and be cast out.”

He caught her hand, once more startled. It was ice-cold.

“As a fox creeps into the badger’s hole when the badger is away,” so said the page of manuscript.

“Do you know a case like that?” he questioned her, keeping his hand closed on hers.

A heartrending look smote him. Suddenly tears streamed down her cheeks. She freed her hand and stretched out her arm toward the sun, murmuring incomprehensible words. They sounded like a low, tremulous cry of lamentation.

Without reflecting on his boldness, he put his arm round her shoulders and pressed her to him. She did not withdraw herself, but nestled within his arm like a child, and fixed on him her glimmering eyes. Then he kissed her red mouth. A shudder ran through her limbs, and as if in a dream she uttered words in a foreign language:

“Eau ti tegn char, eau sunt tien!”

It sounded like an ardent confession, and bliss beyond words flooded his heart. Again he would have kissed her, and he put his lips to her mouth, but she suddenly repelled him and sprang up, pale as death, her eyes flashing.

“What have you dared? This may be your death—!”

He staggered to his feet, bewildered, overwhelmed. What did this mean?

She moved forward, covered her face with her hands and wept bitterly.

Touched by her grief he stood beside her, not knowing what to do. But she turned her face to him, dried her tears with a little handkerchief and said in a clear voice:

“This must never happen again! Promise!”

He bowed his head sadly. “If you bid it!”

The sudden pain of his disenchantment seemed to choke him. She came towards him and held out her hand.

“I will gladly be your friend,” she said, very gently. “But this must be forgotten absolutely, and everything that we have said here. Your hand on that, Herr Storck!”

Without a word, he laid his hand in hers.

“One thing more. Cease to search for what must remain hidden. Must, Herr Storck! It would give me great pain should anything happen to you—”

He looked at her. Was she playing with him?

“Mademoiselle!” he said quietly. “I belong to a union of German comrades which does not permit cowards to remain in its membership. I am not afraid of these keepers of strange secrets who dwell in these mountains. Moreover, it is my solemn duty to look for my vanished uncle and to avenge him on those who are guilty of his death. For he is dead, certainly. Therefore I will not cease to look for the Fire-spirits of whom I spoke to you, not until I know how far they are innocent or guilty of the disappearance of a noble man!”

She turned pale as he spoke, and made an involuntary negative gesture. Her lips showed that she suffered.

“I don’t wish to torment you,” he reassured her. “I love you so, Julia,” he burst out fervently. “Anything that gives you pain or uneasiness I will let alone. But my uncle—he haunts me in the night and reproaches me. I must avenge him, if he has fallen a victim to these unknown powers. You must understand that!”

“Perhaps I can help you a good deal!” she said quickly, as if taking a sudden resolution. “If I find it is possible, I will come to you some day.”

“Really, Julia!” he cried, transported with joy.

“Until then,” she continued steadily, “be patient! Do not attempt to bring about a meeting with me. Remember Fentor the smith and his outburst! I cannot explain everything—perhaps a day will come—Have patience, be chivalrous!”

Was it not love which shone in her eyes? The look went to his heart, and gave him pain as well as delight.

“And now I must go—farewell!” she said suddenly.

The noise of a cart was heard on the road. He bent over her hand and kissed it reverently. With light feet she fled down the path.

XXXVI

IT WAS HORNAUSS with his team of oxen.

“Whoa!” he shouted. The beasts bowed their powerful necks beneath the wooden yoke and came to a stand, gazing with their dull beautiful eyes, and

with dribbling mouths. Pungent clouds of smoke came from the short stump of the peasant's pipe.

"God be thanked, there's peace in the country again!" he laughed contentedly. Peter walked along beside the creaking wagon, half-listening to what the other said. His soul was filled to overflowing with all that had just happened. Yes, Hornauss was saying, it was all right now. The Archduke Johann was already on the march with a hundred thousand white-coats, Cuirassiers and Huzzars, to give the peasants a rest. Had Peter not heard? But an answer was not required from Peter, for as they neared the village Hornauss's wife met them, breathless from running, and called out to her husband that this time she was not going to let him go out again. Not for anything! The Devil might fly away with that accursed Judge Senn of Pfunds, and the Sand innkeeper too! (She was nearly choked by her goitre.) Yes, he needn't look so stupid, it was just as she said! Senn had set the bells ringing again up and down the Valley, just when they were getting back to work, and was calling the forces to Innsbruck. It was time the fine gentlemen should do something—she darted a bitter look at Peter—and find out for themselves what fighting was like. The peasants ought to remember who it was that fed on their sweat and blood!

There was already a stir in the village. Scythes were being sharpened in the smithy, and a young lad was just dragging the heavy drum out of the chapel. Christian Lergetpohrer, with watery eyes, was staring at its stained skin. Women, with cries of abuse and lamentation, were pressing round Kloiber, who, with knapsack and musket, had arrived from the Valley and, alternately laughing and cursing, was holding high above his head his messenger's staff which they were trying to tear from him.

"Why, God in Heaven!" he shouted, "what fault is it of mine? Lefèbvre is marching on Sprugg and Beaumont is advancing from the Scharnitz. They are blazing away along the roads and hanging up the peasants whenever they find anyone with a gun or a club. They are forcing the women in the churchyards and hacking off hands and feet from the blessed images on the cross-roads. They are leaving their filth in the churches and throwing God's body into the sinks. They took one man and tore out his bowels till they hung out of him, and he was left calling out for an hour with nothing inside him till he died. They are stripping our clergy and scourging them with stinging-nettles. They are burning down our houses and driving off our cattle; they are putting our lads against the wall to be shot, with father and

mother standing by! Do you mean to fold your arms and look on? Are you Tyrolese or what are you?"

"We'll go out again!" screamed old Josele. "There's no choice!"

A hawker had come up from the Valley and was pushing through the crowd, gazing craftily about him, with tousled Jewish beard and hooked nose. Articles of value were in his box: St. Luke's letters, Passau charms which make their wearer bullet-proof, pills for toothache, jars of treacle, small bottles containing bright-coloured syrups. He looked searchingly about him, as if he had something on his mind besides selling his wares, and when he saw Peter he started and hobbled quickly towards him. His left leg was club-footed.

"Buy something from me, Herr Baron," he smirked.

"I'm not a baron!" said Peter, declining his offer.

"Well, God be praised! the gentleman looks more like a count! Buy something from the poor Jew, sir, anything!"

Peter turned away, but the man would not be shaken off and followed him, tormenting him so much that at last he took up a little knife and threw the man a silver coin.

But the Jew, quite unabashed, took the knife out of Peter's hand and gave instead a cheap hand-mirror wrapped up in blue paper.

"That will suit the gentleman better," he whispered. "That's a special mirror." He lowered his voice: "You'll have to take the glass out—" Next moment he had mingled with the crowd, and the mirror remained with Peter, who returned to his house.

It was plain to him that the man had some purpose in pursuing him with this mirror. When he had taken the glass out of the pasteboard frame, a folded paper fell from it. Who could have chosen this method of sending him a message? He read the bold, blotted writing:

> "Herr Storck or Strock! I did not take particular note of your name, but this is pretty near it! Set off at once to Vienna or Munich. It will be to your advantage. An end is going to be made of this peasant rebellion, and what is going to happen will not be pretty. It would please me if you would care to stay with me for a while, and the beer here is damned good. I advise you in your own interest to get away at once before the Devil is out. Greetings from yours Sebastian von

Pflederer, for the time being at Munich in the Sendlinger-Gasse No. 313, Third Floor."

The Bailiff, driven out of the country, had found this means of sending him a warning. Peter was touched as he remembered the bulldog face and good-humouredly noisy manner of the official, who, in memory of the hour they had spent together, had taken all this trouble to do him a kindness. A true German!

Yes, it was painful to know that Germans were facing Germans in this quarrel over the poor mountain country.

But next morning he went off to the shooting range on the mountain side with Federspiel, and practiced on the target with his uncle's musket. If the French were actually coming there was no time for further deliberation. The musket fired well—

On the following day another letter was delivered to him, which at first, trembling with delight, he took for a communication from Julia; for a strange woman had brought it to Zeitlanghof in his absence.

But the letter was not from Julia; it was a clumsily-expressed ill-spelt scrawl, yet it struck at his heart:

"I send you those few lines hopeing you are well and have not forgoten me i had a bad time coming into a strange country with God's help I will have great joy in the child it will be called after its dear fathers.

"NOTBURGA LERGETPOHRER."

He looked for the messenger, but she had already gone into the Valley towards the Finstermunz Pass . . .

XXXVII

THAT EVENING beacon-fires blazed on the mountains. The country was again in distress. Next morning rain was falling, and Peter employed himself in cleaning up the beautiful musket, inlaid with gold decorations, and he found some fifty bullets in a leather pouch hanging on the wall; he thoroughly overhauled his weapon and screwed a new flint into the cock. Sparks leaped on the pan when he pulled the trigger. There was a good supply of powder in the horn, and beside the gun-case on the wall hung a well-ground dirk. He had everything ready for the French.

Then he went off to Federspiel.

The hunter was lying on his bed, as on the occasion of Peter's first visit to the hut, but not in order to rest, as the latter quickly perceived. Just as he entered, Anderl was taking a wet cloth from the basin of water beside the bed and laying it round Federspiel's right ankle, which was terribly swollen; his face writhed with pain.

"What has happened?" asked Peter.

"He nearly got me and he meant to!" returned the hunter. "I wanted to climb down to the Chamois' Garden from the Schellbock.—Anderl, you stupid fellow, have you been putting a holy penny into that water again! Well, if it pleases you it can do no harm!"

Peter shuddered at the thought of the awful abyss. "You tried to climb down!"

"Give me that pipe, boy!" Federspiel ordered, and then as he held the flame over it continued: "Why does that frighten you? Didn't the old Rover get down there? And the chamois—how do the chamois reach it? And can't I? I've climbed worse places than the wall of the Schellbock, and by all the devils and Fire-spirits I would have done it, if a stone hadn't come down on me. A big bit hit me on the ankle, and I was in torture forcing myself to keep my grip. Yes, my friend!" he blew out a cloud of smoke excitedly, "my fingers had to hold on like iron clamps and my sound foot was wedged in a crevice. It was intended for my skull, but I pressed close against the cliff under a clump of mountain-pine, and so the stone shot out over me and only grazed my foot."

"You say 'intended'—" exclaimed Peter.

"Certainly intended!" the other laughed angrily. "Someone let fly the stone—he must have been watching me and followed me. I saw his shaggy bush of a skull above me, but too high up for me to recognize him. Stones kept rattling down, and with awful trouble I saved myself by holding on to a patch of grass, then I managed to get the gun off my neck into position and pulled the trigger at the hairy pate. It was only a snap-shot and I missed him by a finger's breadth; the bullet struck the rock beside him and spattered his head, and I saw no more of him. No doubt he said to himself that Federspiel might pick him off the second time.—Boy, put on another rag and stop this burning, and push out a chair or that chopping-block for Herr Storck to sit on!"

When Peter was seated, and had taken his pipe with the green and rose tassels out of his pocket, the hunter continued:

"For me it is settled that they have their nest down below there, where Anderl and I saw the Rover stealing about. It must be so, or else they wouldn't threaten the life of anyone who tries to get into it. Devil take it, if I hadn't blazed away in such a hurry, the murderous beast would have rolled over the cliff with his skull shot to pieces! Well, I saw no more of him!"

"But how did you manage to climb up again with that foot?" The injured ankle was frightfully swollen and suffused with blood.

Federspiel tried to answer, but was seized with such a suffocating fit of coughing that it was some time before he had sufficiently recovered to speak.

"You shouldn't smoke!" said Peter, putting the pipe away.

"It will do me no harm now," smiled the suffering man, and continued: "Take my word for it, I was never frightened by anything in my life, but at this moment a cold sweat breaks out on me when I think of how I got up out of that place. Crawling, climbing, slipping, drawing myself up with my hands, straining till the blood started out of my mouth and my nose—yet I reached the top! And then there was still the path by which you and I went, and with a bad foot! My hat had fallen below and also my right shoe. The jackdaws soon found out how I was situated, and the ravens swooped close over me as if they mistook me for a shot chamois. I felt their red bills on the top of my head, they grew so bold. 'Down! Down! Food, here! Food!' they seemed to be croaking high above me. My life was worth nothing, but I held out till I reached the path. Yes, look here, Anderl! I know what you're thinking, but you are greatly mistaken, you little pious humbug! It was my muscles, my sinews, the will inside my skull, and not the scapular which you sewed into the breast of my coat when I wasn't looking! I had been out eight hours when I reached the hut; it was pitch dark when I climbed in by the window and tumbled on to the bed. I fainted off as if I were dead. However, the foot isn't gone, as Josele's wife says—she pulled at it till I saw nothing but blackness before my eyes. No ointment, she said, but cold water all the time. And she knows more than the surgeons."

He fetched a deep breath and continued:

"I asked to be taken in at the pitch-gatherer's hut, but the old tree-scratcher Blasi wouldn't admit me. He kept growling and whimpering like a fox at a mousehole, and told me to sit down on the bench outside. He would

only rub my foot with spirit of arnica, but that did me so much good that I was able to go on. He spoke to someone inside the hut whom he called ‘Father,’ and that was the Rover, I am sure of it. I managed with awful pain to get away. ‘You must learn not to be inquisitive, friend hunter!’ he said through his teeth; ‘another time you mayn’t get off so easily!’ But I shouted out: ‘You rascals, you’ll have cause for joy when I pull myself together again. I’ll come and find you out at your tricks!’ He only laughed and muttered to himself: ‘Then we’ll have to get you out of the way!’ And that was no jest. I saw it in his face. Oh, it did hurt me, the road home!”

He groaned and closed his eyes, but began again at once: “What was it I told you, boy?”

“That I wasn’t to tell anything to a single soul.”

“Whom specially not—?”

“To—to—”

“Out with it!”

“I was to say nothing to Father Archangelus,” the lad answered, hesitating.

“Right! that’s right!” He tried to move the injured foot but the pain was too great.

“And who dropped the stones?” inquired Peter. “The Rover?”

“The bald old man! No, it was someone with a shaggy pate, as I told you. The smith or the charcoal-burner or some other of the wood-devils. Whoever it was, he was very high up, and I had to look against the light, that’s how I missed him.”

“Let us be glad it happened so,” said Peter, drawing a deep breath.

The hunter smiled grimly. “And now, from this time forth, I’ll give them no peace. Not till I have found out where these night-owls roost, and poked them out. A drink, boy!”

Anderl held the jug of water to the parched lips. “And now I’d like to go to sleep!” He closed his eyes.

Peter signed to the lad to go out with him, and told him he would find something to eat and drink at Zeitlanghof.

“Sir,” the lad whispered, “Father Archangelus says they are failing us again in South Tyrol, and the Bavarians are advancing to the Upper Inn Valley.”

“Why do you tell me that, Anderl?”

“Because I’d like to go out too,” Anderl entreated. “If Herr Storck would only speak to the Father!”

XXXVIII

PETER WENT HOME thoughtfully through the rain. In the solitude of his study he was filled with an intense longing for Julia. His promise forbade him to seek her out, so he could only wait, every word that she had spoken sounding continually in his ears like a sweet tune. If only he could have understood the strange foreign syllables, the passionate complaint which she had uttered in his arms! Everything that concerned her was obscure and covered by a veil, and he could only brood over the unforgettable scene by the spring in the wood, and the tones of her clear voice. With heavy heart he sat listening to the rain as it trickled along the gutters and streamed from the roof.

Towards morning he thought he heard a peal of thunder.

He started up, looking round him half-awake in the pale twilight. The thundering noise continued. It was a wild knocking and hammering at the door of the house.

He leaped out of bed and put on a few clothes. For a moment it flashed through his mind with a sudden horror that it was the French. He opened the balcony window and stepped out shivering. A small group of figures whom he could not recognise was standing in front of the house and appeared to be taking counsel together.

“Who’s down there?” he shouted.

“Open the door, sir,” a man called, whom he recognised as Voglsanger. “There’s no time to lose. We must get the ‘Death-organ’ and the muskets out of the cellar. We have to get the guns down to the Valley!”

Peter ran downstairs and opened the door. Hirlanda, in her nightdress, stood trembling at the door of her room.

“It’s nothing!” he called to the old woman, who was letting drops of candle-grease fall about the passage.

Four or five men burst in. “Who are you?” said Peter, without making way for them. “That is not the way to enter my house!”

“Open the cellar!” shouted a tall fellow, “we have no time for chattering and bargaining!”

“Don’t shout at the gentleman, you bully!” Voglsanger rebuked him. “Folks are gone wild,” he added.

“Gentleman, eh?” muttered the reckless-looking fellow. “There’ll be no gentlemen soon in Tyrol!”

Peter stepped in front of the hook-nosed man and said sharply: “If you can’t hold your rude mouth I will show you what a gentleman is!”

The man looked at him, half-sheepishly, half-defiantly, but said nothing.

Peter accompanied them down into the cellar. A damp stench came out of it, and the light burned faintly and nearly went out in the foul air. Old heavy flintstock guns that fired balls the size of eggs lay on stacks of wood; they shone, having been greased carefully. The twenty barrels of the “Death-organ” lay in two rows, one over the other, held in a firm frame. Thick leather pads were affixed to the butts of the arquebuses, as a protection against the recoil. A large iron-bound chest contained the bullets, so heavy that with their united efforts the men were hardly able to lift it. Peter took up one of the balls in his hand, felt a slight roughness on the surface, and made out by the flicker of the candle the letters printed on the lead with the mould: “Drink Blood.”

They carried up the chests gasping, and found two more casks of powder, and greased packages of match-cord and sulphur-thread; all these they loaded carefully into the wagon waiting in front of the house.

“Where are you taking them?” Peter asked very uneasily.

“Not so far—to Pontlatz Bridge,” answered Voglsanger. “It’s our turn this time. They’re bringing up big forces, and want to call the tune of the dance. Whoever won’t help us now will have the name to all eternity of a rogue and a Judas!” he added, with a significant look.

“A Judas isn’t far off where there’s a gentleman!” grinned the hook-nosed man. “Nobody knows which is the worse, the gentry or the Bavarians.”

“Hold your filthy mouth!” Voglsanger turned on him. “Herr Storck isn’t going to leave us in a fix. Isn’t that right?” he asked, holding out his hand to Peter.

“Quite right!” said he, and shook hands.

“Well, I ask the gentleman’s pardon,” said the bully in a completely changed tone, and took off his hat. “It was because they said down there that Herr Storck is for the Bavarians—”

The heavily loaded wagon moved off creaking and clattering. The oxen snorted and strained forward. The birds were beginning to sing and a ruddy glow appeared through the mist in the east.

The wind carried up from the Valley a clangorous noise. All the bells were calling.

"There's no one to help us now but ourselves!" was the cry in Sankt Marein. "The South Tyrolese can't get through, they are held up at Sterzing. Now, men, it's for home and hearth, and anyone who won't fight for himself, stick him like a pig! Remember wife and child, and don't allow it!"

A young woman with hair streaming behind her danced along the village street, knocking at all the windows and screaming in a piercing voice, "If any man stays at home to-day, kill him like a dog!"

There was no need to rouse the people now. Their homes were threatened, and the wrath of the peasants rose to frenzy. Senn had no longer to drag about his weary feet. The women, in mortal terror of the invaders, preached with greater zeal than the Capuchins. They would go too, they cried; men were not needed to hurl down stones.

Limping painfully between two slicks, Federspiel appeared, and was received with shouts of delight.

"You have joined us at last!" old Josele crowed, and slapped him on the shoulder with his bony hand so that the sick man winced. "And Herr Storck too is a better man now! Lads, you do my heart good!"

Federspiel's thin face worked with pain. "I must get down there," he said, gnashing his teeth. "I'll look out for a good spot. I mustn't miss one shot!"

"You are joining, then?" whispered Peter. "And now, when you might have stopped at home quietly with that foot!"

"There are Frenchmen with them!" he hissed. "I must have them!"

The drum began to beat.

Peter hung the green strap of his musket over his shoulder, and let his bullet-bag and powder-horn dangle from his breast. For the first time since his arrival he took the road down to the Inn Valley. Was it to defend Zeitlanghof? Those around him were fighting for their religion, for the Emperor in Vienna, for their dilapidated barns and poor huts with roofs held down by stones, for their lean cattle and crab-apples. Why was he adventuring his young life in the fight?

A phrase came into his mind, which old Bartenstein had once uttered: "A good Brother is always on the side of the weak." "According to that," said

Peter to himself, “I can still be a good Würzburg Franconian; that’s good enough for me!”

They were met presently in their descent by some quick runners who called to them that Senn needed every man. They must hurry. “To the rescue! to the rescue! This is our fight!”

XXXIX

IN A PLACE where the Valley of the Inn narrowed, and steep rocks and slopes rose over the white road which ran by the turbulent stream, crossed here by the only bridge within a long distance, preparations were being made to receive the advancing enemy. Michael Senn, District Judge of Pfunds, had taken over the command.

They worked with feverish haste. High above the swollen and foaming river, high above the road winding along between river and mountain, the stone batteries were raised, held by ropes to the trunks of the trees. The cords creaked with the strain upon them. Huge angular blocks hung over the steep treeless slope behind the almost prostrate trunks, and smaller stones, the size of head or fist, were filled into every crevice for the terrible avalanche. Youths stood ready with pails of water to tighten the hemp where it grew slack, and picked men, with keen-edged axes, waited quietly beside the ropes at the important points.

The words passed from mouth to mouth: “They’re going to play ‘Thoughts are free.’ That means, ‘The enemy is coming.’ ”

Close beside Peter, who was trying to help the groaning Federspiel, Anderl’s father climbed into his place.

“The dogs! The hellish devils!” he gasped. “I want no cover. I got a Passau charm from the Jew, lead can’t touch me!”

Sweating from their toil they sat about on the stony ground high up on the mountain. Directly below, the full width of the road could be seen, and beside it the grey river. They gazed down through the stone batteries; below them on a shelf of turf another battery had been so built that its deadly mass must fall into the middle of the road whenever the stays were cut. In a wide semi-circle, hidden behind stones and earthworks, the marksmen watched and waited, posted in tiers one above another. Opposite them, on the other side of the valley, musket-barrels and brass buckles flashed every now and

then in the sun. A crimson religious banner, on which was displayed the Virgin with her Infant, lay behind Peter on the short grass; the men of Sankt Marein had brought it with them but were not allowed to raise it. When the heavy brocade should begin to fill and puff out in the wind, it would bring a message of consolation to those destined to pass forever into the presence of the Queen of Heaven.

The hunter was in a fever and his cheeks were flushed.

"You are too ill to fight!" said Peter anxiously, bending over him as he breathed heavily.

"Oh, yes!" said Federspiel, playing with the powder-horn on his breast. "When I was a young student I spat blood, and the dog-soup my lodging-house keeper gave me did not cure the lung disease. I pitied the wretched dog that was killed on my account; for, you see, a dog isn't a beast like others, it's half human . . . And then, getting up so suddenly this morning, that did me harm, and besides, there's my foot . . . God, that boy *is* a boy, he was half crazy with delight when the Father let him come with me. I lose too much blood when I cough, that's it, Herr Storck. But my eyes are all right, and I can lay my finger to the trigger as well as anyone when I sight a Frenchman—"

Peter looked at him sadly. He saw clearly that there was no long prospect of life for this young man, whom he had come to love in his loneliness.

"If I manage to get back, I should like to look out for a better little house for myself," continued Federspiel. "Not one like a tall poplar, all green branches outside and rotten and diseased within. But we don't come into the world twice—" A spasm of coughing interrupted him. "And this life has been too short—"

He laid his head on his shrunken arms and appeared to fall asleep in the midst of the hum of voices, the hammering and shouting.

Peter found himself thinking of Julia's strange words about souls wandering without a dwelling-place, and at the same time he thought of Christian, whom he had not seen.

Gradually the noise died down. All appeared to sink into serious reflection except for one or two of the women overhead who were laughing and teasing the men. Peter felt in the depths of his being the weight of what was impending, and thought how many of these hundreds of men awaiting battle would not see another day. He looked round him, and noticed rosaries in many hands. Manly and prepared for action, these religious men let the

smooth beads fall clicking through their fingers, and their lips, moving in prayer, kissed reverently the little metal crosses at the end of the string. Others busied themselves with their weapons, cleaning the hole in the pan with a brass needle or screwing at the flint of the cock with wrinkled-up eyes. Many who had been engaged for hours and hours in severe toil, lay like Federspiel on the hard ground in the heavy slumber of complete exhaustion. Here and there a peasant talked with his wife, squatting beside him, in a grave whisper. Others ate bacon and bread from their wallets, chewing slowly like all peasants. Overhead, on a projecting rock, stood the look-out man, all alertness and attention, watching the valley below.

A couple of active fellows had insisted on keeping watch down on the road beside the chapel. They were practised messengers and runners, whom it did not suit to remain high up on the mountain.

A low sad song rose over the place where Peter lay. He looked up. Two rather young men, in a remarkable dark costume which he had not seen before, were singing in an undertone a mournful song:

> “Look yonder, above at the heavenly gate,
> A poor soul stands and full sadly doth wait.
>
> “Poor soul of mine, poor soul of mine, come now to me,
> And white as the snow thy raiment shall be.
>
> “White and pure and fair as the snow,
> And we into Heaven together shall go!”

But from the spot where two heavy muskets pointed their round black muzzles out of a hollow in the rock, a sharp commanding voice ordered silence, and cut short the slow singing as if with a knife.

At this solemn moment, Peter perceived with emotion the untroubled calm of nature. Butterflies, almost transparently white and delicate, fluttered past him with red eyes on their wings, and lighted on the dark sweet-smelling flowers. Grasshoppers, crimson under the wing, took their short flight with a rattling sound. A tiny white cloud floated over the blue sky in the bright sunlight; a hawk wheeled upward in wide circles, as if its object were to command a view of the crowds below. A thin blue column of smoke rose from a cooking-fire, spread into a veil in the breeze and vanished. A nuthatch danced up and down the bole of a pine tree playing

hide-and-seek, tapping when it was out of sight and protruding its little head to peer round. And while the birds chirped and the sun shone, amid the fresh green of the mountain grass and the smell of flowers, beneath the cloud and above the noise of the waters, Death waited . . .

He thought constantly of Julia. When marching off, he had gazed longingly at the little window of the smith's house. He had passed, and was looking back once more without hope when for a moment, alas! for one brief moment only, her white hand had appeared between the curtains and waved to him. She dared not do more; it was enough, for now he knew that she was thinking of him. What was to happen further was a man's affair. The balls no doubt would reach the place where he lay with the men of Sankt Marein, and if he were hit, there would be one who would weep for him. One only? Repentance stirred within him as he thought of Notburga, waiting somewhere in a strange land for her trouble, a trouble for which he was responsible. Involuntarily he looked in the direction of the Swiss mountains; in an hour, perhaps, he would be dead and he had done nothing to help her. But was there not a box in his study full of gold coins?

Sun-maiden, beautiful Sun-maiden! Why did they call Julia by that name?

An excited murmur, running from mouth to mouth, roused him. "Pass it on!" said the man on the other side of the sleeping Federspiel, turning to him. "A message has arrived! The Eisack is running red with blood. The French have met with a disaster at Sterzing. The Sand innkeeper wants all good men in Tyrol to know that a great victory has been won!"

Peter passed on the news. Repressed jubilation and waving of hats, signals from one side of the Valley to the other, indicated a sudden exaltation.

"Are you one of the gentlefolks?" asked an old peasant. "Looks as if you was!"

"I belong to Vienna," Peter answered.

"I thought as much! Can you shoot? A good gun's no use unless somebody owns it. What do you say now, how far would you call it to the white stone beyond there?"

Peter measured the distance with a look. "I should say about three hundred paces," he answered.

"You've hit it!" the man grinned. "It's just three hundred!"

At this moment, thin and clear, the sound of a fife rose in the air. The look-out man had seen the front of the enemy's column.

Peter glanced up at the projecting rock.

The fifer was standing behind the look-out man, playing. Peter shivered as at the breath of a glacier. The man blowing the fife was the gruesome creature in the dark red, patched shooting-jacket, the peasant with the nose eaten away and the parchment lips. The eyes were deep sunken in the yellow skull, the stockings hung loose on the shrivelled legs, and the bony fingers moved along the yellow wood of the fife.

The skeleton figure of Zeitlanghof! Peter saw it before him.

Did others see it? Merry and clear, buoyant as a dance tune, a well-known folk-song was borne to him, so peaceful and happy that his heart leaped within him. It might have been a lonely shepherd delighting himself with his flute:

"Our thoughts are free!
  Who can follow their flight?
They move as they list
  Like shades of the night;
No man may stay them,
No hunter slay them
  Though marksman he be:
  Our thoughts are free!"

The air concluded with an elaborate flourish, sweet as the twittering of birds.

XL

THE ENEMY HAD COME.

A thousand heads were raised warily from the barricades; dark fiery eyes, eyes keen, light blue, tired and dim, were directed on the road. The men who had remained on the look-out behind the chapel ran off with long bounds.

A Bavarian dragoon hurried after them on a piebald nag. His broad sabre shone like a blue flame, which went out and then flashed again. The rider stopped short, puzzled, on the now quite deserted road; his big horse

neighed, turned, and trotted slowly back. White flakes of froth blew off from the bright bit. A hundred muskets were aimed at him sportively.

"Don't fire, men! For God's sake wait! Until they're in the hole!" The whisper ran along the fines.

"I could have lifted him off his nag," said Anderl's father, laying aside his heavy musket.

Federspiel had wakened up, and his eyes flashed as he looked after the rider. "Was that a Frenchman?"

"A Bavarian—" Peter reassured him; his own heart was in his throat.

"So once again our German brothers are in front and the French behind!" sighed the hunter. "Well, I suppose I can't alter it!"

A rumbling, ringing, clattering. Trumpets, extraordinarily loud in the narrow valley, struck up a march, and there was a roll of drums. Germans, carried away by the triumphant sound, tramped to the French march. The Tyrolese musketeers also rejoiced in the gallant air. It sounded for them too.

The horses of the White Dragoons curveted and seemed to move their fine heads, full of fire and spirit, in time to the music. The brass trumpets, the laces and buttons, the swords and bridles, flashed golden sparks. An endless line poured along the road, blue, white, red and dark, glittering with silver, gold and copper.

"The blue and black men, with the red cockade on the shako, they're the French—" said Anderl's father. He had already served with Teimer and also had been in the South.

It was only a small detachment of French Engineers belonging to the Deroy Division, which had been assigned to the Tenth Bavarian Regiment of Junkers and to the squadron of Dragoons. Fresh and confident, on the alert for good quarters and for women, they marched along in the white dust. Burscheid the Colonel swayed proudly in his saddle, and beside him rode the bilious-looking Lieutenant-Colonel Basserot. A deserter from the Günter Battalion knew them and told their names.

"Don't fire! Not yet—"

Part of the troops had already passed the bridge. There was a thudding of hoofs on the road.

Tui-i-i—tui-i-i! Far up on the mountain-side there were two shots.

One of the Dragoons, riding on in front over the bridge, with a wild movement tore the helmet from his head, reeled as if drunk, and fell head

foremost out of his saddle. His comrades caught the reins of his snorting, riderless horse and rode back.

The dead man, in his white coat, lay in the middle of the dusty planks, his eyes wide open and staring at the sky, beneath which swallows were darting. His doublet showed a brilliant red, his arms were stretched out. The march stopped, there were shouts and curses, and every eye looked up to the spot on the mountain where two small grey clouds were rising.

But now little clouds broke out all over it. An irregular crackling of shots began. A huge Bavarian rolled over like a hare, another sank with a smashed knee. Several others fell . . . Men stooped and saw their own blood flowing . . .

Trumpets blared. "Halt! Ha-alt!" Burscheid pulled up, and Basserot, with his white-gloved hand, patted the trembling hind-quarters of his steed and drew it back red with blood.

"Ho! Ho! Ha!" Broken shouts of command rang forth. Officers yelled, and dashing out from the ranks rained blows with the flat of the sword. The discharge of shots reverberated with a crackling noise like thunder. Grey piles of balls could be seen on the slopes, and here and there a man darted out from cover and with upraised arm loaded.

With the uproar was mingled a clanging, booming noise. It was the church bells ringing the alarm, and calling on those who were still on the way to hasten to the death-struggle.

"It's our turn now, it's our turn now!"

Suddenly all eyes were directed to one object. A man, a Tyrolese, had crawled forward to the bridge, a fagot of blazing pine-sticks in his grasp. A small flame shot up, but the wood of the bridge was wet and rotten . . . Some soldiers ran forward and threw themselves on the dare-devil, who shouted, foamed at the mouth and kicked. They got cords round his throat and about his arms and legs, and dragged him off into the middle of the column, cutting at him and trampling on the sinews of his knees . . .

And now the Bavarians were advancing in extended formation to climb the slope, bayonets fixed and drums beating. Here and there a man slipped back, catching with his hands at shrub, tree and grass, desisted, rolled over and lay still, covered with blood. A young lieutenant in red and blue uniform stood in the middle of the bridge, making disdainful signals to the peasants.

A Frenchman!

With rapid hands Federspiel raised the barrel of his gun and, rigid as stone, bent his finger on the trigger.

The Frenchman leaped straight up, came down at the foot of the bridge-railing and fell over. He whirled for a moment in the eddies of the stream, disappeared, came to the surface again with spreading hair and epaulettes, and then sank. The river swallowed him, rolling him along over the sand and gravel.

"The devil!" cried Anderl's father to Peter. "That was a clean shot!"

But on the opposite side of the valley, which none of the defenders was able to reach with his weapon, the Bavarians were advancing, blue spots on the mountain side, closing their ranks they fought their way up. Many peasants were seen leaping up in the air, sheltering behind trees, firing. The shots flashed a bright red on the dark background. Many were hit in the act of reversing their muskets after firing, collapsed, rolled back for a short distance, until the bayonet pinned them to the ground writhing.

Pale with horror, the men of Sankt Marein looked on with clenched fists, unable to help. Bullets chirped amongst them occasionally, throwing up the dust.

But from the thickets overhead came a sudden jubilant noise of fifes and shouting: reinforcements from the hamlets and villages. The intensity of the firing on the opposite side was redoubled, and the Bavarians closed up and made another rush forward.

All at once the peasants divided, wheeling left and right. The blue soldiers shouted and pressed on up the mountain.

Hell opened in front of them.

Streams of fire in two close rows one above the other issued in rapid succession, followed by heavy reports. A frightful lane was cleared through the midst of the infantry, legs in white trousers whirled in the air, shrieks of agony rang out, bellowing . . .

"The Death-organ is playing on them—right well it plays!" shouted the men overhead, throwing up their wide hats in a transport of joy. The peasants' fire grew heavy.

Panic and flight! The soldiers raged down the slope which they had climbed with so much difficulty, stumbling over the roots of trees and stones, and the distorted limbs of the dead. Many of them were left, with legs shot away or wounds in the stomach and abdomen. The butt ends of muskets knocked against skulls, smashing them like glass.

XLI

THE MAIN BODY of the troops under Burscheid returned in the twilight to their old quarters, and encamped among the ruined houses of the peasants. They could advance no further. Fists were shaken in the direction of the fatal and unassailable slopes.

A yellow light was seen in the sky as the darkness deepened, and showers of sparks flew upwards. From overhead came sounds of lamentation.

"Prutz is on fire! Murderers! They've set fire to Prutz!"

Gradually it grew dark. The cracking and whistling of bullets died away. A single bell continued to swing, reverberating mournfully.

The wounded—they could be heard now.

"Water! water! For Jesus' sake! Mother!"

Peter had fired one shot only. He had distinctly seen the man at whom he had aimed falling from the limber of the gun, and the heavy wheel crushing the body, which moved convulsively. He continued to hold in his hand the empty weapon.

Someone overhead was quarrelling with the smith.

"What are you standing there for, with your big musket?"

Fentor's harsh voice growled in answer: "Leave me alone, filth! Are you the Commandant?"

"What's that you called me? Do you want a look at my dagger?"

"Ah, this is better! We're finding out our own people in the dark again!" cried Voglsanger, climbing up. Then all was quiet overhead.

What was the matter with Anderl's father? He was sitting in a strange attitude, his hand to his breast. He could be seen by the glimmer of the lantern, shaded on three sides, which old Josele was holding in a trembling hand.

"Jesus! all the blood!" somebody cried.

Anderl's father gazed slowly round. "The Father—" he was beginning to say; and as if by magic the red-bearded Capuchin appeared on the spot, drew forth a box-wood cross and held it up before the dying man's face.

"Say a prayer before your soul goes out through the bullet-hole!" said he.

"Is it—is it all true about the Kingdom of Heaven?" gasped the mortally-wounded man, the breath whistling in his chest. "If only it's true, Father—"

“Dost doubt? Turn away your ear from the wicked Fiend! Honourably and duly you have won the Heavenly reward. The Heavenly gates of pearl and precious stones will open unto you, and the Lord Jesus Himself will lead you in where all the brave men of Tyrol are waiting for their fellow-countrymen. Do not fear, poor man, you have been faithful! Say a prayer, won’t you? Our Father—”

“Our Father—” sighed the peasant. A smile played over his tired face; his head fell sideways.

“Now he is on the road to Paradise,” said the Capuchin. “As a believing Catholic Christian he has gone before the Lord. For God, Emperor and Fatherland. Hats off, folks!”

They murmured the Paternoster.

And then Voglsanger came up with a large wooden vessel. “Have a drink, men!” he muttered. “It’s brandy with tobacco in it—that puts a good rage into you. And we’ll need to have a rage in us to-morrow morning early, not to get soft when we are settling accounts!”

But no poison was needed in the drink. Something happened which drove the peasants wild with wrath.

A terrible shout of pain reached their ears from below. In a hoarse voice a man was wailing, entreating, shrieking, weeping—again there was an awful shriek, long-drawn-out like the howling of a dog. “Not burning! . . . You are Christian people . . . Not burning! . . . Jesus!”

“They’re torturing the man they took on the bridge. He’s from the inn at Pfunds, Falschlunger Simon.— Holy God!”

Peter closed his ears so as not to hear the awful cries of the unfortunate man; they were burning his eyes out with red-hot ramrods and flaying his hands with knives. The shrieks continued long into the night.

The peasants sat in silence.

“To-morrow the Inn must be so red that they will see it in Sprugg,” someone said through his clenched teeth. “To-morrow is pay-day.”

The night was clear, and the stars shone above the mountains and the Valley. Down on the road the exhausted soldiers huddled together, white with dust and hungry, and many of them wounded, muttering curses at the stupidity of their commander, who had led them into this trap. The numerous small fires on the heights around revealed to them their situation. They took off their leather boots, cooled their sore feet in the dust of the road and loosened their stiff collars. There was hardly room for their

necessities. Loaves of bread were passed from hand to hand, there was nothing else to eat. Impatiently they looked forward to daylight, when they would force a way out in the early dawn.

Peter too was waiting for day; perhaps the last morning his eyes would see. A song came into his mind which he had often sung in Würzburg, as he sat dreaming and drinking among his companions:

"When the horrors of death are nigh me,
  And near is corruption's night,
Should a comrade then be by me,
  Then, brothers, death is light;
And my last thoughts, before they fade,
Will bless the union our hearts have made!"

Was it appointed that he should die in this place? Gradually weariness overpowered him.

He slept, until he started up in wild haste, roused by the first uproar of the fighting. The earliest flush of day touched the mountain summits. The white cloaks of the soldiers gleamed. Shots were being fired from every direction; all was in readiness for battle. Federspiel, his teeth chattering, sat beside him shivering and coughing. The din of battle grew louder in the direction of Landeck, and Peter learned from the talk of the peasants that in the grey dusk of morning Burscheid had attempted to march off with his main force, and had encountered the barricades raised during the night: once more he was brought to a stand on the narrow road, with his guns, wagons, and columns of horse and foot, unable to move.

XLII

WAIT! WAS THE WORD passed to the peasants; allow time, and meanwhile waste no shot. The order came from Senn, who was posted somewhere on the heights and watched everything. The enemy must first break his head against the barricade, and would then have to turn back, when the business could be finished.

"How are you, Herr Federspiel?" asked Peter, with a half-glance at Anderl's father, who lay at a little distance content and peaceful.

“Not so well as he is!” said the hunter, smiling. “However, what is not yet may happen still! If the South Tyrolese get through, you will no doubt receive an answer from Giovanelli about the flowers,” he continued.

This reminded Peter that he had completely forgotten to show Federspiel the botanist’s letter. He pulled out his pocket-book, but searched in vain: the letter was not there, and no doubt was lying under the large crystal on his writing-table. As he searched, however, he found something: the note which he had discovered in the window of the inn on that first morning, and had thrust into his pocket.

“I did receive a letter, and if we reach home safe and sound I will show you what Giovanelli said. But here is something else, something I found outside my window the morning after I arrived. Strange that I never spoke of it to you!”

He handed the paper to Federspiel.

The latter listened for a moment in the direction of the firing, then glanced at the slip of paper and read it several times.

“A warning,” he said, “a warning from the Fire-spirits. Pity I only hear of it now.”

“It’s Romansch,” Federspiel nodded. “Old Romansch, too, which is still spoken in a few places in the Engadine, and was spoken here once. I know something of the dialect.”

“You can tell what it means, then?”

“Now I have it!” exclaimed Federspiel, bringing down the back of his hand on the paper. “And it explains that avalanche of stones on the Schellbock that nearly took me along with it. They’re more honourable than I thought, the Fire-spirits, and they sent you a warning immediately after your arrival!”

“But do say what it means!” cried Peter, exasperated.

“It means: ‘He who enters on forbidden paths forfeits his life’—no more and no less. And you have been carrying that about with you for months!”

Heavy firing broke out all round them. The road below was filled all at once with a retreating flood of soldiers, cavalry-men—hardly able to restrain their crazy horses—wagons, and guns. Into the midst of this shouting, jostling, confused crowd the enraged peasants were shooting mercilessly.

A high, clear voice, heard above the crackling of shots, and so penetrating that it seemed more than human, came from the heights

overhead: “In the name of the Holy Trinity—let go!”

Immediately there was a gleam of axes among the Sankt Marein men, and the straining ropes, instantaneously severed, sprang back with a snap. With a frightful crash and amid clouds of dust, tree-trunks, masses of earth, rocks and rubble were precipitated, struck the ground, rebounded, and broke with awful violence in the midst of the struggling throng of men, crushing them down. A single cry, composed of a thousand voices, rose up, and dark clouds of dust enveloped everything.

The downfall!

The snapping and whistling of bullets grew more violent, the big muskets bellowed, and with a noise like thunder the “Death-organ” drove its heavy discharges across the bed of the valley. The twenty bores of the murderous “Organ” vibrated, ploughing gaps through the foot-soldiers, who shot wildly in every direction, and among the maimed horses, who plunged madly, uttering cries more terrible than the shrieks of the men.

The bubbling currents of the Inn were filled with men in blue and white uniforms, turning over as they drowned, raising their arms in the attempt to save themselves, or their heads to breathe: bullets promptly immersed them in the turbid water. A horse’s leg, with white fetlock, writhed convulsively as the animal tried to extricate itself from a heap of stones. The feet of a man, moving slightly, stuck out from under a large fragment of rock, and a soldier shouted as he tugged at them. Blood ran from shrieking and cursing mouths, hands were pressed to crushed eyeballs. Others, desperate and defenceless, clambered up the slope, ran hither and thither, or stood up to their knees in the rushing water, gazing round them with a witless look; balls passed through their bodies, smashed their bones, knocked them over. Peter noticed how Federspiel was shooting, reloading and firing again, without intermission; and he himself, caught by the fever, without taking aim, fired several shots into the midst of the frenzied soldiers. There was no longer a Frenchman to be seen.

In the midst of the death-struggle on the road a Bavarian officer sat calm and brave on his brown horse, expostulating with his men. It could be seen that he was having some success in rallying round him a few resolute men, and compelling them to form into ranks. His brave horse stood on three legs, and the fetlock of the right forefoot was raised, and dripping with blood.

“Shoot!” said a hollow voice close to Peter, who had just reloaded. He started, his musket already in position. Against his will his finger moved and touched the trigger.

The officer fell forward with his face on the horse’s neck, then tried to rise. His hand moved in the air. He slipped slowly from the saddle and fell to the ground.

Peter stared downwards motionless. The man tried once more to raise himself, supported himself on his hand and looked round; then he collapsed and lay quite still, the strap of his helmet round his defiant chin.

Peter heard a repulsive laugh and looked round, beside himself with rage. But there was no one behind him.

“It’s hard—“ said Federspiel, gnashing his teeth and nodding at Peter. “I can’t any longer—!” he cried suddenly, and dashed his gun to the ground. Then he covered his face with his hands and wept.

“Germans—“ Peter heard him say.

“They’re giving themselves up already! They’ve had enough!” was the cry on all sides. “Seize them, lads! Down, everyone!”

They tore downwards to the road, and Peter was borne along in the wild rush.

He found himself one of a crowd surrounding Basserot, whom they were pulling from his horse.

“Where is your Commandant? I wish to speak to the Commandant—” cried the grey-faced Lieutenant-Colonel, his voice sinking to a gasp in the shame of the moment.

The men laughed, spat, shouted, threatened with their fists. “We have no Commandant! Surrender, you rascal!”

There was no further resistance. Guns clattered to the ground; the straps holding the side-arms were flung from the shoulders; the startled team of a gun-carriage dashed over the bank of the stream into the shallow water at the edge. Some of the peasants dragged up the horses, leaving behind one which had its legs broken, and a youth, taking a pistol from a cavalry-man, held it to the animal’s ear, fired, and the head sank over behind the smoke. They were dragging the dead by the arms and legs into their watery grave, when someone shouted that Major Bullingen’s battalion had got away: they must go after it. It was Senn’s voice.

“Let him blather!” said one of the peasants. “It’s time for us to get home. If they want to find us again we’re always there!”

Several hundred prisoners were lounging about, looking stupid and ill-at-ease, but the peasants, furious as they had been, did nothing to them. The old good-humour had returned with the joy of victory. The fight was over! The Bavarians here could do nothing now to anyone.

"Do you want something to eat? Have you got a thirst?" Every face wore a broad smile of delight at the turn things had taken. One of the prisoners remarked that it was the French who had flayed to death the Pfunds man: the Bavarians would have had nothing to do with it.

"That's a good thing for you!" shouted Voglsanger. "We might have done the same to you!"

Peter turned to one of the soldiers with a sudden feeling of anxiety. "Was there a Lieutenant Bartenstein with you?" The Bavarian, a sub-officer, shook his head.

"There's no officer called Bartenstein in the 10th Regiment."

Peter gave a sigh of relief. At this moment he was addressed by Zangerl.

"So you were in it? That was fine of you!"

"I shouldn't care for another experience of it—"

Peter shuddered. He had just trodden on a dead man's hand.

Zangerl smiled sadly. "You are right, it is terrible. This road is slippery with men's blood. Good Heavens! why should great countries send out armies to conquer, as they call it, little countries that have done them no harm? Will the world never be wide enough for a people to be able to say: 'I will belong to this or that nationality,' without the risk of being assailed on that account by huge forces?"

"Zangerl! Where are we to bring the prisoners? Senn is asking for you!" cried someone, and Peter's friendly acquaintance went off hurriedly.

Peter slung his gun over his shoulder and walked slowly up the mountain along the bed of a stream. When he reached Federspiel, the latter pointed to Anderl sitting in prayer beside his father's body, big tears rolling down his cheeks.

"We shall have to leave him there for the time being," said the hunter. "He doesn't hear a word one says to him, poor boy . . . If you don't mind giving me a little help, Herr Storck, I'll see whether I can crawl as far as Sankt Marein."

There were other dead bodies lying about, and many weeping women. A clenched fist protruded from the earth which had been thrown over some corpse.

“Brave fellows!” said Federspiel. “Even in death they show their spirit. They’re Germans! That’s what I like—to show fight, even out of the grave!”

XLIII

PETER SUPPORTED THE HUNTER, whose foot pained him greatly and threatened to give way under him. It was a piece of good luck that Voglsanger was going the same road.

“They’ll not come back!” said the peasant, waving his hand in the direction of the plains. “Never—”

Federspiel made a wry face. “God grant you may be right, Voglsanger,” he said, “but—”

“Have you seen Christian Lergetpohrer anywhere?” interrupted Peter, afraid that Federspiel might incense the other with his gloomy prophecies. “He was not with the Sankt Marein men.”

Voglsanger shook his head. “He’ll never be with us again,” he said. “Christian has trouble inside him though he looks well enough. The Capuchin Father was at his house, but Christian won’t allow anyone in. Nothing can be done for him, for when the Reverend Father says he’ll exorcise the spirit—”

“What’s that you’re saying?” The hunter came to a stand and leaned on his sticks.

“Everyone knows it,” returned Voglsanger seriously. “Christian’s troubled every hour of the day by a little spirit, a dead boy, who has him in his power—”

“How can you believe such stuff?” said Federspiel, growing excited. “There aren’t spirits. He’s ill in his mind, that’s all!”

The peasant stood still and gazed at him from under his bushy eyebrows.

“Well, that’s clever! Is that what you’ve learned in your studies, that there aren’t spirits? Please tell me then, where does the immortal soul go when the body dies and rots?”

“To God—” Peter answered.

“That might be! But if God doesn’t want the soul? Did you hear the song the men from Finstermünz sang yesterday, about the soul standing in front of the gates of Heaven? Look at Sepp of Kranewitten, now—it’s known for

certain about him that he threw his own brother over the Red Wall in a quarrel about a chamois, and now he's lying down yonder himself with a hole above his right ear—do you believe, sir, that a man like that goes in and out by the gate of Heaven? I think, if a man has been like Sepp, it's down again with him, and he must go through everything again till he's good, so good that his soul grows like a white dove. And it'll be the same with that drummer-lad: he can't enter into God's kingdom, and so the man that shot him dead has to listen to him weeping and moaning for the life that he might have wiped out his sins in, if he hadn't come to his end, as God willed it!"

"Well, I hope I'll have a new foot when I come back, and another pair of bellows in my chest—" said the hunter grimly. He sat down on the grassy slope, on which the lizards were rustling. "Stuff and nonsense!"

"I'm not clever at putting it into words," said Voglsanger seriously. "But as sure as I sit here, I've seen a damned soul going out of a nun down there in the Valley, and not so long ago!"

Peter remembered the possessed nun. The horrible scene was still before his eyes, the woman turning and writhing as the spirit was exorcised.

"It was the soul of a man who had done wicked things hundreds and hundreds of years before that, and once when the Sister had had sinful wishes, it got into her. I was there on Sunday in Mid-Lent when the soul spoke out of her in a deep voice, and said it would leave her at twelve o'clock at mid-day. The Father adjured it again to declare in what shape it would leave, and it said it would go out of the Sister's mouth in the shape of three little balls. And at twelve o'clock, while she was shouting and howling, three little round white balls came out of the spittle in her mouth, and were taken up in a cloth and burned. And ever since she has had relief and to-day is well and strong. And if Christian would allow the Father to go near him, it's he would cure him, I think!"

"Oh, you crack-brained ass—I was nearly saying!" laughed the hunter. "And what was it called, then, the spirit that came out of spittle?"

"Things like that are not to be mocked at," replied the peasant.

"Well, rather than listen to such silly talk, I'll walk on, whatever torment it gives me," said Federspiel irritably, and he stood up with a groan. "How anyone can be so stupid—"

"There are many that are called stupid who can see more in the dark than some can in the daylight who are called clever," said Voglsanger. "And

what'll be the end of Christian, if they don't let the Father come near him, you'll see for yourself, and the gentleman here too! The little lad is drawing him away, I'm telling you!"

In silence and ill-humour they walked on. At the last and steepest part of the road they had to support Federspiel on both sides. The sweat ran down his face with pain and exhaustion.

There was no one in the village. A few starved hens were looking for food, forsaken cows lowed mournfully, and in the meadows the grass stood high, untouched by the scythe.

Voglsanger and Peter brought the hunter, limping painfully, to his hut. Somebody disappeared through the door, and was standing inside, a little embarrassed, as they entered.

"You little witch!" cried Voglsanger, making the sign of the cross in front of Sylvana, who looked at him uneasily with a timid smile. "Must I burn your skin with holy water?" He put his fingers quickly into the little earthenware trough at the door-post and drew them back quite dry. "Nothing there—!"

"Leave the wench alone, Voglsanger," laughed the hunter. "It's decent of you to come and help me, you little frog! Go and fetch me some water to clean the powder off my hands, and bring in wood, you little coal-woman!"

Voglsanger plucked Peter's sleeve and they went out. "Now I know the hunter has dealings with the Devil," he said when they were outside. "The witch is at home in his house!"

XLIV

A CHEERLESS AND UNTIDY room awaited him in Zeitlanghof, and when he had taken some food from the pan set on the slovenly table, the young man became a prey to gloomy reflections. He almost regretted that in order to be alone he had sent off the garrulous and inquisitive old woman to the kitchen. All the incidents of the terrible fight came back to him with intense vividness. He could hardly endure the remembrance of the cavalry officer whom he had killed, and over and over again saw the unfortunate man falling from his horse. He heard again the cries for help, the piteous entreaties for quarter, of the soldiers, who spoke in the dialect of this country. They had found little mercy, hundreds of them had been shot,

slaughtered, crushed, drowned. The shrieks of the man under torture in the dark night, his moaning and sobbing, shrilled in his cars again, mingled with the song, “Our Thoughts are Free!” Trivial things that he had noticed in the midst of the horrors recurred to his memory: the butterfly which had settled on the blood-besprinkled grass and pushed its proboscis into the red drops; the lad who had trodden on the body of a Bavarian and shook with laughter, the evil sound of which he heard again. God! what had the cavalry officer done to him, or the gunner, or the poor devils into whose curled-up bodies he had discharged his musket. He forced himself to think of the awful doings reported from Schwaz, perhaps one might regard oneself as an instrument of the vengeance of God . . .

How completely his life had changed within a few months! What had become of his buoyant spirits, his joy in mere living? Was his hair not turning grey in the heyday of his youth? A senseless, hopeless love had taken possession of his heart, and he had been caught into a wild whirl of eerie happenings.

He had murdered; and he now understood Christian Lergetpohrer, and knew how that poor soul felt; the sufferings of the good-natured creature were revealed to him. And he must now call upon his own strength to resist the face of the dead who had fallen at his hand because someone had bidden it. And one outside there, on the wall of this dark, dreary house, was sounding on his fife the measure to which everyone must step. Everyone. There was none who would not have to join in that dance . . .

When he woke out of his melancholy reverie it was beginning to grow dark. He had often amused himself at this hour with Butz, and could still fancy that he felt the animal’s cold nose thrusting itself inside his hand. Alas! even the dog had left him.

The floor creaked.

He almost cried out for happiness. It was a miracle: Julia stood before him.

“I am so glad!” she said softly, laying her small hand on his shoulder. “You have returned!”

He was about to spring up, but the girl’s hand gently pressed him back into his chair.

“I want you to stay where you are,” she smiled, and took a seat on a carved chest at some distance from him. “I came up and no one saw me; that is well! So you are here again!”

She raised her arm for a moment as though she were about to reach it out to him. But at once her beautiful brows contracted, and she looked earnestly into his face.

"Why are you so sad?" she asked.

"Ah, yes, I am sad, Julia!" he said, and his head sank. "I have had terrible experiences. I have killed!—I shot a young officer, Julia!"

"I suppose it could not be avoided?"

"Yes, it could!" he said shortly.

"My question was a thoughtless one!" She shook her head slowly. "Everything that happens must happen. It will pass, Herr Storck, you will forget!"

He rose and reached for the lamp.

"Oh, no!" she begged. "This twilight is pleasant. And I am so glad that you have come back."

He took a step towards her and his heart began to beat more quickly. "Are you playing with me, Julia?" he cried. "Did you not know how hard it was for me to wait, how I longed for you? And yet you allowed me to suffer —!"

"Well, I am here now!" she answered gently. "I have come to you as I promised—!"

"Julia!" he cried, overcome by emotion, "be kind to me at this hour. Explain the riddles that surround you and that torture me. Who are you? What are you in search of, in this corner of the world and in this awful time of insurrection? Do you not understand how all that concerns you affects me too? What am I to think of your intimacy with these outlaws—that you, pure as you are, should make a companion of a wild thing of the woods like Sylvana, a little light-o'-love? Or of that half-savage smith or the queer little pitch-gatherer? And the flowers—where did the flowers come from that you left on the road?"

She rose, her face pale in the darkness. "You promised me—"

"I can't keep that promise!" he went on passionately. "Understand: my old uncle has disappeared inexplicably, and his disappearance is somehow connected with these supposed mountain beings whom they call the Fire-spirits. And it is becoming clearer and clearer to me, Julia, that you know more about these Spirits and their strange doings than anyone else in Sankt Marein!"

“Perhaps they are riddles!” she said after a pause. “But by all that I hold sacred I swear to you that they relate to things which you may regard with indifference. Believe that, Herr Storck! And your uncle—” She stopped short.

“My uncle—?” He caught her trembling hand.

“Speak, Julia, speak this moment! perhaps there will not be such a moment again!”

“I cannot, I cannot!” she said, her hand still trembling in his. “I must not speak. But think no more of the Fire-spirits, I beg of you! they are harmless, and none of them has done any injury to your uncle.”

“Now I know that you are one of those who are hostile to me!” he said sadly. “On the very first day I received a threat—!”

“A warning—”

“Tell me then who sent it?” he urged.

“Someone who knew that you would enter on forbidden paths, like that hunter—”

“Whom they nearly murdered!” he interrupted bitterly.

“The blame was his.” She spoke in a low tone. “Why does he not leave people alone who are doing no harm? Why does he insist on knowing things which need not trouble him?”

“Well, I mean to know these things too, Julia!”

“No, no—do not! I beg it of you earnestly!”

Her eyes filled with tears. He caressed her hair softly.

“Why are you concerned about me, Julia?”

A sob came from her lips, and with a sudden movement she laid her hand lightly on his face and touched his mouth with her lips.

“Eau ti tegn char, eau sunt tien!” she breathed, in a scarcely audible whisper.

But as quickly she shrank away, motioning him back with her hand: “I must go! I must go at once!” she faltered. “We shall see one another again!”

He held her firmly.

“Not till I know what you said just now in some foreign speech—for the second time, Julia!”

“It’s nothing—nothing!” she cried, turning away her face. “Let me go!”

She freed herself from his arms and ran to the door. Like a shadow, silently, she had vanished.

In spite of the disenchantment of her departure, a feeling of blissful happiness remained with him. She loved him! There was no longer any doubt. She loved him and had been troubled about him. And despite the gloomy secret that hovered over her and over her life, the certainty filled him with blessedness.

"Sweetest and dearest!" he thought. "I will not rest until I know what it is that fills your little heart with trouble. Neither wood-devils nor Fire-spirits shall prevent me!"

Was it not as if the touch of her cool hand had redeemed him from blood-guiltiness? His trouble had left him, the scenes of horror had paled away. How remote they had become all at once, as if the fight had happened years before, an event of which he could now think without special emotion.

He could not remain in his room.

As he left the house a brilliant shooting-star passed with its trail of gold over the dark sky. It was said that a wish formed at this moment would surely be fulfilled.

"Well, may she be mine!" he exulted. Once again he was young, his years danced lightly onward, and the load of care which had oppressed him since the previous day fell from him.

XLV

A GROUP OF PEASANTS, who no doubt would have preferred to be celebrating the victory, were standing in front of The Rose beside the sobbing barmaid and Christian's niece, who was likewise in tears.

"Well, we'll go to Josele; he'll give us a glass of brandy," said Hornauss, spitting on the ground. "It's all up with the innkeeper."

"What's the matter with him now?" asked Peter, going up to the girls. They pointed to the entrance, unable to speak. The men shrugged their shoulders and slowly took themselves off.

"What can anyone do?" one of them muttered. "The priest isn't allowed to come any more—"

Peter entered at once by the gloomy doorway and laid his hand on the latch of the tap-room door, but it was closed and would not open. A high falsetto voice could be heard within, laughing, talking, singing. Had the

innkeeper some woman with him? Peter put his ear to the door. He could distinguish nothing but a moan of anguish.

He knocked resolutely, and called the innkeeper by name, saying he had brought some important news. But the strange chattering began again and there was no answer.

He bent his shoulders against the door and pushed with all his might, until the bolt-catches broke out of the decaying door-frame and he himself almost fell on the ground as the door flew open.

No unusual sight met his eyes, nevertheless he felt a chill of horror in his spine.

Christian Lergetpohrer was sitting in shirt and trousers, a half-burned candle on the table in front of him. In his face was a peculiar expression of childish joy, and his large blue eyes were gazing vacantly and without consciousness. He was moving his hands about in the air and talking incessantly, sometimes loudly, then hardly above his breath, with a thin, whimpering boy's voice, which was broken suddenly by weeping.

"Christian, what, for God's sake, are you about?" Peter shouted to him. "Don't you know me?"

The two girls pressed in behind him.

But the innkeeper did not appear to notice them, and kept on chattering and moaning. Gradually one picked up the drift of his talk.

". . . You think I can't make my elbows meet on my back? Then do you suppose they'd have made me a drummer if I couldn't? And I can always do the flourish on parade better than Emil. Only there's one of my shoes I can't find, it was too big and flew off when the Tyrolese man shot me. It was in the head he shot me, it was. And now at night I have to go about without the shoe and you can only hear one foot tapping—tap, tap, tap—when everything is quiet. The Sergeant bought that fat old woman of his a red petticoat—he pinched the money for it, and ten pounds of suet and a new hat. I don't feed with her now, though she only charges two kreuzers a day. You know how she goes on: 'Come here, pretty drummer, sit here, my old man's no good to me!' You know the way the fat old toad is gone on the boys. Comrade, let's have a song, you'll join in, won't you? Now then:

"I was a drummer bold,
They took me from the vault,
  Yes, from the vault.

If I had stayed a drummer,
I never would have come here,
No, never come here."

Now, the second verse!"

Peter could bear it no longer. He went over to Christian, his knees quaking, caught him by the arm and shook him: "Christian, dear Christian, wake up!"

But the innkeeper only smiled and clumsily stroked the hand which had seized him, saying: "It's not reveille yet, Corporal, and I must have another quarter of an hour's sleep. And I'm still singing:

"O gallows built so high,
How fearful 'gainst the sky
You look to me!"

A convulsive sob interrupted the song. The big man flung his two arms on the table, laid his head on them and wept wildly. Neither word nor touch could soothe him.

Peter turned in dismay to the terrified girls. "We shall have to get a doctor," he said, though as he spoke he knew that no doctor could help the unfortunate man.

"He never lets anyone near him," whispered the niece. "He keeps his gun loaded on the bench beside him. Josele's wife was here. She might cure the sickness—and the priest too. But everyone runs away when he turns up his eyes and reaches for the gun."

"Then one of you must stop with him and see that he doesn't hurt himself!" said Peter.

Both the girls cried out and crossed themselves. "You stay, Moidl!"

"Who, I? And let the spirit get hold of me?"

As Peter went out he heard them quarrelling. They were terrified, and refused to remain in the house overnight.

XLVI

TIRED TO DEATH, he sank on his bed.

Next day, early in the morning, he went to Federspiel. The hunter was up, limping about in his room, pale and in ill-humour. A kettle, in which soup was boiling, hung over a glowing fire on the hearth.

"Where is Sylvana?" asked Peter, looking round the room. "It's neat and cosy here to-day!"

"She worked for a while and then we went to bed. She must have climbed over me this morning early, I didn't hear her get up. But there's soup there. To think of her going off again! She lay beside me all night as snug as a purring cat."

Peter sat down on a rickety chair, and watched Federspiel pouring the milk-pottage into a bowl.

The hunter took two wooden spoons out of a drawer and made a gesture of invitation.

"I've breakfasted already, thank you," said Peter, and continued: "There's a sentence in a foreign language which I should like to know the meaning of: Eau ti tegn char, eau sunt tien. What may that mean?"

The other looked at him out of half-closed eyes. "That's a more affectionate phrase than the one you found on the paper in your window. Happy man to whom a pair of rosy lips say: 'I love you, I am yours!' "

Peter felt that he was blushing. "It wasn't said to me—"

The little room with the antlers, the poor furniture and the bear-skin, widened out to rosy-gilded distances, silver bells sounded . . . But the hunter's mocking voice broke in:

"All the same, I am pleased to find that you have learned by heart the language of love!"

Two shrewd clear-blue eyes smiled at Peter as he blushed again.

"Lergetpohrer's illness is taking a bad turn," said Peter to cover his confusion, and he told what had happened on the previous evening at the inn.

Federspiel fed himself slowly from his spoon and said, "The poor devil has had too soft a heart all his life. I remember it well, how he cried, cried like a child, over his old dog Tyras. The dog was sick and was in such pain that it howled all night through, and at last it was resolved that I was to shoot him. The dog suspected nothing, and I made a speedy end of him and buried him in the field. But, my God! the state Christian was in! And now, that affair of the little drummer-boy—he'll never get over it!"

"The people say he's possessed."

The hunter brought the palm of his hand down on the table so violently that everything rattled. “We both heard yesterday what that ox Voglsanger thought about it. But that you, Herr Storck, should be the next! His mind is out of order, that’s all.”

“But it comes to much the same thing,” argued Peter, “whether you call it by this name or that—”

“But the name you give the disease, Herr Storck, is not the right name to give it among these superstitious people. Names like that do mischief. Don’t you know that there have been several cases of possession here? Go into our church and have a look at the big picture there. An obligation rests on men like you and me to talk the people out of such nonsense. Is there not enough darkness in their peasant skulls? If only I succeed in beating up the Fire-spirits, I hope a great deal from that, for they’ll see then how much the thing has to do with spirits! And, Herr Storck,” he added, with a sharp glance, “don’t lose your wits even if there’s a sound of angels’ music. Mice are caught with bacon and men with love!”

“Herr Federspiel!” cried Peter, starting up. “What does that mean?”

The hunter sat unmoved. “I don’t like using many words to avoid saying the right one. In that respect I’m a German. Plainly then: they have sent the little brown wood-fox to me and to you something more elegant and beautiful!”

“This I cannot allow, sir!” said Peter angrily. “The lady of whom you—”

“Gently!” Federspiel rested his hand on Storck’s upraised arm. “Are we going to cross swords here like students? The fact that you asked me about the sentence explained everything to me. Something dainty and distinguished is provided for you, though the little brown wench is good enough for Serafin Federspiel. Don’t fly out, Herr Storck. This is no time for drawing-room compliments; it’s a matter of life and death. We will take it, then, that so far as you are concerned they have succeeded in causing you to desist from our common purpose, and to leave the Fire-spirits undisturbed. My foot is a reminder to me of the plans we meant to carry out together—”

Peter had a feeling of sickness. Was it possible that Julia—? He dismissed the thought. That noble maiden was not false. He was too firmly convinced that it was her anxiety about himself that had brought her to him.

Once more Federspiel seemed to read his thoughts. “Understand me well,” he said more gently. “I don’t wish to revile anyone whom you

respect. But I should be disappointed, bitterly disappointed, if for the sake of a pair of fine eyes and a sweet voice you should cease to acknowledge any obligations to your uncle. For I tell you once more: his disappearance has to do with the Fire-spirits. I can't prove it, but a feeling which does not deceive me tells me it is so. And she has been trying to dissuade you from seeking them out, exactly as my little rogue has been doing with me, for she could not chatter enough about how careful I ought to be in climbing the mountains so much and taking paths on which death is waiting. It's the same thing with both of them! The Fire-spirits are sending us a message by them!"

Peter stood for some time troubled and silent; then he spoke: "A man worth his salt goes through with the job he has taken in hand, or comes to grief over it. Here's my hand! I'm with you wherever it brings us, and I will allow no one to divert me from it. Only no more about the young lady!"

"Yes, yes!" smiled the other, "we are full of good intentions, we two. But we can't leave alone the one thing which is wine and fragrance to us in the desert! Neither you nor I, though we both know well that it takes the strength from us. Well, I think I'll go down with you now to Christian."

Things were not so bad at the inn as Peter had feared. Christian seemed to have got rid of his nightly visitant. His face looked shrunken and as if he had not slept, but there was nothing unusual in what he said. He was drinking with a couple of musketeers, who were trying to convince him of the retreat of Marshal Lefèbvre. Peter and Federspiel, now in high favour for having taken their share in the fight at Pontlatz, were pressed to sit down and drink a health in the dark red wine of the country. The brave fellows appeared to be highly pleased: there was to be an end now to the greed of their enemies; Andreas Hofer was firmly established in the Imperial Castle at Innsbruck, and was really governing. The aristocrats indeed looked sulky, and the shameless women were being taught at last to dress modestly, while the over-clever professors were obliged to yield their places to good scholarly priests. All was well with the people generally. Only in the south a storm was brewing, and French regiments were joining up in Italy . . .

There were others at the table who did not seem disposed to indulge in boastful speeches, and had anxious faces. They had heard too often the cry that all was over, yet all the terrors of war had returned. They were tough, these foreign devils, and however many were killed there were always more of them.

“How are you to-day, Christian?” asked Peter in an undertone.

The innkeeper looked at him as if he did not understand. “Who? I? I am always better in the daytime.” A sudden distress flickered in his eyes. “Wine helps—it makes a man forget—” And he gulped down the liquor in his glass.

“Hurrah for Tyrol!” exclaimed the man who had been bragging, throwing his hat on the table. “Fetch me another glass, my pet, my darling!”

The barmaid screamed as he tried to get hold of her, and ran off with the empty bottle.

Then they sang the song, “Thoughts are free”:

“Though deep in a dungeon
  My body they bind,
Where help cannot reach me,
  And no friend can find;
Yet the spirit within me
My freedom shall win me,
  Through iron and stone:
  Our thoughts are our own!”

After this they went off, laid aside their muskets and powder-horns, put on their everyday clothes, and applied themselves cheerfully to their peasant labours, faithful to the niggardly soil for which so many of them had given up their lives.

XLVII

IN THE BRIGHT MORNING Peter went into the garden of Zeitlanghof, about which he had not as yet troubled himself, and surveyed with some remorse the fruit trees, which were in urgent need of care and cultivation, trying to remember anything he had learned which might help him. Nests of caterpillars hung on the branches; some were devouring the leaves in which they had wrapped themselves. It was time that he should give more attention to his estate than heretofore. In the first place he held it in trust, and he might have to render an account for it. The fir wood too, in which the resin-gatherer had been allowed to bark the trees without supervision, he determined to visit during these quiet days.

It might even happen that Zeitlanghof would acquire a mistress.

The thought was too sweet not to bring with it anxious doubts. Did she really love him? The poison instilled by Federspiel's words worked in him, and gradually a dark veil closed over the golden dream.

There was a rustling sound in one of the old apple trees. He went over to it and caught sight of two red naked legs, struggling upwards and disappearing amongst the branches: it was Sylvana, endeavouring to hide from him. He could not help laughing, and took hold of her by the feet. A green apple with a bite out of it dropped in his face, and thereupon he seized her and dragged her down screaming.

"I have you now, you little thief!" he laughed. "Now I'll put you through your catechism, wild cat!"

She looked up into his face and laughed.

"Where is the beautiful young lady, that I never see her?" he asked more seriously, for the windows in the smith's house were closed.

"Where is she? Gone to Sprugg. [Innsbruck] You can run after her!" she said mockingly, trying with all her strength to escape his grasp.

Suddenly he let her go. "You scratch too!" he cried, rubbing his hand.

"Why did you hurt me then with your rough paws?" she asked angrily. "What do I care about your young lady?"

"Why are you so cross with me, Sylvana?" he coaxed her. "Would you like me to bring you upstairs?"

She smiled and pressed close lo him. "I'd love it!" she cried, her eyes sparkling.

"But you'll have to steal up and not let the housekeeper hear you," he warned her. "I don't want to set people talking!"

She nodded knowingly and stole after him without a sound.

The study, with its numerous bright-coloured, curious and glittering objects about the room and round the walls, put her into an ecstacy of delight. She examined everything critically, sniffing with her small freckled nose and feeling with her hands whatever she could reach. He looked on with pleasure while, with a little cry of delight, she put out her hands to feel a shining crystal or a coloured glass, a speckled bird's-egg or a metal bowl, next moment discovering a silver sugar-caster or a silk cushion.

"Give me that!" she cried, and could not herself have said what her choice was. At last he drew her attention to something which made her giddy with excitement.

It was a small musical box with a lid that could be lifted off, allowing one to see the cogged brass cylinder and bright steel tongues of the works. When a little lever was pressed down a minuet of Mozart began, clear and fine like fairy music. It seemed as though the birds, painted on the gilded porcelain of the little box, were twittering.

"Oh! oh!" she cried, and put down the singing treasure on the floor, beside herself with delight. When the music ceased, he showed her how to place a small key in the body of a blue bird and bring the creature to life again.

She sprang up, and before he could stop her, stripped her body of her chemise and petticoat, and stood before him quite naked, pretty as a little elf.

"Am I not nice?" she cried enticingly, dropping her head to one side. "Look at me—!"

"I saw you once before like that, Sylvana!"

She looked at him with wide eyes and put her hand to her small bosom. "This?" she smiled.

"Just as you are now. Beside the spring in the wood up there—"

She uttered a cry. "You are lying—!"

"You and the lovely Julia and your brother. And you danced—"

A cloud gathered on her bold little face. She took up the box from the floor and banged it on the table so that the works rang. Silently she slipped on her chemise, and tied her short petticoat round her slim hips.

"You saw her naked?" she said in a dull tone.

"Yes, her." He repented keenly his indiscretion, but it was now too late. "And you too—"

"Then God dies—!" she stammered in horror. "Oh, misery!" She threw herself on the couch and burst into a wild fit of weeping.

"Sylvana—" He was much moved, and caressed the sobbing girl. "What is that you say? Who must die?"

"God dies—!" she wept.

He raised his hand to his forehead. What was the child thinking of?

"Sylvana, my dear little witch," he said, sitting down beside her. "Why do you call the young lady 'the Sun-maiden'? Tell me, and I will give you the musical box!"

She half rose, and supporting herself on her arm looked at him with eyes which had grown dark.

“You have entered forbidden paths,” she murmured, with a sadness which seemed foreign to her. “You have brought death—”

“Speak now, Sylvana. Take what you like. Look about in the room for what you most desire. But tell me what you know. You called yourself once a Raven, and your brother talked about himself as a Hidden One. And then some time ago you had a red flower in your hair, which does not grow anywhere about here. You are clever, Sylvana, and you can easily explain everything to me if you choose. And if you will only tell me what Fraulein Julia has to do with you—”

She spat at him like a wild cat, and cried, “I’ll tell you nothing—nothing! Do you hear? Not if you give me everything in your fine house! You may burn me alive but I’ll tell you nothing! Never, never!”

He saw that he had not taken the right way to obtain the knowledge he wanted. “Very well, then, tell me nothing, Sylvana,” he resumed. “The box with the birds and the music is yours all the same!”

A slight smile passed over her face. “And you’ll let me keep it—?” she asked. “You won’t take it back?”

“No, little Sylvana, I make you a present of the box.”

She ran to the table, pressed the box tenderly to her heart, holding it in both her hands. “Won’t you—” she uttered an ugly word, which she had no doubt picked up from some fellow.

“No, Sylvana,” he said, almost saddened by the thought of all this childish creature seemed to know. “I want nothing from you.”

Her eyes sank. “I know why you don’t want me. You love her!”

“Sylvana—”

“Yes, you love her and she loves you. And that means death.”

He was now really startled. “I demand nothing from you,” he said hastily. “But you have now for the second time spoken of death. I must know what that means, and I ask you, dear Sylvana, to tell me. You are a little woman yourself and you must know how one feels when one loves anybody. You too must love someone better than anyone else. I don’t know who it is—”

“It’s Serafin,” she said, and her cheeks grew darker.

“Well, if someone were to tell you that Serafin Federspiel must die, would not you too ask, Why?”

“He must soon die,” she whispered. “He said so himself. I often cry about it—” Her eyes were full of tears, and her mouth was drawn as if she were about to weep.

“Don’t cry, don’t cry!” Peter tried to console her. “Serafin may be quite well again. No one need sentence him to death.”

“You are good—“ She smiled and stroked his hand. “As for the others, I don’t care. But Serafin—I love him more than anything in the world.”

“Then you can understand, Sylvana. Who is it threatens Julia?” he asked anxiously.

She looked at him and appeared to be struggling with herself, but presently she said, gently and hesitatingly: “No one is threatening her . . . I will tell you this much only: There’s a saying among those who have knowledge, ‘If the purity of the Sun-maiden receives a stain, then God dies . . .!’ ”

Was it really a child who thus gravely and in well-ordered words touched on a secret, of which the deeper meaning must not be betrayed? He was now convinced that a number of the people in this district were sworn members of a brotherhood which required the strictest secrecy among its initiates, and followed up inexorably anyone who attempted to penetrate to its mysterious activities. What lay hidden behind these strange designations, these nocturnal fires on the mountain-heights, these dances in secret places?

What manner of God was it that was subject to death?

The girl stood before him: she pressed the musical box close to her bosom, and her eyes were fixed longingly and uneasily on the door.

“Run away then!” He forced a laugh.

She made a step towards him, raised herself on her toes in order to reach his ear, and whispered: “They all know that you are spying on them—you and Serafin—” And immediately, like some wild animal, she ran from the room.

It was time for her to do so, for just then old Hirlanda appeared with the tablecloth.

XLVIII

THAT EVENING, Peter, filled by a sad longing for Julia, suddenly remembered his uncle’s old book, locked away in the writing-table as if it had been an important bequest, instead of standing with the hundreds of other books, many of which had titles indicating curious contents.

He took the “Treasury” from the drawer in which it had slumbered so long, with its instructions in alchemy, cures for gout, and strange reminders of an age of hardy toping, and tried once again to discover some hint in the passages marked with red, anticipating failure ere he began. He had essayed this vain task too often, bending over the mouldy pages with throbbing temples, and never discovering the slightest significance in the order of the printed passages.

This time too he succeeded no better, and after worrying over the book for an hour he threw it impatiently on the table.

His eyes smarted, and he walked up and down the room exhausted.

Then he noticed something which immediately excited him.

The book had fallen in such a way that it lay open, with a single leaf standing upright, through which the lamplight shone faintly. And in the middle of the paper thus rendered transparent appeared little bright golden points.

He started and looked closer. Yes, this must be it! Under single letters in the lines the paper had been pierced by a fine needle, and through these tiny apertures the lamplight passed.

The solution! This might be the solution!

With a feverish hand he smoothed out the page. The letters marked with the needle-point belonged to lines in the paragraph in which directions for the Crab-trick were given. And this paragraph was indicated in red on the margin.

Hastily Peter took ink and paper, turned the pages to the first of the indicated passages and dipped his quill. His eyes swam. It was not always easy to find the perforation, which was close under the individual letters, but with much care he succeeded in not neglecting any of them. Letter ranged itself beside letter on his writing-sheet, and at last the sentence, which his vanished uncle had left as the sole news of himself, was written out clear and distinct before him:

> “If you will unveil the secret, pierce into the heart of the mountain. The stream will show the road to the bold.”

Deeply stirred, he sat with what he had written before him. Did death wait at the end of this road? Had his uncle taken it?

The thought of brooding there through a sleepless night was intolerable. He extinguished the lights quickly, stole out of the house, and groped his way slowly in the moonless cloudy night to where Federspiel's hut lay still and dark. Nothing was to be heard but the noise of the stream, rushing eternally from the mountain to the Valley.

After a stealthy search he found above a pile of sticks the little window behind which the hunter slept. He knocked softly.

A sigh came from the room, a muttering as of one roused out of a deep sleep. The bed creaked.

"Is that you, Sylvana?"

"It's I—Storck," called Peter in a low voice. "I must speak to you at once."

The hunter rose slowly and came to the door; the bolt was drawn back with a clatter. There was a stifling odour in the room. The steel rang on the flint, sparks started in the tinder and a blue flame spurted up emitting a pungent smell. At length the oil-wick was lit.

Peter carefully closed the door. He hung a cloak over the window, then turning to the hunter, who was blinking sleepily at the yellow light, said abruptly:

"I have discovered the secret. I have it!"

Federspiel's eyes flashed.

"Is it true? There's no mistake?"

Peter drew forth the blotted sheet on which he had written and held it under the lamp.

It was not till the first light of dawn that Storck left the hunter's hut, having first looked out carefully to see that no one was about. He reached Zeitlanghof without meeting or seeing anyone.

The cocks were crowing as he stretched himself in the cool sheets of his bed.

"The attempt must be made at once," the hunter had said.

XLIX

ON THE SECOND NIGHT following they set forth cautiously on the expedition.

The sky was overcast. There had been a slight fall of rain in the forenoon, and a mist hung about the giant heads of the mountains. It was four o'clock when they arrived at the bed of the stream.

At first the way was difficult, and Federspiel groaned whenever it was necessary to use his injured foot in leaping. And there were plenty of leaps to be taken. The track had to be found from stone to stone by the edge of the roaring water. More than once the wounded man reeled as his ankle gave way under him. Both of them were wet to the waist from the spray. Peter almost compelled his limping companion to give him the knapsack, in which was a supply of rope, an axe, candles and food.

After several hundred paces the path, though still narrow, became well-defined and high enough to travel on even when the stream was swollen.

At the point where this part of the path began, Federspiel stood still, and pointed to the grey and moist wall of rock.

"It's just as I thought. There's an easy zig-zag path from the top; you wouldn't notice where it begins in a thicket of juniper bushes away up there. Try it, and go up a little way."

Peter obeyed, and ascended the path for a short distance until he saw that it wound upward regularly. He was turning to descend, when the inside pocket of his coat, which lay open, caught in a thorny bush and was torn. He heard the noise of the rent, but did not allow himself time to look at it.

"You were right—quite an easy path," he reported to his companion.

"That's the road by which the Fire-spirits come down into the Klamm. It's up there that we see the lights at the time of the equinoxes. And it must have been about here that they found the Shuffler—"

"He said something about devils—" said Peter, remembering Christian's story.

" 'Two devils hunted me over the cliff,' were his words. Hornauss made no mistake about it. Two devils! And he also says that the Shuffler was neither a fool nor a coward, and if he said there were two devils there were two devils. And it's these devils, Herr Storck, that we're going to find out at their tricks!"

He shouted this in Peter's ear in order to be heard above the roaring of the stream by which they were standing; then silently he took a double-barrelled pistol from his inside pocket and showed it to his companion.

"It's necessary to bring a little dog that can bite in affairs of this kind!" he shouted.

They went on. The Klamm grew narrow as the high walls of rock approached one another, and between these, far overhead, ran a thin grey ribbon of rainy sky, against which stood out the dark-fledged trees growing at the edges of the terrible gulf. Something red vanished into the cliff as they gazed upwards: a fox, which no doubt had his hole there.

And at length they stood in front of the monstrous door out of which the stream thundered. Some frightful force seemed to have split open the mountain here in the dawn of the ages. After the shock which had rent the huge masses apart they had fallen together again, but had not closed up completely the cleft in the body of the mountain. The raging water had then no doubt swept away the debris in order to gain a clear passage, rolling down the blocks of rock in its way, turning them over in its eddies and dragging them along with it. A broad and lofty door had been left, consisting of two monstrous fragments of rock which leaned against one another at their upper ends. In spite of their overwhelming weight they vibrated beneath the unceasing assault of the mass of water which struck their base.

Speech here was impossible: it died in the tumultuous uproar which ascended from the abyss. Black and sinister opened before them the entrance into the underworld, and a vaporous spray blew against them out of the cavernous darkness.

Federspiel took out a lantern from the knapsack which Peter was carrying, and after some attempts he succeeded in lighting the candle within the greenish glass. The tinder had become damp in the wet mist of the Klamm, and a feeble, flickering light threw some illumination on the wet walls of the passage, and on the narrow path which they still followed. Federspiel pointed with sudden excitement to footprints visible in the clay. As they went on, a tepid air blew up on them and the hunter knelt down, motioning to Peter to do the same. They held their hands in the rushing water, which was warmer than it had been outside, and the further they advanced the clearer it became that from some direction hot springs found their way into the stream.

Step by step, and often halting to light up the cavern, the hunter led on. Once the yellow gleam rested on a semi-circular basin filled with clear water; the edges were formed of the limy droppings from the roof, and in the moist depth moved slim, rosy-tinged salamanders with inert, fleshy legs, frail-looking little animals, cave creatures, never seen.

A lateral passage opened out, and Federspiel stood irresolute. But the next moment he pointed with an excited gesture to a metal ring coated with rust at the entrance to this gallery, in which was still fixed the stump of a burnt pine-torch. Here the path suddenly broadened out into a floor of fine sand marked with numerous footprints, large and small, nailed boots of men and the tracks of women's feet. The sides of the passage appeared to have been hewn with the pickaxe a long time previously. The turbulent water rushed by the entrance to the passage, and with every step they took forward the sound of it grew fainter, becoming at length a hollow murmur, like the deep sound of a choir heard in the distance.

"We are on the right road," said Federspiel in an undertone, and pointed to the remains of some pine-torches, heaped in a niche at one side. "They climb down into the Klamm with these torches and then come this way."

Peter returned no answer; he was in a state of intolerable excitement. This then was the secret path taken by the Rover, the pitch-gatherer, the Fentor brothers, and, alas! Julia herself and little Sylvana, on those nights of the year when day and night were of equal duration. So far as this, or even farther, the vanished Martin Storck might have come before he entrusted his secret to the old book. And Julia—?

What was the lure of these secret assemblies which had power to draw her, too, hither?

Suddenly a great square cavern chamber opened in front of them. Federspiel directed the light towards a portion of the wall which gave back a white reflection, and uttered an exclamation of amazement. Peter came quickly to his side and stood still, staring fixedly, as if unable to move.

In the faint gleam of the tallow candle two human forms, brought to life by the flickering flame, rose out of the gloomy monotony of the rocky wall and gazed with empty eyes: the Rover and Julia. Peter's heart was seized with fear and horror.

But next moment he recognised the work of an artist: two portraits in bas-relief, chiselled out of noble, even-toned marble, the sepulchral monument of a fully-equipped Roman soldier and of a girl who leaned lightly on his mailed shoulder; half-length portraits executed with life-like perfection. Underneath on a smooth slab was engraved an inscription commemorating the names and rank of the pair:

AEMILIAN. SAGITTAR. TRIBUN. LEGION.

I. NORICORUM ET FILIA JULIA.

“A grave,” whispered Federspiel, overwhelmed by the awfulness of the place, and he pointed almost fearfully to two stone urns in a small cavity below the monument. “The ashes!”

Peter gazed with painful emotion at the two heads, so dissimilar and yet with a certain likeness to one another. Seen beside the hard, furrowed and clear-cut face of the old Tribune, whose unbending will was revealed in the bold features and thin lips, the classically regular face of the daughter appeared to gain in beauty, with its haughty yet gentle mouth, the tender round of the checks and the clear forehead. On the breast of the coat-of-mail worn by the old warrior a snaky-locked Medusa-head was represented, as if to accentuate the contrast.

“Aemilianus Sagittarius, Tribune of the First Noric Legion, and his daughter Julia,” Federspiel read. “Strange that living persons should resemble those who have long ago turned to ashes.”

“Julia—” called Peter with a choking voice. He reached out his hands helplessly to the motionless, marble figure.

“This place makes me shiver—” whispered Federspiel. “It’s not a place to loiter in.”

Peter, however, did not move, but stared with wide-open eyes, as if beside himself. Federspiel caught hold of him, called him by name, shook him. Peter started, uttered a deep sigh and said: “We will go on—”

They turned away from the spectral heads and looked round them. Other urns, they now noticed, reposed in this sepulchral chamber. On a small stone the word “Venator” was cut, and involuntarily the two exclaimed in the same breath: “heritor.” It sounded as if the old Latin word had suffered a simple alteration in the course of time. Ghosts slumbered in this place, at intervals awaking and abandoning their sepulchres, venturing into the village and dwelling amongst the people there.

They found a kind of stone altar at one wall, almost breast-high, facing towards a human figure with the head of a lion. Perhaps in grey antiquity sacrifices had been offered here to the shades of the dead.

In general, the chamber was quite bare. There seemed to be no outlet from the gallery along which they had come. Out of one of the four walls, opposite the entrance to the gallery, projected an unhewn block of stone, separated from the surface of the wall by narrow clefts.

“Once more let me look at the portraits,” Peter was about to say. But the hunter’s face suddenly took an expression of the most strained attention,

and with a motion of the hand he enjoined silence; then he stepped back, quick as lightning moistened his finger and extinguished the candle, grasped Peter firmly by the arm, drew him into the darkness behind the altar, and pressed him to the ground. They cowered down, and Peter heard the words just breathed: “Here they come!”

A bright line of light, narrow as the blade of a knife, framed the block of rock in the wall, then spread out and lit up the sepulchral chamber. A humming sound was heard, a noise of rolling, followed by a heavy knock as of stone colliding with stone. They did not dare to move. Immediately after, both of them saw a man advancing towards the opening of the gallery through which they had come.

It was the Rover. By the light of the earthenware lamp which he held in his left hand they could see him distinctly. He wore the short red cloak in which Peter had once already seen him, short leather breeches and coarse stockings. His right hand gripped his staff, fitted with a long sharp iron point. Erect and with rigid countenance, bearing a startling resemblance to the figure in the wall, he strode past the altar, and immediately afterwards passed out of the entrance to the gallery, by which was the way out.

Peter had heard with concern a groan from the hunter beside him, which gradually became more distressing. But it was not until he had ceased to hear the old man’s footsteps, and the noise of the wild stream once more filled his ear, that Peter, who as yet did not dare to move, noticed a movement by his side, and guessed from the stifled and convulsive sounds which now began that Federspiel, in due hunter fashion, had thrown his hat on the ground and buried his face in it, in order to relieve a bad fit of coughing.

After some time, quite exhausted, the hunter managed to relight the candle, he was deadly pale, and large drops of sweat glistened on his forehead; there were dank dark spots on the green hat.

“I thought I would have burst!” he gasped. “If he had stood still I should have had to murder him!” he broke out, still breathing heavily and spitting out blood on the sand. “Otherwise he would have run me through. I noticed his arms: old as perhaps he is, he has terrible strength. But where did he come from so suddenly? I heard him and saw the light over there—a moment later and we would have been face to face with him.”

A low click drew Peter’s attention to the fact that the other had lowered the cocks of his double-barrelled pistol, which he had apparently been able

to pull back without any sound. The hunter then turned his light on the block of stone.

"That's the door!" he said, feeling with his hands and trying in vain to move it. "That's where he got through." He made another attempt, but the massive block did not yield by a hair's breadth.

"Well, we shall have to be satisfied for the present, the rest of the way is barred to us. But we'll try again, by all the Tribunes, devils and Fire-spirits! If we could only get through we might set foot in that green meadow in the Chamois' Garden."

"Do you really think so?" asked Peter, who thought the assertion somewhat bold.

"Have you forgotten that Anderl and I saw the Rover there below us? I know now that he didn't get down over that awful Schellbock wall. And I'm convinced that we two ought to succeed in reaching the place the old man came from, and by the same way! We'll follow him there, and before long!"

"It may mean our lives!"

"In that case I'll be dead a couple of months sooner," returned Federspiel with a grim smile. "But now let's get away before more of them come."

"I want to see the sculptures once again," Peter begged of him, putting out his hand for the lantern.

"Not on any account, Herr Storck!" answered the hunter. "Things like that are bad for a man. I feel myself as if a lot of ancient evil eyes were peering at us out of the dark corners—! Let us go!"

Without looking round to convince his friend, he returned to the passage, holding the unsteady light. Soon they were deafened once more by the roaring of the waters. The basin lay still and they saw again the slim bodies of the salamanders. Cold drops fell from overhead, labouring patiently through the ages at the icicles of stone which hung from the roof with a white and yellow gleam. The damp air made the travellers shiver.

Far in front of them appeared a star of bluish light, which spread out and became at length the door out of the cavern. They looked cautiously out of the darkness and issued forth. Federspiel extinguished the feeble light.

WHEN, FAR BELOW THE CAVERN, they had climbed out of the bed of the stream, they took a rest.

"That terrible resemblance—" murmured Peter, half to himself. "People living on after they are dead—"

"Beware of superstitious thoughts, Herr Storck!" said Federspiel earnestly. "Remember Christian! We must not yield to any horrors. A stone figure may easily bear a resemblance to a person who has it constantly before him and in his mind. And faces like the old Rover's and the Roman's are often to be seen about here. Men with hawk-heads like that are all just the same to look at. I know, I know; there's a fascination in abandoning oneself to these imaginations, and in losing our senses in mysteries. But on that very account reason must remain in firmer control, or a man will soon bewilder himself with illusions and at last will not know the difference between sleeping and waking. We must be on our guard, Herr Storck, and beware of everything which clouds the senses. If it weren't so with us two we should not be sitting here, and should still be devout believers in the Fire-spirits like the people in the village. Once we have seen the end of this apparition of wretched souls on fire, we shall hear no more of miracles and spirits, and find that everything explains itself if we look at it boldly, without letting ourselves be fooled by the old woman's soul that exists in us all!"

Peter, however, had been too deeply moved to be reassured by these well-meant counsels. Though it was broad daylight round him, he felt as though unknown powers were drawing snares closer and closer about him, as though some fatality were concealed in all that had so far befallen him. A formidable Something stood between him and his beloved, threatening death and destruction; something inapprehensible and not to be reached by the ordinary processes of understanding. His sad gaze was fixed on a tussock of strange whitish grass amid the heather on a round hillock not far from them. What kind of blades, thin and silvery, could lie over one another so curiously?

"What sort of grass is that—the white patch yonder?" he asked the hunter, who was quietly devouring bread and bacon.

The hunter looked and his face clouded.

"Rascals!" he muttered, and then called aloud. "Ho, there! Won't you get up? I'm looking at you, old spy!"

The clump of grass began to move, an old head with two piercing eyes rose out of it, and a toothless mouth grinned.

"I was just having a fine sleep!" It was old Blasi.

"Get away!" said Federspiel mockingly. "So you just happened to make a choice of that spot!"

The pitch-gatherer, in his shiny-black coat of mail, stood up with a crackling noise, and as if he had heard nothing, observed: "You are early abroad, gentlemen? Where may you have been, then?"

"I suppose you aren't even inquisitive?" returned the hunter. "We were up in the heath yonder." And he pointed towards the Hockauf.

"Then the wind must have blown this on to the path down to the Klamm," grinned the pitch-gatherer, taking from his pocket a silken tassel, apple-green and peach-red.

Peter started and felt for his Franconian pipe: the silken embellishments were missing. Then he remembered how, when he had climbed up the path at Federspiel's request, his coat had caught in the shrubs and he had heard something tear.

Federspiel looked on moodily as Blasi handed Peter the bright-coloured badge and said with a smile: "The gentlemen should be more careful next time. Queer! The wind was coming up from the Valley all the forenoon, and yet this thing was carried down there!" He wagged his wrinkled face and tittered.

"You trouble yourself a great deal about what doesn't concern you!" said the hunter shortly.

The old man, who appeared exceedingly pleased, clapped his hand on his shining trousers and sang in a thin crowing voice:

"A snail inside her little cell
  Was sure that none could view her,
Then came old father gardener
  And said Good Morning to her!"

He picked up his faded hat from the ground, cocked it on his white head and went off with stiff knees in the direction of his hut. The hunter looked after him, raging.

"They keep a cursedly good look-out," he muttered to himself. "The Spirits and I are going to come to grips soon!"

They said nothing more to one another, and separated when they came near the village.

LI

UNABLE TO THINK of anything but the strange adventure in the cavern and the mysterious likeness of the stone figures, Peter stretched himself on his couch for an hour. How full of hope he had gone forth with the hunter, after the discovery in his uncle's old book, filled with the delusion that he was about to unravel the enigma! And now the veils were multiplied, and the hope of lifting them had become more remote since it had been made plain that those who were in possession of the secret were on the watch.

The following days, during which Federspiel was not to be seen, were passed in gloomy reveries. Ten times he found an excuse for going down to the village and staring up at Julia's closed window. But Julia was far away, and even a bold resolution to take her completely into his confidence and force an explanation from her was for the present idle. Vainly he sought to convince himself that it had been no more than his excited nerves which had suggested a resemblance between the marble maiden and the living Julia. Certainly her gracious face was always before him; but the shock with which, by the dim light of the lamp, he had recognised in the beautiful stone countenance a perfect representation of Julia's features, had been so overwhelming that he could not dismiss the resemblance as a deception.

Often he was near despair. Never, never would he succeed in winning out of this maze of riddles into a clear atmosphere. Perhaps in truth it was better to know nothing of the secret things that were done in these wild woods and gloomy mountain caverns . . .

Then he remembered the page of manuscript which had been laid with the book. With what intention had Martin Storck preserved these single paragraphs on examples of Possession, separating them from the rest of the scries to which they belonged? Was this indeed a place in which lurked unfortunate souls, waiting to find a new dwelling-place in human bodies? The nun yonder in the Valley, the innkeeper out of whom came at times the voice and the laugh of the drummer-boy he had shot . . . It occurred to him suddenly that the hunter had spoken of a curious picture in the Sankt Marein church.

He started up at once and went off to the little church. The rusty iron gate of the churchyard groaned as he opened it, and as he passed the charnel-house a whim took him to look at the skulls displayed there. They were ranged behind an iron grating, propped against one another and varying in shape, some decked with garlands of artificial roses or with pious texts inscribed on the white bone of the forehead. In the middle of the small arched chamber stood the parish hearse, and all round it the grave-digger had piled his winter supply of wood.

Peter came out again into the sunlight and made his way to the church through sunken graves and slanting crosses. The door was open; close beside it the greasy bell-rope hung from the roof. On the altar were ornamental pyramids of paper roses, blue, red and violet, mingled with gold-tinsel, and between these the emaciated figure of the Redeemer bowed its thorn-crowned head. Pleasing spots of colour were thrown from the windows along the benches, and near the altar hung the picture, crowded with figures, which he had come to look at.

In the middle of an impossibly green meadow from which, in the background of the picture, rose the church in which he stood, represented faithfully, a young girl knelt, supported by two men in peasant costume and a woman with a large cap. The girl wore an old-fashioned purple dress, and a priest in white cope and yellow stole was raising a crucifix in front of her, his left hand holding a little black book with red edges, in which his forefinger was inserted.

A large company of people, all dressed in the same way and with the same expression on their faces—men, women and children—stood round in a circle, their hands folded in prayer. A small bristling monster, somewhat like a walrus with wings, was issuing from the girl's mouth in a cloud of blue smoke and yellow flame. The inscription below the picture had become scarcely legible, and with some difficulty Peter made out that the Christian maiden Lidwina Lergetpohrer had in this place, on July 6, 1682, been freed from a devil named Zorboth, and that her parents had presented this picture to commemorate the event.

Peter stood for a long time before this rude representation, from which the colour was fading. The unfortunate child had been a Lergetpohrer, and no doubt belonged to the family from which the innkeeper was descended. How strange that a man of her kindred should now be suffering from a similar spiritual ailment, and should believe that he harboured in his body a

strange guest! Did the word “ailment” explain everything? The fact that Christian kept talking in a way quite appropriate to a Bavarian drummer, the song that he sang in a shrill boy’s voice during his nights of torture—when one weighed all the circumstances, was there not a residue of real mystery? Even though Federspiel was right in insisting that one should make no surrender to superstition, it was not easy to ignore such questions. And if unknown powers were at work in this case, was it not also possible that the soul of the Tribune of the Noric Legion was lodged in the Rover, and that of the Tribune’s daughter in Julia?

Peter laughed suddenly at the aberrations in which he caught himself. Where would such fantasies bring him if he began to yield to them? Was it not already a kind of madness to occupy one’s mind with such thoughts? Superstition, he knew well, was infectious; and the beliefs which existed in the timid souls of the people of this district, nourished constantly by fear in presence of the inexplicable, and confirmed in them by their ignorance of the thousand possibilities of mental disturbance, were no doubt inherited from one generation to another, becoming at last articles of faith. And the Church had gradually allied herself with this faith, which thus in a manner sustained itself from sacred sources. Moreover, there was the influence of the lofty mountains enclosing this little world like rigid guardians; of the dark and gloomy woods, filled at night with voices; of the wind which rushed down the valleys and howled at the windows. Never had Peter known nights so dark, or the moon with such an appearance of watching and prying. Well, there was only one cure for him: to return to the cheerful world, to hospitable rooms and happy laughter. How long indeed was it since he had laughed heartily?

He went out of the ghostly church and looked about him round the graveyard, noticing in distant corners pieces of rotten wood from the coffins, and fragments of bone green with moss.

He caught sight of Anderl bending over a newly-made grave. At the sound of Peter’s feet in the long grass the lad started.

“It’s I, Anderl,” he said sympathetically. “You mustn’t stay sitting at your father’s grave, lad. There’s no good in that!”

The young chubby-faced Anderl had become pale and thin and his eyes gazed unsteadily. “I have to keep watch,” he whispered, looking round timidly, “that the Evil One may not get at him!”

“Your father has long ago entered into eternal happiness, and needs no one to keep watch over him,” said Peter reprovingly. “Father Archangelus said so too!”

“It isn’t sure—” The beads of the rosary ran once more through the boy’s thin fingers, and his lips whispered.

“Aren’t you going out hunting any more with Federspiel?” asked Peter.

Anderl nodded. “When he goes after the Fire-spirits. I must go with him then—”

Peter was startled. How did the lad know so much? He questioned him, somewhat less friendly in his manner.

The young fellow smiled disconcertedly.

“You were once talking to Serafin when I was on the bench behind the oven. Serafin had forgotten about me. It was then I heard that you and he mean to go after the Fire-spirits when the time comes. And I made up my mind I’d go with you—”

“But you heard nothing of the kind!” Peter tried to deceive him. “You dreamed all that!”

Anderl only shook his head slightly, and began to repeat aloud a Paternoster.

So this boy too knew of their design. Most likely others knew of it too!

LII

ON THE FORENOON of the next day Peter received an unexpected visit. A pair of rough-looking peasants whom he did not know entered Zeitlanghof without ceremony, in the company of Hornauss, and dragged the mighty “death-organ,” the large muskets and other weapons back to the cellar.

When they had completed their work they called bluntly for wine and food, tramped upstairs without asking leave and made themselves at home in the study.

Peter tried to conceal his annoyance, although the smell of their rank tobacco and their spitting almost made him sick. When he reproached one of them for spitting, the fellow grinned and said:

“My good friend, you’ll gain nothing by giving yourself airs! We peasants aren’t quite as stupid as we used to be; there’s one of us now in the

Emperor's castle and the town gentry have to do what he pleases. This little house of yours isn't any finer than that! But you needn't be frightened, we aren't robbers. For the matter of that, the wine in your cellar was grown by a peasant, and it was a peasant bred the pig that the side of bacon in your chimney came from! You may as well be polite to the people who have to feed you!"

The men turned out to be harmless enough, when one made allowance for their irritating talk; they ate and drank in moderation and soon took themselves off.

"Peasant-folk want for once to be treated with consideration," said Hornauss as they parted.

Nevertheless, an uncomfortable feeling remained with Peter, and he could no longer content himself in the lonely house. The truth was that since Julia's departure, the whole neighbourhood, in spite of the beauty of the early autumn, appeared gloomy and repugnant to him. In his heart he knew well that it was no longer his uncle's disappearance that caused his interest in the Fire-spirits, but the fact that some relation existed between them and the lovely girl. His nature was not one to profit much from the excessive simplicity of his life in this place; he had always been accustomed to lively society, and what had been tolerable to him, so long as he knew that his beloved was near, now became a joyless renunciation. The incident with the peasants, which showed an unpleasant side of their character, now increased his dissatisfaction.

Was there the least obligation upon him to remain here idle, waiting until some chance should bring Julia back to Sankt Marein? The thought that she might never come back brought a sudden terror; what if she were accustomed, or should be obliged, to spend the autumn and winter in the capital?

Only a quick decision could save him from the doubts which had settled on him like a flock of gloomy birds. He must follow her, follow her, before perhaps she had left the little town and it had become impossible to find her again. This was no occasion for deliberation: his whole heart bade him go.

Without further delay, then, he wrote a note to the hunter promising a speedy return, packed a small valise with necessaries, charged Hirlanda, who was somewhat taken aback, to look after the house, gave Anderl his baggage to carry, and set off at once down to the Valley, as if afraid lest something should happen to detain him.

“Julia!” his heart sang as he descended the path, so quickly that Anderl found it hard to keep up with him.

Silvery threads floated towards him on the breeze from the Valley, gossamers, hovering in the pale sunlight and catching in his hair. The wayside bushes were loaded with long-shaped berries, and in a clump of larches sat hundreds of brightly coloured feathery balls, birds of passage, assembling for their long journey. Ah, how sweet it was once again to escape from solitude and constraint and to descend into the broad Valley striped with crops, through which the white road led out into a gladder world! He passed the scene of the battle, repressing in himself the awful memory of the bloody night of Pontlatz. There beneath the earth lay one and another, struck down by a ball from his uncle’s musket which he had carried into the fight. No, he would not think of the Bavarian officer . . . It was better as it was.

“I live!” he said aloud, and the lad trotting beside him looked at him in surprise.

He was about to enter the diligence when he was surrounded by a wild crowd of poor and wretched people, a hollow-eyed man in tatters with a matted beard, a woman in rags holding her sick infant to her skinny hanging breast, and four or five half-naked children who shouted together and thrust one another aside as they pressed forward. Filthy hands were stretched out to him.

“Bread, gentleman, bread!”

“We are Schwaz folks,” the man stammered, pointing to his hollow chest. “Used to be a big man. All’s over now. Burnt out. Give me something for the love of God and the Holy Virgin!”

He gave them any loose money he had in his pocket. The peasants in the market-place looked on indifferently: they were used to such sights. Ruined people were ranging the country in bands, stealing where they could, goaded by starvation.

A cool wind swept the streets of Innsbruck. Inhospitable, taciturn, cowering in fear, lay the town by the foaming Inn. The shops were for the most part closed, and the windows shut. Men slunk past one another. These were evil days, and every morning brought some alarming news. No one knew what lay in store—certainly nothing good.

It was easy to find a lodging. The inns were empty, and Peter was able to choose his room at the Golden Eagle. The place was full indeed of noisy

and bragging militia-men, and others who gave out that they were so: men with desperate faces which certainly were not Tyrolese, and dialects which were not of this country. Timid and dejected, a few citizens sat about in the corners, talking with one another in a whisper.

The innkeeper did not appear to recognise him, and this was a serious blow to Peter, who had hoped by the help of this man, who had been so friendly to him before, to find out where Julia lived. As it was, he himself knew nothing of her but her Christian name.

He reminded the innkeeper of the evening on which the Bavarian officers were drinking in the special room and the beautiful young lady had come into the taproom looking for the wild, shaggy peasant. His host looked at him sideways, put his hand to his cap with an annoyed expression, and muttered that there had been Bavarians every evening, and more peasants than they wanted. Peter mentioned that on the evening in question he had just come from Vienna, but the man only glanced at him suspiciously, saying that a great deal came from Vienna and that it wasn't always good that came, and so left him standing there. The barmaid was equally disobliging: "There's a lot of people comes to this place," she said shortly.

He went out of the gloomy inn depressed and passed along the Arcade, losing himself at length in a short, narrow lane. On an ancient stepping-stone at a corner, used by horsemen to help them in mounting, sat a wretched old woman who reached out her brown, wrinkled hand. Her forlorn appearance excited his pity, and he put two silver pieces in her withered palm. "You are real good, sir; but don't stay in this town!" she whispered in her gratitude; "it's all up, and the day of vengeance is coming!" Although the poor head underneath the large, mushroom-shaped cap appeared to be crazy, he began to talk to the old woman, asking why he ought not to stay. She gazed at him with a bright look of attention.

"The peasants know it well, there are many in this town who want the Bavarians back, and they've more than once threatened to turn out the gentry. And there ain't no government. How could a little innkeeper from the Pfairer Valley know how to govern when kings and emperors have to learn it from childhood up, and even so they haven't made a good hand of it?"

In the midst of this important deliverance of the old woman it occurred to him that she, sitting there begging the live-long day, might possibly know something about the beautiful, dark young lady.

He tried to describe as well as he could the person he was looking for, the old woman listening and wagging her head: “Eh, that’s the kind of gentleman it is?” she said with a titter, the joy of a procuress lighting up in her eyes. “I think it’s in the second or third house in the Fuggergasse someone lives like what you say, sir, with a white face and black hair. There’s a confectioner’s at the place and you can ask there.” She told him the way to take, smacking with her toothless jaws, as if she had a piece of sugar-stick in her wrinkled mouth, and nodded after him with her trembling head.

LIII

HE HURRIED OFF and came out into the wide main street. A couple of horsemen, sturdy fellows, were trotting haughtily down the street, their swords rattling by their sides. “The Sand Innkeeper’s dragoons!” cried a young locksmith wearing a leathern apron, and he gave a shrill whistle on two fingers. “Look out, Jackele, your nag has dropped something!” One of the men pulled up his horse with a sharp tug at the reins and turned to ride after the youth, who ran off, his boots clattering on the pavement.

At length Peter found the Fuggergasse. He passed trademen’s sign-boards, little shops exhibiting dusty wares and the dark openings of house-doors. A glass door beside a semi-circular window, in which were sweetmeats with flies crawling over them, brought him to a sudden stand. He entered, announced by a bell in the door. A comfortable-looking man in a white apron, a round linen cap on his head, emerged from the back of the shop.

“What can I do for you, sir?” he asked amiably.

Peter, not without some embarrassment, began a description of the object of his search: he had a particularly important message for the lady, and asked if the confectioner knew where she lived, adding that he had been directed to enquire here.

“You have come to the right place, I think,” the man answered pleasantly. “I daresay it’s Fraulein Julia you mean, or I should say, Mademoiselle Avorai: she lives just here on the second floor. She often goes up to the Oberland, and people come to her from there. It might be she, from your

description. Would you like to give me the letter or leave your message, sir?"

Peter, rejoicing in the depths of his soul, replied that he would like to deliver the message himself.

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed the baker with a sly smile. "Well, sir, go straight up to the second floor, you'll easily find her. Perhaps I can oblige you with a cordial—?"

Peter asked for a glass of ginger-cordial, by way of showing his gratitude, and sipped it.

"What's going to happen to us Tyrolese?" the man asked. "A gentleman like you will know more than we do."

"There will soon be peace, I hope," answered Peter absent-mindedly. "You said the very next door?"

He paid and went out. His friend in the white apron accompanied him obsequiously to the street and showed him the entrance to the house. "Bad times these!" he sighed, still anxious to talk. "The peasants aren't the worst: it's the people over there beyond the Inn: they'll be here to fill their sacks with loot as soon as they hear the sound of shooting. They cleared everything out of my place before—bread, confectionery and a hundred Gulden too—and I had to look on at the rascals—"

Peter ascended the narrow winding staircase, his hand on the leather rope hung in iron rings. It was almost dark on the landing of the second floor. But here too chance came to his aid.

Behind one of the three doors opening on to the landing he heard Julia speaking. A man's voice answered her in pleasing tones. Peter felt a sudden pain. He stood listening, his heart throbbing violently.

The voices were animated. She was speaking in a foreign language. Peter tried in vain to distinguish words. The subject of their talk appeared to be painful.

He waited irresolutely. "Fraulein Avorai"—a curious name! In this strange situation, he found himself endeavouring to think of any name with a similar sound. All at once, however, he was seized by an impulse to put an end to the indignity of waiting outside her door listening to her talking with a man.

He knocked, more loudly perhaps than he had intended. The talking ceased at once.

A quick step came to the door, which was opened. Bright daylight streamed out into the landing. In the midst of the brightness stood Julia, almost unearthly in her beauty, dressed in a flowing white robe caught in under her bosom by a gleaming girdle, little black velvet shoes tied with ribbons on her feet. At one look he took in the blessed long-desired vision.

"You—!" she cried, and her cheeks were suffused with a soft rosy flush of surprise.

Behind her a man was standing, slim, dark-complexioned, with fine features and in a somewhat foreign dress, a tall felt hat in his hand.

"Pardon!" said Peter, much taken aback. "I see that I am interrupting!" His voice trembled with pain and jealousy.

She looked at his open face, which was quite incapable of concealing his excited feelings, and again coloured. Without answering Peter, she whispered some rapid unintelligible words to the stranger, who surveyed Peter Storck with a slightly inquisitive smile and then reached out his hand.

The man bowed ceremoniously to the girl and kissed her fingers. He made a short bow to Peter, who angrily ignored it; looked at him again in polite surprise, and went out on to the landing. Julia closed the door behind him and was alone with Peter.

"We can't stand here," she said, and her voice too betrayed some agitation. "Come in here!"

She opened the door of an inner room. Peter drew a deep breath and looked round him. The apartment was very simply furnished with repp-covered chairs and a couch. A few plaster-cast groups in bas-relief hung on the walls, which were striped in blue and white. He stammered senseless excuses as she fixed her accusing eyes upon him, and hardly dared to seat himself. However, the thought of the stranger lent him the courage of disillusion.

"You are angry with me," he said, "despise me perhaps for my importunity. But there are things stronger than promises and resolves. I could not endure to remain longer without you. Well, I have had my punishment now—" His voice faltered.

"What punishment?" she asked, her eyes opening wide.

"Julia!" his eyes flamed. "Was not that a foreigner who left you just now?"

"Since you already know—" she said haughtily.

“And you would betray this wretched country to its enemies!” he cried. “Julia, you!” His hat fell from his hand and rolled on the floor. “I would rather a bullet had gone through my heart that day when you waved to me as we were leaving Sankt Marein—!”

She made a hurried gesture of contradiction. “I am betraying no one,” she said sadly.

“But this meeting—! Julia, the country, this poor little peasant country, is preparing for a last struggle with an enemy that is more than its match—”

The girl looked at him long and gravely. “This man took a great risk in coming into this country in order to bring me news of my mother’s death. And he advised me to leave Tyrol before the Dalmatian regiments come over the passes.”

“So your mother—” Peter could think of nothing to say. He clenched his hands helplessly.

“You need not try to console me,” she said coldly. “I am not grieving for the woman who gave me life. She was a worthless woman, a—” She bit her lips.

“But what is he to you—this foreigner?” he cried suddenly. “Julia, I cannot bear it . . .”

She moved close to him and laid her hand lightly on his arm. “He brought me the news,” she said. “I never saw him before in my life. He is from the place I used to live in, that’s all! You need not torture yourself!”

Unable to speak, he bent over her hand and kissed it. She drew him up to her, a flame shone in both their eyes. With a passionate movement she threw her arms round his neck, and their lips met in a long kiss. Her hair touched his cheeks.

“Eau sunt tien—” she whispered as she had done once before, and his blood caught fire . . .

“No—!” She wept, implored, pressed herself to him, kissed him again and again. “It was I who was at your bedside on that night, dearest . . . I kissed you as you lay asleep.” Her eyes grew large and soft, her supple body quivered in his embrace, she gave herself, weary of resistance . . . A cry of woe caused the man to tremble in the midst of the storm of the senses . . .

He wakened up bewildered, like one who has been startled out of a deep dream. The peal of the noontide bells sounded in the room, which was filled with garish light.

He shuddered . . . A memory rose up out of the mists of the past, and with a sudden apprehension he looked towards the door, as though it were opened a little, as though he saw through the narrow chink a woman's face distorted with pain: "Mother!" he groaned, looking wildly round him. He glanced at Julia, who was gazing at him with dark dead eyes, filled with a nameless horror.

"Oh, God!" he murmured. "What has happened? Forgive—forgive!" He extended his hands imploringly to Julia. She rose, put her hands in her disordered hair, and gazed fixedly in front of her.

"I am lost," she murmured, "I am lost!" Large burning tears ran down her cheeks.

"Julia!" he cried, "speak to me—! Do speak!"

A sad smile passed over her face. "Go!" she said, "leave me!"

He rose obediently and took up his hat. "When shall I see you again?" he asked. "When, Julia?"

"Never! never!" Her voice was now quite steady. "Go! Go, if you love me!"

LIV

HE WENT, STUMBLING DOWN the steep spiral stairway, paused in the narrow street, then walked away as if in a dream.

"Sun-maiden—"

Whence came this fear, which seemed to be settling upon him amid these crowds of indifferent people hurrying to their mid-day meal from workshop and office?

So on that night it had been she! The silky black hair discovered by Notburga had been hers! In the pale moonlight streaming through the window at Zeitlanghof, her lips had touched his mouth, wakening him; and at a time when he had scarcely dared to hope, and was devoured by longing.

It was his destiny to cast a stain on everything pure that came near him. A curse lay upon him, ever since that terrible hour in which his mother had looked at him through the half-open door.

And now a new load of guilt oppressed him.

From the door of the inn an odour of grease and onions reached him. Why had he returned? For food? He laughed crazily to himself and walked along the Arcades, at length finding himself in front of the yellow pile of the Castle, at the gate of which two men with muskets were on guard. As he looked up at one of the large windows he caught sight of a thick-set man with close-cropped hair and full beard, his hands in his leather belt. No doubt the Sand Innkeeper. The ruddy good-natured countenance of the Tyrolese Commander in Chief appeared grave and anxious. Involuntarily Peter raised his hat, and Andreas Hofer nodded twice in a friendly manner before turning round and disappearing into the apartment, from which issued a lively air, sung by several voices.

Peter wandered along by the roaring Inn, and gradually the fit of penitence left him. Thoughts of his happiness came to him, wrapping him as if in a royal robe of silk and gold.

"She is mine—!" he said to himself. "Everything else is nothing!"

People looked at him as they passed. A besotted-looking old fellow, blinking craftily, came up to him, and trudging beside him tried to engage him in conversation. Peter tossed a gratuity into the greasy hat which the man held in his hands as he walked, and realised, from the overwhelming gratitude of the recipient, that he had given a gold piece.

He smiled, his heart blossoming like a rose.

But a voice whispered out of the depths of his memory, the childish voice of little Sylvana: "There's a saying with those who have knowledge: 'When the purity of the Sun-maiden is stained, God dies!' "

In sudden anguish he ran back, losing himself several times in the narrow passages of the old part of the town, and stopped to recover his breath in front of Julia's house. But as he was about to enter the house-door, the confectioner, who had been observing him through his own window, came, redolent of vanilla, out of the shop, and called: "She's not there now!"

"The lady—?" said Peter, almost staggering.

"She has left. A peasant fetched her away in a basket carriage."

"Left!" Peter gazed blankly at the man's knowing smile. "A foreigner?" he cried, his voice choking with anger.

The other shook his head slowly. "Oh, no! He wasn't a foreigner. I don't think you need be jealous, sir," he added, smiling. "He was a black, hairy fellow from the mountains, and he has often been here before with the

lady." He ran quickly into the shop and returned with a flask and a glass. "This came from the Monastery—particularly good for a sudden upset!"

Peter drank the acrid aromatic spirits and leaned against the wall of the house. He was in the depths.

"I know what it's like," said the confectioner confidentially. "I had my share in my own young days, if I may be so bold! I should tell you, sir, that before I settled down here I travelled into Hungary as far as Temesvar, and on the other side to Stuttgart in Schwabia. And for a young journeyman trading in sweet things such as the women like, there are pretty girls enough! And trouble too now and then. But that passes. Time goes by!"

Peter escaped from the man's good-natured chatter and paced along the narrow street.

There was only one thing to do: return at once.

Fentor the smith had taken her away.

He inquired for the post-house. After some trouble he discovered the postmaster in the inn near the Triumphal Gate, deep in a game of cards, amid clouds of tobacco-smoke. "Eh? a special chaise to the Upper Inn Valley? Did the gentleman know what that would cost, in such times as these and with oats so scarce? And when troops were on the road joining up with Speckbacher and Haspinger in order to march on Salzburg? And what sort of money would the fare be paid in? No one would take Hofer's twenty-florin pieces or Vienna bank-notes; Bavarian coins were also doubtful. Sometimes one was up, sometimes the other."

Peter took gold from his pocket. "Ah!" said the old gentleman politely, "that's another matter! I'll book you." He entered Peter's name and asked where he came from. "Vienna? Compliments! You must then have heard what happened at the armistice of Znaim? They say the Emperor had to promise to give us no more help in Tyrol." A troubled look came into the postmaster's tired eyes. "If we could only have known that earlier!"

"Unfortunately I know nothing of these matters," Peter answered. He wished only to be alone, to feel that every pace of the horses was bringing him nearer to the only being for whom his heart yearned.

"Ah, you didn't hear? The Emperor has other countries to think about. I suppose if a few peasants and students lie under the sod, they won't allow it to spoil their appetites in Schonbrunn. The devil himself will come for the rest of us now!"

“Are prospects really so bad?” Peter was touched by the old man’s bitter hopelessness. “There’s no enemy now in the country—!”

The postmaster took a pinch from his tortoise-shell snuff-box. “I daresay! But we hear from the postboys how things are looking. There’s dirty weather brewing, they say. Bavarians and Frenchmen thicker than flies in summer. Yes, it’s just as I always said it would be: we should have made it up with the Bavarians and spared ourselves the French!”

Peter thought of Pflederer’s letter, of Federspiel. This was precisely what they had said.

“The chaise will be ready at six o’clock to-morrow morning,” said the old man as they parted.

To-morrow morning! Peter went back along the Maria Theresien-Strasse in despair.

At Saint Anna’s Column there was an excited crowd. An armed band had collected, chiefly lads, with a few men, some quite old. A bottle of wine was being passed round, and loaves of bread. A carelessly handled musket went off with a crack, and the bullet went whistling over the roofs. “Oh, you blockhead!” shouted a laughing voice. A youth of sixteen stood pale with fright, the smoking weapon in his hands.

A bent, white-haired old man near Peter, wearing a bright red shooting-jacket, looked at him with clear vulture-eyes: “I’m no use, mister, my bones ache too badly!”

“You’ll have to come!” interjected a man who wore a gold-tasselled hat in which were two cock’s-feathers. “Haven’t you a St. Luke’s letter in your bag? And you can shoot like—You never lose a bullet!”

“Aye, aye!” muttered the old man. “But the way it catches me—”

“I’ve seen him myself picking the bullets out of his coat. He’s made of ice, lead can’t touch him. Eh, gentleman? You’ll come too?” He uttered a hoarse laugh.

Peter went on. He heard a whistle behind him, a laugh, and a word which he did not understand.

In the dim light of the tap-room in the Golden Eagle he listened to the ceaseless tale of the troubles and anxieties which now weighed on the Tyrolese. God! would it never come to an end, this murdering? The people were exhausted, empty of all hope, and each day the suffering grew worse. The young men had grown wild and thrown off all restraint; the food prices were intolerable. Roaming bands had begun to rob again. The moving

stories of how the Emperor had wept, and of how the Archduke Johann had implored to be allowed to put himself at the head of the Tyrolese, were no longer circulated.

And the worst news was that in the South, twenty thousand men had decamped at the approach of the French general Peyri with four thousand men. The wonder was that he delayed his advance so long.

It was also reported that the King of Bavaria had wished to come to terms with the Tyrolese, but that Napoleon would not allow it. The people of Vienna had sent Hofer a golden chain of honour and several thousand ducats. What had become of the gold? Who had seen anything of the yellow-boys? The Sand Innkeeper, perhaps! Hofer was a secret fellow, someone said venomously; but the others were indignant and forbade him to speak thus of their leader, who was an upright man. The slanderer slipped out of the room. “Bavarian rascal!” they shouted after him. But in their anger there was an undertone of depression.

Yes, everyone now spoke as Federspiel had spoken from the first.

LV

AFTER a sleepless night Peter set forth on his journey.

The chaise drove along by the foaming river in beautiful September weather; white clouds sailed before the east wind over the blue sky towards the Oberland. Every now and then the postillion blew on his horn a note half merry and half melancholy; he was a pleasant fellow, rarely using the whip. Peter was sunk in gloomy thoughts, and what he saw did not tend to improve his spirits.

Several times the little vehicle, as it rolled easily along, was met by small companies of musketeers, who gazed at him with the grave look of men forewarned of death, yet passed the pleasant greeting of countryfolk. Once Peter drove through a crowd of fighting-men resting by the wayside: one or two detached themselves from the others and limped after the vehicle, with threatening shouts.

At a village in which he spent the night he met with an adventure, at first somewhat disturbing. Peasants with dark looks were crowding round the table at which he sat. The fact that he was from Vienna and was travelling to Sankt Marein, by no means satisfied them.

“Who is this fellow?” enquired someone in a sharp, authoritative voice, and a well-dressed gentleman thrust the peasants aside and came forward to the table.

“For this expression, sir, if you are a man of honour, you will not refuse me satisfaction!” said Peter, firing up.

The stranger bowed. “I am Count Hendl, at your service!” he said. “That is, as soon as I feel assured that I have to do with an honest man. Not before!”

But Peter found an unexpected ally. “Sir, weren’t you with us at Pontlatz Bridge when a friend of mine had to give up the ghost?” He described Anderl’s father.

“I was standing beside him,” answered Peter. The peasant looked at the Count, who stepped forward at once to Peter and cried: “I must ask you most earnestly, sir, to excuse me! If you will permit me, I shall be very glad to join you at your table.”

“These swells won’t do anything to one another,” muttered a man in the background. “They hold together always.”

“That wouldn’t help them much,” said the man who had recognised Peter. “The gentleman picked a Bavarian officer off his horse so cleanly that I nearly died laughing! There’s nothing to say against that!”

The peasants withdrew into a corner, and the same speaker told further stories of the fight at Pontlatz.

“Years ago I was a student myself,” the Count laughed, “and I was delighted at the way you jumped when you heard the word ‘fellow.’ ”

In spite of all his trouble, Peter could not help smiling.

“I am very anxious,” said the Count. “It’s now or never with us, Herr—what did you say? Herr Storck? Von Storck? No? Herr Storck, then.” He whispered across the table: “The Tyrolese can do no more. No wonder, when one thinks of what the poor folk have been through. And yet there’s nothing else for it. Even though they no longer pay any attention to Speckbacher’s letters and call Haspinger a rogue of a priest—they must fight! And now the Devil is coming—Napoleon himself.”

“They were very despondent at Innsbruck—” observed Peter.

“I can believe it!” The Count’s face worked. “I am very anxious myself. And Vienna? I knew Archduke Karl well—the hero of German nationality, and I left Vienna because it horrified me to see how the services of that noble man went for nothing. He’s too much of a popular hero, you

understand? And Andreas Hofer, he too will presently be thought too popular yonder, and though it should cost only a word to save him—that word, Herr Storck, will not be spoken!"

Who was it who had once used these very words? Was it Federspiel again? he appeared to possess the uncanny gift of knowing everything sooner than others.

"You speak very candidly—" said Peter, with a glance at the attentive peasants.

"My feelings get the better of me!" returned the Count. "It isn't always a good thing to put such thoughts into words. For all that, Herr Storck, I ask you not to think less of me for it. It may very well be that I shall soon have to take the long journey, and I should be sorry if you should then think ill of me."

Peter grasped the hand of this strange man. "We will hope for better things—"

"After all, I may die in my bed—who knows?" the peasants' leader laughed. "Bonne nuit, Monsieur!" And he left the room, his spurs clanking.

Though very tired, Peter lay awake for a long time beneath his huge quilt. Two tearful eyes, Filled with a nameless despair, were fixed upon him. "Never, never!" a weeping voice said. And as memory began to fade at the approach of sleep, the pale countenance changed, and he thought he was standing in his study in Zeitlanghof, listening to a sad song which the forsaken girl—the other!—had been used to sing . . .

When, towards noon on the following day, he had reached the top of the narrow road and caught sight of the roofs of Sankt Marein, he felt as if, after a long absence and many adventures, he were returning home.

The place, now so intimately known to him, and which so suddenly had grown hateful and intolerable, once more soothed and restored him. Yonder in their places were all the familiar peaks, with rounded or broken outlines, the Hockauf, the Schellbock, the Black lien and the Haberer, and beyond these the shining white summits of the Urtoz and the Wild Man.

His heart beat fast when he saw the smith's dark face looking out of the door of the house in which, he supposed, was his beloved! He glanced cautiously up at the window, but there was no sign of her.

In the Rose, where swarms of flies, weak and languid in the late season, were buzzing about the empty glass and rings of moisture on the table, Christian Lergetpohrer lay on the bench asleep.

His breath came heavily, and his swollen face was tinged with blue. The drunken man's hand moved helplessly in the direction of the flies as they crawled over his perspiring skin. Peter stood for a while at the open window peering out at the smith's house, and coughed loudly once or twice. But the innkeeper would not be roused, and no little hand was raised to the bolt of the window over yonder. He went on through the village with a heavy heart.

No one was to be seen. The street was empty: no living thing but a tabby cat crossing the road with velvet feet and mewing softly. The trees were fading, and golden leaves fluttered down from a birch. The woods were tinged with a soft red, and jays screamed in the mountain-ash trees. The summer was over.

Beside the door of Zeitlanghof the painted skeleton-figure leered at him with hollow eyes, holding the fife to its thin lips. No note was heard, but Peter knew that this sinister figure was practising a horrible tune which would soon shrill forth. He stepped slowly across the threshold.

LVI

HE HEARD A CLASH of pots and crockery, and Hirlanda ran out. Thank God the master was back again. All sorts of vagrant people had been coming up from the Valley, demanding food and drink, and casting thievish glances at everything: strangers mostly, from Heaven knows where, foreigners and gipsies. Dinner would soon be ready. Yes, and Herr Federspiel had come every day to know when the master would be back. He had something important to say.

After a hasty meal Peter went off at once. Serafin Federspiel looked ailing and suffering, and the churchyard roses on his cheeks were brighter than ever. As usual, his pipe hung in his mouth, making him cough still more.

He sprang up in joyful surprise as Peter entered. "That's right! I'm glad; I was giving you up. You haven't then altogether forgotten what day to-morrow is?"

Peter looked at him in surprise. "To-morrow?"

"The equinox! The time for the Fire-spirits! I had begun to fear you were leaving me in the lurch. Well, now you are here, we'll go through with it, Herr Storck!"

Impatiently as Peter had often thought of the long interval before the autumnal equinox, when the Fire-spirits made their second appearance in the year, Federspiel's words now awakened little response in him. True, the fiery people would then descend into the Klamm as they had done in Spring, and perhaps he would succeed in getting a little certain knowledge about them. But what, after all, did it matter to him? It would not bring his uncle back. His thoughts, which kept circling in feverish longing round the smith's house, entered only reluctantly into Federspiel's plans, which had lately been his own as well.

"The equinox—ah, yes!" he said abstractedly, and idly took up a bullet-mould lying on the table.

Was it that he had expected to hear some news of his beloved from the hunter?

Federspiel looked at him disapprovingly. "It seems to me that you have lost most of your interest in what has already cost us so much trouble and danger. When the end is in sight, then, you mean to stand out of it?" A furrow of displeasure appeared on his forehead, and almost angrily he took the iron implement out of Peter's hand.

"Speak plainly, Herr Storck! If you want to leave me in the lurch—very well! But speak out what is in your mind! I can go on with the affair by myself, I suppose."

"I am going with you," said Peter; it was as though someone else was speaking with his voice.

"You aren't very enthusiastic!" said the hunter ironically. "You can't be when you have something else on your mind."

"It's the journey," said Peter by way of excuse. He was hurt by the other's ill-humour. "Of course I'm going with you."

"What's the matter with you, then?" asked Federspiel, looking at him searchingly. "You have lines about your mouth—all at once; the journey knocked you up, eh?"

"A little," said Peter, meeting his eyes. "When do we start?"

The sick man's face brightened up. "Ah, you feel battered after your expedition; I was a little unsympathetic, I suppose," he said more gently. "Well, it's all right now that you're coming. I shouldn't have cared to have to do it alone. Listen, then—"

He lit his pipe again, puffing and coughing, and glanced quickly at the window, then took a stride to the door, which he flung open.

“You must know, I’m being watched,” he muttered. “The Fire-spirits are on their guard. Sylvana came to the window yesterday evening, and begged and besought me to let her sleep here, the young rascal! She had been sent. So I said you and I would have to pay an early visit to the Valley. They will certainly be on the look-out for us, and there’s nothing for it but to go down a bit of the way and then come back by the stream. We’ll hide ourselves up there through the day till they come.”

“And if they don’t come?”

“It’s their day and they will come, as they have done always. And then we’ll follow them in there! I’ll call for you as soon as it’s daylight, Herr Storck!” One of his terrible coughing-fits seized him.

“I have shot a good many innocent creatures—” he groaned at last. “I’m hit myself now!”

As Peter left the cottage, Anderl started out from behind a bush. “May I go with you to-morrow?” he asked at once. His eyes shone.

“To-morrow? Where?” asked Peter.

“To the Fire-spirits—”

Peter forced a laugh. “What do you mean, Anderl? Federspiel and I are going to Prutz in the morning.”

The boy looked at him and put out his underlip. “So I’m not to go with you?” he asked defiantly.

“Be off with you—” ordered Peter. “You are crazy with your Fire-spirits.”

Anderl looked at him sullenly and was about to say something, but turned abruptly and went off towards the village.

Peter determined to make one more attempt to catch sight of Julia, but as he approached the inn a terrible sound of lamentation reached his ears.

There was a crowd of people round the door. In the midst of them stood the innkeeper’s young cousin, wringing her hands and uttering shrill cries, her eyes wide in horror.

Peter hurried forward anxiously and tried to enter the house, but Hornauss, who was in the crowd, caught his arm. “Don’t go in,” he said warningly. “You wouldn’t like it! He’s blue all over, and the eyes are standing out of his head—I must send a message at once to the Engadine, to Notburga, though I don’t know the place where she lives.”

“Hanged himself—?” cried Peter.

“Dead as a mouse!” continued the other. “Just as old Blasi said! We cut the rope at once, but his soul had gone out of him. And there was a note lying on the table—I have it here—” He handed a bit of paper to Peter.

“The drummer is taking me away—” were the words written in a clumsy shaky hand.

“Where is he?” faltered Peter, with tears in his eyes.

“In the shed at the back of the house; he left the note in the room.”

Peter fled away in horror to his house.

In the study he found quietness. The evening had drawn on and the stars were sparkling.

He was bound in honour to join in the adventure of the morrow, though convinced beforehand of failure. It was indeed possible that by the light of pine-torches smugglers’ goods were dragged into the sepulchral chamber, and it might easily be that these had previously been stored in other similar hiding-places. The fact that the face of the Schellbock was unscalable was no argument to the contrary: the goods might have been brought into the caves by other paths, and might be fetched thence by the smugglers.

It was all so unimportant.

Even poor Christian’s death, dreadful as had been the first horror of it, was fading from his mind. All his thoughts were directed to a different subject.

In Vienna were small white country houses, in the midst of shrubs and lawns, with roses and jessamines clambering over them. Happy people lived there, a cheerful race of men and women, catching the moments as they passed, good-natured, and with an understanding of love affairs. Some little nook could surely be found there for himself and Julia. To her he felt that he was united for ever.

This gloomy house with its skeleton-fifer might meanwhile fall to pieces, crumbling away in snow, rain, and storm. Was it not madness to commit his young life to it?

He repented deeply that he had given his promise to the hunter; he had thus lost a valuable day, a day, perhaps, spent by the lovely girl in bitter grief. Was it not his most sacred duty, despite her “Never,” to force his way to her, to dry her tears and to devote himself to her for ever? And could he live and again be happy without knowing that she was to be his always?

He went to the balcony and looked out. The stars shone clear, but night here was less the friend of man than elsewhere. The distant angry roar of

the torrent, the blasts of wind in the black tree-tops, had a threatening and hostile sound. Depression and melancholy were the lot of those who dwelt here. Trees fell and crushed people; storm-clouds brandished a blinding and fatal sword of flame; avalanches of earth and stone slew and maimed; snow and ice lulled wayfarers into their last sleep. The soil was hard and niggardly, the summer brief . . .

And yet it was for this poor country that these people were fighting. It was their mother, whom they loved all the more for her poverty. They asked nothing of the great world; wished only to be let live in peace, and that no one should meddle with their fixed and pious faith. They were heroes, fighting not for gain, and dying, great in their simplicity.

He undressed in the dark and went to bed. For a long time his thoughts kept circling round the house of his gloomy enemy Fentor.

LVII

IN THE GREY DAWN he was startled out of sleep. A pebble had been flung at his window and a low whistle announced that Federspiel was ready. He washed and dressed, drank a little cold milk, and stole out of the house. Cocks were crowing and the ravens flew above the fir trees. Federspiel was waiting below.

Peter's account of his meeting with Anderl appeared to annoy him. "I don't like the lad," he said. "He's always with that Capuchin fox, watching me. If only now he doesn't run after us!"

Talking loudly, like folk who have business in hand, they took the road down to the Valley. They had gone only a little way when the hunter made a sudden movement, stumbling as he strode forwards. He uttered a low curse and kicked a stone out of his way. Peter looked at him inquiringly, but the other gave a warning glance and began to talk vivaciously of a hank of red wool which he would have to buy at the dealers'. At the same time, he took from his pocket a small round mirror and held it in the hollow of his hand. They walked on, until they had turned a bend of the road, when he stood still, breathing deeply.

"He has climbed down now!" he whispered, "and he's going back to the village. I saw it all in the glass!"

"Who?"

“Old Blasi was hiding very cleverly in the top of the bent fir when we were passing. I was startled when I caught sight of him, and pretended I tripped over a stone. They are good watchers, those chaps!” He looked round carefully in every direction, examining through his glass for a long time the mountain slopes. Then they descended into the bed of the stream, and were soon under cover of the strip of wood which followed it. The roar was deafening; the water seethed and bubbled; the great mill was in action, pounding together gravel, broken wood and fragments of rock. Trout sprang at glancing flies. Bushes trailed low branches in the cascades.

Then they had to jump from stone to stone, and after much toil they reached that point in the Klamm at which the path began to descend. Here they stayed for a long time under cover and kept a look-out. There was no sign of anything unusual.

The Fire-spirits were no doubt still sleeping.

Federspiel drew Peter cautiously towards him, to a spot where thick bushes offered a good hiding-place. The entire path through the walls of the Klamm could be seen from this point, and a patch of dry grass afforded both concealment and rest.

“Go to sleep for a little, Herr Storck—” the hunter invited him. “I’ll keep guard.”

Peter still felt in his eyes the traces of last night’s wakefulness and yielded. Federspiel made a bed of the dry grass, with his knapsack, covered by a handkerchief, for a pillow. It made a comfortable bed, and the noise of the water quickly lulled Peter to sleep.

He started up, not knowing where he was, but was reassured when he saw his companion still seated on the same block of stone. The whole place, however, looked different. It was dark now at the bottom of the Klamm, and the edge of the cliff above, which had reflected the rays of the sun with dazzling brightness, lay now within a broad band of shadow. Even the path looked dim and grey. Federspiel offered him bacon and bread.

“I call that a good sleep,” said he. “It’s well on in the afternoon now. But that’s nothing, we have time enough and you wanted a sleep.”

“I had bad dreams. About Christian—” said Peter.

“You knew what the end must be. Anderl was with me—the lad’s gone to pieces. Stop!” he cried suddenly, and putting the field-glass to his eye he gazed for some time down the Klamm. “Now, I would have sworn I saw a

head down there in the bushes." He looked again. "I suppose it must have been a bird—"

"I wonder whether my uncle watched like this?" mused Peter.

"I daresay he did. Who can tell? Perhaps he's lying somewhere about in the bushes. When I die, I could wish for nothing better than that they would let my corpse lie in some spot in the wood, with air, earth and water round it, so that it might be transformed into new life—blue flies and green grass, a litter of young foxes and little ravens, a feast for roots and beetles! I would lose myself in everything, as I have wanted to all my life long. However, they'll put me into some dark hole and shovel earth over me—" He shuddered with horror.

"And the soul?" said Peter.

"Can't believe in that," said the hunter gloomily. "It would be a consolation to me when I have to go away from everything while still young, from woods and mountains and game, from women, whom I have had little enough of, though they are sweet as honey and silky like young hares. A sick man thinks and broods a lot, Herr Storck, so you mustn't object to my talking, you who have a long life in front of you!" He gave a little sigh of envy and was silent.

They sat for a good while thus, listening to the roar of the water and watching the light fade continually.

The dusk gathered, and presently Peter saw his companion's face only as a pale spot. The outlines overhead were dim. Out of the thicket where they sat, a great white owl rose with a silent beat of the wings, hovered over them, and then close by they heard a hideous hooting laugh, like the cry of a ghost amid the noise of the stream.

Night came slowly up out of the Valley.

Suddenly Federspiel's fingers closed with a tight grip on Peter's arm, and with his other hand he pointed overhead.

On the edge of the Klamm above them, just where the mountain began, a yellow flame appeared, moving downward slowly and unsteadily. A second, a third, a fourth—several others followed. The lights were plainly moving with the steps and leaps of people who carried them.

The hunter's hand, still retaining its hold on Peter's arm, was trembling violently. Breathless with excitement, Peter watched the train of lights clambering down.

The first had reached the bottom of the path, and came to a stand about thirty paces from where they watched. He could be seen distinctly emerging from the bushes.

"The Devil!" cried Federspiel into Peter's ear. Peter too was terribly startled. It was the Devil.

LVIII

IT WAS THE EVIL ONE. A hairy skin covered the upper part of his body, his arms and hands; his shapeless legs tramped along the narrow path beside the stream. Above the shaggy neck appeared a horrible countenance with a Satanic grimace, surmounted by pointed ears, with green eyes and wreathed horns.

Peter's heart stopped beating.

A second devil came out, with fat, puffy cheeks, pale brassy eyes and white, bristling beard, buck's horns between his flaccid ears; a boar's tusks protruded from his jaws.

Peter thought he must be dreaming, and gave himself a sharp pinch on the arm. "Wake up—!" he said to himself, shutting and opening his eyelids. What was Federspiel about? he was moving his arm and bending forward. Ah, he was looking through his little telescope. It was shifting about and finally came to rest.

All at once the hunter laughed, nodded to Peter and said: "It's a masquerade. They have false faces. Hairs of bark-fibre, eyes of tin-foil, goats' horns—!"

The gigantic devil who had been the first to appear raised his torch and gave a long and careful look about him. His hideous face turned slowly round.

"The Shuffler was quite right," hissed Federspiel.

"Sure enough, there are five devils—" He laughed noiselessly.

At this moment the leader of the procession took the mask from his face and stripped off the hairy hide from his body.

"Fentor!" exclaimed Peter and the hunter simultaneously.

Without suspecting anything, the people continued their progress, and each of them was plainly visible in the torch-light. Gravely and

ceremoniously they followed one after the other: old Blasi, the charcoal burner; other peasants whom they did not know.

Was Julia amongst them?

The procession passed them. There were many people, but the girl was not amongst them. The last was the charcoal-burner's son.

Presently the two were sitting again in profound darkness.

"Up!" cried Federspiel. "We must follow them. Keep close to me!"

Far in advance of them the torches glimmered, points of light, vanishing into the chasm out of which issued the raging stream. A murky red light came from within the cavern. They waited for a long time, then slowly approached the entrance, which was lit up by a torch fastened in a cleft.

They heard stumbling steps behind them, and turned in dismay. It was Anderl, his face deadly pale.

"I can't stay here by myself—" he gasped.

"Jesus and Mary!"

Federspiel's mouth twitched, and the muscles of his jaws stood out like knots. But when he saw the horror in the boy's face he forced himself to be calm.

"If we are all done for it's your fault," he said carelessly. "Get in behind us. If you breathe a sound it's all up!"

Without turning his head again in the direction of the quaking Anderl, he stepped into the passage. Peter followed close behind him.

What would happen now?

They reached the sepulchral chamber without encountering any hindrance. By the gleam of a torch which here too was crackling and smoking, held by a ring in the rock, they could see into a passage which the block of stone, now lying back, left open. This was the way by which the Rover had come, closing it behind him.

The figures in the wall seemed to move in the ruddy light. A look of mockery played about the lips of the Roman Tribune.

Federspiel advanced without hesitating. They went for some time along a dark passage; the air was heavy, warm and moist. In the dead silence which prevailed here the slightest noise could be heard. All at once Federspiel uttered a low cry.

He had come out into the open air.

They were standing in a deep hollow enclosed by lofty walls of rock. High, infinitely high overhead shone the stars of evening. A gleaming

waterfall, descending from the top of the cliff in front of them, filled the darkness with its roar, and formed a small lake from which rose a grey mist. Large shrubs as high as trees stood in the warm, moist air. Peter plucked a leaf, and a sticky moisture remained in his hand; he touched it with his tongue and found it sweet. These were the trees which in summer bore red blossoms, foreign trees which were able to thrive in this warm atmosphere —Giovanelli's rhododendrons.

"The Chamois' Garden," said Federspiel. "We are in the Chamois' Garden—"

It was sultry and vaporous like a hothouse. There were hot springs here, and the air was oppressive and stagnant.

"Yonder—yonder!" The hunter pointed to a cavern behind the waterfall. They crept in behind the sparkling curtain. As they went on the cave narrowed, and a faint light glimmered in the distance.

And then they came to a stand in front of a thick, musty-smelling curtain, through a division in which the light had appeared.

The hunter hesitated.

"The risk must be taken—" he whispered, looking back, and passed through the curtain. Peter, with Anderl holding on to his coat, followed.

Then they stood still, motionless, rooted to the ground with amazement. They found themselves in a spacious rocky hall, feebly illuminated by a few small lamps. Many people were here assembled, waiting motionless in devout attention. No one turned round as they entered and stood quietly in the deep shadow.

By the light of the small, widely-separated oil-lamps they could distinguish no further details. On the wall opposite the entrance there appeared to be a whitish stone platform, on which they could dimly make out human figures. In front of it rose a kind of altar on which was something bright. Overhead the vaulted roof disappeared mysteriously in darkness. Midway on the left of the motionless throng could be seen the black opening of a side gallery.

There was a sudden stir, and the crowd seemed to take a quick breath. Sweet and clear came the notes of a flute, simple and moving. The spring in the wood—! The flute beside the spring in the wood had sounded just so!

The light in the opening of the side-gallery was extinguished. The flute-tones grew louder. A movement passed over the assembly.

“The Ravens and the Hidden Ones—” whispered a voice in front of Peter, tremulous with awe. “The Father is coming—!”

The notes of the flute rose to a jubilant strain, and grew stronger and fuller. Peter recognised it well; it was the Pan’s-pipe of the charcoal-burner’s son.

Two small figures appeared out of the narrow side-door: Sylvana and a girl of the same age whom they did not know, naked and white, a glistening girdle round their slender loins. They danced with short graceful steps, setting one foot before the other. Behind them came the lad with the shepherd’s pipe, clothed in a speckled goat-skin; his arms and legs were bare, and a strap fastened his shaggy coat in front. A garland of little white roses lay round his dark locks. He was accompanied by three other boys similarly attired.

“The Lion—” said the voice again, tremulous with reverence before the mystery.

A gigantic figure entered, wearing a round iron cap on his wild hair and over his leather jerkin a coat of ring-mail which allowed his formidable arms to be seen. He had short trousers, and sandals were strapped to his feet. In his hand flashed a drawn sword.

It was Fentor, the smith.

Anderl trembled so violently that in spite of his own excitement Peter laid his arm on the boy’s shoulder to reassure him. He heard a whispered prayer, or was it a low sob?

“Be quiet—for God’s sake!” he breathed.

The girls with the torches, the piper and the mighty wielder of the sword remained standing beside the entrance.

A loud-swelling hymn burst from the cavern: “Nama, nama, sebesio!”

“Father—Father!” Loud sobs and yearning cries were heard. The people extended their arms, and many sank on their knees.

An aged man appeared through the side-door.

Peter experienced a powerful and inexplicable emotion which constrained him to fall on his knees. He felt that he must prostrate himself in the presence of this man who had entered.

It was the Rover. The Rover, but transformed!

He walked solemnly amid the torches, clad in a snow-white robe over which hung in heavy purple folds from his shoulders a regal cloak. A

golden circlet adorned his lofty brow. In his hands he bore a shining chalice which he raised in blessing as he moved along.

All bowed low, murmuring a prayer in deep devotion. Who was he? When had Peter seen this proud yet infinitely mild and kind countenance, the glorified expression of a godlike soul? Passionate love for this aged and unknown man gushed from his heart. And he knew now that in the hard and scornful face of that strange being who had twice crossed his path, a faint semblance of this transformed face had fascinated him from the first; he recognised that it was a mysterious and unacknowledged love which had been roused in him, in spite of the stranger's repellent mien. And now he saw that face redeemed from its sinister likeness to the cruel head of the Roman soldier, and transfigured . . .

He felt a touch. It was Federspiel's hand which sought his own and betrayed by its fervent grip a deep devotion. What ailed the hunter? A tear glistened on his sunken cheek.

But there was no possibility of questioning him. He now saw something which made him forget everything else—

LIX

"THE SUN-MAIDEN—look! It is she!" a murmur went round. People rose up in a transport. Peter scarcely breathed.

Julia—!

She came in, clothed, like the beautiful old man, in white, and like him wearing a golden circlet round her head. She held in her hands a crystal bowl, in which a blue flame burned.

In a moment the place was inundated with light.

Through a great shining sphere of glass poured the brilliance, within wide concentric circles of twelve colours, scarlet-red, violet hues, yellow-dun, deep green, honey-colour, sky-blue, water-green, milk-white. The figures on the marble platform were bathed in the fiery brightness.

A youth in a Phrygian cap and flying cloak knelt on a mighty bull, a short sword raised for the thrust . . . "Soli invicto Mithrae"—these words were inscrolled above him.

"Mithra—!" said Peter to himself. "A Mithra-temple!" He could hear Federspiel's heavy breathing beside him.

But it all seemed like a dream, unreal and phantasmal.

His drunken eyes took in only the figure of his beloved, and her white face as she paced forward bearing the bowl in which the bluish flame flickered.

The old man approached her, a bundle of pine-shavings in his hand. A pile of wood stood ready, and beside it shone the chalice, on which lay a slice of bread.

Slowly the priest extended his hand towards the sacred flame. No one breathed in the solemn stillness.

Then the Sun-maiden seemed to totter, the bowl in her hands slanted over and clashed in pieces on the ground. The blue flame was extinguished.

A cry of consternation, in which Peter's involuntary exclamation was drowned, went up from the whole assembly.

The girl buried her lovely face in her hands and fell on her knee, and a cry of woe escaped from her. An awful silence fell. The people remained in helpless attitudes, as if unable to move.

Then she sprang up and ran to the side passage. Her garment caught in the torch borne by Sylvana, which fell crackling on the ground. Her white, streaming robe disappeared in the dark opening.

She was no longer pure, and it was no longer permitted her to touch the vessel containing the Sacred Fire.

In the deep silence which had followed the general cry of horror, all eyes were fixed apprehensively on the old man. The pine-shavings slipped from his hand with a dry, rustling sound.

Slowly he turned his head. There was a profound sadness in his noble face, and with a gesture of final despair he hid his face in the sleeves of his priestly garment. A low moan came from him.

He raised his head, deadly pale and with features of stone, then lifting his hands above him he called out in a hollow and broken voice:

"II dyi ei ischturien . . . ei ven ad esser sarein . . . ei ven freid . . . Dieus mora!"

The young girls threw on the ground their torches, which were extinguished in smoke. A solitary voice was heard calling in mortal terror: "Father!"

The old man appeared to be in search of something, looked round, then caught his hands to his heart as if in sudden agony, and fell.

With a hoarse yell the smith sprang to the inanimate figure and lifted it as though it were a child. The old man's arms hung loose; the bright lights were reflected in his wide-open eyes.

Once more there were loud cries of lamentation; people fell prostrate on their faces; shrieks were heard. Peter's arm was gripped. "Away! away quick!" whispered Federspiel.

"Profanation!" someone cried. Angry eyes gleamed, and hands were stretched threateningly in the direction of the intruders. A sword flashed out.

"Now for our lives!" cried the hunter, pulling Peter away. They tore madly back along the passage, the lad behind them whimpering, half crazy with terror. As they raced along breathlessly, Federspiel caught a half-extinguished torch out of its ring and swung it round till it blazed again. The waterfall was lit up with fiery sparks; beyond it in the Chamois' Garden the trees were rustling. There was a noise of running feet behind them, fierce shouts. In the wall of the sepulchral chamber the stone figures watched motionless. And behind the three fugitives the rock-door fell with a resounding crash, a heart's throb too late . . .

LX

THAT WAS THEIR SALVATION. As they fled on, objects on either side glided by like ghosts. Stumbling, falling, picking themselves up again, they ran along by the roaring waters of the stream. Fresh air blew upon them, stars glittered. The Klamm.

"On still! On!" cried the hunter. "If they get us they'll tear us in pieces!"

"They would do right!" groaned Peter, his throat parched. Anderl shouted and blubbered, calling on the names of the saints. The torch was nearly extinguished, but they found their way through the ravine and hurried, sick with horror, up the narrow winding path.

At the top they all dropped suddenly on the ground. Gasping horribly for breath, Federspiel tore open his shirt-collar; there was froth on his lips.

"I'm dying . . ."

Peter tried to help him by raising him up.

"Where's the boy? Anderl?" The hunter's breath whistled. Peter looked round. The boy had vanished.

"Anderl!" he called, "Anderl!"

No one answered. The torrent roared in its deep bed.

“Good heavens! that’s a bit of bad luck,” muttered Federspiel, half raising himself and trying to shout with his weak voice: “Anderl!” His head sank heavily.

In mortal fear, Peter waited until the hunter should recover a little. What if their pursuers were still to overtake them?

“He’s off to tell the priest,” groaned Federspiel.

“And we are to blame for it—” Peter was about to shout again, but the sick man restrained him. “It’s no use,” the latter said quietly. “They might hear us. We can do nothing now—”

“What—what was it that the old man said?” Peter burst out. “He spoke Romansch—did he not speak Romansch? You must have understood it!”

Federspiel nodded. “I understood—everything—”

And in a faint voice he continued: “ ‘The darkness gathers—Night comes—The cold begins—God dies!’ That was what the old man said.”

When the Sun-maiden loses her purity, God dies.

“We are doing no good with this—we must get on before the priest gets to work.” He rose with an effort, breathing heavily. “We must warn her—”

“Warn?” asked Peter.

“You go on down to the village,” said the hunter, “and wait there for the smith—for the lady. You save the young lady! I must go and look for old Blasi, I will have to risk it . . . In the morning the priest will be here with the peasants after him, I am sure of that.” And as Peter still hesitated he added grimly: “I’m not going to look on while they are butchering little Sylvana—”

Peter suddenly realised the danger which threatened Julia. “I’m going,” he said. “I will wait for her—”

They shook hands, each of them making a silent vow, and separated.

Peter ran down the path. His heart was crushed with fear. Would she have taken another path and have reached the smith’s house before him?

He reached the empty street of the village, and the house. The windows were in darkness and the door shut fast. He took up a stone and flung it at the pane of her window, smashing the glass; then all was silent.

As he turned away from the house he noticed a dark figure in front of The Rose. There was a low growl.

“Who is that?” he called.

In the clear night air he saw that it was a woman. A dog beside her showed white teeth. He started.

“You—?” he exclaimed.

“Yes, it’s I,” said Notburga. “They sent me word my brother was dead and I have to look after what belongs to me.”

“And—and the child?” he said. His heart seemed to stop beating.

“The child—the little baby would not stay with a sinner like me,” she said in a stifled voice. “There’s nothing between us now, Herr Storck!”

“I have done you a great wrong—”

“Crying over it doesn’t help,” she answered calmly. “And God has pardoned me.”

“Will you live here again?” he asked.

“Only for a little. I’m going to marry Zoggeli Durfel and he’s coming here. He has forgiven me for all that has happened, and I’ll make him a good wife.”

“And this is old Butz—?” said Peter, reaching out his hand to the dog, who drew back with a suspicious growl. “He never liked me—” he added sadly. “And you too no longer, Notburga?”

“I belong to another man,” she said, holding out her hand. “And now, God bless you! It isn’t right for us to be together!”

“Farewell!”

She turned towards the inn. The door jarred. But she came back, took his head in both her hands and kissed him on the mouth. Her cheek was wet. The house-door closed heavily behind her.

LXI

HE STOOD GAZING AT IT, then roused himself with a start. Julia! Here he stood, gazing into the past, and perhaps in the morning a wild murderous mob would come—

He walked a short distance up the road by which Julia must come. Cicadas chirruped round him, the stars shone clear in the vault of the heavens. How beautiful the night was, and how full of horror and fear! His feet were as if weighted with lead, his head ached, his eyes burned. The pale moon looked down indifferent.

Ah, to be away from this place! Away from this valley of terror! But not without her, no, never without her!

There was a sound of steps, and Peter was at once on the alert. Something bright flashed in front of his eyes.

"Dog!" shouted a hoarse voice. Peter just avoided the thrust. Quick as lightning he had stepped aside and seized with all his strength the hairy paw holding the knife.

"I want to save you, man!" he cried. "And above all you, Julia! Listen!"

The smith freed himself by a slight movement, and Peter was able to see the ravages of grief in the man's hairy face.

Beside him stood Julia, her head bowed.

In great haste Peter related what had happened: how he and Federspiel had listened to the service, and how the lad who had stolen after them had run off. He told the smith, who listened with a grim face, that Federspiel had gone to warn Blasi. They must escape, or else prepare for the worst in the morning.

"It's all the same now," said Fentor gloomily. "All's over!"

"Well, do as you will, then!" cried Peter in despair. "But you, Julia, you will stay with me—!"

She did not answer, and stood pale and still in the moonlight.

Peter looked in perplexity at the smith. "You hate me—" he said. "It has all happened because I thought the Fire-spirits had murdered my uncle."

"What now, then, when you have yourself seen him die in the midst of the Fire-spirits, as you call them? What do you think now?"

"Then the old man—?" Peter staggered, caught his hand to his forehead and looked at Julia. She nodded silently.

"Oh, Julia, why did you not trust me?" he cried. "Why, why not, Julia?"

The smith laughed harshly.

"The way was marked for you in an old book, Herr Peter Storck. But you were the kind of man who couldn't keep it to yourself, and told others. So you didn't succeed in reaching us, and you've brought ruin on those who serve the Light. Friend to you I'll never be! The lady here may do as she pleases. If she'll come with me and the brethren into the Engadine, she'll have to return at once on the road we've come by; if she chooses to remain in your care, it's all one to me. The Sacred Fire is out, and needs no one any longer to keep it. She out of whose hands it fell may live with men now like other women!"

He thrust Peter aside and went toward his house.

"Julia!" cried the young man again.

As she stood there like a statue in the clear light of the moon and returned no answer, he was seized with despair. He caught her arm and drew her along with him towards Zeitlanghof.

"You'll stay with me, Julia!" he burst out. "Until the storm which is certain to come has blown over. And to-morrow as soon as it is dark you shall leave this terrible neighbourhood with me!"

A sob broke from her. "Father—!"

He felt that her heart was sore and that she needed to rest after the dreadful scene in the Mithra-grotto. He felt a faint assurance that she trusted him. But no word to her now! No questions!

His own heart seemed dead within him. Even feeling was extinguished. Shadows, faint and unreal, flitted through his mind. Notburga, the dog—dreams! they were phantoms of the night, spectres, which would dissolve at the first flush of dawn.

Julia was beside him, leaning heavily on his arm. Her feet stumbled on stones and she tottered forward, her eyes closed.

He took her up in his arms and carried her through the disordered autumn garden, past the figure of Death watching silently beside the door, and up the staircase, which creaked as he mounted it with his burden. He laid the motionless body on his bed. Her breath came quietly, and now and then in her sleep she uttered a low sob like a child.

He bolted all the doors and placed on the table a loaded musket ready for use. Then he went out again into the moonlight. The stars were fading.

The smith came back from his house, and seeing Peter standing in the garden, walked up to him and threw down a bundle on the ground. "Clothes," he said, in a voice like distant thunder. "Clothes, and things that belong to the young lady."

Peter took the bundle and involuntarily put his hand on a sack on the man's shoulder. "That's mine!" he said. Fentor roughly pushed away Peter's hand. "Unclean feet shall not soil the place where the Father sleeps!" He laughed bitterly.

"What have you in it?" asked Peter uneasily.

"You'll know time enough! And now, young sir, don't detain me! Every word you say is like as if you put your hand into the raw flesh of a wound. And if I knew it was through you that the sacred bowl was broken—" He clenched his lists and his eyes flashed. "You may thank the Daughter of the Sun that I don't break you like rotten wood. She prayed for you—" His

formidable fists trembled and a groan issued from his throat. Then his anger passed. “It’s all one now. Nothing matters.”

He suddenly burst into tears. With quaking shoulders he passed Peter and stamped heavily up the road.

“His God is dead,” thought Peter, looking after him. “Dead—”

He took up the bundle and carried it into the house, then closed the door softly and laid it in the room where she slept.

His restlessness drove him out of doors again. He had to wait a long time for Federspiel.

“I found Blasi,” said the hunter. “At first he wanted to have my life, but I kept him off and at last was able to talk to him. He’s out of his wits now, laughing and crying together!”

He sat down beside Peter at the side of the road.

“Well, we have carried out our plan. And now, when it’s too late, I find that without knowing it I have all my life been one of the Fire-spirits myself! Yes, I too have worshipped the Sun every day . . . It was a priest whom we saw dying—”

“And I found my uncle after all, saw him for the first and the last time,” returned Peter. “Neither of us brings a blessing with him, Herr Federspiel —”

“We have done what we set out to do. And while I have been securing the poor little thing from those rascals, who will be here in an hour or two like wild bulls—you, I suppose, have not been sleeping?”

“She is at my house—” said Peter. “And to-morrow at dusk I leave this place—for ever. And you, Herr Federspiel, you will come with us. There’s plenty of room in my house in Vienna.”

The hunter laughed constrainedly.

“I? I in Vienna? You don’t believe it yourself, Herr Storck! Something else is in store for me here. I know it. Thank you. You are good-hearted. No, no, don’t talk to me. I stay where I am. I know well what is going to happen, and compared with it, this rising of peasants against the Sun-worshippers will be child’s play, and soon over. They’ll find no one now in the caves and to the dead they can do nothing. And now, Herr Storck, we’ll try to rest for an hour or so. The moon has set already, and soon the God will be here whom they think dead. He dies every year, and grows pale and paler till he comes to the turn of winter and puts on his girdle of gold—”

He rose, pressed Peter's hand and went off to his hut. The first timid cries of birds were heard. A thin rosy streak appeared in the east.

"There is still time," murmured Peter, who could hardly keep his eyes open. He stole softly through the garden and took off his shoes as he entered the house.

In his uncle's chair, with his face toward the slowly brightening window, he gazed with aching eyes at the rising day.

LXII

A WILD UPROAR, above which sounded a penetrating voice, roused him with a start from a light sleep.

He quickly closed all the doors and went down into the village. They were here! They had come up from the Valley as the hunter had foretold, and the Sankt Marein people mingled excitedly with the armed bands.

The Capuchin's red beard was wagging, and his fists were stretched out of the sleeves of his brown cloak.

"Now we know all—" cried Father Archangelus, and his powerful voice sounded like a trumpet. "The reason is plain why it was that in the parish church down yonder the Sweet Heart of Jesus shed tears of blood for all to see. Now we know why God is angry and has withdrawn His hand from Tyrol and given it over to its foes for chastisement. Vain have been the tears and prayers of your priests, vain our fervent supplications to Saint Joseph, our country's patron. What then is amiss with us? What is amiss with this Catholic country?"

He lowered his arms and looked fiercely at the crowd.

"Our Christian religion is shamed, our Lord and Saviour insulted, the Blessed Virgin Mary has turned away her face from us with bitter tears. Horrors have happened in these mountains, heathenish, hellish horrors, filth of Satan! The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is turned to mockery by a heathen priest, naked whores dance in front of idols, creatures in the shape of devils wander about in this place! Three Christian men have looked on shuddering while Satan's mass was being celebrated in a cave. Andreas!" he shouted, "come forward and bear witness!"

The crowd parted and Anderl came forward trembling. His clothes were torn, his hands gashed with thorns. In a quaking voice he related how he, with Herr Storck and Serafin Federspiel, had seen the devils descending and how the three had followed them. He told everything—the flute-playing, the shameless dancing, the coloured lights, the chalice, the bread, the hymns —

The crowd listened in wild excitement.

"Now, Andreas!" ordered the Capuchin. "Name the members of this unhappy parish who took part in this idolatry!"

Slowly, timidly the names were uttered: "Fentor the smith, his brother the charcoal-burner, the pitch-gatherer, the young lady—the Rover—He was their Head—"

"Therefore God has overthrown him!" shouted the monk furiously. "Up now, you Christian people, and make an end of heathenism! Enough has been told you—!"

The anger of the crowd blazed into a frenzy. In a twinkling the circle of listeners had broken up and in a confused rabble they rushed to the smithy.

Peter stepped forward quickly to the zealot. "Father, what you are doing will bring great unhappiness. The people up there have done no harm to anybody—"

The red-bearded priest looked at him out of the corners of his eyes. "Take care!" he hissed, "I warn you!"

Peter understood well enough, realising his helplessness. A word from this man in the brown cloak might mean death. And then Julia too would be lost.

The door of the smithy stood firm for a while, till they found a crowbar, and the oaken boards were soon battered in. With loud yells the crowd poured into the deserted house, smashing glass and throwing out into the street window-frames, feather beds, cupboards, chests, crockery. The smith was nowhere to be seen.

"I appeal to you once more—!" said Peter, turning to the clergyman, enraged by this senseless destruction.

"I know very well that you are not a true Christian!" returned the other harshly, and his freckled face darkened. "I am not responsible for your soul, but I am for the souls of these people. Once more: do not try to hinder me!"

A woman emerged from the house with a crucifix. She caressed the Saviour with her hand, saying: "Isn't that better? You will be well off with

me. You will have a light always. Ah, your pain must have been ten times worse in that accursed house—!"

"Now for the heathen sorcerers! Up to the charcoal-burner's! Burn the witch!" They formed once more into a band.

"Andreas!" cried the Father, "lead on!"

And with the lad as their guide they rushed off up the mountain, the priest with his crucifix at their head.

Peter stayed behind. He heard a titter beside him. It was Josele's old wife.

"Oh, the fools!" A thousand wrinkles moved about her mocking lips. "They want to destroy the secret ones who live in the mountain, but they have more power than the Crucified God, and I saw myself the way Donner threw his hammer into the church below in the Valley, and it went up in bright fire. Because he was stronger than the other . . . And he won't be able to help the Tyrolese, the God on the cross . . ."

She went off mumbling to herself.

With hurried steps Peter went to his house; he brushed aside Hirlanda, who was standing, at her wit's end, before the locked door of his room, and entered.

"Julia!" he called softly. "Are you awake?"

He opened the door of the bedroom. She came towards him, in one of the dresses which the smith had brought, foreseeing what would happen in his own house. There were deep shadows under her eyes and her face was white.

Soothingly, moved by a deep love, he stroked her hair. She burst into tears and flung her arms about him.

He refrained from troubling her with questions and brought her some milk and bread, telling her as much as was necessary of the morning's doings.

"In the evening we will leave this house," he said, "and this country, Julia!"

"Where am I to go?" she wept. "I have no longer anyone—!"

"Are you not my wife?"

She looked at him and trembled. A light blush spread over her face. "I am yours!"

LXIII

THEN, AT FIRST HESITATINGLY, but soon finding relief in escaping from a prolonged restraint, she began to speak.

The actress of the Karntnertor Theatre at Vienna, who had disappeared after the scene between Peter's uncle and the French prince, had been her mother.

In a little village in a valley of the Ungadine, her home, the woman had brought Martin Storck's child into the world in poverty and misery. A letter in which the frivolous creature, after some years, implored help from the lover she had deceived, at length told him her whereabouts. He sent a confidential messenger, who was charged to offer her a sufficient sum of money, on condition that she would give up the little girl and send her to him. The actress, whose real name was Avorai, had without hesitation consented, and handed over the child, who, left wholly to herself, had been growing up among children who spoke the Romansch dialect.

Martin Storck had at once taken to his heart the pretty child and had caused her to be educated carefully at Innsbruck, appearing himself once every year in the little capital that he might see that everything possible was done for his daughter's welfare.

At the recollection of the loving care of the father whom she had so recently lost, Julia burst into fresh tears, and it was some time before Peter ventured to question her further. "Poor child!" he said, comforting her and stroking her hair. "How little joy you must have had in your childhood!"

She started up, looking at him with shining eyes. "Little joy? If you knew how happy my noble father's love made me, and how great was my joy when he allowed me to spend my summers in Sankt Marein and to be near him! It was he who unlocked for me the treasures of his knowledge and let my soul drink of his wisdom. I could never tell how good he was to me!"

"You were here, then—in Zeitlanghof?" Peter asked, surprised.

She shook her head. "No. He did not allow it. Only the smith knew that I was his daughter; he had complete confidence in Fentor, at whose house I lived. The people in the village had no suspicion of our real relationship."

"Strange—" said Peter. "And yet you held one of the highest and most sacred dignities of the Mithra brotherhood—?"

She covered her eyes with her hand. Peter took her arm gently. "Be a brave girl and tell me everything!" he entreated.

Her face was troubled. "There was a change—" she said, as if to herself.

“What change?” he urged, eager for the key to the mystery which still surrounded her.

“I knew nothing of these things when I spent the first summer at Sankt Marein,” she continued. “It was only in the second year that I noticed that my father had become more silent and grave, and often looked at me mysteriously. Then I was very anxious when he began to stay out all day on the mountains, with the smith and old Blasi, and when he came back, several times he said strange things which filled me with anxiety, called himself Aemilianus, and said that he had lived in this place two thousand years ago and had belonged to the worship of the Unspotted God. And once it frightened me to see a hard light in his eyes, always so kind; it was as if someone else were looking out of them, a merciless wicked person! In those days he began to speak Romansch, which I had known well from my childhood; Fentor the charcoal-burner and Blasi understood it also, and it was these two who persuaded my father to set about restoring the old faith, which bad never been quite extinct, for every year its festivals were celebrated. They were absolutely convinced that my father was a priest of Mithra come to life again, the same Aemilianus Sagittarius whose image you saw in the sepulchral chamber. One day my father was quite overcome. He was sitting with me in the wood where we had been looking for berries and mushrooms, and suddenly his eyes grew fixed and large, and he uttered words that filled me with horror. ‘He that is in me wills it! He that is in me constrains me!’ And then he fell in a faint on the grass. I cried out and wept, and at last the old pitch-gatherer came and brought him to himself again.” She shuddered at this remembrance and wrung her hands.

“And then, for your father’s sake, you too attended the nightly worship?”

“Yes,” she answered. “The old faith of Mithra suddenly revived when the word was passed that a ‘Father’ had returned from the dead; for believers give that name to the priest who transmutes the bread and the sacred wine, and who alone may kindle the sun-fire. Before this, little companies of the faithful had walked in the secret paths at the times of the equinox, disguised partly as devils, so as to frighten away the inquisitive. ‘Fire-spirits’ these light-bearers were called by the people. But now in a short time the sun-worshippers grew to hundreds. The Sun-maiden only was wanting. Then my father took me, bade me put on a white robe and conducted me to the Grotto. They kissed the hem of my robe, and from that time I was

surrounded with love and veneration, and I carried the vessel containing the Sacred Fire to the Father, on the days of the Great Festival."

"And about me—did your father never say anything about me?" interjected Peter, grieved a little.

She smiled. "He was always speaking of you," she said, gazing at him. "It was when he had changed, and the 'other' as he said, was in him, that your name was often on his lips. 'The way is marked out for him in the book,' he said once to Fentor and me; 'he will find it.' Fentor did not approve, but he was accustomed to yield. After this, my father's state grew worse. Only at intervals was he free from the idea that he was a Roman Tribune. Perhaps he was uneasy about it himself, or why should he secretly have left a gift for you in his desk? He must have had a foreboding that his spirit would grow darker and more disturbed. And one day he did not come back. He went into the mountains and never after that returned. I waited for him in deadly fear, and at last in the evening Fentor and Blasi announced to me solemnly that the Father was now united to God and must remain close to the sacred places. I might see him in Blasi's hut. I went up there and saw him, and found with horror that the delusion had taken complete possession of him. Long before this, however, he had exacted a solemn oath from me that if you should ever come to Sankt Marein, I would never tell you of anything that concerned him. When it was God's will, you would find the way to him."

"And yet he crossed my path twice—" exclaimed Peter.

"He could not resist the longing to see you. He loved you so much, and he often said that you were the only one left of his blood and name, and that even as a child in the cradle you had shown an affection for him. But whenever you were near, the power of the other soul that was in him weakened

"Oh, if only you had trusted me, Julia!" cried Peter.

She bowed her head. "It was impossible. I was bound by my oath. Almost every day the smith reminded me of my promise, he hated you, Peter, and suspected that you would never rest until you had found your uncle. It was he who left that warning at your window in the inn. Blasi and he spread the report that my father had met with an accident in the mountains, and no one troubled himself about the stranger who lived in the pitch-gatherer's hut. And even if they had looked into his altered face they

would never have taken him for the handsome Martin Storck, with his long white beard and kindly eyes."

"Strange! Strange!" muttered Peter.

"And once—" her voice faltered, "once my father was seized with pains in the chest he had often before suffered from this complaint and I asked Sylvana to fetch the pills which he took for it; they were in your study, as I knew well. She was afraid of the dog and would not venture. So I came myself. You were sleeping, and the moon was shining on your face. You were smiling—and then—"

She was silent.

"Then you kissed me—" He pressed his lips to her mouth. Then he said hurriedly: "Your religion was pure. How did it happen that a little wench like Sylvana was allowed to take part in the sacred rites?"

Julia lowered her eyes. "Many were against her," she answered softly. "But the Father was indulgent towards her, and often took delight in her childish liveliness. And his word was law, even though many were displeased. No one would have dared to rebel against him, and so she was admitted to the lowest grade—among the Ravens. Oh, and by this time—"

Once more she was overcome by a fit of silent weeping.

Peter sat beside her without moving, took her small hand in his own and waited patiently.

"Well, the riddles are all answered now," he said presently. "And I have only one wish, dear Julia—that we may escape from this gloomy neighbourhood to pleasanter surroundings."

She did not answer but pressed close to him.

"I will go with you—" she whispered. "I loved you the first time I saw you, I love you now and will always love you—"

A terrible crash caused them both to start up. The mountains took up the thundering sound, tossing it to and fro between them. The windows rattled as if before a sudden and frightful blast of wind.

In dismay they looked toward the mountain. Two greyish-yellow clouds of dust mounted in the air, then spread out. One issued from behind the summit of the Schellbock, the other wreathed upwards out of the Klamm like a dragon.

"It's Fentor!" cried Julia. "He has blown up the Grotto!"

LXIV

IN THE AFTERNOON the peasants returned, disappointed and exhausted. The Capuchin was with them.

They had failed to set foot in the places which had been consecrated to the worship of the Sun-god. A frightful explosion, which knocked down those who were in advance and choked up the passages with debris, made all approach impossible. Brown-stained water burst seething down through The Klamm, amid tumbled fragments of the vaulted roof. Never again would anyone living tread the paths by which the Fire-spirits had gone.

In other respects the expedition had been unsuccessful. The pitch-gatherer's hut stood empty, with open doors, and the poor and scanty furniture tempted no one to take the trouble to destroy it.

The charcoal-burner's hut likewise was forsaken, and in the middle of it, fashioned out of bark and red tree-fibre, a caricature image, with cowl and foxy beard, was so recognisable that a young fellow shouted loudly: "Father Archangelus!"

Towards evening the crowd melted away. About the ruined house of the smith feathers from the torn beds were still whirling in the wind. The village lay still as death, and people kept within their houses in anxiety and dismay, frightened still further by the strange talk of old Josele's wife. None could tell how great might be the power of the god who had been so affronted . . .

By the wall of the churchyard, a girl in a dark dress and with golden hair, closely followed by a black dog, gazed at the gravedigger as he shovelled earth into Christian's unconsecrated grave. Every now and then she raised her handkerchief to her eyes, and then the dog would utter a short, plaintive whine.

A black woodpecker tapped at a tree beside the charnel-house with a quick succession of pecks, which made a sound like the muffled beating of a drum.

And later, in the clear night, a carriage drew up at a point in the road down in the Valley where no houses were to be seen. Two persons entered, a third stood at the carriage-door.

"Once more, Herr Federspiel, come with us to Vienna!" said Peter Storck.

“No, it can’t be!” returned the hunter. “I must stay. A little while and it will be over! Farewell, and may you be truly happy, you and your lovely bride!”

“Adieu! Adieu!”

The words soon were lost in the wind, which lifted the man’s hair as he stood for a long time with his hat in his hand, looking after the carriage.

The sound of the wheels grew fainter and died away, but the trotting of the horses was heard for some time longer in the still night.

Then all was silent round Federspiel.

“I’m alone again now,” he said, clenching his teeth. “The good time is over.” He coughed, and walked slowly up the road to Sankt Marein.

LXV

THE MARRIAGE was celebrated on November 2, 1809. The day was dark and cheerless, with drizzling rain.

But in the old house, Zum Alten Blumenstockel, branching silver candelabra lit up the white table and the candles burned with a golden flame; glasses sparkled, and from the bouquet of white roses in Julia’s hand hung broad ribbons, apple-green and peach-red.

Bartenstein, the Franconian, had come from Würzburg, and Peter’s friends had gathered. The delicate notes of a spinet and a chorus of tuneful voices greeted the bride and groom as they entered . . .

A tear glistened on the bride’s cheek.

“Do not weep, dearest,” whispered Peter in her ear. “He whom we both mourn is looking down on us and blessing our union.”

A little girl dressed in bright blue silk, with flaxen hair, curtsied prettily and held before the bridal pair a silver tray, on which were two green rummers tilled with sparkling Rhine wine.

Peter shuddered as he reached out his hand. “Listen!” he said, “there was a shot!”

The guests gathered round laughing and jesting. “He’s still fighting at Pontlatz Bridge,” said Bartenstein. “I drink to you, Brother!”

The glasses clinked together with a thin clear sound like a distant peal of bells.

LXVI

AT THE SAME HOUR, at the head of a strong column, General Rechberg was riding towards the bridge over the Upper Inn. A young Captain of the French regiment of Chasseurs, mounted beside hint on a restless white horse, was looking up at the slopes which rose from the river beside the road.

Behind the two horsemen walked the guide, two men with fixed bayonets on either side of him. He was an old peasant in a dirty red jacket, thin and meagre, and with a repulsive appearance, he had no nose, his thin lips were drawn back from his teeth in a set grin, and his deep-sunken eyes looked out of their hollows with a piercing gaze.

A stray dog which accompanied the soldiers ran up to him, sniffed at his thin shanks, then howled suddenly, and made off along the road in front of them, its tail between its legs.

“Pardon, General!” said the young Captain to Rechberg. “Is this the spot where these cowardly rebels inflicted that shameful reverse on Colonel Burscheid?”

The Bavarian General surveyed the talkative young man contemptuously.

“Perhaps, Captain, your judgment would be different if you were to come to close quarters with the sharpshooters of this country. We now prefer to hope that we Bavarians may at last succeed in winning the confidence of a brave people.”

“Bavarians?” The Frenchman laughed, pursing his lips. “Considering that our Dalmatian and Italian regiments have a notion of occupying this country, it’s questionable whether we are going to hand it over to the Bavarians. The Emperor will decide what is to be done with these goat-herds.”

The General bit his lip and bent his head. “The shame of it!” he said to himself. “Must I put up with such insolence?” An angry retort rose to his lips.

At this moment, at a bend of the road near the fatal bridge, a man appeared from behind the leafless bushes and stood motionless in the middle of the road.

Involuntarily the two officers pulled up their horses.

The man had a curious appearance. His cheeks were sunken, the skin was tight over his cheek bones, and his feverish eyes flashed like blue flames.

His slovenly clothes were torn and neglected, a musket hung on a faded band over his shoulder, and the tattered feathers of a blackcock fluttered in his yellow-green hat.

He stood squarely and defiantly with his face to the advancing troops, a strange smile on his pale features.

The General kept his horse standing.

"What's this?" asked the Frenchman, pointing towards the man with his gold-knobbed riding-rod.

"A rebel, putting in an appearance in your honour," answered the General, scowling.

The Captain laughed loudly and put spurs to his horse, which reared and dashed forward; then he advanced at a smart trot towards the man, flicking his rod carelessly. With a supercilious face, looking down out of half-closed eyes, he pulled up his horse a step or two in front of the Tyrolese and, still flicking his riding-rod, said shortly:

"Rends-toi, canaille!"

The emaciated man shouted a laugh and, quick as lightning, brought his musket into position: a yellow tongue of fire flashed out in blue smoke. The Frenchman uttered a squeal like that of a hurt cat and fell heavily from his horse, with his face in the mud of the mist-soaked road.

The General rode forward and shouted. But without any order from him a crackle of shots broke from ten, twenty muskets . . . The assailant collapsed without uttering a sound, and his blood steamed in the cool air.

The dead man had been alone, and was a poor, sick creature, formerly a student, named Serafin Federspiel.

THE END

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6. OLD FAITHFUL AND OTHER STORIES - RAYMOND Z. GALLUN
7. THE ALIEN ENVOY AND OTHER STORIES - MALCOLM JAMESON
8. THE MAN WITHOUT A PLANET AND OTHER STORIES - RICHARD WILSON
9. THE MAN WHO WAS SECRETT AND OTHER STORIES - JOHN BRUNNER
10. THE CLOUDBUILDERS - COLIN KAPP
11. SOMEWHERE IN SPACE - C.C. MACAPP

DAY KEENE IN THE DETECTIVE PULPS

1. LEAGUE OF THE GRATEFUL DEAD AND OTHER STORIES - VOL. I - INTRODUCED BYJOHN PELAN
2. WE ARE THE DEAD AND OTHER STORIES - VOL. II - INTRODUCED BY ED GORMAN
3. DEATH MARCH OF THE DANCING DOLLS AND OTHER STORIES - VOL. III - INTRODUCED BY BILL CRIDER
4. THE CASE OF THE BEARDED BRIDE AND OTHER STORIES - VOL. IV - INTRODUCED BY DAVID L. WILSON
5. A CORPSE WALKS IN BROOKLYN AND OTHER STORIES - VOL. V - INTRODUCED BY ROBERT J. RANDISI
6. HOMICIDE HOUSE AND OTHER STORIES - VOL. VI - INTRODUCED BY RICHARD A. LUPOFF

RAMBLE HOUSE's

HARRY STEPHEN KEELER WEBWORK MYSTERIES

(RH) indicates the title is available ONLY in the RAMBLE HOUSE edition

The Ace of Spades Murder

The Affair of the Bottled Deuce (RH)

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The Case of the Canny Killer

The Case of the Crazy Corpse (RH)

The Case of the Flying Hands (RH)

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The Case of the Jeweled Ragpicker

The Case of the Lavender Gripsack

The Case of the Mysterious Moll

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The Case of the Transparent Nude (RH)

The Case of the Transposed Legs

The Case of the Two-Headed Idiot (RH)

The Case of the Two Strange Ladies

The Circus Stealers (RH)

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The Crimson Cube (RH)

The Face of the Man From Saturn

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The Five Silver Buddhas

The 4th King

The Gallows Waits, My Lord! (RH)

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Finger! Finger!

Hangman's Nights (RH)

I, Chameleon (RH)

I Killed Lincoln at 10:13! (RH)

The Iron Ring

The Man Who Changed His Skin (RH)

The Man with the Crimson Box

The Man with the Magic Eardrums

The Man with the Wooden Spectacles

The Marceau Case

The Matilda Hunter Murder

The Monocled Monster

The Murder of London Lew

The Murdered Mathematician

The Mysterious Card (RH)

The Mysterious Ivory Ball of Wong Shing Li (RH)

The Mystery of the Fiddling Cracksman

The Peacock Fan

The Photo of Lady X (RH)

The Portrait of Jirjohn Cobb

Report on Vanessa Hewstone (RH)

Riddle of the Travelling Skull

Riddle of the Wooden Parrakeet (RH)

The Scarlet Mummy (RH)

The Search for X-Y-Z

The Sharkskin Book

Sing Sing Nights

The Six From Nowhere (RH)

The Skull of the Waltzing Clown

The Spectacles of Mr. Cagliostro

Stand By—London Calling!

The Steeltown Strangler

The Stolen Gravestone (RH)

Strange Journey (RH)

The Strange Will

The Straw Hat Murders (RH)

The Street of 1000 Eyes (RH)

Thieves' Nights

Three Novellos (RH)

The Tiger Snake

The Trap (RH)

Vagabond Nights (Defrauded Yeggman)

Vagabond Nights 2 (10 Hours)

The Vanishing Gold Truck

The Voice of the Seven Sparrows

The Washington Square Enigma

When Thief Meets Thief

The White Circle (RH)

The Wonderful Scheme of Mr. Christopher Thorne

X. Jones—of Scotland Yard

Y. Cheung, Business Detective

Keeler Related Works

A To Izzard: A Harry Stephen Keeler Companion by Fender Tucker — Articles and stories about Harry, by Harry, and in his style. Included is a compleat bibliography.

Wild About Harry: Reviews of Keeler Novels — Edited by Richard Polt & Fender Tucker — 22 reviews of works by Harry Stephen Keeler from *Keeler News.* A perfect introduction to the author.

The Keeler Keyhole Collection: Annotated newsletter rants from Harry Stephen Keeler, edited by Francis M. Nevins. Over 400 pages of incredibly personal Keeleriana.

Fakealoo — Pastiches of the style of Harry Stephen Keeler by selected demented members of the HSK Society. Updated every year with the new winner.

Strands of the Web: Short Stories of Harry Stephen Keeler — 29 stories, just about all that Keeler wrote, are edited and introduced by Fred Cleaver.

RAMBLE HOUSE's **LOON SANCTUARY**

A Clear Path to Cross — Sharon Knowles short mystery stories by Ed Lynskey.

A Corpse Walks in Brooklyn and Other Stories — Volume 5 in the Day Keene in the Detective Pulps series.

A Jimmy Starr Omnibus — Three 40s novels by Jimmy Starr.

A Niche in Time and Other Stories — Classic SF by William F. Temple

A Roland Daniel Double: The Signal and The Return of Wu Fang — Classic thrillers from the 30s.

A Shot Rang Out — Three decades of reviews and articles by today's Anthony Boucher, Jon Breen. An essential book for any mystery lover's library.

A Smell of Smoke — A 1951 English countryside thriller by Miles Burton.

A Snark Selection — Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* with two Snarkian chapters by Harry Stephen Keeler — Illustrated by Gavin L. O'Keefe.

A Young Man's Heart — A forgotten early classic by Cornell Woolrich.

Alexander Laing Novels — *The Motives of Nicholas Holtz* and *Dr. Scarlett*, stories of medical mayhem and intrigue from the 30s.

An Angel in the Street — Modern hardboiled noir by Peter Genovese.

Automaton — Brilliant treatise on robotics: 1928-style! By H. Stafford Hatfield.

Away From the Here and Now — Clare Winger Harris stories, collected by Richard A. Lupoff

Beast or Man? — A 1930 novel of racism and horror by Sean M'Guire. Introduced by John Pelan.

Black Beadle — A 1939 thriller by E.C.R. Lorac.

Black Hogan Strikes Again — Australia's Peter Renwick pens a tale of the 30s outback.

Black Is the Color — Voodoo and racial politics combine in this 1960s novel by John Brunner.

Black River Falls — Suspense from the master, Ed Gorman.

Blondy's Boy Friend — A snappy 1930 story by Philip Wylie, writing as Leatrice Homesley.

Blood in a Snap — The *Finnegan's Wake* of the 21st century, by Jim Weiler.

Blood Moon — The first of the Robert Payne series by Ed Gorman.

Bogart '48 — Hollywood action with Bogie by John Stanley and Kenn Davis

Calling Lou Largo! — Two Lou Largo novels by William Ard.

Cathedral of Horror — First volume of collected stories by weird fiction writer Arthur J. Burks.

Cornucopia of Crime — Francis M. Nevins assembled this huge collection of his writings about crime literature and the people who write it. Essential for any serious mystery library.

Corpse Without Flesh — Strange novel of forensics by George Bruce

Crimson Clown Novels — By Johnston McCulley, author of the Zorro novels, *The Crimson Clown* and *The Crimson Clown Again.*

Dago Red — 22 tales of dark suspense by Bill Pronzini**.**

Dark Sanctuary — Weird Menace story by H. B. Gregory

David Hume Novels — *Corpses Never Argue, Cemetery First Stop, Make Way for the Mourners, Eternity Here I Come*. 1930s British hardboiled fiction with an attitude.

Dead Man Talks Too Much — Hollywood boozer by Weed Dickenson.

Death Leaves No Card — One of the most unusual murdered-in-the-tub mysteries you'll ever read. By Miles Burton.

Death March of the Dancing Dolls and Other Stories — Volume Three in the Day Keene in the Detective Pulps series. Introduced by Bill Crider.

Deep Space and other Stories — A collection of SF gems by Richard A. Lupoff**.**

Detective Duff Unravels It — Episodic mysteries by Harvey O'Higgins.

Devil's Planet — Locked room mystery set on the planet Mars, by Manly Wade Wellman.

Diabolic Candelabra — Classic 30s mystery by E.R. Punshon

Dictator's Way — Another D.S. Bobby Owen mystery from E.R. Punshon

Dime Novels: Ramble House's 10-Cent Books — *Knife in the Dark* by Robert Leslie Bellem, *Hot Lead* and *Song of Death* by Ed Earl Repp, *A Hashish House in New York* by H.H. Kane, and five more.

Doctor Arnoldi — Tiffany Thayer's story of the death of death.

Don Diablo: Book of a Lost Film — Two-volume treatment of a western by Paul Landres, with diagrams. Intro by Francis M. Nevins.

Dope and Swastikas — Two strange novels from 1922 by Edmund Snell

Dope Tales #1 — Two dope-riddled classics; *Dope Runners* by Gerald Grantham and *Death Takes the Joystick* by Phillip Condé.

Dope Tales #2 — Two more narco-classics; *The Invisible Hand* by Rex Dark and *The Smokers of Hashish* by Norman Berrow.

Dope Tales #3 — Two enchanting novels of opium by the master, Sax Rohmer. *Dope* and *The Yellow Claw.*

Double Hot — Two 60s softcore sex novels by Morris Hershman.

Double Sex — Yet two more panting thrillers from Morris Hershman.

Dr. Odin — Douglas Newton's 1933 racial potboiler comes back to life.

Evangelical Cockroach — Jack Woodford writes about writing.

Evidence in Blue — 1938 mystery by E. Charles Vivian.

Fatal Accident — Murder by automobile, a 1936 mystery by Cecil M. Wills**.**

Fighting Mad — Todd Robbins' 1922 novel about boxing and life

Finger-prints Never Lie — A 1939 classic detective novel by John G. Brandon.

Five Million in Cash — Gangster thriller by Tiffany Thayer writing as O. B. King.

Food for the Fungus Lady — Collection of weird stories by Ralston Shields, edited and introduced by John Pelan.

Freaks and Fantasies — Eerie tales by Tod Robbins, collaborator of Tod Browning on the film FREAKS.

Gadsby — A lipogram (a novel without the letter E). Ernest Vincent Wright's last work, published in 1939 right before his death.

Gelett Burgess Novels — *The Master of Mysteries, The White Cat, Two O'Clock Courage, Ladies in Boxes, Find the Woman, The Heart Line, The Picaroons* and *Lady Mechante*. Recently added is A Gelett Burgess Sampler, edited by Alfred Jan. All are introduced by Richard A. Lupoff.

Geronimo — S. M. Barrett's 1905 autobiography of a noble American.

Hake Talbot Novels — *Rim of the Pit, The Hangman's Handyman.* Classic locked room mysteries, with mapback covers by Gavin O'Keefe.

Hands Out of Hell and Other Stories — John H. Knox's eerie hallucinations

Hell is a City — William Ard's masterpiece.

Hollywood Dreams — A novel of Tinsel Town and the Depression by Richard O'Brien.

Homicide House — #6 in the Day Keene in the Detective Pulps series.

Hostesses in Hell and Other Stories — Russell Gray's most graphic stories

House of the Restless Dead — Strange and ominous tales by Hugh B. Cave

I Stole $16,000,000 — A true story by cracksman Herbert E. Wilson.

Inclination to Murder — 1966 thriller by New Zealand's Harriet Hunter.

Information Received — E. R. Punshon thriller, and the first featuring Bobby Owen.

Invaders from the Dark — Classic werewolf tale from Greye La Spina.

J. Poindexter, Colored — Classic satirical black novel by Irvin S. Cobb.

Jack Mann Novels — Strange murder in the English countryside. *Gees' First Case, Nightmare Farm, Grey Shapes, The Ninth Life, The Glass Too Many, Her Ways Are Death, The Kleinert Case* and *Maker of Shadows.*

Jake Hardy — A lusty western tale from Wesley Tallant.

James Corbett — *Vampire of the Skies*, *The Ghost Plane*, *Murder Begets Murder* and *The Air Killer* – strange thriller novels from this singular British author.

Jim Harmon Double Novels — *Vixen Hollow/Celluloid Scandal, The Man Who Made Maniacs/Silent Siren, Ape Rape/Wanton Witch, Sex Burns Like Fire/Twist Session*, *Sudden Lust/Passion Strip, Sin Unlimited/Harlot Master, Twilight Girls/Sex Institution.* Written in the early 60s and never reprinted until now.

Joel Townsley Rogers Novels and Short Stories — By the author of *The Red Right Hand: Once In a Red Moon, Lady With the Dice, The Stopped Clock*, *Never Leave My Bed.* Also two short story collections: *Night of Horror* and *Killing Time*.

John Carstairs, Space Detective — Arboreal Sci-fi by Frank Belknap Long

Joseph Shallit Novels — *The Case of the Billion Dollar Body, Lady Don't Die on My Doorstep, Kiss the Killer, Yell Bloody Murder, Take Your Last Look.* One of America's best 50's authors and a favorite of author Bill Pronzini.

Keller Memento — 45 short stories of the amazing and weird by Dr. David Keller.

Killer's Caress — Cary Moran's 1936 hardboiled thriller.

Lady of the Yellow Death and Other Stories — More stories by Wyatt Blassingame.

Laughing Death — 1932 Yellow Peril thriller by Walter C. Brown.

League of the Grateful Dead and Other Stories — Volume One in the Day Keene in the Detective Pulps series.

Library of Death — Ghastly tale by Ronald S. L. Harding, introduced by John Pelan

Malcolm Jameson Novels and Short Stories — *Astonishing! Astounding!, Tarnished Bomb, The Alien Envoy and Other Stories* and *The Chariots of San Fernando and Other Stories.* All introduced and edited by John Pelan or Richard A. Lupoff.

Man Out of Hell and Other Stories — Volume II of the John H. Knox weird pulps collection.

Marblehead: A Novel of H.P. Lovecraft — A long-lost masterpiece from Richard A. Lupoff. This is the "director's cut", the long version that has never been published before.

Mark of the Laughing Death and Other Stories — Shockers from the pulps by Francis James, introduced by John Pelan.

Master of Souls — Mark Hansom's 1937 shocker is introduced by weirdologist John Pelan**.**

Max Afford Novels — *Owl of Darkness, Death's Mannikins, Blood on His Hands, The Dead Are Blind*, *The Sheep and the Wolves*, *Sinners in Paradise* and *Two Locked Room Mysteries and a Ripping Yarn* by one of Australia's finest mystery novelists.

Mistress of Terror — Fourth volume of the collected weird tales of Wyatt Blassingame.

Money Brawl — Two books about the writing business by Jack Woodford and H. Bedford-Jones. Introduced by Richard A. Lupoff.

More Secret Adventures of Sherlock Holmes — Gary Lovisi's second collection of tales about the unknown sides of the great detective**.**

Muddled Mind: Complete Works of Ed Wood, Jr. — David Hayes and Hayden Davis deconstruct the life and works of the mad, but canny, genius.

Murder among the Nudists — A mystery from 1934 by Peter Hunt, featuring a naked Detective-Inspector going undercover in a nudist colony.

Murder in Black and White — 1931 classic tennis whodunit by Evelyn Elder.

Murder in Shawnee — Two novels of the Alleghenies by John Douglas: *Shawnee Alley Fire* and *Haunts*.

Murder in Silk — A 1937 Yellow Peril novel of the silk trade by Ralph Trevor.

My Deadly Angel — 1955 Cold War drama by John Chelton.

My First Time: The One Experience You Never Forget — Michael Birchwood — 64 true first-person narratives of how they lost it.

My Touch Brings Death — Second volume of collected stories by Russell Gray.

Mysterious Martin, the Master of Murder — Two versions of a strange 1912 novel by Tod Robbins about a man who writes books that can kill.

Mystery in St. James's Square — The last novel by Gilbert Collins, first published in 1937.

Norman Berrow Novels — *The Bishop's Sword, Ghost House, Don't Go Out After Dark, Claws of the Cougar, The Smokers of Hashish, The Secret Dancer, Don't Jump Mr. Boland!, The Footprints of Satan, Fingers for Ransom, The Three Tiers of Fantasy, The Spaniard's Thumb, The Eleventh Plague, Words Have Wings, One Thrilling Night, The Lady's in Danger, It Howls at Night, The Terror in the Fog, Oil Under the Window, Murder in the Melody, The Singing Room.* This is the complete Norman Berrow library of locked-room mysteries, several of which are masterpieces.

Old Faithful and Other Stories — SF classic tales by Raymond Z. Gallun

Old Times' Sake — Short stories by James Reasoner from Mike Shayne Magazine**.**

One Dreadful Night — A classic mystery by Ronald S. L. Harding

Pair O' Jacks — A mystery novel and a diatribe about publishing by Jack Woodford

Perfect .38 — Two early Timothy Dane novels by William Ard. More to come.

Prince Pax — Devilish intrigue by George Sylvester Viereck and Philip Eldridge

Prose Bowl — Futuristic satire of a world where hack writing has replaced football as our national obsession, by Bill Pronzini and Barry N. Malzberg.

Red Light — The history of legal prostitution in Shreveport Louisiana by Eric Brock. Includes wonderful photos of the houses and the ladies.

Researching American-Made Toy Soldiers — A 276-page collection of a lifetime of articles by toy soldier expert Richard O'Brien.

Reunion in Hell — Volume One of the John H. Knox series of weird stories from the pulps. Introduced by horror expert John Pelan.

Ripped from the Headlines! — The Jack the Ripper story as told in the newspaper articles in the *New York* and *London Times.*

Rough Cut & New, Improved Murder — Ed Gorman's first two novels.

R. R. Ryan Novels — *Freak Museum*, *The Subjugated Beast*, *Death of a Sadist* and *Echo of a Curse* – introduced by John Pelan.

Ruby of a Thousand Dreams — The villain Wu Fang returns in this Roland Daniel novel.

Ruled By Radio — 1925 futuristic novel by Robert L. Hadfield & Frank E. Farncombe.

Rupert Penny Novels — *Policeman's Holiday, Policeman's Evidence, Lucky Policeman, Policeman in Armour, Sealed Room Murder, Sweet Poison, The Talkative Policeman, She had to Have Gas* and *Cut and Run* (by Martin Tanner.) Rupert Penny is the pseudonym of Australian Charles Thornett, a master of the locked room, impossible crime plot.

Sacred Locomotive Flies — Richard A. Lupoff's psychedelic SF story.

Sam — Early gay novel by Lonnie Coleman.

Sand's Game — Spectacular hard-boiled noir from Ennis Willie, edited by Lynn Myers and Stephen Mertz, with contributions from Max Allan Collins, Bill Crider, Wayne Dundee, Bill Pronzini, Gary Lovisi and James Reasoner.

Sand's War — More violent fiction from the typewriter of Ennis Willie

Satan's Den Exposed — True crime in Truth or Consequences New Mexico — Award-winning journalism by the *Desert Journal*.

Satan's Secret and Selected Stories — Barnard Stacey's only novel with a selection of his best short stories.

Satans of Saturn — Novellas from the pulps by Otis Adelbert Kline and E. H. Price

Satan's Sin House and Other Stories — Horrific gore by Wayne Rogers

Secrets of a Teenage Superhero — Graphic lit by Jonathan Sweet

Sex Slave — Potboiler of lust in the days of Cleopatra by Dion Leclerq, 1966.

Sideslip — 1968 SF masterpiece by Ted White and Dave Van Arnam.

Slammer Days — Two full-length prison memoirs: *Men into Beasts* (1952) by George Sylvester Viereck and *Home Away From Home* (1962) by Jack Woodford.

Slippery Staircase — 1930s whodunit from E.C.R. Lorac

Sorcerer's Chessmen — John Pelan introduces this 1939 classic by Mark Hansom.

Star Griffin — Michael Kurland's 1987 masterpiece of SF drollery is back.

Stakeout on Millennium Drive — Award-winning Indianapolis Noir by Ian Woollen.

Strands of the Web: Short Stories of Harry Stephen Keeler — Edited and Introduced by Fred Cleaver.

Summer Camp for Corpses and Other Stories — Weird Menace tales from Arthur Leo Zagat; introduced by John Pelan.

Suzy — A collection of comic strips by Richard O'Brien and Bob Vojtko from 1970**.**

Tales of the Macabre and Ordinary — Modern twisted horror by Chris Mikul, author of the *Bizarrism* series.

Tales of Terror and Torment Vols. #1 & #2 — John Pelan selects and introduces these samplers of weird menace tales from the pulps.

Tenebrae — Ernest G. Henham's 1898 horror tale brought back.

The Alice Books — Lewis Carroll's classics *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* together in one volume, with new illustrations by O'Keefe.

The Amorous Intrigues & Adventures of Aaron Burr — by Anonymous. Hot historical action about the man who almost became Emperor of Mexico.

The Anthony Boucher Chronicles — edited by Francis M. Nevins. Book reviews by Anthony Boucher written for the *San Francisco Chronicle,* 1942 – 1947. Essential and fascinating reading by the best book reviewer there ever was.

The Barclay Catalogs — Two essential books about toy soldier collecting by Richard O'Brien

The Basil Wells Omnibus — A collection of Wells' stories by Richard A. Lupoff

The Beautiful Dead and Other Stories — Dreadful tales from Donald Dale

The Best of 10-Story Book — edited by Chris Mikul, over 35 stories from the literary magazine Harry Stephen Keeler edited.

The Bitch Wall — Novel about American soldiers in the Vietnam War, based on Dennis Lane's experiences.

The Black Dark Murders — Vintage 50s college murder yarn by Milt Ozaki, writing as Robert O. Saber.

The Book of Time — The classic novel by H.G. Wells is joined by sequels by Wells himself and three stories by Richard A. Lupoff. Illustrated by Gavin L. O'Keefe.

The Case in the Clinic — One of E.C.R. Lorac's finest.

The Strange Case of the Antlered Man — A mystery of superstition by Edwy Searles Brooks.

The Case of the Bearded Bride — #4 in the Day Keene in the Detective Pulps series.

The Case of the Little Green Men — Mack Reynolds wrote this love song to sci-fi fans back in 1951 and it's now back in print.

The Case of the Withered Hand — 1936 potboiler by John G. Brandon**.**

The Charlie Chaplin Murder Mystery — A 2004 tribute by noted film scholar, Wes D. Gehring.

The Chinese Jar Mystery — Murder in the manor by John Stephen Strange, 1934.

The Cloudbuilders and Other Stories — SF tales from Colin Kapp.

The Collected Writings — Collection of science fiction stories, memoirs and poetry by Carol Carr. Introduction by Karen Haber.

The Compleat Calhoon — All of Fender Tucker's works: Includes *Totah Six-Pack, Weed, Women and Song* and *Tales from the Tower,* plus a CD of all of his songs.

The Compleat Ova Hamlet — Parodies of SF authors by Richard A. Lupoff. This is a brand new edition with more stories and more illustrations by Trina Robbins.

The Contested Earth and Other SF Stories — A never-before published space opera and seven short stories by Jim Harmon.

The Corpse Factory — More horror stories by Arthur Leo Zagat.

The Crimson Butterfly — Early novel by Edmund Snell involving superstition and aberrant Lepidoptera in Borneo.

The Crimson Query — A 1929 thriller from Arlton Eadie. A perfect way to get introduced.

The Curse of Cantire — Classic 1939 novel of a family curse by Walter S. Masterman.

The Daymakers & City of the Tiger — Two volumes of stories taken from the influential British science fiction magazine *Science Fantasy*. Compiled by John Boston & Damien Broderick.

The Devil and the C.I.D. — Odd diabolic mystery by E.C.R. Lorac

The Devil Drives — An odd prison and lost treasure novel from 1932 by Virgil Markham.

The Devil of Pei-Ling — Herbert Asbury's 1929 tale of the occult.

The Devil's Mistress — A 1915 Scottish gothic tale by J. W. Brodie-Innes, a member of Aleister Crowley's Golden Dawn.

The Devil's Nightclub and Other Stories — John Pelan introduces some gruesome tales by Nat Schachner.

The Disentanglers — Episodic intrigue at the turn of last century by Andrew Lang

The Dog Poker Code — A spoof of *The Da Vinci Code* by D. B. Smithee.

The Dumpling — Political murder from 1907 by Coulson Kernahan**.**

The End of It All and Other Stories — Ed Gorman selected his favorite short stories for this huge collection.

The Evil of Li-Sin — A Gerald Verner double, combining *The Menace of Li-Sin* and *The Vengeance of Li-Sin*, together with an introduction by John Pelan and an afterword and bibliography by Chris Verner.

The Fangs of Suet Pudding — A 1944 novel of the German invasion by Adams Farr

The Finger of Destiny and Other Stories — Edmund Snell's superb collection of weird stories of Borneo.

The Ghost of Gaston Revere — From 1935, a novel of life and beyond by Mark Hansom, introduced by John Pelan.

The Girl in the Dark — A thriller from Roland Daniel

The Gold Star Line — Seaboard adventure from L.T. Reade and Robert Eustace.

The Golden Dagger — 1951 Scotland Yard yarn by E. R. Punshon.

The Great Orme Terror — Horror stories by Garnett Radcliffe from the pulps

The Hairbreadth Escapes of Major Mendax — Francis Blake Crofton's 1889 boys' book.

The House That Time Forgot and Other Stories — Insane pulpitude by Robert F. Young

The House of the Vampire — 1907 poetic thriller by George S. Viereck.

The Illustrious Corpse — Murder hijinx from Tiffany Thayer

The Incredible Adventures of Rowland Hern — Intriguing 1928 impossible crimes by Nicholas Olde.

The John Dickson Carr Companion — Comprehensive reference work compiled by James E. Keirans. Indispensable resource for the Carr *aficionado*.

The Julius Caesar Murder Case — A classic 1935 re-telling of the assassination by Wallace Irwin that's much more fun than the Shakespeare version.

The Koky Comics — A collection of all of the 1978-1981 Sunday and daily comic strips by Richard O'Brien and Mort Gerberg, in two volumes.

The Lady of the Terraces — 1925 missing race adventure by E. Charles Vivian.

The Lord of Terror — 1925 mystery with master-criminal, Fantômas.

The Madman — Ingenious thriller by Mark Hansom.

The Man who was Murdered Twice — Intriguing murder mystery by Robert H. Leitfred.

The Melamare Mystery — A classic 1929 Arsene Lupin mystery by Maurice Leblanc

The Man Who Was Secrett — Epic SF stories from John Brunner

The Man Without a Planet — Science fiction tales by Richard Wilson

The N. R. De Mexico Novels — Robert Bragg, the real N.R. de Mexico, presents *Marijuana Girl, Madman on a Drum, Private Chauffeur* in one volume.

The Night Remembers — A 1991 Jack Walsh mystery from Ed Gorman.

The One After Snelling — Kickass modern noir from Richard O'Brien.

The Organ Reader — A huge compilation of just about everything published in the 1971-1972 radical bay-area newspaper, *THE ORGAN*. A coffee table book that points out the shallowness of the coffee table mindset.

The Place of Hairy Death — Collected weird horror tales by Anthony M. Rud.

The Poker Club — Three in one! Ed Gorman's ground-breaking novel, the short story it was based upon, and the screenplay of the film made from it.

The Private Journal & Diary of John H. Surratt — The memoirs of the man who conspired to assassinate President Lincoln.

The Ramble House Mapbacks — Recently revised book by Gavin L. O'Keefe with color pictures of all the Ramble House books with mapbacks.

The Secret Adventures of Sherlock Holmes — Three Sherlockian pastiches by the Brooklyn author/publisher, Gary Lovisi.

The Secret of the Morgue — Frederick G. Eberhard's 1932 mystery involving murder and forensic science with an undercurrent of the malaise that's driven by Prohibition.

The Shadow on the House — Mark Hansom's 1934 masterpiece of horror is introduced by John Pelan.

The Sign of the Scorpion — A 1935 Edmund Snell tale of oriental evil.

The Silent Terror of Chu-Sheng — Yellow Peril suspense novel by Eugene Thomas.

The Singular Problem of the Stygian House-Boat — Two classic tales by John Kendrick Bangs about the denizens of Hades.

The Smiling Corpse — Philip Wylie and Bernard Bergman's odd 1935 novel.

The Snark Was A Boojum — A previously-unfinished Gerald Verner thriller now completed by the author's son, Chris Verner.

The Sorcery Club — Classic supernatural novel by Elliott O'Donnell.

The Spider: Satan's Murder Machines — A thesis about Iron Man

The Stench of Death: An Odoriferous Omnibus by Jack Moskovitz — Two complete novels and two novellas from 60's sleaze author, Jack Moskovitz.

The Story Writer and Other Stories — Classic SF from Richard Wilson

The Strange Case of the Antlered Man — 1935 dementia from Edwy Searles Brooks

The Strange Thirteen — Richard B. Gamon's odd stories about Raj India.

The Technique of the Mystery Story — Carolyn Wells' tips about writing.

The Threat of Nostalgia — A collection of his most obscure stories by Jon Breen

The Time Armada — Fox B. Holden's 1953 SF gem.

The Tomb of the Dark Ones — Adventure in Egypt where ancient forces are roused from æons of slumber. A J. M. A. Mills novel from 1937.

The Tongueless Horror and Other Stories — Volume One of the series of short stories from the weird pulps by Wyatt Blassingame.

The Town from Planet Five — From Richard Wilson, two SF classics, *And Then the Town Took Off* and *The Girls from Planet 5*

The Tracer of Lost Persons — From 1906, an episodic novel that became a hit radio series in the 30s. Introduced by Richard A. Lupoff.

The Trail of the Cloven Hoof — Diabolical horror from 1935 by Arlton Eadie. Introduced by John Pelan.

The Triune Man — Mindscrambling science fiction from Richard A. Lupoff**.**

The Unholy Goddess and Other Stories — Wyatt Blassingame's first DTP compilation

The Universal Holmes — Richard A. Lupoff's 2007 collection of five Holmesian pastiches and a recipe for giant rat stew.

The Werewolf vs the Vampire Woman — Hard to believe ultraviolence by either Arthur M. Scarm or Arthur M. Scram.

The Whistling Ancestors — A 1936 classic of weirdness by Richard E. Goddard and introduced by John Pelan.

The White Owl — A vintage thriller from Edmund Snell

The White Peril in the Far East — Sidney Lewis Gulick's 1905 indictment of the West and assurance that Japan would never attack the U.S.

The Wizard of Berner's Abbey — A 1935 horror gem written by Mark Hansom and introduced by John Pelan.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz — by L. Frank Baum and illustrated by Gavin L. O'Keefe

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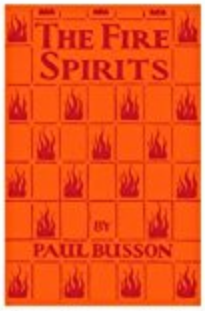

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