

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHEN Amelia was asked to interpret what Consuelo had written on her tablets and engraved in her memory, she said she knew nothing about the matter, though she was able to translate literally these words:

"Let the person you have injured salute you."

"Perhaps," said she, "he wishes to speak of Albert or of himself, saying that an injury has been done them, by taxing them with madness. You must know they think themselves the only two reasonable men alive. Why, though, look for sense in the conversation of a madman? This Zdenko occupies more of your thoughts than you think."

"The people everywhere," said Consuelo, "attribute to madmen a kind of intelligence altogether superior to that perceived by colder minds. I have a right to preserve the prejudices of my class, and I cannot think a madman speaks *ad libitum*, when he utters things which seem to us unintelligible."

"Let us see," said Amelia, "if the chaplain, who is well versed in all the formidable formulas of the old world lore our parents are familiar with, is acquainted with this." Going to the good man, she asked him to translate the phrase of Zdenko.

These obscure words, however, seemed to cast a terrible light into the chaplain's heart. "Living God!" said he, "was such a blasphemy ever heard!"

"If there ever was," said Amelia, "I cannot conceive what it is. For that reason I asked you to translate it."

"Word for word in good German it means 'let the person you have injured save you.' If though, you wish to know the meaning loud, (I dare scarcely to pronounce it,)—the meaning is—'Let the devil be with you!'"

"In plain language," said Amelia, "it means, 'Go to the devil.' Well, that is a pretty compliment, and this is all we make, dear Nina, by talking to fools. You did not think that Zdenko, with his affable smile and pleasant grimaces, played so ungalant a part with you?"

"Zdenko?" said the chaplain. "Ah! none but an idiot speaks thus. Very well: I was afraid it was some one else—I was wrong. Such a series of abominations could only come from a head filled up with old heresy. Whence did he obtain a knowledge of things either unknown now or forgotten? The Spirit of Evil alone can suggest it to him."

"Bah! that is nothing but a simple asseveration used by the populace in every country. The Catholics are no worse than others."

"Think not so, baroness," said the chaplain. "This is not a malediction in the understanding of him who uses it. On the contrary, it is a benediction—in that consists the crime. This is an abomination of the Lollards, a detestable sect which begot the Vaudois, from whom come the Hussites."

"And they will beget many others," said Amelia, gravely, as if she wished to laugh at the good priest. "Let us see, though, father. How can one gain another's thanks by recommending his neighbor to the Devil?"

"The reason is, that, as the Lollards think, Satan was not the one

my of humanity, but on the contrary, its protector and patron. They said he was the victim of injustice and jealousy. As they think, the archangel Michael and the other celestial powers who precipitated him into darkness were true devils, while Lucifer, Beelzebub, Astaroth, Astarte, and the monsters of hell, were innocence itself. They thought the reign of Michael and his glorious army soon would end, and that the devil and his phalanxes would be restored. They also paid him an impious worship, and when they met, said, 'May the one who has been wronged salute you,' that is to say 'salute and assist you.'

"Well," said Amelia, laughing loud, "Nina is under the most favorable auspices. I shall not be amazed if we should have to use exorcisms to destroy the effects of Zdenko's incantations."

"Consuelo was amused by this sport. She was not very sure that the devil was a chimera and hell a poetic fable. She would have been inclined to think that the indignation and terror of the chaplain was serious, had not the latter, offended by Amelia's scoffs, been perfectly ridiculous. Amazed, troubled in all her childish opinions by the scene of strife into which she had been cast, between credulity and superstition, Consuelo had not a little trouble in saying her prayers. She passed in review all forms of worship which she had hitherto received blindly, but which no longer satisfied her. As far as I can see, there are two kinds of devotion at Venice. That of the convents and of the populace, and that of the people, which perhaps goes too far; for under the guise of religion it receives all kinds of superstitious accessories, the ORCO, (the devil of the Lagunes,) the sorceries of Malamocco, the search after gold, the horoscope and vows to the saints for the success of the most impious wishes. There is also that of the fashionable world and of the higher clergy, which is but a mere type. They go to church as they do to the theatre, to hear music and to show themselves, laughing at everything, even at religion, thinking nothing is serious or exerts an influence over their conscience—that form and custom are everything. Consuelo continued to think of these things, to express her regret that Anzoletto was not religiously inclined; that Porpora had faith in nothing. She was herself in the greatest trouble, and said, "For what shall I toil? Why shall I be pitiful, brave or generous, who am alone in the world, unless there be a Supreme Being, intelligent and full of love? who judges not, but approves and aids me? who also blesses me. What power, what intoxication do they infuse into life, who can pass from hope and love above all the vicissitudes and all the illusions of life?"

"Supreme Being!" cried she in her heart, forgetting the accustomed form of her prayer, "teach me what I ought to do. Infinite Love! teach me what I ought to love. Infinite Wisdom! teach me what I ought to believe."

While thus praying and meditating, she forgot the flight of time, and it was past midnight when before retiring to bed she cast a glance over the landscape now lighted by the moon's pale beams. The view from her window was not very extensive, owing to the surrounding mountains, but exceedingly picturesque. A narrow and winding valley, in the centre of which sparkled a mountain stream, lay before her, its meadows gently undulating until they reached the base of the surrounding hills, which shut in the horizon, except where at intervals they opened to permit the eye to discover still more distant and steeper ranges, clothed to the very summit with dark green firs. The

last rays of the setting moon shone full on the principal features of this sombre but striking landscape, to which the dark foliage of the evergreens, the pent-up water, and the rocks covered with moss and ivy, imparted a stern and savage aspect.

While Consuelo was comparing this country with those she had travelled through in her childhood, she was struck with an idea she had not known before. It seemed that what passed before her was not entirely new, either because she had been in Bohemia or in some very similar place. "My mother and myself," said she, "travelled so much, that it would not be at all surprising had I ever been here; and often I have a distinct idea of Dresden and Vienna. We may have passed through Bohemia to go to one or the other of those capitals. It would be strange, however, if we had received hospitality in some barn where I am now welcomed as a lady; or if we earned by our songs a piece of bread at the door of some hut where Zdenko now sings his old songs. Zdenko, the wandering artist, is my equal, though he does not seem to be."

Just then her eyes fell on the Schreckenstein, the brow of which she saw above a nearer peak, and it seemed to her to be crowned with a ruddy color, which feebly changed the transparent blue of heaven. She looked closely at it, and saw it become more indistinct, disappear, and come again, until it was so distinct that it could not be an illusion of the senses. Whether this was but the passing abode of a band of Zingari, the haunt of some brigands, or not, it was very evident that the Schreckenstein was now occupied by living beings; and Consuelo, after her fervent prayer to Almighty God, was no longer disposed to believe in the stranger beings with which popular tradition peopled the mountain. Did not Zdenko kindle the fire to ward off the chill of the night? If Zdenko was there, was not that fire kindled for Albert's sake? This light had often been seen on the mountain, and all spoke of it with terror, attributing it to some supernaturalism. It had a thousand times been said that it came from the enchanted trunk of Ziska's tree. The Hussite, however, no longer existed; at all events he was at the bottom of the ravine, and the red light now burned on the top of the mountain. Whither could this mysterious light call her, if not to Albert's retreat?

"Oh, apathy of immortal souls," said Consuelo, "you are a blessing of God or an infirmity of incomplete natures." She asked herself if she would have courage to go alone, and her heart replied that for a charitable purpose she certainly would. She was, however, flattering herself perfectly gratuitously in this respect, for the severe discipline of the castle left her no chance of egress.

At dawn she awoke, full of zeal, and hurried to the mountain. All was silent and deserted, and the grass around the Rock of Terror seemed undisturbed. There were no traces of fire, and no evidence that any one had been there on the night before. She examined the whole mountain, but found nothing. She called for Zdenko, whistled to arouse the barking of Cynabre, called him again and again. She called "Consolation" in every tongue she knew, and sung several verses of her Spanish song, and even some of the Bohemian airs of Zdenko, which she remembered perfectly. She heard no reply. The moss rustled beneath her feet, and the murmur of mysterious waters beneath the rocks alone broke on her ear.

Exhausted by this useless search, she was after a few moments' rest about to retire, when she saw at her feet a pale and withered rose-leaf

She picked it up, unfolded it, and became satisfied that it could not be a leaf of a bouquet she had thrown to Zdenko. The mountain produced none but wild roses, and besides, this was not the season of their bloom. This faint index consoled her for all her fatigue and the apparent uselessness of her walk, persuading her fully that she must expect to meet Albert at the Schreckenstein.

In what impenetrable cavern of the mountain though was he concealed? He either was not there all the time, or now had some violent cataleptic attack. Perhaps Consuelo was mistaken in thinking her voice had any power over him, and his delight at seeing her was but an access of madness, which had left no trace in his memory. He now, perhaps, heard and saw her, laughed at her efforts and her useless advances.

At this idea Consuelo felt her cheeks flush, and she left the mountain at once with a determination never to return thither. She left behind her, though, the basket of fruits she had brought with her.

On the next day, she found the basket in the same place, perfectly untouched, and even the leaves which covered it were undisturbed. Her offering had been even disdained, or Albert and Zdenko had not passed it. Yet the red light of the pine-wood fire had burnt all night on the mountain brow.

Consuelo watched until dawn to ascertain this. She had more than once seen the light grow bright and dim, as if a careful hand attended it. No one had seen Zingari in the vicinity. No stranger had been observed on the outskirts of the forest, and all the peasants Consuelo examined in relation to the Stone of Terror told her in bad German, that it was not right to inquire into such things, for that people should not look into the affairs of the other world.

Albert, then, had not been seen for nine days. He had not been absent so long before, and this fact, added to the unlucky presages in relation to his thirtieth year, were not calculated to revive the hopes of his family. They began to be uneasy, and Count Christian began to sigh in a most unhappy manner. The baron went out shooting but killed nothing, and the chaplain made the most extraordinary prayers. Amelia neither laughed nor sung; and her aunt, pale and feeble, neglected her domestic cares, telling her chaplet from morning till night. She seemed bent a foot more than usual.

Consuelo ventured to propose a scrupulous and careful exploration of the mountain, confessed the examination she had made herself, and confided to the canonesse the circumstance of the rose-leaf, and the careful manner in which she had examined the surface of the mountain. The arrangements Wenceslawa made for the exploration soon induced Consuelo to repent of her confidence. The canonesse insisted on securing Zdenko's person, or terrifying him, and on sending out fifty men with torches and guns. She also wished the chaplain to pronounce an exorcism over the fatal stone, while the baron, accompanied by Hans and his most faithful companions, besieged the mountain.

This was the very way to make Albert staring mad, and by means of prayer and persuasion, Consuelo induced Wenceslawa to undertake nothing without her consent. This was her final proposition, and the one determined on: they were to leave the chateau on the next night and go alone, being followed in the distance by Hans and the chaplain, to examine the fire of Schreckenstein. This, however, was too much for the canonesse. She was satisfied the witches held their Sabbath on the Stone of Terror, and all Consuelo could obtain

was, that the gates might be opened to her at midnight, and that the baron and a few other persons should accompany her without arms and in silence. It was arranged that Count Christian was to know nothing of this, because his advanced age and feeble health would not permit him to do so during the cold and unhealthy season. All knew, however, he would insist on accompanying them.

All this was done, as Consuelo had desired. The baron, the chaplain, and Hans accompanied them. She went alone a hundred paces in advance of their escort, ascending the mountain with a courage worthy of Bradamante. As she drew near, however, the light which seemed to radiate from the fissures of the rock became gradually dim, and when she had come there a deep obscurity enveloped the mountain from the base to the summit. All was silent and solitary. She called for Zdenko, Cynabre, and Albert, though when she uttered his name she was terrified. All was silent, and echo replied alone.

Perfectly discouraged, she soon returned to her guides. They extolled her courage greatly, and ventured to examine the places she had left. They found nothing, and all returned in silence to the chateau, when the canoness, as she heard their story, felt her last hope decay.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONSUELO, after having received the thanks and the kiss of the kind Wenceslawa, went carefully to her room, taking precaution not to waken Amelia, from whom the enterprise had been concealed. She was on the first story, the rooms of the canoness being on the ground floor. As she went up the stairway, though, she let fall her light, which went out before she had time to pick it up. She thought she could find her way without its aid, especially as day was about to break. Whether, because her mind was strongly engrossed, or that her courage after such an unusual exertion had been exhausted, it at once left her, and she trembled so that she went on until she came to the upper story, and reached the corridor of Albert's room, just above her own. Completely terror-stricken, she saw a dark shadow retire before her, and glide away as if its feet did not touch the floor, into the room Consuelo was about to enter, thinking it was her own. Amid all her terror, she had enough presence of mind to examine the figure, and see that it was Zdenko. What business had he to enter her room at that hour, and what had he to say to her? She did not feel disposed to meet him face to face, and went down stairs to see Wenceslawa. Not until after she had passed down stairs, and through a whole corridor, did she become aware she had seen Zdenko enter Albert's room.

Then a thousand conjectures suggested themselves to her mind, which was become perfectly calm and attentive. How had the idiot been able to penetrate by night into a chateau so closely watched and examined every night? The apparition of Zdenko confirmed an idea she had always entertained, that the castle had a secret outlet. She hurried to the door of the canoness, who had already shut herself up in her austere cell, and who shrieked aloud when she saw her so pale and without a light.

"Do not be uneasy, dear madam," said the young girl to her. "This is a new event, whimsical enough, perhaps, which need not make you afraid. I have just seen Zdenko in Albert's room."

"Zdenko! You are dreaming, my dear child. How could he have got in? I shut all the gates carefully, as usual; and all the time you were on the mountain I kept a close watch. The drawbridge was up, and when you passed over it on your return I remained behind to see it lifted up again."

"Be that as it may, madam, Zdenko is in Albert's room. You can satisfy yourself."

"I will, and will have him put out. He must have come in during the day. That proves, my child, that he knows no more where Albert is than we do."

"At all events, let us see," said Consuelo.

"One moment," said the canoness, who, being about to go to bed, had taken off some of her under-garments, and fancied herself too lightly clad. "I cannot thus present myself before a man. Go for the chaplain or the baron, the first you see. We cannot expose ourselves to meet this madman. Now, though, I think, it will not do for a woman like you to knock at their doors. Well, I will soon be ready. Wait for me."

She dressed herself as quickly as possible, acting, though, as if the interruption of her usual habits had completely crazed her. Consuelo, impatient lest during the delay Zdenko might leave Albert's room and conceal himself somewhere in the castle, regained all her energy. "Dear madam," said she, lighting her lamp, "will you call the gentlemen, while I take care Zdenko does not escape."

Going hastily up two flights of stairs, she opened Albert's door without any difficulty. The room, however, was deserted. She went into the cabinet, examined every curtain, and even looked under the bed and behind the curtains. Zdenko was not there, and had left no trace.

"Nobody is there," said she to the canoness, who came up-stairs with Hans and the chaplain. The baron was in bed and asleep, and they had not been able to wake him.

"I begin to be afraid," said the chaplain, rather out of humor at the new alarm, "that Porporina is the dupe of her own illusions."

"No, sir," said she; "no one of this company is less so than I am."

"And no one," said the good man, "has more true good will. In your ardent wish to discover some traces of Albert, you have suffered yourself to be deceived."

"Father," said the canoness, "la Porporina is brave as a lion, and prudent as a doctor. If she saw Zdenko, he was here. We must have the house searched, and, as it is closed, he cannot escape us, thank God."

The other servants were awakened, and every place was searched. Every dormitory was opened, every article of furniture was deranged. The forage even of the stables was examined. Hans looked even into the big boots of the baron. Zdenko was neither in them nor in any visible place. All began to think Consuelo had been dreaming. She, though, was more satisfied than ever that there was a mysterious outlet to the castle, and this she resolved to discover. After a few hours' rest, she resolved to look again. The building in which her rooms were (Albert's were there too), was, as it were, hung on the hill side. This picturesque position had been selected by Albert, be-

cause it enabled him to enjoy a fine southern view, and on the east overlook a pretty garden on a level with his workshop. He was fond of flowers, and cultivated some rare plants in beds on the terrace, the earth to form which had been brought thither from below. The terrace was surrounded by a heavy stone wall, breast high, overlooking rough rocks and a flowery belvidera on one side, and on the other a large portion of the Boehmer-wald. Consuelo had never yet been in this place, and admired its fine position and picturesque arrangement. She then made the chaplain tell her what had been the use of this terrace since the time the castle had been transformed from a fortress into a residence.

He said it was an old bastion, a kind of fortified terrace, whence the garrison were able to watch the motions of troops in the valley or mountains around. Every pass was visible hence. Once a high wall with loopholes surrounded the platform, and protected the garrison from the arrows of the enemy.

"What is this?" said Consuelo, approaching a cistern in the midst of the parterre, and in which was a narrow winding stairway.

"This once supplied the garrison abundantly with spring water. It was of vast importance to the fortress."

"This water is then fit to drink," said Consuelo, as she looked at the green and slimy water of the cistern. "To me it looks as if it had been disturbed."

"It is not good now, or, at least, it is not always good, and Count Albert uses it only to water his flowers. I must tell you that about two months ago a strange phenomenon took place in this fountain. The spring (for there is one in the mountain) became intermittent. For several weeks the water sinks rapidly, and Count Albert makes Zdenko bring up buckets-full to water his plants. All at once, sometimes during one night or one hour, the cistern becomes filled with warm troubled water, as you see now. Some phenomenon of this kind must have taken place during the night, for on yesterday only the cistern was clear and full, and now it looks as if it had been empty and filled again."

"These phenomena do not recur regularly?"

"No. I would have examined them carefully, had not Count Albert, who keeps all from entering his room and his garden, with the sternness he exhibits in every respect, forbade me to do so."

"How, then, do you explain the disappearance of the water at other times?"

"By the great quantity required for the Count's flowers."

"Many hours, it seems to me, would be required to empty this cistern. Is it not deep?"

"Not deep? It has no bottom."

"Then your explanation is not satisfactory," said Consuelo, amazed at the chaplain's folly.

"Find a better one, then," said he, sharply.

"Certainly I will," said Consuelo, completely engrossed by the caprices of the fountain.

"Oh! if you ask Count Albert about it," said the chaplain, who would have willingly acquired an ascendancy over the clear-sighted stranger, "he would tell you they are the tears of his mother, collected in the centre of the mountain. The famous Zdenko, to whom you attribute so much penetration, would say that some syren sang there to those who had ears to hear. They have baptised this well 'the

fountain of tears.' All that may be very fanciful to persons who are satisfied with Pagan fables."

"They do not satisfy me, and I will find out this secret."

"For my part," said the chaplain, "I think there must be an escapement in some other part of the fountain."

"Certainly," said Consuelo, "otherwise it would always overflow." "Certainly, certainly," said the chaplain, unwilling to confess that the idea occurred to him for the first time. "One need not go far to ascertain so simple a thing. There must, though, be some derangement in the canals since the spring does not maintain its old level."

"Are those natural veins, or artificial aqueducts?" said the self-willed Consuelo. "It is important to ascertain this."

"No one can do so," said the chaplain; "for Count Albert will permit no one to interfere with his fountain, and has positively ordered that it shall not be cleaned out."

"I was sure of it," said Consuelo, going away. "I think you are right to respect his wishes; for God only knows what may be the result if his syren be contradicted."

"It seems clear to me," said the chaplain, as she left, "that that young lady's mind is as much out of order as Count Albert's. Folly is contagious. Perhaps Porpora has sent her hither to be revived by country air. If I did not look at the obstinacy with which she insisted on explaining away the mystery of the fountain, I would be half inclined to think her the daughter of some canal-maker of Venice, and pretending to know all about such things. I can see, though, from her last words, and her hallucination about Zdenko this morning, and taking us up in the mountain, that it is a fancy of the same kind. She takes it into her head Count Albert is in the well. Poor children, will they ever become reasonable?"

The good chaplain then went to tell his beads until dinner time.

Consuelo said to herself, "Idleness and apathy must beget a strange weakness of mind, to make this holy man, who has read and learned so much, have no idea of my suspicions about this fountain. Forgive me, oh God! but that servant and minister of thine makes little use of his reason. They say Zdenko is imbecile!" Consuelo then went to give the young baroness a lesson in music, to while away the time, until she might be at liberty to begin her examination again.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"HAVE you ever been present at the falling of the water, or seen it re-ascend?" said Consuelo, in a low voice, to the chaplain, as he sat comfortably digesting his dinner during the evening.

"What—what did you say?" cried he, bounding up in his chair, and rolling his great round eyes.

"I was speaking to you of the cistern," returned she, without being disconcerted: "have you ever yourself observed the occurrence of the phenomenon?"

"Ah, yes—the cistern—I remember," replied he, with a smile of vanity. "There," thought he, "her crazy fit has attacked her again."

"But you have not answered my question, my dear chaplain," said

Consuelo, who pursued her object with that kind of eagerness which characterised all her thoughts and actions, and which was not prompted in the least by any malicious feeling towards the worthy man.

"I must confess, mademoiselle," replied he, coldly, "that I was never fortunate enough to observe that to which you refer; and I assure you I never lost my sleep on that account."

"Oh, I am very certain of that," replied the impatient Consuelo.

The chaplain shrugged his shoulders, and with a great effort rose from his chair, in order to escape from so very ardent an inquirer.

"Well, since no one here is willing to lose an hour's sleep for so important a discovery, I will devote my whole night to it if necessary," thought Consuelo; and while waiting for the hour of retiring, she wrapped herself in her mantle, and proceeded to take a turn in the garden.

The night was cold and bright, and the mists of evening dispersed in proportion as the moon, then full, ascended towards the empyrean. The stars twinkled more palely at her approach, and the atmosphere was dry and clear. Consuelo, excited, but not overpowered, by the mingled effects of fatigue, want of sleep, and the generous, but perhaps rather unhealthy sympathy she experienced for Albert, felt a slight sensation of fever, which the cool evening air could not dissipate. It seemed to her as if she touched upon the fulfilment of her enterprise, and a romantic presentiment, which she interpreted as a command and encouragement from Providence, kept her mind uneasy and agitated. She seated herself upon a little grassy hillock, studded with larches, and began to listen to the feeble and plaintive sound of the streamlet at the bottom of the valley. But it seemed to her as if another voice, still more sweet and plaintive, mingled with the murmurings of the water and by degrees floated upwards to her ears. She stretched herself upon the turf, in order, being nearer the earth, to hear better those light sounds which the breeze wafted towards her every moment. At last she distinguished Zdenko's voice. He sang in German, and by degrees she could distinguish the following words, tolerably well arranged to a Bohemian air, which was characterised by the same simple and plaintive expression as those she had already heard:—

"There is down there, down there, a soul in pain and in labor, which awaits her deliverance.

"Her deliverance, her consolation, so often promised.

"The deliverance seems enchained, the consolation seems pitiless.

"There is down there, down there, a soul in pain and in labor which is weary of waiting."

When the voice ceased singing Consuelo rose, looked in every direction for Zdenko, searching the whole park and garden to find him, called him in various places, but was obliged to return to the castle without having seen him.

But an hour afterwards, when the whole household had joined in a long prayer for Count Albert, and when everybody had retired to rest, Consuelo hastened to place herself near the Fountain of Tears, and seating herself upon the margin, amid the thick mosses and water plants which grew there naturally, and the irises which Albert had planted, she fixed her eyes upon the motionless water, in which the moon, then arrived at the zenith, was reflected as in a mirror.

After the lapse of about an hour, as the courageous girl, overcome by

fatigue, felt her eyelids close, she was awakened by a light murmur on the surface of the water. She looked around, and saw the reflection of the moon vibrating on the mirror of the fountain. At the same time a bubbling and an indistinct noise, at first imperceptible, but growing gradually impetuous, was heard. She saw the water gradually sink; and in a quarter of an hour disappear. She ventured to descend a few steps. The stairway, which seemed to have been made to enable the tide level of the water to be reached, was formed of vast blocks of granite cut in a spiral form. The slippery steps afforded her no resting-place, and descended to a great depth. Darkness, the dripping of the rest of the water down the immeasurable precipices, and the impossibility of a steady step, put an end to the mad attempt of Consuelo. She ascended, with her face looking downwards, with great difficulty, and pale and terrified, sat on the first step.

The waters seemed to sink in the bowels of the earth. The noise became more and more indistinct, and Consuelo had almost resolved to go for a light to examine the interior of the cistern. She was, however, afraid that the person she expected would not come, and therefore was motionless for half an hour. At last she fancied that she saw a faint light at the bottom of the well, which seemed gradually to grow near her. She was soon relieved of all doubt, for she saw Zdenko come up the stairway, holding on by an iron chain which was fastened to the rock. The noise he made, as he took hold of the chain and again let it go, informed Consuelo of the existence of a regular stairway, and relieved her from all anxiety. Zdenko had a lantern, which he hung on a hook, intended to be used for the purpose, and which was about twenty feet below the ground. He then came rapidly up the rest of the stairway without using the chain or any apparent aid. Consuelo looked at him with the greatest attention, and saw him assist himself by various points of the rock, and by several parasitic plants which seemed more vigorous than the other, and it may be, by various nails driven into the wall, with the position of which he was familiar. As soon as he was able to see Consuelo, she hid herself behind the balustrade, at the top of the stairway. Zdenko went out and began to gather with much care certain choice flowers. He then went into Albert's room through a glass door, and Consuelo saw him look among the books for one which he seemed at last to find. He then returned to the cistern with a smile on his face, and at the same time talking almost inaudibly, as if he was afraid to awaken the inmates of the house, and yet was anxious to talk to himself.

Consuelo had not, as yet, asked herself whether she should speak to him and ask him to take her to Albert. To tell the truth, she was at this time amazed at what she saw, and rejoiced at having had a presentiment of what she saw to be the truth. She had not courage enough, though, to venture to descend into the bowels of the earth, and suffered Zdenko to descend again, take his lantern and disappear—his voice resuming its power as he went into the depths of his retreat:—"Liberty is manacled and consolation is pitiless."

With a beating heart and a neck outstretched, Consuelo ten times at least was on the point of recalling him. She was resolved at one time to make a heroic effort, when she remembered that from surprise the poor man might quail and tremble, and that dizziness might cause his death. She did not therefore call, but resolved on the next day to be more courageous, and to call him at the proper time.

She waited to see the water rise, and on this occasion it did so more

rapidly. Scarcely a quarter of an hour had passed since Zdenko's voice became inaudible and the light of his lantern invisible, when a hoarse noise, not unlike the rolling of distant thunder, was heard. The water rushed up violently, whirling around the walls of the well and boiling impetuously. This sudden rush of water was so violent that Consuelo trembled for poor Zdenko, and asked herself if in thus sporting with danger and controlling the powers of nature, he was not in danger of being carried away, and some day of reappearing on the surface of the water crushed and bruised, like the slimy plants she saw floating on the surface.

"Yet everything must necessarily be very simple. He needed only to lift up or shut down a flood-gate—perhaps he had only to push down a stone as he entered, and remove it as he left. Might not this man, always preoccupied and immersed in reveries, be mistaken some day and move the stone a moment too soon? Did he come up by the same passage which led from the spring? I must go through, though, either with or without him, and that at no more remote an hour than the next night—'For a soul is in toil below waiting for, and anxious because I do not come.' That was not sung by chance, and not without difficulty did Zdenko, who hates German and pronounces it imperfectly, speak to-day in that tongue."

At last she went to bed, but passed the whole night a prey to terrible night-mares. Fever was beginning; she was not aware of it, so full was she of power and resolution. Every now and then, though, she awoke suddenly, imagining that she was yet on the stairs of that terrible well, without being able to ascend them, while the water rose around her rapidly as possible.

She was on the next day so changed that everybody remarked it. The chaplain could not help saying to the canoness, that this "agreeable and obliging person" seemed to be a little deranged. The good Wenceslawa, who was unused to see so much courage and devotion, began to fancy that the young daughter was very excitable and nervous. She had too much confidence in her iron-bound doors and the keys which always hung at her belt, to fancy it possible for Zdenko to enter and leave at night. She then spoke kindly to Consuelo, and besought her not to identify herself with their family misfortunes, and endanger her health. She also sought to give her hopes of the speedy return of her nephew, though she had begun to lose all hope of it herself. Indeed, she was under the influence of both hope and fear, when Consuelo replied to her with a glance brilliant with satisfaction—

"You are right to think and hope so, madam. Count Albert is alive and not sick, I hope. He yet is anxious about his books and flowers in his retreat—I am certain of it, and can satisfy you."

"What mean you, my child?" said Wenceslawa, overcome by her manner. "What have you discovered? Tell me, for heaven's sake. Restore peace to our family."

"Tell Count Christian that his son is alive and not far away. It is as true as that I love and respect you."

The canoness went a once to her brother, who had not yet come down stairs. A glance and sigh, however, from the chaplain, induced her to pause. "Let us not without care give such pleasure to my poor Christian," said she. "What if the fact should soon contradict your promises! Ah! my child, we would then be the murderers of the unfortunate father."

"Do you then doubt my word?" said Consuelo, amazed.

"God keep me from doing so, my noble Nina: you may be mistaken.—Alas! that often happens to us. You say you have proofs, my dear child—can you not mention them?"

"I cannot—at least it seems to me that I cannot," said Consuelo, with embarrassment. "I have discovered a secret, to which Count Albert certainly attaches much importance, and I cannot betray it without his consent."

"Without his consent!" said the canoness, looking at the chaplain with an expression of doubt. "Can she have seen him?"

The chaplain shrugged his shoulders imperceptibly, without understanding the grief he thus inflicted on Wenceslawa.

"I have not seen him," said Consuelo; "I will soon, however, do so, and so too will you. For that reason I shall be afraid, if I contradict his wishes, to prevent his return."

"May divine truth make its home in your heart, generous being," said Wenceslawa, looking at her anxiously and sorrowfully. "Keep your secret, if you have one, and restore Albert to us if you can. All I know is, that if this be ever realized, I shall kiss your knees as I now do your poor brow—humid and burning as it is," said she. After having kissed the young girl, she looked towards the chaplain with an excited air.

"If she is mad," she said to the latter, as soon as she could speak without witnesses, "she is yet an angel of goodness, and seems to be more occupied with our sufferings than we are ourselves. Ah! my father, there is a malediction weighing over this house. All that have any sublimity of feeling are attacked with madness, and our life is passed in complaining of what we are forced to admire."

"I do much admire the kind emotions of this young stranger," said the chaplain. "You may, however, be sure that she is mad. She dreamed of Count Albert last night, and represents her visions as certainties. Be careful to leave undisturbed the pious and submissive heart of your brother. Perhaps, too, you should not encourage the temerity of this Signorina Porporina. They may precipitate her into dangers of another kind than those she has hitherto been willing to brave."

"I do not understand you," said the canoness, with grave *naïveté*. "I find not a little difficulty in explaining myself," said the worthy man. "Yet it appears to me, that if a secret understanding, innocent though it be, should be established between this young artist and the count—"

"Well?" said the canoness, staring.

"Well! madam, do you not think that sentiments of interest and anxiety, innocent however they might be at first, from the force of circumstances and the influence of romantic ideas, may become dangerous to the repose and quiet of the young artist?"

"I never would have thought of that," said the canoness, who was struck with the reflection. "So you think, father, that Porporina can so far forget her humble and uncertain position, in associating with one so far above her as the Count of Rudolstadt, my nephew?"

"The Count of Rudolstadt might himself aid her in doing so, without the intention, however, from the manner in which he spoke of the advantage of rank and birth."

"You make me very uneasy," said Wenceslawa, all the family pride of whom was awakened.—"This was her only bad trait. Can the

idea have germinated in the young girl's mind? Can there be in her agitation and anxiety to find Albert, more than her attachment to us?"

"As yet I think not," said the canon, who had no wish but by his advice and counsel, to play an important part in the family, though he all the time preserved the air of obsequious submission. "You must, however, my dear daughter, keep your eyes open to the course of events, and your vigilance must never forget such dangers. This is a delicate *role*, and it suits you precisely. It requires the consolation with which God has gifted you."

After this conversation, the canoness seemed completely overcome. She forgot that Albert was, as it were, lost to her, and was now dying or dead, and remembered only the horrors of an unequal match, as she called it. She was like the Indian in the fable, who having ascended a tree while under the influence of terror in the form of a tiger, amused himself by driving a fly from his head.

She watched all day every motion of Porporina, and carefully analyzed every word and act. Our heroine—for such she was in every sense of the term—saw this, but did not attribute it to any other motive than the desire to see her keep her promise, by restoring Albert. She did not think it worth while to conceal her own agitation, so calm and quiet did her conscience seem, for she was rather proud of her plan than ashamed of it. This modest confusion, which a few days before had awakened the young count's enthusiasm, was dissipated at the touch of a serious determination, free from any personal vanity. The bitter sarcasms of Amelia, who had a presentiment of her enterprise, without any knowledge of its details, did not at all excite her; she scarcely heard her and replied to her by smiles. She suffered the canoness—the ears of whom were always open—the care of registering, commenting on, and interpreting them.

CHAPTER XL.

Yet, when she saw herself watched by Wenceslawa as she had never been, Consuelo was afraid of being contradicted by mistaken zeal, and remained calm, cold, and cautious as possible, by means of which she escaped during the day, and went with a light heart to Schreckenstein. In doing so she had no idea but to meet Zdenko, and force him to an explanation, and make him inform her if he would take her to Albert. She found him near the castle, on the road to the mountain. He seemed to come towards her, and spoke Bohemian with great rapidity.

"Alas! I do not understand you," said Consuelo, when she was able to interrupt him. "I scarcely know German, that harsh language you hate, as the badge of slavery, and which reminds me of exile. Since, though, there is no other means for us to understand each other, speak it with me. We each understand it slightly, and I will learn Bohemian if you will teach me."

These words appealed to Zdenko's sympathies, and he gave Consuelo his hand, which she did not hesitate to clasp. "Blessed child," said he, "I will teach you my language and all my songs. What shall I begin with?"

Consuelo thought she would humor his whim by making use of the same means of interrogation. "I wish you," said she, "to sing me the ballad of Count Albert."

"There are," said he, "more than two hundred thousand ballads about my brother Albert. I cannot teach them to you, for you cannot understand them. I make new ones every day altogether different from the old ones. Ask something else."

"Why shall I not understand them? I am consolation. I am named Consuelo to you and to Count Albert, who alone knows me here."

"You Consuelo," said Zdenko, laughing in derision. "You do not know what you say; deliverance is bound."

"I know that; consolation is pitiless. You, though, know nothing, Zdenko. Liberty has broken its chains, and consolation its fetters."

"No, no. Folly and German words," said Zdenko, repressing his tricks and laughter, "you cannot sing."

"Yes, I can. Listen,"—and she sang the first verse of his song on the three mountains, which she had retained in her memory, and which Amelia had taught her to pronounce.

Zdenko listened with delight, and said, with a sigh, "I love you dearly; shall I teach you another song?"

"Yes; that of Count Albert, first in German; the Bohemian you shall teach me at some other time."

"How does it begin?" said Zdenko, looking mischievously at her.

Consuelo began in a low tone the song she had heard on the previous evening. "There is below, there is below, a soul in labor and pain."

"Ah! that was yesterday's song; to-day I have forgotten it," said Zdenko, interrupting her.

"Well, tell me to-day's."

"Let me have the first words. That you must tell me."

"The first words? Here they are,—'Count Albert is below in the cavern of Schreckenstein.'"

No sooner had she pronounced these words than Zdenko at once changed his air and manner. He stepped backwards several paces and lifted up his hands as if he was about to curse her. At the same time he began to speak Bohemian with all the energy of anger and menace.

At first she was alarmed, but seeing that he was about to go, she sought to retain him. He turned round, and seizing a stone, so large that he could scarcely hold it with his thin, skeleton hands, he said—"Zdenko hitherto has done wrong to no one; Zdenko would not break the wing of a fly, and if a child wished to kill him he would submit. If you look at me again—if you speak to me, false and treacherous Austrian, daughter of the evil one—Zdenko will crush you as he would a worm, and then cast himself into the torrent to wipe away the stain of human blood!"

Consuelo fled in terror, and met at the end of the path a peasant, who, amazed at seeing her run so pale and terror-stricken, asked her if she had met a wolf.

Consuelo, anxious to ascertain if Zdenko was able to such attacks, told him she had met the innocent, who had frightened her.

"You should not fear him," said the peasant, smiling at what he thought her timidity. "Zdenko is a good fellow, and either laughs or sings, or tells stories which we do not understand, but which are very beautiful."

"But he gets angry sometimes, and then threatens and throws stones."

"No, no," said the peasant, "that never has happened, and never will. You must not be afraid of Zdenko, who is an angel."

When she had recovered, Consuelo thought the peasant must be right, and that by her imprudence she had provoked the only attack of madness he had ever suffered with. She reproached herself bitterly, and said—"I was too eager, and have awakened in the quiet soul of this man, deprived of what they proudly call reason, a suffering he has hitherto been ignorant of, but which will now take possession of him on every opportunity. He was a maniac, and perhaps I have made him incurably mad."

She became yet more sad when she sought for the motives of Zdenko's anger. It was now certain that her suspicions were verified of Albert's retreat in Schreckenstein. With what zealous care did Albert and Zdenko conceal the secret from them. She was not privileged—she had no influence over Count Albert, and this feeling which had induced him to call her his Consolation, the care he had taken the evening before to attract her attention by a symbolic chaunt, had been but a momentary whim, without any true and constant inspiration pointing to her rather than another as his consoler and liberatrix. This very word, Consolation, pronounced and divined by him, was a mere matter of chance. She had concealed from no one that she was Spanish, and her maternal language was yet more familiar to her than Italian. Albert, enchanted by her voice, and aware of no more energetic expression than that which expressed the idea he was so anxious about, and which so completely engrossed his imagination, had spoken in a tongue he knew perfectly, and which no one else about them understood.

Consuelo had never been so much deceived in this respect. Still, so fanciful and so ingenious a coincidence had seemed to her something providential, and her imagination had seized upon it without much examination.

But now everything was once more doubtful. Had Albert, in some new phase of his mania, forgotten the feeling he had experienced for her? Was she henceforth useless for his relief, powerless for his welfare? or was Zdenko, who had appeared so intelligent and earnest in seconding Albert's designs, more hopelessly deranged than Consuelo had been willing to suppose? Did he merely execute the orders of his friend, or did he completely forget them, when he furiously forbade to the young girl all approach to the Schreckenstein, and all insight into the truth?

"Well," whispered Amelia on her return, "did you see Albert this evening floating in the sunset clouds? or will you make him come down the chimney to-night by some potent spell?"

"Perhaps so," replied Consuelo, a little provoked. It was the first time in her life that she felt her pride wounded. She had entered upon her enterprise with so pure and disinterested a feeling, so earnest and high-minded a purpose, that she suffered deeply at the idea of being bantered and despised for want of success.

She was dejected and melancholy all the evening; and the canoness, who remarked the change, did not fail to attribute it to her fear of having disclosed the fatal attachment which had been born in her heart.

The canoness was strangely deceived. If Consuelo had nourished

the first seeds of a new passion, she would have been an entire stranger to the fervent faith and holy confidence which had hitherto guided and sustained her. But so far from this, she had perhaps never experienced the poignant return of her former passion more strongly, than under these circumstances, when she strove to withdraw herself from it by deeds of heroism and a sort of exalted humanity.

When she returned to her room, she saw on her spinet an old gilded book with the coats of arms engraved on it. She saw at once it was an old book she had seen in Albert's room, and that Zdenko had taken away on the previous night. She opened it at the place where there was a mark. This was at the place where the psalm *De profundis clamavi ad te* begins. These Latin words were underlined with an ink which was as yet scarcely dried, for it had run into the next page. She looked through the whole book, which was a famous old Bible, known as that of de Kralic's, and published in 1579. She found in it no note, no indication whence it came. A simple cry, though, seemed to come from the earth, as it were from the abyss; not, perhaps, significative, but eloquent. What a contradiction there was between the formal and constant vow of Albert and the recent behavior of Zdenko.

This last idea arrested Consuelo's attention. Albert was sick and overcome at the depth of the cavern, which she supposed was beneath the Schreckenstein, and was perhaps retained there by the mad love of Zdenko. Perhaps he was a victim to this madman, who perhaps loved, though he kept him his prisoner. Yielding sometimes to his wish to return to the upper earth, and fulfilling all his messages to Consuelo, though sometimes he prevented his success, by interposing a kind of indefinite terror.

"Well," said she, "I will go, if I even have to confront the ridiculous folly of fools and egotists; I will go, even if the person who calls me dares to humiliate me by his indifference. How, though, can I be humiliated, if he is, perhaps, as mad as poor Zdenko? I shall only have to pity both of them; and then, I will have done my duty. I shall have obeyed the voice of God who inspires me, and his hand, which impels me with irresistible force."

The feverish state in which she had been for some days, and which since she had seen Zdenko, had replaced a painful languor, again exhibited itself in her soul and body. She regained all her power, and concealing from Amelia both her design and the book, exchanged various pleasant words with her, saw her go to sleep, and set out for the fountain of tears, with a little dark lantern she had procured on that very morning.

She waited for a long time, and was forced to go more and more into Albert's studio, to revive her half-chilled limbs by a warmer atmosphere. She ventured to look over this enormous mass of books not arranged on shelves as in a library, but cast pell-mell on the floor as if in contempt and disgust. She ventured to open several of them. Almost all of them were in Latin, and Consuelo at once conceived the idea that they were on religious controversy, and had either emanated from the Roman church, or been approved by it. She sought to ascertain their titles, but, just then, heard the water bubbling in the fountain. She went thither, putting out her light, and hid herself until Zdenko came. He, on this occasion, paused neither in the parterre nor in the library. He went through the two rooms, and left Albert's apartment, as Consuelo ascertained at a later time, to go and

listen at the oratory of Count Christian, to ascertain if the old man was awake in trouble, or sound asleep. This anxiety was always exerting not a little influence over him, though Albert, as we shall see by-and-by, had never thought about it.

Consuelo did not at all doubt about the course she should adopt: her plans had already been formed. She had no longer any confidence either in the honor or the benevolence of Zdenko, and wished to see him whom she considered a prisoner, and, as it were, under guard. There was certainly but one way of passing under ground from the castle cistern to Schreckenstein. If this way was difficult and dangerous, at all events, it was practicable, for Zdenko passed through it every night. At all events, light would be of advantage; and Consuelo had provided herself with light, a piece of steel, wadding, and a flint, to be able to strike a light whenever she pleased. What made her sure of reaching Schreckenstein in this manner, was an old story she had heard told by the canoness, in relation to a siege of the Teutonic knights.

"The knights," said Wenceslawa, "had in their very refectory a cistern, through which they obtained water from the neighboring mountain, and when their spies went out to watch the enemy, they exhausted the cistern, and passed through its subterranean conduits to a village which belonged to them."

Consuelo remembered that, according to the chronicle of the country, the village which was on the hill, known as Schreckenstein, had, since the conflagration, depended on the Giant's fortress, and had, in time of siege, maintained secret communications with it. She had, then, sufficient reason to search out this communication and this issue.

She took advantage of Zdenko's absence to descend into the well. Before she went, she recommended herself to God, and made the sign of the cross, as she did in the theatre of Saint Samuel, before she appeared on the stage, for the first time. She then descended the winding staircase, and looked for the chain, &c., which she had seen Zdenko hold on by, taking care, to avoid vertigo, not to look down. She got hold of the iron chain without any difficulty, and when she had done so, felt herself at ease. Then she ventured to look down. There was yet some water, and this discovery caused her not a little emotion. Soon, however, she recovered her presence of mind—the well might be very deep, yet the opening through which Zdenko came could not be very far down. She had already gone down fifty steps, with an address and activity of which young girls educated in drawing-rooms are ignorant, but which people of the lower orders acquire in their childhood's games, and the hardy confidence of which they preserve through all their life. The only real danger was in passing over damp steps. Consuelo found in one of the corners an old hat the Baron Frederick used to wear when he hunted. She took possession of it, and made sandals which she tied on her shoes, after the fashion of the old *cothurni*. She had observed that Zdenko was similarly shod. With his felt shoes Zdenko passed noiselessly through the corridors of the castle, and seemed to glide rather than walk. Thus the Hussites had been wont to shoe their spies, and even their horses, when they wished to surprise the enemy. At the fifty-second step, Consuelo found a kind of landing-place, with a stairway. She did not hesitate to enter it, and to advance, half-bent, into a narrow subterranean gallery, dripping with water, and which evidently had been wrought by the hand of man.

She proceeded down it without any difficulty, for so, *æ* minutes, when she fancied she heard a slight noise behind her. Zdenko, perhaps, was returning to the mountain. She was, however, in advance of him, and increased her pace to avoid so dangerous a companion. He could not suspect that she was in advance of him. He had no reason to run after her; and, while he amused himself by muttering alone his complaints and interminable stories, she would be able to place herself under Albert's protection.

The noise she had heard increased, and became like that of water, which growls, struggles, and bursts forth. What had happened? Had Zdenko become aware of her intention? Had he pulled up the floodgate to destroy her? He could not do so, however, until he had passed her, and now he was behind her. This reflection gave her very little confidence. Zdenko was capable of destroying and of drowning himself rather than betray Albert. Consuelo, nevertheless, saw no floodgate, nothing to restrain the water. It must, therefore, come from below, yet the noise seemed to have its origin behind her. It increased, however, came nearer to her, and seemed to have the voice of thunder.

Suddenly Consuelo made a horrible discovery, and saw that the gallery, instead of ascending, descended, at first, gently, and then by a more rapid inclination. She had mistaken her way, in her anxiety, and in the dense vapor exhaled from the cistern, she had not seen the second and larger entrance, which was opposite the one she had taken. She had gone into the passage way, which served as a kind of escape pipe, instead of ascending the one which led to the reservoir or to the source. Zdenko, who had taken the opposite direction, had quietly lifted up the flood-gate, and the cistern was already filled to the level of the escape pipe. The water was already rushing into the gallery where Consuelo was, completely overcome by amazement. Ere long, this gallery, which was so contrived that the cistern, losing less water than it received, became filled, and had something to spare. In the twinkling of an eye, the escape was inundated, and began to roll down the declivity. The vault, already humid, bade fair ere long to be filled, and there was no prospect of escape. Rapidity of flight would not save the unhappy fugitive from the torrent. The air was already intercepted by the mass of water which was rushing down with a great noise. A stifling heat interfered with respiration, and did as much as fear and despair to suspend animation. Consuelo already heard the muttering of the stream. A red foam, the unpromising herald of the flood sped over the pavement, and preceded the uncertain steps of the terrified victim.

 CHAPTER XLI.

"O my mother!" she cried, "open thine arms to receive me! O Anzoleto, I love thee! O my God, receive my soul into a better world!"

Hardly had she uttered this cry of agony to heaven, when she tripped and stumbled over some object in her path. O surprise! O divine goodness! It is a steep and narrow staircase, opening from