

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

one of the walls of the gallery, and up which she rushes on the wings of fear and of hope! The vault rises before her—the torrent dashes forward—strikes the staircase which Consuelo had just time to clear—engulfs the first ten steps—wets to the ankle the agile feet which fly before it, and filling at last to the vaulted roof the gallery which Consuelo had left behind her, is swallowed up in darkness, and falls with a horrible din into a deep reservoir, which the heroic girl looks down upon from a little platform she has reached on her knees and in darkness.

Her candle had been extinguished. A violent gust of wind had preceded the irruption of the mass of waters. Consuelo fell prostrate upon the last step, sustained hitherto by the instinct of self-preservation, but ignorant if she was saved—if the din of this cataract was not a new disaster which was about to overtake her—if the cold spray which dashed up even to where she was kneeling, and bathed her hair, was not the chilling hand of death extended to seize her.

In the meantime, the reservoir is filled by degrees to the height of other deeper waste ways, which carry still farther into the bowels of the earth the current of the abundant spring. The noise diminishes, the vapors are dissipated, and a hollow and harmonious murmur echoes through the caverns. With a trembling hand, Consuelo succeeds in relighting her candle. Her heart beats violently against her bosom, but her courage is restored, and throwing herself on her knees, she thanks God. Lastly, she examines the place in which she is, and throws the trembling light of her lantern upon the surrounding objects. A vast cavern, hollowed by the hand of nature, is extended like a roof over an abyss into which the distant fountain of the Schreckenstein flows, and loses itself in the recesses of the mountain. This abyss is so deep that the water which dashes into it cannot be seen at the bottom; but, when a stone is thrown in, it is heard falling for the space of two minutes, with a noise resembling thunder. The echoes of the cavern repeat it for a long time, and the hollow and frightful dash of the water is heard still longer, and might be taken for the howlings of the infernal pack. At one side of this cavern a narrow dangerous path hollowed out of the rocks runs along the margin of the precipice, and is lost in another gallery where the labor of man ceases, and which takes an upward direction and leaves the course of the current as it turns towards more elevated regions.

This was the course Consuelo had to take. There was no other: the water having completely filled the one through which she had come. It was impossible to wait in the cavern for Zdenko. The dampness was deathly, and the torch began to grow pale, threatening to go out.

Consuelo is not paralysed by the horror of her situation. She is well aware that she is not going towards Schreckenstein. The subterranean galleries which open before her are a sport of nature, and lead to impassable places or labyrinths, an outlet to which she can never find. She will yet venture to enter them, though only for the purpose of having an asylum until the next night. On the next night Zdenko will return; he will shut off the current, and the captive will be able to retrace her steps, and see the light of the stars again.

Consuelo then sought to penetrate again the mysteries of the cavern. Her courage had revived; and, on this occasion, she was attentive to all the accidents of the soil, and was careful to follow only the

ascending paths, without consenting to turn aside to enter the more spacious galleries which she passed. By doing so, she was sure not to encounter any currents of water, and was able to retrace her steps.

She passed over a thousand obstacles: vast stones encumbered her route; from time to time huge bats, roused from their slumbers by the light of the lantern, came in whole battalions against her, and whirled around her steps. After the first emotions of surprise, she felt her courage increase at every new terror. Sometimes she ascended vast blocks of stone which had fallen from the vaults above, showing that other masses were ready to follow them, being now retained by but a slight hold in fissures, twenty feet above them. Then the passage became so narrow, that Consuelo was forced to crawl through an intensely close air to force her way. She had been walking thus for about half an hour, when having turned a sharp angle, where her lithe and supple body had much difficulty in passing, she fell from Charybdis into Scylla, meeting Zdenko face to face. Zdenko at first was petrified with surprise, and chilled by terror; but soon became indignant and furious as we have already seen him.

In this labyrinth, amid countless obstacles, by the quivering light of a torch, which, from want of air, was almost ready to go out—it was impossible to fly. The wild eye, the foaming lips of Zdenko, proved clearly enough that, on this occasion, he would not stop at menaces. He at once became strangely ferocious, and began to pick up large stones, placing them between Consuelo and himself, as if he would wall up the narrow gallery in which she was. Thus he was sure that if he did not empty the cistern for several days, she must die of hunger, precisely as the drone is starved to death, when the bee closes up its cell with wax.

Zdenko, however, made use of granite, and worked with strange rapidity. The physical power of this emaciated and apparently feeble man was so perfectly displayed, that Consuelo saw that resistance would be impossible, and that it was far better for her to find some means of escape by retracing her steps, than to irritate and force him to extremities. She sought to soothe, to persuade, and to subdue him by words.

"Zdenko," said she, "what are you at? Albert will never forgive you. He calls me; I am his friend, his consolation, and salvation. You destroy him when you destroy me."

Zdenko, afraid of being persuaded, and determined to carry out his idea, began to sing in his own tongue, in a loud and animated strain, working all the time at his Cyclopien task.

One stone alone was required to complete the edifice. Consuelo saw him place it with terror. "I shall," said she, "never be able to pull down that wall. To do it a giant's hands will be required." The last stone was put up, and she saw that Zdenko was beginning another, leaning on the first. He was erecting a perfect fortress between Albert and herself. He continued to sing, and seemed to take pleasure in his toil.

A wonderful inspiration at last took possession of Consuelo. She remembered the famous heretical formula which had been explained by Amelia, at which the chaplain had been so much offended.

"Zdenko," said she, in Bohemian, through one of the orifices of the disjointed wall, "let the one who has been injured salute you."

This phrase worked on Zdenko like magic. He let the enormous block he held fall, uttering at the same time a deep sigh, and began to

destroy his wall with more rapidity than he had erected it. He then gave his hand to Consuelo, and assisted her to pass over the ruin; after which he looked attentively at her, sighed strangely, and, giving her three keys tied together by a ribbon, pointed out the way to her, saying, "Let the one who has been injured salute you."

"Will you not be my guide?" said she. "Take me to your master."

Zdenko shook his head, saying, "I have no master. I had a friend. You took him from me. Fate is being fulfilled. Go whither God directs you. I shall weep until you return."

Sitting down then on the ruins, he hid his face in his hands, and remained silent.

Consuelo did not wait to console him. She was afraid his madness would return; and, taking advantage of the moment when he respected her, set out like an arrow from the bow. In her uncertain and difficult journey Consuelo had not gone far, for Zdenko, proceeding by a longer route, but which was inaccessible to the water, had met her on the junction of the two caverns—the one made by the hand of man—and the other, strange, distorted and dangerous, surrounded the castle and its dependencies, and even the hill on which it was. Consuelo at this time had no doubt that she was under the park, yet she passed through the gratings in a manner that all the keys of the canonesse could not prevent. She had an idea, after having proceeded for some distance on this route, to retrace her steps, and abandon an enterprise, in carrying out which she had already met with so many difficulties. Perhaps new difficulties yet awaited her. The ill temper of Zdenko might be aroused. What if she were pursued by him. He might build up a wall again to prevent her return. If, however, she abandoned her plan, and asked him to show her the way to the cistern, she might find him kind and gentle. She was too much excited, however, to venture again to meet this strange person. Her dread of him increased as she withdrew from him, and after having boldly confronted his anger, she became afraid when she thought of it. She fled from him without daring to do any thing to win his favor, and hoped alone to find one of the magic doors, the keys of which he had given her, to thus put a barrier between the madman and herself.

Was she not, however, about to meet Albert, another madman, whom she rashly persisted in thinking gentle and manageable, in a position similar to that of Zdenko towards her? Over the whole affair there was a thick veil; and when she had divested herself of the influence of romantic ideas, Consuelo thought herself the most delirious of the three, in having rushed into this abyss of dangers and mysteries, without being sure of a favorable result.

She passed through a spacious cavern, which had been admirably wrought by the iron hands of the men of the middle age. All the passages were cut in regular elliptical arches. The less compact portions, or chalky parts of the soil, wherever anything might give way, were sustained by well-cut stone columns, which united by the key-stones of this quadrangular vault. Consuelo lost no time in admiring this immense work, which had been constructed with a solidity that yet might defy centuries. She did not even ask how it chanced to be that the present owners of the castle were ignorant of so important a work. She might have explained it, had she remembered that all the historical papers of the family had been destroyed more than a hundred years before, at the epoch of the war of the Reformation. She did not

however, look around her, for she thought of nothing but her own safety, being perfectly satisfied could she but find a plain surface, healthy air, and room to walk in. She had yet a long way to go, this direct path being longer than the tortuous winding of the mountain road, and being unable to find the light, she did not know whether the passage led to Schreckenstein or to some far more distant spot.

After walking about a quarter of an hour, she saw the arches expand again, and all traces of the work of art disappear. Man, however, had yet toiled in these vast passages and majestic grottoes, but vegetation having made its inroads, and receiving the air by numerous fissures, they looked a little less stern than the galleries. There were a thousand ways to avoid the pursuit of an angry enemy. A noise of rushing water, however, terrified Consuelo, and had she been able to jest in such a place, she would have confessed that Baron Frederick on his return from hunting had never been so much afraid of water as she was.

Yet she made use of her reason. She had constantly ascended since she left the precipice; and, unless Zdenko had control of an hydraulic machine of immense power, he could not bring his terrible auxiliary, the torrent, to act against her. It was also evident that somewhere or other she must meet the current, the flood-gate, or the spring itself. Had she used more reflection she would have been amazed at not having met this mysterious fountain of tears which filled up the cistern. The reason was, the fountain had its origin in the hidden veins of the mountain, and the gallery ran at right angles with it, only very near the cistern, and again at the mountain, in the same direction as she herself had come. The flood-gate was then far behind her, in the route Zdenko had gone alone, and Consuelo was drawing near the spring which for two centuries no one but Albert and Zdenko had seen. She soon saw the current, and followed it without either fear or danger.

A path of fresh sand led along this limpid and transparent stream, which ran with a cheerful noise through a bed carefully walled in. Here human labor again became apparent. This path was graded with rich and fertile soil, for beautiful aquatic plants, enormous wall-flowers, and wild brambles grew without shelter or protection. The external air penetrated through a multitude of orifices and crevices sufficiently to support vegetation, but which did not suffice to enable them to be seen from without. It was as it were a natural hot-house, protected from frost and snow, but ventilated by countless loopholes. One might have thought these beautiful plants had been carefully protected, and that the sand had been heaped up on the stones, to keep them from injuring the feet. This really was the case, for Zdenko had made Albert's retreat beautiful and approachable.

Consuelo had begun to feel the influence of a less stern and poetic aspect of external things on her imagination. When she saw the pale rays of the moon pass through the orifices of the rock and fall on the quivering water, when she felt the forest air from time to time fall on the motionless plants which were above the reach of the water, she knew she approached the surface of the ground and felt her strength revive. She began to picture to herself in the most lively colors the reception which awaited her. At last she saw the path turn aside from the stream and enter a newly-made gallery. She paused at a little door which seemed made of metal it was so cold, and around which a huge iron bar, like a frame,

When she saw herself at the termination of all her fatigues and doubts, when she placed her weary hand on this last obstacle, which she could pass instantly, for she had a key in the other hand, Consuelo hesitated, and experienced a timidity which was less easy to overcome than all her terrors. She was now about to enter a place closed to every eye, to every human thought, to disturb the slumbers or meditations of a man whom she scarcely knew, who was neither her father, brother, nor husband—who loved her, perhaps, but whom she neither could nor would love. "God," said she, "has led me hither, amid the most wonderful dangers. Through his aid and protection I am come hither. I came with a fervent soul, a resolution full of charity, a tranquil breast, pure conscience, and a heart entirely sincere. Perhaps death awaits me, yet I am not afraid. My life is lonely, and I shall not be sorry to lose it. That I proved but a few moments ago, and only an hour since, I saw myself devoted to a horrible death with a calmness which amazed myself. This is, perhaps, a grace God vouchsafes me at my last hour. I shall, it may be, fall beneath the blow of a madman, yet I march to that catastrophe with the firmness of a martyr. I have an ardent faith in the Eternal, and feel that if I perish here the victim perhaps of useless devotion, deeply religious though it be, I will be rewarded in a happier existence. What delays me? Why do I experience inextricable trouble, as if I were about to err, and blush before him I would save?"

Thus Consuelo, too modest to comprehend her very modesty, struggled against herself, and looked on the delicacy of her emotion almost as a crime. It, however, occurred to her that perhaps she might be exposed to a danger greater than death. Her chastity could not conceive the idea of her becoming the victim of a madman's brutal passions. She became, however, instinctively afraid at seeming to obey a less exalted and less divine sentiment than that which animated her. She put the key in the lock, and made more than ten efforts before she could determine to turn it. An overpowering fatigue, an excessive weakness in her whole frame, destroyed her resolution, at the very moment she was about to be rewarded—on earth, by the performance of a noble act of charity!—in heaven, by a sublime death!

CHAPTER XLII.

NEVERTHELESS, her part was taken. She had received three keys, whence she judged that she had three doors to open and two apartments to traverse, before reaching that in which she supposed Albert to be a prisoner. She had, therefore, time enough to stop, in case her strength should fail her. She entered a vaulted chamber, containing no other furniture than a bed of dry heather, covered with a sheep-skin. A pair of old-fashioned shoes, however, in a most remarkable state of dilapidation, served to indicate to her that this was Zdenko's bed-chamber. She also recognised the small fruit-basket which she had left on the Stone of Terror, and which, after a lapse of two days, had at length disappeared. She determined now to open the second door, after having carefully closed the first; for she still reflected with terror on the possible return of the fierce possessor of that strange

abode. The second apartment into which she passed was vaulted like the first, but the walls were hung with matting and with wicker-work, stuffed with moss. A stove diffused a pleasant warmth through the chamber, and it was, beyond doubt, from its chimney pierced through the solid rock that the dreary light which Consuelo had seen on the summit of the Schreckenstein was produced. Albert's bed, like that of Zdenko's, was no more than a mass of dry leaves and grass; but Zdenko had covered it with a superb bear-skin, in spite of the absolute equality on which Albert insisted in their relations, and to which Zdenko agreed on all respects, where it did not clash with the extreme love he bore him, and the anxious preference which he himself awarded to his patron. In this apartment Consuelo was received by Cynabre, who when he heard the key turn in the lock, had taken his post on the threshold with a menacing eye and erected ear. But Cynabre had been educated by his master not as a guardian, but as a friend. He had been prohibited from his earliest youth to bay or howl, so that he had lost the natural habit of his species. Still, had any one approached Albert with evil intentions, he would have recovered his voice; had any one attacked, he would furiously have defended him. But, prudent and circumspect as a hermit, he never made the slightest noise without being sure of his ground, and without having carefully examined persons and scented their garments. He approached Consuelo with a look almost as intelligent as that of humanity, smelt her dress for some time, as well as her hand, in which she had been holding Zdenko's keys, and, as if completely satisfied by that circumstance, abandoned himself to the friendly recollections he had retained of her, and, rearing himself up on his hind legs, laid his great hairy paws on her shoulder, while he swept the ground with his fine tail in mute and stately joy. After that grave and decorous greeting, he returned and lay down on the corner of the bear-skin which covered Albert's bed, and stretched himself out on it with something of the lassitude of old age, but not without watching every movement of Consuelo with steady eyes.

Before she dared to approach the third door, Consuelo cast a glance over the arrangement of that hermitage, in order to derive from it if possible, some information as to the moral state of its occupant. She found in it no trace either of frenzy or despair. The greatest cleanliness, and even a sort of order, reigned throughout all its details. There was a cloak together with a change of garments hanging on the horns of the auroch—curiosities which Albert had brought home with him from the interior of Lithuania, and which here answered the purpose of clothes-hooks. His numerous books were all arranged on shelves of unplanned timber, supported by rustic branches, artistically interwoven by an intelligent hand. The table and two chairs were of the same material and workmanship. An herbal and some books of old music, unknown entirely to Consuelo, with titles in the Slavonic tongue, completed the evidences of the calm and peaceful life led by the studious anchorite. An iron lamp, curious only from its antiquity, hung from the roof, burning with a clear light in the eternal gloom of that mournful sanctuary.

Consuelo further remarked that there was nothing like a weapon in the place. For, notwithstanding the taste of the magnates of that land for the chase, and the objects of luxury which accompany it, Albert possessed neither gun nor knife; and his old dog had never learned the grand science, on which account Cynabre had ever been

an object of contempt and pity to the Baron Frederick. Albert had a perfect horror of bloodshed, and, although he appeared to enjoy life less than any other person, he possessed a religious and unlimited respect for the idea of life in general. He could neither himself inflict death, nor look upon its infliction, even on the lowest animals of creation. He would have loved all natural sciences, but he had stopped short at botany and mineralogy. Entomology seemed even too cruel a science for his prosecution, for he could not endure to sacrifice even an insect to his curiosity.

Consuelo was aware of these peculiarities, and she recalled them all to mind as she looked on the various attributes of Albert's innocent pursuits. "No, I will not be fearful," she said to herself, "of a being so gentle and pacific. This is rather the cell of a saint than the dungeon of a madman." But the more she argued with herself on the nature of his mental malady, the more she felt embarrassed and agitated. She half regretted that she had not found him ill or deranged, and the very certainty that she was about to visit an actual man made her but hesitate the more.

She mused for a few moments, undecided how she should announce herself, when the sound of an admirable instrument fell upon her ear. It was a stradiarius, uttering an air of grand and mournful sublimity, under the touch of a pure and scientific hand. Never had Consuelo heard so perfect a violin, never an amateur whose style was so simple yet so touching. The music was unknown to her, but she judged from its singular and artless character that it was older than the oldest music she had ever heard. She listened in ecstasy, and now understood how it was that Albert had so perfectly comprehended her on hearing her sing one single passage. It was that he had himself the revelation of true and grand music. He might not be thoroughly scientific at all points—he might not possess all the dazzling resources of the art, but he had in him the divine inspiration, the intelligence and love of the beautiful. When he had ended, Consuelo was entirely reassured, and animated by a more lively sympathy, was on the point of knocking at the door which alone separated them, when it opened slowly, and the young count made his appearance, with his head bent forward, his eyes lowered, and his violin and bow hanging from his nerveless hands. His pallor was alarming, his clothes were in disorder, such as Consuelo had never seen before. His abstracted air, his sad and depressed carriage, the despairing carelessness of his movements, announced, if not total derangement, at least the last disorder and abandonment of human will and energy. He might have been taken for one of those dumb and senseless phantoms in whom the Slavonic races believe, who are seen at night to enter houses mechanically and to perform actions without end or object, obeying, as if by instinct, the habits of their past life, without recognising or even seeing their terrified friends or servants, who either fly from them or gaze at them in silence, frozen by fear and astonishment.

Such was Consuelo as she beheld Count Albert, and perceiving that he beheld her not, although she was within two paces of him. Cynabre had arisen from his bed, and was licking the hand of his master, who spoke to him kindly in the Bohemian tongue; then following the dog with his eyes, as he proceeded to offer his quiet caresses to Consuelo, still without lifting his head, he looked attentively at her feet, which were covered at this moment by shoes something like those of

Zdenko, and then spoke some more Bohemian words, which she did not understand, but which appeared to be an interrogation, and which terminated with her own name.

Seeing him in this state, Consuelo felt all her timidity vanish. Absorbed now entirely in compassion, she saw only the heart-sick invalid, who called for her, yet failed to recognise her when present; and, laying her hand firmly and confidently on the young man's shoulder, said to him in Spanish, in her pure and thrilling tones, "Consuelo is here."

 CHAPTER XLIII.

SCARCELY had Consuelo mentioned her name, before Count Albert raising his eyes and looking her full in the face, altered his attitude and expression altogether. He let fall his precious violin on the ground, as recklessly as though he knew not the use of it, and clasping his hands together with an air of the deepest tenderness, and most respectful grief, "It is thou, then, whom I see at length in this place of suffering and exile, O my unhappy Wanda!" he exclaimed, uttering a sigh which seemed to rend his heart asunder. "Dear, dear, unhappy sister! unfortunate victim, whom I avenged too late, and whom I failed to defend! Ah! thou knowest, then, that the wretch who outraged thee perished in tortures, and that my hand was bathed ruthlessly in the blood of his accomplices. I opened the deepest vein of the accursed church, I washed away thy affront and my own, and that of my people, in rivers of gore—what wouldst thou more, unquiet and vindictive spirit? The time of zeal and wrath hath passed away, the time of penitence and expiation is at hand. Ask from me tears and prayers, but ask for no more blood. Oh! I am henceforth sick of blood. I will shed none of it—no, not a drop! John Ziska will no longer fill his chalice save with tears inexhaustible and sighs of bitterness."

As he spoke thus, with bewildered eyes, and features animated by sudden enthusiasm, Albert moved around Consuelo, and recoiled from her in a sort of horror, at every movement she made to stop his fantastical adjuration.

Consuelo had no need of long reflection to comprehend the turn which his insanity had now taken. She had heard the history of John Ziska often enough to know that the sister of that formidable fanatic, being a nun before the outbreak of the Hussite war, had been outraged by an atrocious monk, and that the whole life of Ziska had been but one act of long and solemn vengeance for that crime. At this moment Albert, drawn back by I know not what transition of ideas, to his prevailing mania, believed himself John Ziska, and was addressing her as the shade of his unhappy sister Wanda.

She resolved not to contradict him too suddenly in his illusion, but said to him gently, "Albert, for thy name is no longer John, as mine is no longer Wanda, look at me steadfastly, and see that I am changed in character and countenance even as thou art. I come to remind thee of that, of which thou hast but now reminded me. Human justice is more than satisfied, and it is the day of heavenly justice

which I now announce to thee. God commands us to pardon and forget; these fatal recollections, this pertinacious resolution to exercise in thy person faculties which he grants not to other men, this fierce and perilous memory which thou dost retain of thy past existences, God now withdraws from thee, offended, because thou hast abused them. Dost thou hear me, Albert, and dost thou now comprehend me?"

"Oh! my mother," cried Albert, pale and trembling, falling on his knees and gazing at Consuelo with extraordinary dismay, "I hear you, and comprehend your words. I see that you have transformed yourself, in order to convince and subdue me. No; you are no longer the Wanda of Ziska, the outraged virgin, the weeping nun. You are the Wanda of Parachalitz, whom men have named the Countess of Rudolstadt, and who didst bear the wretch whom men now call Albert."

"It is not by the caprice of men that you are so called," replied Consuelo, fervently, "for it is God who caused you to live again, under new circumstances, and with new duties. These duties you know not, Albert, or if you do know, you despise them. You reascend the ladder of ages with an unholy pride; you aspire to pry into the secrets of destiny; you think to equal yourself to a God, embracing at a glance the present and the past. This is the truth. It is I who tell it to you. It is faith which inspires me to do so. This retrogressive thought is impious—it is a crime, a madness. This supernatural memory which you affect is an illusion. You have mistaken vague and fugitive gleams for a certain light, and your own imagination has made a mockery of you. Your own pride has built an edifice of chimeras, when you attribute to yourself the great deeds of your heroic ancestry. Beware that you become not that which you believe yourself to be. Fear, lest to punish you, Eternal Wisdom open not your eyes for one instant, and suffer you to behold in your own past life crimes less illustrious and subjects of remorse less glorious than those of which you dare to boast yourself."

Albert listened to this harangue with a sort of timid self-restraint, his face buried in his hands, and his knees pressed hard upon the ground.

"Speak—speak!" he cried, "O voice of heaven which I hear, yet fail to recognise," he murmured in half-smothered accents. "If you be the angel of this mountain, if you be, as I believe you are, the apparition which has appeared to me so often on the Stone of Terror, speak, command my will, my conscience, my imagination. You will know that I seek for the light with anguish; and, if I lose my way in the darkness, it is through the earnestness with which I strive to dissipate that darkness, in order to meet you."

"A little humility, a little confidence and submission to the decrees of that wisdom which is incomprehensible to men, these are for you, Albert, the road to truth. Renounce in your soul, renounce firmly, once, and that forever, the desire of knowing yourself beyond the existence of this transitory life which is imposed on you, and you will again become acceptable to God, useful to other men, and at peace with yourself. Descend from your haughty science, and without losing faith in your immortality, without doubting the divine goodness which pardons the past and protects the future; attach yourself to the attempt of rendering humane and pleasant this present life which you despise, when you ought rather to respect it, and to devote

to it entire yourself, with all your energy, your self-denial and your charity. Now, Albert, look at me, and let your eyes be unsealed. I am neither your mother nor your sister, I am a friend sent to you by heaven, and led hither by miraculous ways to reconduct you from the regions of pride and insanity. Look at me, and tell me, in your heart, and on your conscience, who am I?"

Albert, trembling and embarrassed, raised his head, and looked at her once more, but with less wildness and alarm than before. "You compel me to cross abysses," he said. "You confound my reason by the depth of your words, which I believed superior to my misfortune to that of all other men, and you command me to comprehend the present time and the things of humanity. I cannot do it. In order to lose the memory of certain phases of my life, I must undergo terrible crises; and in order to discover the sentiment of a new phase, I must transform myself by efforts which lead me to agony. If you command me by virtue of a power which I feel superior to my own, to assimilate my thoughts to yours, I must obey; but I know the terror of these struggles, and I know that death is at the end of them. Have pity on me, you who govern me with a sovereign spell, aid me or I fall. Tell me who you are, for I know you not. I remember having seen you, I know not of what use you are, yet here you stand before me like some mysterious statue, the type of which I vainly seek in my recollections. Help me! help me! or I feel that I die."

As he spoke thus, Albert's face, which had at first been flushed with a feverish return of animation, again became fearfully pale. He stretched his hands out for a moment towards Consuelo, and then lowered them to the ground, as if to save himself from falling under a weakness which he could not resist. Consuelo, who began by degrees to comprehend the nature of his mental malady, felt herself animated with renewed strength, and inspired as it were by a novel intelligence and power. She took his hands, gently compelled him to arise, and led him to a seat beside the table. He let himself sink upon it, overpowered by ineffable weariness, and bowed forward as if he were on the point of fainting. The strife of which he spoke was but too real. Albert had the faculty of recovering his reason and banishing the suggestions of that delirium which suffused his brain; but he only succeeded in doing so, through efforts which exhausted all his powers. When this reaction occurred spontaneously, he found himself refreshed, and as it were renewed. But when he brought it on by a resolution of his own will, his body failed under the crisis, and all his limbs were seized with catalepsy. Consuelo understood what was passing within him. "Albert," said she, laying her cold hand on his burning head, "I know you, and that suffices. I take an interest in you, and that ought to satisfy you for the present. I forbid you to make any effort to recognise or speak to me at present; listen to me only, and do not even exert yourself too much to understand me, I only ask of you passive submission and a total abandonment of all reflection. Can you not descend into your heart, and there concentrate the whole of your existence?"

"Oh! how much good you do me," exclaimed Albert. "Speak to me yet again—speak to me ever thus. You hold my secret in your hands. Whoever you be, keep it; suffer 't not to escape, or it will go knock at the gates of eternity, and there will perish. Tell me, who are you? Tell me quickly; and if I understand not, explain to me; for, in my own despite, I seek and am agitated."

"I am Consuelo," replied the young girl; "and you know it, since you converse with me instinctively in a language which I alone of all your friends can understand. I am the friend whom you have long expected, and whom you recognised that day when I was singing. From that day, you forsook your family and concealed yourself here, and you summoned me hither several times by means of Zdenko; while Zdenko, though to a certain degree he obeyed your commands, would not conduct me hither. I have come, however, through a thousand dangers."

"You could not have come if Zdenko had not permitted you," replied Albert, raising his body, which had rested heavily and faintly on the table. "You are a dream, I perceive it clearly, and what I hear you say, is the mere effect of my own imagination. Oh! my God! you excite me with false joys, and on a sudden the disorder and incoherency of my dreams reveal themselves, even to myself, and I find myself alone—alone in the world—with my despair and my madness. Oh! Consuelo, Consuelo!—fatal, yet delicious dream!—where is the being who assumes your name, and sometimes wears your likeness? No! save in myself, you have no existence; and it is my delirium only which gave you birth."

Albert sank down again on his extended arms, which became as cold and stiff as marble. Consuelo saw that he was fast falling into his lethargic crisis, and at the same time felt herself so much exhausted, and so near to fainting, that she doubted her power to conquer the crisis. She strove, however, to revivify the hands of Albert between her own, which were, in truth, hardly more living than her patient's. "Heaven!" she said, in a faltering voice, and with a broken spirit, "aid two unhappy beings who lack the power to assist one another!" She felt herself alone, shut up with a half-dying man, half dead herself, and with no hope of assistance for either, unless it were from Zdenko, whose return she looked for with far more of alarm than hope.

Her prayer, however, appeared to strike Albert with an unexpected emotion. "Some one," said he, endeavoring to raise his bewildered head, "some one is praying near me. I am not alone," he added, looking at Consuelo's hand, which he held firmly grasped between his own. "Oh! aiding hand—mysterious pity—human, fraternal sympathy—you render my agony less agonizing—you fill my heart with gratitude." And he pressed his icy lips on the hand of Consuelo, and remained long in that attitude.

An emotion of modesty recalled Consuelo to the consciousness of life. She dared not withdraw her hand from the poor wretch; but divided between her embarrassment and her exhaustion, unable to hold herself any longer erect, she was forced to lean upon him, and to rest her other hand upon Albert's shoulder.

"I feel myself revived," cried Albert, after a few moments had elapsed. "I fancy that I am in the arms of my mother. Oh! my aunt, Wenceslawa, if this be you, pardon me that I have forgotten you—you, and my father, and all my family, whose very names had fallen from my memory. I return to you; leave me not, but restore to me Consuelo, Consuelo—her whom I so long awaited—her whom I found at last, only to love again; for without her I cannot breathe."

Consuelo would have spoken to him; but in proportion as Albert's memory and life seemed to return, in like proportion did Consuelo's seem to fail her. Such a succession of fears, fatigues, emotions,

efforts, almost superhuman, had broken her down so that she could struggle against them no longer. The words died on her lips, she felt her knees give way under her, and her eyes lose their vision. She dropped on her knees by Albert's side, and her fainting head fell heavily against the young man's bosom. Then Albert, starting as if from a dream, saw her, recognised her, uttered a loud cry, and, recovering himself, caught her energetically in his arms. Through the veils of death which appeared to be closing over her eyelids, Consuelo beheld the joy which beamed from all his features, and was not alarmed by it; for it was a chaste and holy joy. She closed her eyes and fell into that state of languid unconsciousness which is neither sleep nor waking, but a sort of indifference and insensibility to all things present.

 CHAPTER XLIV.

So soon as she recovered the use of her faculties, before she was yet able to lift her eyelids, finding herself seated on a hard bed, she endeavored to collect her memories. But her prostration had been so complete that her powers returned to her but slowly, and, as if the sum of the fatigues and emotions which she had endured for so long a time had completely overpowered her, she sought in vain to remember what had befallen her since leaving Venice. Her very departure from that adopted country, in which her days had flowed away so softly, appeared to her a dream; and it was a consolation to her—though, alas! too short—to be able to doubt for an instant her exile and the misfortunes which had led to it. She persuaded herself, then, that she was still in her poor chamber in the Corte Minelli, on her mother's pallet, and that, after a violent and bitter scene with Anzoleto, some confused memory of which floated through her spirit, she was recovering life and hope, finding him by her side, hearing his interrupted breath, and the sweet words which he whispered in her ear. A languid and delicious joy filled her heart at the idea, and she made an effort to rise and look at her repentant lover, and offer him her hand. But the hand which she encountered was a cold and strange one; and in lieu of the smiling sun which she was wont to see shining redly through her white curtains, she saw only a sepulchral light, streaming downward from a dark vault, and floating through a damp and misty atmosphere; she felt the skin of some wild beast stretched out beneath her, and, in the midst of an appalling trance, she saw the pale face of Albert leaning over her like a spectre.

Consuelo believed that she had gone down alive into the tomb, and fell back on the bed of dry leaves with a groan of horror. It required yet that several minutes should pass before she understood where she indeed was, and to the care of how fearful a host she was entrusted. Fear, which up to this moment the enthusiasm of her devotedness had combated and conquered, took possession of her to such a degree, that she was afraid to open her eyes, lest they should meet some hideous spectacle—the preparations of a death-bed, or a grave open before her. She felt something upon her brow, and raised her hand to it. It was a wreath of foliage with which Albert had crowned her; she took it off and looked at it, it was a cypress wreath.

"I thought thee dead!—O, my soul!—O, my Consolation!" said Albert, kneeling beside her, "and I wished before following thee to the grave to adorn thee with the symbols of hymeneals. The dark cyresses were the only branches from which my hand could pluck the bridal wreath. Behold it! Refuse it not! If we must die here, let me swear to thee that, restored to life, never could I have any bride but thee, and that I die with thee, united to thee by an indissoluble oath!"

"Affianced! united!" exclaimed Consuelo, in terror. "Who is it, then, that has pronounced this decree? Who, then, has celebrated these hymeneals?"

"It is destiny, my angel," replied Albert, with inexpressible sweetness and melancholy. "Dream not that you can escape from it. It is a strange destiny for thee—a stranger yet for me. You comprehend me not, Consuelo, and yet you must learn the truth. You forbade me but now to look back into the past; you interdicted to me the memory of those by-gone days, which are called the night of ages. My whole being obeyed you, and I know no more of my anterior existences; but my present life I have interrogated—I know it—I have it all before me in one eye-glance; it appeared before me instantaneously, while you appeared to be reposing in the arms of death. Your destiny, Consuelo, is to belong to me, and yet you will never be mine. You love me not; you will never love me as I love you. Your love for me is only charity, and the devotedness of heroism. You are a saint whom God has sent to me, and to me you will never be a woman. I must die consumed by a love which you cannot partake; and yet, Consuelo, you will be my bride, as you are now my betrothed, whether we perish here, and your pity consent to give me that title of husband, which no kiss will ever ratify; or whether we revisit the sun, and thy conscience compel you to accomplish the designs of God toward me."

"Count Albert," said Consuelo, endeavoring to arise from that bed, covered with a black bear-skin, which resembled a pall; "I know not whether it is the enthusiasm of a gratitude far too lively for its object, or the consequences of your delirium, which lead you to speak thus. I have no longer the power to combat your illusions, and if they are now to be turned against me—against me, who have come at the risk of my life to succor and console you—I feel that it is not in my power to dispute with you, either my liberty or my life. If the sight of me irritate you, and God forsake me, let the will of God be done! You, who think you know so much, must know how my life is poisoned, and with how little regret I should surrender it."

"I know that you are miserable, my poor saint! I know that you wear on your brow a crown of thorns, which I cannot tear from it. The cause and the consequence of thy misfortunes, I know not, and I ask them not. But I should love thee much less, and I should be much less worthy of thy compassion, if on the day when I first met thee, I had not perceived the sadness which fills thy soul and steepens thy life in bitterness. What can you fear from me, Consuelo? You who are so firm and prudent; you to whom God has inspired words which subjugated me and conquered me in an instant. You must feel a strange falling off in the light of your reason and your faith, since you so dread your friend, your servant, and your slave? Return to me, my angel—look at me. Behold me at your feet, for I am even prostrate in the dust. What sacrifice do you require of me? What

oath must I offer you? I can promise to obey you in all things. Yes, Consuelo, I could become a self-controlled man, submissive, and to all appearance as reasonable as other men. Hitherto I have never had the power to do that which I desire to do; but henceforth all that thou wouldst of me shall be granted. Perhaps I may die in the act of transforming myself in accordance to your desire, but it is my part to tell you that my life would always have been poisoned, and that I should not regret it so long as I lost it for you."

"Generous and noble Albert," said Consuelo, "explain yourself more clearly, and let me understand the depths of your impenetrable spirit. In my eyes you are the greatest of men, and from the first day of my beholding you, I conceived a respect for you, which I had no cause to dissemble. I was always told that you are mad—I always disbelieved it. All that was said to me of you, added to my esteem for you. Still I was compelled to admit, that you were overpowered by a deep and fantastical moral disease. I persuaded myself, presumptuously perhaps, but sincerely, that I could assuage this disease. You led me yourself to believe so. I came to seek you out, and now you speak to me in a manner that would fill me with conviction, respect, and veneration for you and for myself, to a degree for which I cannot account, if you did not mingle with your arguments strange ideas, intermingled with a spirit of fatalism, of which I never could be a partaker. May I say all that I would say, without wounding your feelings?"

"Speak what you will, Consuelo; I know beforehand all that you would say to me," replied Albert.

"I will speak, then, for I had promised myself so to do. All those who love you, despair of you. It is their duty, they imagine, to respect—or, in other words, to deceive your delirium. They are afraid of exasperating you, by suffering you to perceive that they are aware of it—that they it, and fear it. I have no such terrors, nor have I the least hesitation in asking you—'Wherefore, being so wise, you act at times like a madman? wherefore, being so good, you commit acts of ingratitude and pride? wherefore, being so enlightened and so religious, you abandon yourself to the reveries of a diseased and despairing spirit? wherefore, in conclusion, I find you here buried in a melancholy cavern, afar from your family, which seeks you and deplores your absence; afar from your equals, who love you with ardent affection; afar from me, last of all, whom you summon, and whom you say that you love, and who has found you by a miraculous exertion of will, and by divine protection?'"

"You ask me the secret of my life, the key-word of my destiny, and you know it better than I do myself. Consuelo, it is from you that I expected the revelation of my existence, and you question me of it. Oh! I understand you; you desire to lead me to confession, to an efficacious repentance, to a victorious resolution. You shall be obeyed. But it is not now that I can recognise myself, judge myself, transform myself, at a moment's notice. Give me a few days, give me at least a few hours to learn myself, and thereafter to teach you, whether I am indeed a madman, or whether I enjoy my reason. Alas! alas! both are true, and it is my misfortune that I doubt it. But to ascertain whether I must entirely lose my judgment and my reason, or whether I can triumph over the demon which besets me—this is what I cannot make out at this instant. Have pity on me, Consuelo; I am still overpowered by emotions too strong for my control. I am ignorant what

I have said to you; I know not how many hours have elapsed since you have been here; I know not how you can be here at all without Zdenko, who would not bring you hither; I know not where my thoughts were wandering when you entered! Alas! I know not how many centuries I have been shut up here, struggling with unheard of sufferings, against the plague which devours me. Of these sufferings themselves, I have no consciousness when they are once overpast; I only feel the fatigue which remains after them; a stupor and a sort of terror, which I strive in vain to banish. Consuelo, suffer me to forget, if it be but for a few minutes. My ideas will become more luminous, my tongue will be relaxed. I promise you, I swear it to you. Give me only by degrees this light of reality, which has been so long closed against me by hideous darkness, and which my eyes cannot, as yet, endure. You have commanded me to concentrate my whole life in my heart. I remember that you told me that, for from that instant date my memory and my reason. Well! that one word has poured an angelic calmness into my bosom. My heart now lies entire and unwounded, although my reason slumbers yet. I could still bewilder myself, and terrify you by my reveries. I will henceforth live only in my feelings, which to me will be a life unknown; but it will be a life of delight, if I could but abandon myself to it without displeasing you. Ah! Consuelo, wherefore did you command me to concentrate my whole life within my heart: explain yourself. Suffer me to have no object in life save yourself only. To occupy myself with you alone—to see, to comprehend you only—in one word, to love you. Oh, Heaven! I love—I love a being similar to myself; I love with all the power of my existence; I lavish on her all the ardor, all the sincerity, all the sanctity of my affection. It is surely happiness enough for me to be allowed this, and I will ask no more."

"Be it so, dear Albert. Repose your diseased spirit in that sweet sentiment of peaceable fraternal tenderness. God is my witness that you may do so without fear or danger, for I feel toward you a fervent friendship, and a sort of veneration which no frivolous conversations or vain reasonings have power to shake. You have understood by some mysterious and strange instinct, that my life also is broken by sorrow. You said so, and it is truth from on high, that must have inspired you with the knowledge. I could not love you otherwise than as a brother; yet, say not that it is charity or pity only which is my guide. If humanity and compassion gave me the courage to come hither, a sympathy, nay a particular esteem for your virtues, give me also the courage and the right to speak to you as I do. Abjure, then, now and forever, the illusion under which you labor concerning the nature of the sentiment you feel toward me. Speak to me of love no more, nor of marriage. My past years, my memories, would render that impossible, and the difference of our conditions. If you return to such ideas, you will render my devotion to you rash, perhaps improper. Let us seal this engagement which I now make, to be your sister, your friend, your consoler, by a sacred oath. Swear to me that you will never look for aught else in me, and that you will never love me otherwise."

"Generous woman," said Albert, growing pale, "you reckon much on my courage, and much on my love, when you ask such a pledge of me. I might be base enough to speak falsely, nay, to swear falsely should you require it of me. But you will not require it, Consuelo. You will perceive that this were but to agitate me anew. Be not

crossed, therefore, as to how I love you; I scarcely know that myself; only I feel that to withdraw the name of love from the sentiment which I feel were blasphemy. I accept your pity, your care, your sisterhood, your passionless and peaceful attentions. I will not have so much as one expression of the face or a glance of the eye, that should offend you. Be at ease, therefore, my sister, and my consoler. I swear to be your brother, and your servant. But ask no more of me. I will be neither importunate, nor indiscreet. It will suffice me that you know you may command me, and govern me despotically, not as a brother is governed, but as a being who is given up to you, wholly and forever."

CHAPTER XLV.

FOR the moment Consuelo was satisfied with this language, though it did not leave her without much apprehension for the future. The almost fanatical self-denial of Albert, evidently had its source in a deep and real passion, of the truth of which his serious countenance and solemn speech left no possible doubt. Consuelo, though deeply touched, was greatly disturbed, and asked herself secretly how she could devote herself to the care of a man so deeply and unreservedly attached to herself. She had never thought lightly of such relations, and she saw at a glance that Albert was not a man with whom any woman could incur them without the risk of perilous consequences. She did not doubt either his good faith, or his plighted word, but she saw that the calmness to which she had hoped to restore him, was not compatible with ties of this nature. She offered him her hand with a sigh, but she continued for a few moments in deep thought; at last she said, raising her eyes from the ground, "Albert, you do not know me when you ask me to undertake such a charge. No woman could undertake it, but one capable of abusing it. I am neither proud, nor a coquette, and I do not believe myself to be vain; but I have no desire for domination. Your love would flatter me, could I return it, and if it were so I would tell you forthwith. To afflict you, in your present condition by reiterated assurances to the contrary is an act of cold-blooded cruelty which you ought to spare me, and which is, nevertheless, forced upon me against my will. Pity me, then, for being forced to distress you, perhaps to offend you, and at a moment when I would give up my own life to restore you to health and to happiness."

"I know it, high-souled maiden," said Albert, with a melancholy smile. "You are so good, so great, that you would give your life for the meanest creature; but I know that your conscience will bend to no one. Do not then fear to offend me in displaying this sternness which I admire—this stoical coldness, which your virtue maintains along with the most moving pity. It is not in your power to afflict me, Consuelo. I am not the sport of illusion; I am accustomed to bitter grief; my life has been made up of painful sacrifices. Do not then treat me as a visionary, as a being without heart, and without self-respect, in repeating what I already know, that you will never love me. Consuelo, I am acquainted with the circumstances of your