

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CATASTROPHE.

THE bells were ringing, the men were rejoicing, and the girls of Windisch-Matrey and its environs took position with baskets of flowers on both sides of the street. For the victorious defenders of the country were approaching; their cheers were already heard at a distance; and they already saw the merry boys who had gone out to meet them, and who now headed the procession amid manifestations of the liveliest delight. Yes, they were coming, they were coming! Yonder, down the mountain-slope, moved the motley procession of the Tyrolese, resembling a glittering serpent of gigantic proportions. How their rifles flashed in the sun! How beautifully the bouquets adorned their pointed green hats! And now they were already able to distinguish the faces and the individual forms. Immediately behind the boys, at the head of the procession, walked Anthony Wallner-Aichberger. How splendid the commander-in-chief looked; and how beautiful was Lizzie, walking by his side, handsomely dressed, and wearing a beautiful bouquet in her bosom! Her attentive father had despatched a special messenger to his wife for Lizzie's holiday dress and her trinkets, so that Lizzie, the pride and joy of his heart, might make her entrance in a becoming manner into Windisch-Matrey.

Lizzie looked really splendid in her holiday attire. Her raven hair, flowing down in heavy tresses on her neck, was interwoven with dark-red ribbons, and large rosettes of the same color were fastened with silver pins to her head. Her low-necked corset, adorned with silver trimmings, was fastened on the breast with silver chains; and above it rose a white chemisette trimmed with laces, and veiling chastely her faultless bust and beautifully-shaped shoulders. Large white sleeves covered her arms and were fastened to her wrists with dark-red rosettes. An ample skirt of fine dark-red wool, trimmed with black velvet, fell from her slender waist down to her ankles, and her small feet were encased in handsome

stockings and shoes adorned with large silver buckles. The boys had brought to her the splendid bouquet which she wore in her bosom, and had told her, amid laughter and cheers, that her betrothed sent her the bouquet as a wedding-present.

But these words had rendered Lizzie silent and sad. The smile had disappeared from her lips, and the color had faded from her cheeks; she looked anxiously at her father, but he nodded to her and said laughingly: "Do not ask me any questions to-day, Lizzie, for I will not tell you any thing. Await quietly the events that will take place, and bear in mind that your father loves you dearly, and is anxious to make his little daughter happy and contented."

Eliza tried to divine what these words of her father meant, and a gloomy foreboding, a terror which she was unable to explain to herself, filled her heart.

She listened no longer to the joyous shouts of the boys, and ceased singing with Panzl the fine songs of the Tyrolese mountains, but walked along, pale, silent, and hanging her head.

Now they reached Windisch-Matrey, and stood still at the entrance of the street, where the clergy, municipal authorities, and the beautifully-dressed girls, bade them welcome. Oh, it was a soul-stirring moment, a sacred festival of welcome! The brave men had gone out to fight for their native country, their emperor, and the liberties of the Tyrol; and God had granted them victory. He had assisted them in all contests, the country was free, the emperor was again master of the Tyrol, and the men of Windisch-Matrey returned victoriously to their homes. All seemed to greet them with glowing looks of love; the whole earth seemed to shout "Welcome!" to them. Even the glistening snow-clad summits of the Gross-Glockner seemed to look at them over the other mountains with an air of curiosity and solemn kindness; and on the green mountain-pastures stood the red cows so proud and handsome, as if they had placed themselves there for the purpose of adorning the landscape for the returning heroes. And the wild Iselbach murmured merrily at the roadside and sent its silvery spray into the air, and the boys laughed and sang; the bells pealed so loudly and solemnly, and received

ringing responses from the villages farther down in the valley ; the priests stood with solemn, devout faces at the entrance of the place, blessing the heroes with uplifted hands, and eyes turned to heaven ; and the girls and matrons, strewing flowers to the returning men, stood on both sides of the street, and greeted them with beaming smiles.

Oh, this sweet, sublime moment silenced all cares and doubts. The smile returned to Eliza's lips, her cheeks crimsoned, and her eyes beamed with the purest joy. With a loud cry of delight she threw herself into the arms of her mother, and kissed her a thousand times, and scarcely listened to the address of the curate, who returned thanks to her in the name of the whole parish for her courage and the assistance she had rendered to her countrymen wounded in battle.

But now Eliza heard a dear familiar voice, which caused her to raise herself from her mother's arms and look up.

Yes, it was the old, kind-hearted Baron von Hohenberg who was standing before her, and held out his hand to her with his sunniest and kindest smile. "My brave daughter," he said, feelingly, "give me your hand. You know that I love you as though you were my own child ; and now I am proud of you, for you have become a heroine, and have done honor to our Tyrol. Elza was right after all in always calling you another Maid of Orleans, and saying you were a born heroine."

"But where is Elza?" said Lizzie, anxiously, to the old castellan.

"Here I am, dearest Eliza," said the young lady, who had hitherto kept herself behind her father and the clergyman.

"Oh, my Elza, my dear, dear Elza!" exclaimed Eliza, rapturously ; and she encircled her friend's neck with her arms, and imprinted a glowing kiss on her lips.

But she felt that Elza's lips quivered, that she did not return the kiss, nor press the friend to her heart ; and it seemed to Eliza as though a cold hand suddenly touched her heart and pressed it rudely and cruelly. She raised her head from Elza's shoulder, and looked her full in the face. It was not until now that she saw how pale Elza was, how red her eyes with weeping, and how forced her smile.

"You are sick, Elza," she said, anxiously.

"No," whispered Elza, "I am not."

"Then you love your Lizzie no longer?" asked Eliza, pressing.

"Yes, I do," said Elza, in a hollow voice, and with a wondrously mournful smile. "I do love you, and, to prove it, I present you with this wreath. God bless you, dear Lizzie ; may He grant you happiness!"

"Elza," cried Eliza, anxiously, "Elza, pray come to me and tell me what it means, what—"

"Hush, Lizzie, hush," said her father, seizing her hand and drawing her forward. "Do you not see that the procession is moving on, and that we must go with it? See, the curate and the castellan are already far ahead, and we must go too."

"But where, father, where?"

"To the church, you dear little goose!"

"To the church? What are we to do there? Why do we not go home?"

"Have you become so impious during your campaign, Lizzie, as not to know that we must always render homage to God first and above all things? We are going to church to return thanks ; come with me, and ask no more questions."

"But I will take off the myrtle-wreath!" exclaimed Lizzie, lifting her hand anxiously to the wreath. But her father drew back her hand.

"No, Lizzie," he said, "do not remove the wreath. It fits well on your head."

"But I am no bride going to church on her wedding-day."

"Really, Lizzie, are you not?" asked her father, laughing. "But hush now, my child, we are already at the church-door, and do you not hear the glorious swelling notes of the organ? Let us enter the church, dear Lizzie."

He drew her forward, and Eliza followed him : but indescribable anguish oppressed her soul ; she did not know why, and she felt as though something dreadful were about to happen here, and as though she ought to flee, flee far into the mountains, into solitude.

But her father held her by the hand, and walked with her up the main aisle to the large altar. Rows of chairs, decorated

with flowers, had been placed here, and Eliza had to seat herself on one of these chairs ; by her side sat her father ; opposite her, the castellan and her friend Elza ; then came the municipality, and John Panzl, lieutenant-commander of the men of Windisch-Matrey, and behind them stood the dense crowd of the sharpshooters of the Pusterthal.

Eliza cast a searching glance on the dense crowd ; she looked at all the pews, and yet she did not know what she was looking for, nor what alarmed her heart so much.

All at once she started in sudden terror, and her cheek turned deadly pale. Yonder, behind the windows of the vestry, she beheld a young man in a handsome uniform ; it was he, he whom she had looked for without knowing it herself ; he from whose sight her heart had shrunk with anxiety and dismay. And yet Eliza had longed to see him, for she had been uneasy on his account ; she had feared lest he should still suffer gravely from the consequences of his wound. But she had not dared to ask any one about him ; hence, she was glad to see that he was well, and showed her gladness in her gaze at him. Their eyes met, but he looked upon her with an expression of hatred and contempt ; a haughty, disdainful smile played round his lips, and he threw back his head superciliously, instead of nodding pleasantly to her.

Eliza felt a terrible pain in her heart ; she wished to jump up, she— All at once she heard her name drop from the lips of the curate, who was standing before the altar, and who had just concluded the thanksgiving prayer. What did he say— why did he mention her ? She held her breath to listen to him. Great heavens ! another name fell from the curate's lips. He uttered the name of Ulrich von Hohenberg ; he proclaimed him the bridegroom of Eliza Wallner, who was present ; he called upon Captain Ulrich von Hohenberg to appear before the altar, and receive the consecration of his union with his betrothed in the presence of all these witnesses.

With a hollow groan, crushed, and as if broken-hearted, Eliza sank back into her chair, and her pale lips murmured : "Now I am lost, and so is he !"

"Ulrich von Hohenberg," shouted the priest at the altar, "come hither and take your bride by the hand."

The door of the vestry opened, and Ulrich von Hohenberg stepped in. His tall, slender form presented a very fine appearance in the brilliant gala uniform ; a flashing cross adorned his breast ; in his hand he held his gold-laced hat, with the waving white plume ; only the sword was wanting to his side, and this alone betokened his humiliating position, and showed that he was a prisoner amidst all these armed men. But the consciousness of this fact seemed not to humiliate him, for he walked up, his head proudly raised, and his stern, cold eyes gazing scornfully upon the assembly.

He stepped close up to the altar. "Reverend father," he said, in a clear, loud voice to the priest, "you have called me. Here I am. What do you want of me ?"

"I have called you, Ulrich von Hohenberg, to marry you to your betrothed. Eliza Wallner, step to the side of your bridegroom."

But Eliza Wallner did not rise from her chair ; she leaned her head, almost in a swoon, against the back of her chair, and stared, as if unconscious of what was going on around her, at the priest and the young man, who fixed his eyes on her at this moment with an air of cold contempt.

"Eliza Wallner," he cried aloud, "do not come hither, for I am not your betrothed, and never shall you become my wife !"

A deafening cry of rage burst from all lips : the eyes of all the brave men in the church flashed with anger, and they laid their hands menacingly on their rifles.

But Anthony Wallner sprang to his feet, pale with rage, his eyes shooting fire, like those of an angry tiger, rushed toward the captain, and seized his arm.

"What !" he cried, furiously, "you infamous, perjured scoundrel, refuse to marry my daughter ? First you stole her love, you promised to marry her, and now that I would give her to you, you refuse to take her !"

"Yes, I do," cried Ulrich von Hohenberg, almost joyously. "Never will Eliza Wallner, the peasant-girl, become my wife ; never will I stoop so low as to allow a wife to be forced upon me, merely to save my life, and least of all her who has fought against my countrymen and brethren ; who participated in

the studied insult inflicted upon the brave soldiers of my king, and in the infamous treason you have all committed against your king and lord. Yes, I tell you, you are infamous rebels and traitors, and you think I, Captain Ulrich von Hohenberg, a soldier who took the oath of allegiance to his king, could act so dishonorably and meanly as to join the rebels! No, never! Never will the daughter of the rebel Anthony Wallner become my wife! Kill me now if you want to do so. You may take my life, but you cannot dishonor me!"

Eliza sat still motionless, and as if petrified. She had heard, as if in a dream, the captain's words; and, as if in a dream, she saw that Schröpfel rushed forward and raised his powerful arm against him, and that all the men crowded up to him with menacing gestures; as if in a dream, she heard wild shouts and imprecations.

All at once two ice-cold, trembling hands seized Eliza's arms, and a beloved voice penetrated her ear with the vehemence of mortal anguish and terror.

"Eliza!" cried this voice—"Eliza, will you allow them to kill him?"

"Elza!" murmured Eliza, as if starting up from a trance, "Elza, what is the matter?"

"They will assassinate him, Eliza!" wailed Elza. "They have tied and gagged him, and say that they will take him out and shoot him. Eliza, you alone can save him! Have mercy, forget what he said in his rage and grief. Have mercy upon him, upon me! For I tell you, they will assassinate him. Oh, see, they are forming a circle round him, and dragging him down the aisle! They are taking him out to the public place! They intend to shoot him! Save him, Eliza, save him!"

Eliza made no reply; she sprang up from her seat and hastened down the aisle after the men, who were just issuing from the church-door, and in whose midst was walking Captain Ulrich von Hohenberg, conducted by Anthony Wallner, and his servant, lame old Schröpfel, his hands tied on his back, and a gag in his mouth.

But the sharpshooters surrounded the prisoner like a thick, impenetrable wall. Vainly did Eliza beg and implore the

men to let her pass; vainly did she try with the strength of despair to elbow her way through the ranks. The men pushed her back impetuously.

"You shall not intercede in behalf of the infamous villain," they said; "you shall not save the life of the mean Bavarian who calls us rebels and traitors, and yet did not keep his own word. He shall and must die, he has forfeited his life." And their strong arms pushed her from the circle which they now formed on the large place in front of the church. In its middle stood the captain, by his side Anthony Wallner, and behind him Schröpfel, like a watch-dog ready at any moment to tear his enemy.

Anthony lifted his arm with slow, solemn tranquillity, and dropped it heavily on the captain's shoulder.

"Ulrich von Hohenberg," he said, "you are an infamous villain, for you pledged your word to my daughter that you would marry her, and now you repudiate her. You are a liar and a slanderer, for you call us infamous rebels and traitors merely because we fought for our country and our emperor. Therefore, you have sinned against God, man, and honor. Ulrich von Hohenberg, you must die!"

"Yes, you must die!" shouted the men; and they took the rifles from their shoulders and loaded them.

Anthony Wallner and Schröpfel stepped back from the prisoner, and the men who had stood behind him moved out of the way. Hence the circle, which had hitherto been impenetrable, now opened. Eliza saw it, and sprang forward, regardless of the sharpshooters, who were just raising their muskets, regardless of the danger menacing herself. Pale, with panting breath, her hands lifted to heaven, she sped across the open space toward the captain, and, placing herself before him, exclaimed, with flashing eyes, and in an exulting voice: "Now shoot, men, shoot! For I tell you he shall not die alone, and if you shoot him, you shall kill me too."

"Eliza!" cried her father, beseechingly, and withal angrily, "Eliza, stand back! He is a traitor, and must die."

"He is no traitor, nor must he die; and if you assassinate him you shall assassinate me too," cried Eliza.

"But, Lizzie, did you not hear, then, how he repudiated and abused you, the faithless Bavarian?" asked her father.

"I did, and I forgive him," she said gently, "for I know full well that he does not mean what he says. Are you so stupid, men, as not to comprehend that he cannot act otherwise, and that he must speak thus and not otherwise? Father, you said I was a true daughter of the Tyrol, and that you loved me and were content with me. I pray you, then, dearest father, spare the life of my betrothed until to-morrow morning, and have him taken back as a prisoner to our house until then. Schröpfel may watch him, and not take his eyes from him. Oh, dear, kind friends, brave men, have mercy upon me! Bear in mind that we fought together for our beloved country, and that you told me you would never forget me, and would comply with my wishes whenever you could. I wish now that you spare the life of my betrothed only until to-morrow morning."

"He says he is not your betrothed, Lizzie, and will never marry you!" exclaimed the men, with irresolute faces, and already half softened by the beseeching, touching expression of Eliza's countenance.

"He says so," she said, casting a fiery glance on the captain, who stood pale and motionless, heard every word, and was unable to make a reply; "he says so, but I know that he loves me, and will be joyously ready to-morrow morning to do what I ask of him. Father," she added, in a low voice, seizing Anthony Wallner's arm, and drawing him aside quickly, "do you not comprehend, then, that Ulrich cannot speak differently? Would not his king, after his return to Bavaria, pronounce him a traitor, and charge him with having joined us and the Austrians, and with having convicted himself by marrying a Tyrolese girl? Be wise, dearest father, and see how shrewdly Ulrich manages every thing, and that he acts precisely as I told him. It must look as though he did not marry me of his own accord, but compelled by you; otherwise his king and his father, who is a very proud man, would never forgive him. But when they hear what has occurred here, and that you threatened to shoot Ulrich because he would not marry me, the gentlemen at Munich will under-

stand that Ulrich had to take me in order to save his life."

"And are you satisfied to have it look as though he married you only under compulsion?" asked her father, gloomily.

"I am, father," she said, "for I love my betrothed; and he shall not become unhappy for my sake and forfeit the good graces of his king and his father. State all this to your friends, dear father, and tell them to let Ulrich and me alone for to-day; but ask them all to come to our house to-morrow morning and accompany the bride and bridegroom to the church, for Ulrich will marry me at nine to-morrow morning."

"But, Lizzie, why not to-day?" asked her father. "Why not at this hour?"

"It will not do, father. If you had told me beforehand what was to be done here, I should have told you at once what I am telling you now: it will not do for a young girl to appear before God's altar without due preparation, and as though she were going to a dance. What I am going to do is something very serious, and I will do it seriously. I will pray to God to-day, go to confession, and have a great many things to talk over with Ulrich, for I know he wants me to set out with him immediately after we have been married, and that it may not look as though he had stayed voluntarily with you in our valley. I must, therefore, pack up my things and prepare for departing as soon as we have been married. Let us alone, then, dear father, to-day, and invite the men to come to-morrow morning and attend my marriage with Captain Ulrich von Hohenberg."

"Well, then, Lizzie, I will comply with your wishes," said Wallner, after a short reflection. "I will give you and him time until to-morrow morning; but I tell you, my daughter, if he continues the same game to-morrow, and talks then in the same strain as to-day, I shall take the jest in dead earnest, and will not believe a word of all you say to excuse him: and then his life is forfeited, and he must die.—No, Schröpfel, come here; take the prisoner back to my house, and confine him where you have kept him for a week past. But I tell

you, watch him well, and admit no one to him except Lizzie, and prevent him from talking with anybody but his betrothed."

"I will do so, and watch him as I have done up to this time," said Schröpfel, gloomily. "He shall not talk with anybody, and I should like it best if he were not permitted either to speak with Lizzie, for I do not believe at all that she is his betrothed."

"We shall see to-morrow morning, when the marriage is to take place," said Anthony Wallner.—"Take the prisoner away."

"You let him go?" exclaimed the men. "You spare his life?"

"Only until to-morrow morning, because Lizzie begged me to do so," said Anthony Wallner. "The wedding will take place at nine to-morrow morning; I invite you all to attend it, men, and we shall see then. To-morrow morning there will be a wedding or an execution. Now let us speak no more of it to-day; let us forget what has happened to Anthony Wallner and his daughter; and let us bear in mind only that we have returned after delivering our dear Tyrol from the French and Bavarians. Let us go now to my house, where my wife awaits us with a keg of excellent wine. Come, we will drink to the welfare of our fatherland, and to the health of our dear Emperor Francis!"

CHAPTER XXII.

ELIZA AND ULRICH.

SCHRÖPFEL, the faithful servant, had taken Ulrich von Hohenberg, in obedience to Anthony Wallner's order, back to the small room where he had passed the last eight days as a prisoner. Since he had him again in his custody, no additional precautions were necessary, for Schröpfel knew that he could rely on his own vigilance, and that the prisoner surely would never escape from him. Hence, he loosened

the cords with which he had been tied, and removed the handkerchief with which he had been gagged.

"If it affords you pleasure," said Schröpfel, "you may use your mouth and inveigh against Lizzie Wallner, who has saved your life to-day a second time, and whom you rewarded, like a genuine Bavarian, that is to say, with black ingratitude and treachery. But I advise you not to abuse her loud enough for me to hear you outside, for I am not as patient as Lizzie, and I shall never permit you to abuse and treat so contemptuously the noblest and best girl in the whole country. She acted toward you to-day as a good Christian and a brave girl, for you insulted her, and she not only forgave you, but protected you, and saved your life. And now, sir, abuse her if you cannot help it; but I tell you once more, do not speak too loud, lest I should hear you."

And Schröpfel turned with a last threatening glance and left the room. Outside he sat down on the cane-settee which, for the past eight days, had been his seat by day and his couch by night; and he pressed his eye to the middle hole which he had bored in the door. He could distinctly see and watch the captain through it. Ulrich had sunk down on a chair and leaned his head on his hand; he lifted his sombre eyes to heaven, and there was a strange expression of emotion and grief upon his face. But he seemed not to intend availing himself of the permission which Schröpfel had given him to abuse Lizzie Wallner, for his lips were firmly compressed, and not a sound fell from them. Or could Schröpfel, perhaps, not hear him, because the men down in the bar-room were laughing and shouting so merrily, and speaking so loudly and enthusiastically of the Tyrol, and drinking the health of the emperor and the Archduke John, who had again taken possession of their country and solemnly proclaimed that he would restore the ancient and liberal constitution of the Tyrolese?

"How merry they are down-stairs!" growled Schröpfel. "I might be there too; I have amply deserved to have a little exercise and pleasure. Instead of that I must sit here with a dry mouth; and if this goes on much longer, I shall surely grow fast to my settee. And all that for the sake of the mean, perfidious Bavarian, who is so utterly dishonest, and