

"Art tired of waiting, Joseph?" asked Franz, coming up, and taking his instrument from the ground.

"No, uncle," and the boy smiled brightly; for was not Franz his own mother's brother, the one to whom that gentle mother had confided him on her death-bed as a precious trust, and had not Franz Brett regarded that trust as sacred?

"Boy," and Franz snapped the strings of his guitar, thereby showing that though rude in make it was not in tone, or else that the hand which touched it was that of a master of the art of using it; "boy, I am minded to put off going till to-morrow. Marie—thy aunt, as is to be some day"—and he laughed a soft little laugh, as one who was sure of his ground, "loves our music, and I would like to play to her once more from the grove. Dost mind, Joseph?"

"No, no!—and uncle, Marie is so good, I am sure she is. I love her too. Methought she looked like a saint to-night as she stood on the balcony, for I went once and looked to find out where you wore; I feared, uncle, that Jakob might be near."

So they talked on in the gloaming, and when the stars shone down upon them, and the lights all had disappeared from the windows of the hotel, they played sweet airs, which stole upon the holy night like the music of angels who had been sent to watch over the graves of those who had weakly tried to render their lives better than mortals' lives could ever be. Then in the morning Franz was tempted to see his love once more, so that it was late ere they quitted the fair isle, and the sun was strong and golden, as Joseph sat once more waiting for his uncle by the way-side. A footstep came up stealthily from behind; perhaps it was his uncle come to surprise him, or—, and here he started, giving vent as he did so to a low cry of pain. A second blow followed the first, and then he recognised the hand which dealt them. Thick and fast they fell upon his poor little defenceless body, his persecutor being none other than Jakob the boatman, the rival of his uncle, and, judging by the ferocious light gleaming in his eyes, Joseph about guessed that he meant to kill him ere he had done. Again, another step, firm and manly, was heard approaching, with now and then a note from a guitar—it was Franz, the good uncle, and in another moment Jakob, who, for all his cruelty, was but a coward, hurried away. "Joseph, Joseph! my poor Pauline's sledge! What is it?" But, ere the boy could find words to reply, his eye took in Jakob's retreating figure, and his whole frame seemed to dilate with a great and righteous wrath.

His words, however, were not righteous for all that—he did not pursue and punish the coward as he deserved; for Franz knew that he was leaving Marie, his treasure, behind, and he wished not to call up any more bitter feeling than was already in Jakob's mind, for her sake; but he swore a fierce oath, as he stood there, an oath which, alas! he lived to fulfil.

They travelled here, there, and everywhere, and Franz was careful of the moneys he received, for were they not for Marie and the happy, happy days to come? He would then rent a little farm, so he said, and settle quietly down; but not yet—and so they roved about, amongst the villages and towns, delighting all with their sweet music, only even as they played, and little Joseph sang, the heart of each turned lovingly, fondly, to the fairy isle, and the girlish figure which they well knew would watch and wait, watch and wait, for their return. It was pleasant, this dream of theirs of a pleasant home, and a gentle rule—it seemed to them almost like heaven compared with their present; and yet, I think, they enjoyed their rambles vastly in those bright days of looking forward; partly, I suppose, because of the sweet sameness which lay beyond. They spent the winter far away, even in Paris, and in the meantime no word came to them of fair Nonnenwerth. Franz trusted his love, trusted her so implicitly, that many of us, I fear, can scarce comprehend the simplicity of his unsuspecting nature. Sometimes a thought of Jakob crossed his mind; but then the owner of the hotel would care for Marie—his maidens of the household were to him almost as his children, and Marie, too, was wary; but as to doubting her true love, why such a thought never so much as entered his mind. And so time swept on. Paris, with its gaieties, its shops, its frolics for old and young, rich and poor, helped to pass the winter away for them as for many another, and their music helped feebly to swell the sea of amusement, of which this city—the playhouse of the world, as it were—makes her joyous boast. But when spring came, with its clear skies and balmy air, Franz turned away without a pang of regret, and little Joseph too was glad to go as well; for

on in the distance, the Rhine, the free, unfettered river of poetry and song, beckoned them to come where love, joy, and home awaited them both in their separate forms. Back they therefore journeyed to the fond goal of their hopes, and in shorter time than you would deem possible, their feet again pressed the violet sod of fair Nonnenwerth. Then ere they thought of either rest or refreshment, they played sweet melodies as heretofore, from the midst of the trees which formed the grove.

No Marie made her appearance in the balcony—no, the house seemed to them, those waiting two, as forlorn and deserted as though no guests were within its walls—for them there was but one face, one voice, one smile, in the whole vast universe. They watched the house in vain, but just when Franz was bethinking him of going into the strangers' common room within the noble building to get refreshments for himself and Joseph, as well as to assure himself that all was well with the one he loved, a cautious footstep broke the silence, as he stood thinking deeply, in the almost twilight, beneath the shadow of the early spring buds and tender leaves.

"So thou art come at last!" The voice was oily and soft, yet the smile upon the speaker's face was malicious and evil in spite of all. "I will not say that thou art too late—for that I will leave thee to judge for thyself," and he chuckled as he gazed into the homely yet honest face of the startled Franz.

"Ha! thou knowest not of my good fortune then, friend," he went on, as the other made him no reply. "Thou knowest not as yet; but thou will know in time. 'Ha! ha!' and then he turned upon his heel and went away, with a cautious, cowardly footstep, as he had come.

His words, vague as they were, filled Franz with alarm. He did not care somehow to go to the hotel himself for refreshments, so giving Joseph a coin or two, he bade him go and bring back such things as they needed, well knowing that the boy would be treated fairly, because of the custom they two, with their simple melodies, had helped to bring to the place during the summer months of the past year. In the grove was a sort of shed or hut, and thither Franz went to await the boy's return. Be it known that he and Joseph had spent the greater part of those summer nights during the previous year beneath this shelter, so that the boy well knew where to find his uncle, when he should come back. In bygone days, in fact, sometime during the Thirty Years' War, a well had been sunk close by this spot whereon the hut was built—only a dead well, remember, just one in which were stored away some of the convent valuables till peace should return, and the nuns once more take up their abode in the convent as of old. Franz knew of this well; but to him, as to most people, it was merely a relic of the past tumults, nothing more; now, however, as he sat pondering, his face turned in that direction, his attention was taken by a strong cord fastened to a tree near, while the other end dropped over into the dead well. Just then, however, little Joseph returned with brown bread, cheese, and wine, and alas! some news also, which it were well he had forgotten to tell. One of the waiters who had heard their music in the grove had told the boy, that it had been all as well if they had not come back to the island at all. Marie was false! Marie was soon to wed with Jakob the boatman, because he had money and a house of his own, whereas Franz possessed neither. They said naught of her father's death, of a widowed mother and an invalid brother, whom the girl deemed it her duty to provide for—nothing, too, of the persuasions of the keeper of the hotel, and, in fact, of everybody else, which wrought so upon her that she was resolved at last to accept Jakob and his gold, in the stead of the truer gold of a loving heart. Franz listened to the end, drinking large draughts of the wine the while; then tossing another coin to the boy, he bade him fetch yet another bottle of the liquor, and then he himself sat on alone, his face looking white and deadly with rage, in the now deepening twilight. A slight chinking sound attracted his notice, again and again it came, and as it sounded in the direction of the old well, he arose and stooped over to discover the cause. Deep down at the bottom shone a twinkling light like that of a tiny star in the darkness, and once again the chinking sound was heard. "Who's there?"—and he put his hands to his mouth, forming as it were a sort of speaking trumpet. The noise ceased at once, and a voice tremulous and weak with fear replied, "It's only me, Jakob Gudert—I'm killing a nest of vipers!"