

his narrow escape, he arose with a spring and once more grasping his staff, hobbled with renewed vigor in pursuit of his assailant, who soon vanished from sight and hearing into the dark night.

It was after midnight when he arrived in the city and passed down street after street, unobserved by the few who chanced to be out at that late hour. His step was slow and heavy, but he moved with an apparent disregard for his fatigue. Once he paused, opened slowly the door of a lodging-house and looked in. An old woman, whose voice proclaimed her a hag, screamed furiously at him and slapped the door in his face. He turned away slowly with the same submissive silence that had characterized his every action. He moved a little farther down the street and paused again before a dimly lighted window. Snow had begun to fall with the cold rain and the streets were wet and slippery. He strove to rise, but could do no more than sit up. His strength had completely gone. A drowsy numbness seemed to pass through him like a chill, and then he felt warm again. The dripping snow fell upon his uncovered head, and he bowed his face slowly in his hands and slept.

II.

The lodging-house before which the footworn vagrant had incidentally paused, had been the scene of many a lawless hour. Men of wealth, men of rank even, who wished to pass a night unobserved in loose pleasures, had for some years made this their rendezvous. The keeper, who happened to be blind in one eye, seemed to see less than half of what went on beneath his roof; and what he did see was treated with cool disregard. He was unmarried, but had for some years supported an old woman as his mistress. She had a history that none but herself seemed to know and few cared to learn. Though a virago by nature, she had the faculty of talking in the most wheedling tones when occasion required, and smiled viciously at times, even when a smile seemed most out of place. The frequenters of the place spoke of her only as "the hag," and invariably addressed her as

"mother." Though mistress to the keeper, he was by no means her master.

On this night little pleasure was found in loitering about the cold streets. Consequently, a number of men and women had sought shelter in the large room of the old lodging-house. As it grew later, noisy groups passed out one by one, and before midnight only three persons were left in the room. A woman and two men (one a military officer), were seated at a table in one corner, talking quietly. The officer leaned back leisurely in his chair and pulled out his watch.

"Well," said he, "it's midnight. Nickolai, according to his promise, should have been back at least an hour ago."

"Where did he go?" asked the other.

"Oh, he had some little difficulty with the tenants on his estate a few miles out."

"I'll wager it's a woman that keeps him," broke in the woman. "Those peasant girls, you know, are in love with medals and fine clothes."

"I haven't seen him much with the girls since he rid himself of his wife," returned the officer.

"His wife!" exclaimed the woman.

"What, Nickolai's wife?"

"Of course!" broke in the man. "Didn't you know Nickolai had a wife?"

"You know," said the officer quietly, "he had her exiled less than a month ago."

"No, I never knew," replied the woman. "But why did he have her sent away?"

"Perhaps because she wasn't pretty enough," said the officer, with a smile.

"More likely because she was too virtuous," replied the gentleman, casually. "Oh, you fellows can do pretty nearly what you like! If you were all like Nickolai——"

"Oh," interrupted the officer, "but we're not."

"No," retorted the woman, "but not far from it."

Just then the door was thrown suddenly open, and a man dressed in a military riding-habit, stepped into the room. The young officer arose and advanced to meet him.