

through the forest for many weeks. Hunta was making her usual observation of the road from under her twisted fingers when a horseman clattered up, and wanted to know if he could have some supper and a night's lodging. "I can only give you a clean bed in the loft, and a plain supper," answered Hunta in her humble manner. "Well, be quick about it; I had an early dinner," said the stranger, leaping from his horse, and stretching his legs as though he were tired from long riding.

It did not take Hunta long to see that the traveller was dressed in the finest of riding coats, and his horse fitted up with such trappings as she had never before seen. Hunta hurried in to make supper ready and kept her watchful eyes on him through the little window, as he swaggered around the yard with Ludwig at his heels. She saw that he frequently put his hand on one side of his waistcoat, as if to be sure something was there, and she knew what that meant. It was a sign that had never tailed yet.

At supper he showed himself very friendly; asked if the old man was her husband, if she did not find the forest lonely, and if she had any children. She told him she had one son; and he asked her more questions in such hearty, simple fashion that, in spite of his unprepossessing appearance and the ugly fringe of red beard around his chin, and the lanky hair that fell over his collar, she was led on to talk more than she had for many years.

So, while she watched him sip his mug

of milk, she told him how Erfurt went to Sopdorf to make his fortune; and what a splendid lad he was, with curls all over his head, and such a grip in his jaw and his hands that he had cracked nuts with his teeth ever since he was five years old, and could throw any man in the market town.

The stranger's eyes twinkled with amusement at the old woman's simple-hearted bragging, but he soon seemed to lose interest in it, said he began to feel sleepy, and would talk again with her about her son in the morning. So Ludwig came to show him the way to the sleeping loft, and it was not long before the little hut was as silent as one of the trees of the forest in which it stood.

In the morning Hunta sent Ludwig up as usual to go through the formality of calling the guest. He had been gone only a few minutes, when she heard the shrill, terrible cries he always made when he was frightened. She clambered hastily up the ladder, and found Ludwig wild-eyed and trembling from head to foot. He pointed with horror, first at the fringe of red beard and wig of lanky hair that now lay on the floor, and then at the dead man extended lifeless on the cot. Hunta saw at a glance the close-cropped curly hair, the powerful jaw, and handsome, good-natured mouth, and threw herself upon the body with a heart-broken cry of anguish. She had killed her own son.

GEORGE ANNABLE,

*In Short Stories.*

