

THE CHAMOIS HUNTER.*

BY FLORENCE ASHTON FLETCHER.

CHAPTER VI.

The next morning, long before daylight, Ulrich and the old crystal-seeker were up and preparing for their expeditions.

Uncle Job's cottage was still smaller and more miserable than old Trina's. The whole furniture consisted of a bed, a small table and three stools, but the four walls were ornamented with the collections he had made on the mountains. Those bright stones, and dried plants, those butterflies and insects, with their many-colored wings, which tapestried his hut, gave to it an indescribably strange air, to which the old man himself added, with his old world costume, his grey beard, and his white hair, which fell in long locks about his neck.

Uncle Job looked lovingly at his treasures, as he rolled around himself the rope that was to help him to reach the nest he had discovered yesterday, and loaded himself with his travelling bag, iron crocks, iron pins, and the short bar indispensable in his perilous search.

Ulrich, during this time, was equally busy with his preparations. He very carefully examined his gun, an old hunting weapon, single-barrelled, but able to hold two charges, which might be fired one after the other.

Carefully loading it, he drew a leather case over it, and joined Uncle Job, who was waiting for him at the door.

All the young man's love had been necessary, and the certainty that Trina would only bestow the hand of Freneli upon him who had fulfilled the strange condition she imposed, to persuade

him to return to a life which he knew only too well.

Is there another that can expose to so many fatigues, privations and perils? The hunter is in the habit of starting in the evening, in order to have reached some high part by day-break. If he can find no tracks there, he mounts higher, ever higher, only stopping where he has seen some marks which may lead him towards his game. Then he advances cautiously, sometimes on his knees, sometimes dragging himself on by his hands, until near enough to distinguish the chamois' horns, as it is only then he is within shot. If the chamois on watch—for they always have a sentinel—has not seen him, the hunter looks for a rest for his rifle, and aims at the head or heart; for when the ball strikes elsewhere, it may pierce the animal through without stopping him, and he will go on and die in some nook in the mountain, and serve for food for the *lämmergeier*.

If, however, his course is cut short, the hunter hastens after him, tries to reach him and cuts off his haunches. Then he must get the burden on his shoulders, to carry it to his dwelling, through torrents, snow and fearful chasms. More often than not, night overtakes him in this dangerous journey; he seeks a cleft in a rock, draws from his bag a morsel of black bread, too hard for any teeth to bite; grinds it between two stones, drinks a little melted snow, puts a stone under his head and goes to sleep—with his feet over an abyss, and his head under an avalanche.

The next day brings new trials and new dangers, and this often lasts several days, without his having found a roof or seen a human being.

* This story is founded on a French story by Emile Souvestre.