

"See, there she is," said the Countess in French, stopping to look at her.

"It is hard to say whether she is a Raphael or a Greuze," said Serge. "This morning she had more the look of a Raphael with a Russian nose; it is a hybrid style of beauty, but it has a certain charm."

They continued their walk while Mavra entered the workroom with her pile of linen. When her hands were free she stood trembling and silent, as though she had been guilty of a crime.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" said one of the girls, pulling her by the apron.

"I don't know," replied Mavra. "I feel as if I had received a blow, and my hands keep on trembling."

"You have carried too heavy a load for your strength. Sit down and you will see it pass off."

And in fact it did pass away in a few minutes, but from that moment Mavra was haunted by a pair of black eyes that little suspected it.

Her veneration for the Countess was in no wise diminished by this. On the contrary, she loved her more if possible. But in place of one idol she had two. By little innocent tactics that surprised herself, she succeeded in having the service of the young Count's room assigned to her, and thenceforth her happiness was complete. The care of the wardrobe was in the hands of the *chambre*, who scrupulously avoided doing anything else; and while Serge on his magnificent black horse was galloping along under the vaulted arches of the pine forests that interwove their long branches above his head, Mavra, penetrated by a sweet emotion, with profound gratitude to God for making her life so easy and happy, was smoothing with her delicate hands the fine linen sheets of the camp bed on which her dear young master slept and passing her hesitating fingers over the pillow. "He will place his head there when night comes and close his eyes in sleep." This thought made the young girl raise her hand and blush as though there had been a profanation.

Serge was the most brackish rider in the world; not from bravado, since for the most part he was alone when he performed his wild exploits, but from instinctive contempt for danger. With a bound of his horse he would leap over the hedges and ditches that enclosed the fields, and when the whim seized him, would launch his horse to swim across a river, never troubling himself to find a ford; it was sooner done besides. In these feats of strength and dexterity a stoic indifference to pain or peril grows gradually along with feeling of the ridiculous when the least prudence is exercised.

One fine morning, clearing a hedge six feet high—there were none lower—the Count's horse stumbled and fell on its side. A touch of the spur made it spring up, but when Serge tried to spur the other side, that on which it had fallen, he suffered excruciating pain. Fortunately it was the last hedge, else he would have had some difficulty in getting home. He rushed on, however, and reached the entrance; but when he endeavored to test his foot on the stirrup to alight, he found it absolutely impossible, and amid the lamentations of the servants who had gathered around, he had to let himself be taken down from his horse and be dragged, as he said, like a bundle to his bed.

When he was duly unbedded and examined, the supreme indifference with which he allowed himself to be handled and moved about, spite of the paleness of his face, did not lessen the fact that he had seriously fractured his thigh.

The banister was sent for, in conformity with a precept of the Countess who preferred a banister at hand to the first surgeon in the world 300 miles off. A horribly complicated dressing, bristling with splints and bandages, was applied to the leg, with very respectful but formal injunctions not to move and to remain in bed for six weeks.

Six weeks! and the sporting season good, and flights of partridges started every minute by the Count's dogs, hunting now for their own pleasure, the door of the kennel being seldom closed; the horses neighing from sheer weariness, and the grooms giving themselves lumbarge, brightening up trappings that were now to be unused.

The Countess was a good reader, spite of her eyeglass; she read untiringly, the result of which was to send the patient to sleep—infallible result; simply an affair of time, often in ten minutes, sometimes an hour. Serge's breathing would become more regular, the fever that colored his cheek bones would gradually disappear, and then the good mother, closing the book, would go about her duties as mistress of the house, leaving Mavra in charge of her son.

Gradually the needle of Mavra's embroidery work would slacken its motion, and for long hours her eyes remain fixed on the face of the sleeping young Count. Daylight would decline and no candles be brought, lest the healing rest should be disturbed. Seated near the window in the deepening shadow, the outlines of her figure relieved against the pale blue autumn sky in which her dear stars were fast gathering, Mavra would lose herself in a vague infinite ecstasy as she sat gazing at her sleeping young master, whom her heart only could now see. At the first sign of his awaking she was on her feet, with her hand upon the bell. On the arrival of the lamp Mavra would withdraw to the workroom. At night in her dreams she would continue her spiritual, almost mystical, contemplation of the beautiful fair head asleep on its pillow.

When Serge got well she was the prey of an implacable, unconscious, immortal love. Henceforth she belonged to her idol. Present or ab-

sent he was her adored master, for him alone she breathed. She would have almost hated the convalescence that day by day was taking him from her had not the young man's weakness obliged him frequently to seek her aid. Supporting himself with a stick in one hand and resting the other on Mavra's shoulder, he would walk round his room. She was happy and proud the day when, to give the Countess a surprise, she led him thus into the little *salon* where the Countess, thinking he was asleep, was reading a devotional book. The agitated joy of the mother and the nervous gaiety of the son brought tears to the eyes of the young peasant girl; but stoical, like all her race, she drove the tears back to her heart.

Serge walked alone with a stick, then without a stick, limping a little; by and by his firm elastic tread was heard again on the waxed oak floor. The northern early winter was come, snow already blocking up from time to time the seigniorial mansion, then melting under the breath of a warmer wind till the great winter blockade finally set in. One day a sledge, lined with fur, drawn by spirited horses, clinking the bells that studded the harness, drew up before the door. Serge and his mother stepped into it, waving a friendly farewell to the household that crowded around with noisy benedictions. The Countess was to pass the winter at St. Petersburg, where her son was to resume his service in the huzzars of Grodno. When they were gone, when the heavy gate which Mavra had opened one beautiful August day was shut, and the snow fell slowly in large flakes reflecting the colors of the prism, it shut out all the outer world from the inmates of the seigniorial mansion.

Mavra returned to her embroidery frame, no longer under the orders of the good Dacka, but under the capricious, fickle superintendence of a housekeeper charged in the interval with the workroom department. Life was not so easy, but what matters it to Mavra that there should be more harshness or less kindness? She did not live in the present. Her waking hours were passed in an innocent ecstasy that wore her away without suffering. She did not know this was love. Had she known it no amount of prayer or tears would have been enough to expiate her unpardonable sin. She loved just as flowers blossom; her idea was exalted, her dream pure, and she lived upon them. One less chaste would have died. And as regards the young Count, he had no idea of all this.

The Countess came back in spring, and the house resumed its grand, hospitable ways. Mavra was profoundly touched to find that her mistress, far from having forgotten, inquired kindly after her. She returned to her personal attendance upon the Countess, with more devoted fervor than ever. Later on the young master was to come. Dacka conveyed in a mysterious manner that he had something better to do than bury himself in the country. In the evening she confided to the landress, in innumerable whispers, secrets that were no doubt interesting, but which Mavra made no attempt to overhear, being by nature and taste discreet and reserved.

On the eve of St. John, when young girls plait crowns of flowers, which they throw into the river to see if they are to be married within the year, Mavra went, like the others, to consult one after this graceful fashion. She never dreamed of marriage; it was a closed world to her, into which she had no desire to penetrate; but she would plait a crown and watch it through the eddies of the capricious stream. The girls had thrown in their garlands. Mavra's got entangled in flowers that a young lad of twenty had just flung in. He was a carpenter. The two crowns whirled round in company, and vanished together from view at the bend of the river.

"Here we are engaged, Mavra," said the carpenter. "Let it be once for all."

"No," she replied, calmly, without blushing.

"Why, do you dislike me?"

"No, not more than other people. I don't wish to marry."

This was enough to make the carpenter persist in his wish. He tried every means—went the length of begging the Countess to intercede for him. Mavra, sent for by her mistress, gave the same explanation.

"Well, if the child does not wish to marry, leave her alone," said philosophically the excellent lady, who would have scrupled to force a fly to drink a drop of milk.

And Mavra by her own desire was devoted to celibacy.

In the month of September Serge returned, but only for eight days. He brought no dogs nor equipages with him this time. When he saw Mavra he gave her a friendly smile and then thought no more about her. When he went away his mother accompanied him, and the house was again plunged into solitude long before the usual time. Six weeks later news arrived that the young Count was married.

This announcement was the signal for great rejoicing. According to ancient usage barrels of sweet beer and hydromel were brewed; white bread and meat were distributed to the whole village. The poor had abundant alms and the whole retinue of servants had new dresses. Mavra had a handsome blue woollen dress and a silk handkerchief. No one was forgotten; debts in arrears were remitted, and the young girl was suddenly told she might return for the winter to her family, till her father could make new arrangements for the payment in kind of what he owed.

This was no joyful news for the young peasant girl, but resignation is an inherent Russian virtue; she packed up her clothes in a basket and one fine morning courageously set out on foot for her native village. She was received coolly by her mother. One month more to feed! besides which, peasants are sparing of their demonstrations of affection. After a few days Mavra relapsed into her old habits, bent all day over her embroidery frame by the narrow window, in the evening standing leaning against the door, gazing, as was her wont, at the stars. More than ever she loved them; behind these marvellous lights, that she likened to tears—for she was often sad now—she saw the black eyes and handsome face that had taken possession of her soul. As long as she was staying at the grand seigniorial mansion where the image of her idol met her at every step in familiar attitude, where she had only to close her eyes to see Serge before her, Mavra was happy; she was of those for whom the innocent and daily presence of the beloved makes the whole happiness of life. Here, where nothing spoke of him, she felt for the first time the pain of separation. Uneasy, she asked herself what it was that was torturing her to this degree, and the truth nearly dawned upon her. But she stopped at the thought, not daring to sound it further, saying to herself that there must be at the root of all this suffering some great sin she herself was ignorant of. Morning and evening she knelt long before the sacred images, imploring God to deliver her from her pain; and feeling herself soothed by this effusion of mystic tenderness, she kept her sadness to herself, still refusing to fathom it. But she was visibly wasting away; the smoky atmosphere of her home had now the same painful influence upon her that the want of fresh air had formerly when she first left her village. She passed the winter suffering, uncomplaining, unrelaxing in her work. Gradually she gave up looking at the stars. Not only did they more than ever look like tears, but no sooner did she turn her eyes toward the night than they filled with tears, so that she hardly knew whether it was the fires of heaven or her own tears that sparkled beneath her eyelids.

Spring came, though more tardily than usual; then summer with its field labors. The Countess seemed to have forgotten Mavra, who thought with ever more and more resigned sadness of this much beloved mistress. Her indulgence concerning the service dues of her family appeared to the young girl not a favor, but a punishment. At haymaking as at harvest young lads seek out the girls. Had Mavra wished it she might have found ten husbands. She was no longer quite young according to the notion of peasants who marry their daughters at sixteen and their boys at twenty. She was getting on to twenty, and her mother at times reproached her, treating her as a useless mouth, although Mavra's embroidery was readily bought by the traders from the large towns who came to the village twice a year.

In the beginning of September, Serge said to his young wife, who was about to make him a father—

"If you follow my advice you will yourself nurse our child."

"I should like to do so, but then I must have a trained, devoted servant, one endowed with all the virtues," answered the young wife, "and mamma says this is more difficult to find than a suitable nurse."

"It is quite true," said the Countess, present at this family council, which had taken place on an average thrice a week for the last four or five months; "but, Serge, now that I think of it, we have Mavra! the sweetest, quietest, most devoted of nurse-tenders!"

"Mavra! the very thing. How is it we never thought of her before? Not trained!—seeing she is unmarried, but so active and intelligent!"

The manager was written to, ordering him to send on Mavra by the convey which every year, about this period, brought to St. Petersburg fruits, preserves, salt provisions, linen, and, in short, all the products of the earth. The young girl once more packed her clothes up in her little basket, and took her seat on one of the long file of heavy wagons that slowly rolled along the roads for eight or nine days, she sleeping at night under the linen awning drawn over the chests of preserves, while the horses were in the stables and the wagons by their sides. Sometimes on awaking she saw the stars, but they no longer brought tears to her eyes.

When the convey of provisions arrived, and Mavra, still dizzy, had made the necessary change in her dress, she was led into the room of the young Countess, where the whole family was assembled, augmented within the last few days by a superb new-born baby, which none of the servants knew how to manage.

"Here you are, Mavra. 'Good-morning!' said the triumphant father, taking up his son in his awkward arms, at the risk of making him roar still louder. "You have a light hand and a gentle voice. I give you my son to take care of."

"I humbly thank you," said the young girl, pale with joy. "I shall do my best."

She carried the infant into an adjoining room, where she soon learned the special care to be given to a child of noble race, which was as different from its cradle from that of little peasants, his brothers in God's sight, as he would be the rest of his life. Toward evening the young mother, surprised at no longer hearing the music her first-born had already had time to accustom her to, sent Serge to find out the reason of this unusual silence. The young master

entered the large dark room where Mavra was slowly pacing up and down, the child's cheek pressed against hers, warming it with her warm breath and the love of a heart henceforth happy. She was singing a pleasant lullaby in a low voice, inventing words to the tune. "Dear child of my master, sleep on your servant's heart that loves you, treasure more precious than all things, my joy, my share of happiness in this world—my little star."

Serge returned on tiptoe to his wife.

"I think our minds may be quite at ease," said he.

Mavra is now old. She declares she has always been perfectly happy.

CAUGHT IN A LIE.

"I once had an example of how well it is to tell the truth," said a gentleman who was once a prominent candidate for Governor of Arkansas. "Some time ago I was travelling on horseback through a very lonely part of the country. I was never a brave man, and I was not in the least surprised upon discovering that I was scared. Every rustle of the leaves, every sudden cry of a bird startled me. I couldn't think of anything but robbers and desperadoes, and shuddered as I remembered a man who, years ago, had been found in the woods, murdered in cold blood. Every feature of the ghastly face came up, and I turned sick when the gaping wound in his throat rose before me with startling verisimilitude."

"When I thus reflected, a short turn of the lonely road, winding around a thickly wooded hill, brought me almost face to face with two men who seemed to be standing for me. Their horses were hitched to a neighboring grapevine, and the suggestive manner in which they looked at the animal I was riding sent a thrill like a streak of ice water up my back. I saw at once that they were desperate men, and felt that they would not hesitate to kill me. Fight was out of the question, for any such move, on my part would, I was convinced, prove certain death. For the first time in my life I resolved to play the bully, and, assuming what I fancied was an unconcerned expression, I said, 'Good morning.' "How are you?" they replied. "Going far?"

"I don't know that it is any of your business," I replied. "I don't want any trouble with you, for I have decided to lead a better life. Never again do I want it said that I shed the blood of a human being."

"A bad man, I reckon," said one of the desperadoes.

"At one time I couldn't have believed such an accusation; but, as I told you, I have resolved never to kill another man. I hope you will not molest me."

"Hold on, partner!"

"I've got no time to talk."

"But hold on! What's your name?"

"I'm Bill Poston, the outlaw, and the man of whom you have often heard. I have killed men far less than this, and I don't want you to cause a breaking of my resolve."

"Do as you like about your resolve," said the taller of the desperadoes. "I don't know who you are, but I know that you are not Bill Poston, the robber."

"How do you know?"

"Because I am Bill Poston, and this is my brother."

"Oh, Lord!" I supplicated. "Have mercy on me!"

"Climb off that horse, C. p.: I reckon we'd better hang you right here."

"I begged, but saw no mercy in their eyes: I prayed, but I heard no answer."

"I'll teach you how to go around the country committing depredations and laying them on to me! Fine man, you are! Stole this horse, I reckon. John, get that rope off my saddle. We'll swing him up right here."

"They put the rope around my neck. I prayed in vain; I asked the Lord to forgive me for my sins, and closed my eyes, every moment expecting to be drawn up."

"If I let you go will you promise never again to use my name?"

"I swear I won't. Let me live and I'll be a better man. I'll do anything for you, and when I'm elected Governor I'll pardon you."

"All right; you may go this time. Take off the rope, John."

"I mounted my horse and rode away, with fearful thankfulness and a determination never to tell another lie. Next day, when I reached the place of discussion, a large crowd had gathered. When I approached the people were shouting with laughter. Great Alexander! Some one was relating my experience. Shoving my way forward, I recognized in the speaker the tall man who had accused me of taking his name. I could not face the crowd and left as rapidly as possible. The whole thing was a joke. At the election I was defeated by an overwhelming majority."

A WORLD OF GOOD.

One of the most popular medicines now before the American public, is Hop Bitters. You see it everywhere. People take it with good effect. It builds them up. It is not as pleasant to the taste as some other Bitters, as it is not a whiskey drink. It is more like the old-fashioned bone-set tea, that has done a world of good. If you don't feel just right, try Hop Bitters.—*Nunda News.*