

Bianca went, and with her husband, to the mines. The dismal hut of a workman in the mines of Idria was but a poor exchange for the magnificent palace of the Count Alberti, on the banks of the Danube, which was now confiscated to the crown; though a small estate was given to the venerable and respected countess during her life. But Bianca smiled with a smile of satisfied happiness, as, leaning on her husband's arm, she stopped before the hut which was to be their future home. Their conductor opened the door, but the count had forgotten to stoop, as he entered the low door-way, and he struck his lofty forehead a violent blow. Bianca uttered a faint shriek, her first and only complaint in that dark mine. The alarm which Bianca betrayed at his accident, banished the gloom which had begun to deepen on her husband's spirits: to remove her agitation, he persuaded himself to speak, and even to feel cheerfully: and when Bianca had parted away his thick hair, to examine the effects of the blow, and had pressed her soft lips repeatedly to his brow, she said playfully, as she bent down with an arch smile, and looked into her husband's face:

"After all, this terrible accident and my lamentations have not had a very bad effect, as they have brought back the smiles to your dear features, my own Ernest."

The miner's hut became daily a more happy abode; the eyes of its inhabitants were soon accustomed to the dim light, and all that had seemed so wrapt in darkness when they first entered the mines, gradually dawned into distinctness and light. Bianca began to look with real pleasure on the walls and rude furniture of her narrow room. She had no time to spend in useless sorrow, for she was continually employed in the necessary duties of her situation; she performed with cheerful alacrity the most menial offices—she repaired her husband's clothes, and she was delighted if she could sometimes take down from an old shelf, one of the few books she had brought with her. The days passed on rapidly; and as the young pair knelt down at the close of every evening, their praises and thanksgivings were as fervent as their prayers. Ernest had not been surprised at the high and virtuous enthusiasm which had enabled Bianca to support at first all the severe trials they underwent, without shrinking; but he was surprised to find that in the calm, the dull and hopeless calm, of undiminished hardship, her spirit never sank; her sweetness of temper and unrepining gentleness rather increased.

Another trial was approaching. Bianca, the young and tender Bianca, was about to become a

mother; and one evening, on returning from his work, Ernest found his wife making clothes for her unborn infant. He sat down beside her, and sighed; but Bianca was singing merrily, and she only left off singing to embrace her husband with smiles, he thought the sweetest smiles, he had ever seen.

The wife of one of the miners, whom Bianca had visited when lying ill of a dangerous disease, kindly offered to attend her during her confinement; and from the arms of this woman, Ernest received his first-born son; the child who, born under different circumstances, would have been welcomed with all the care and splendour of noble rank. But he forgot this, in his joy that Bianca was safe, and stole on tiptoe to the room where she was lying. She had been listening for his footstep, and as he approached, he saw in the gloom of the chamber her white arms stretched towards him.

"I have been thanking God in my thoughts," said Bianca, after her husband had bent down to kiss her; "but I am so very weak! Dear Ernest, kneel down beside the bed, and offer up my blessings with your own."

"Surprising strength seemed to have been given to this delicate mother, by Him 'who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb;'" and she recovered rapidly from her confinement; but when her infant was about a month old, Bianca began to fear for his health. It was a great sorrow for her to part with her own darling child; but she felt it to be her duty to endeavour to send him out of the mines, to the care of the old Countess Alberti. It was very hard to send him away, before he could take into the world the remembrance of those parents who never would behold him more—before his first smiles had seemed to notice the love and the care of the mother who bore him; but Bianca did not dare to think of her sorrowful regret, for it was necessary to use every exertion to effect this separation, so painful to herself. She knew that the wretched inhabitants of the mines were dropping into the grave daily; she knew that their lives seldom exceeded the two first years of their horrid confinement, and she panted with eager desire to send her pallid child to pure untainted air.

It was at this time that Ernest, as he was at work in one of the galleries, beheld a stranger, attended by the surveyor of the mines, approaching the place where he stood. Ernest turned away as the stranger passed, but he started with surprise, to hear the tones of a voice which he well remembered. He could not be mistaken, for the person spoke also with a foreign accent.