

"Are you sure of the number?" said she quickly. "Did you count them?"

"As certainly as I might count my fingers."

"They were led by an emperor—you are not mistaken?"

"Did I never hunt till to-day?"

The old woman made no reply. Her eyes were fixed upon the bright, dancing flames before her, but her thoughts were far away.

"I followed them for three hours among the points and along the Echelottes," continued Hans, getting more and more excited. "First they went to the Viescher Horn across the glacier; then they retraced their steps. Four times I took a short cut and got near enough to them to hear the commanding whistle of the emperor, who still took the lead, but there was always a crevice or a peak to cut off my passage."

"And where did you lose them?" enquired Trina.

"On reaching the Eiger. In the time I took to get round a rock they all disappeared."

"It is so—yes, it is so," said the grandmother, pensively. "Nine chamois, an emperor at the head—impossible to reach; and when at last he does get near they all vanish. Freneli's father saw them a month before his death."

Hans shivered in spite of himself, but after a moment's silence, said, with a careless shrug of the shoulders:

"Do you think, then, this was a troop of phantom chamois?" (chamois d'égarement or imaginary chamois that are pursued in vain and lead to precipices.)

"Who knows?" said Trina, looking fixedly before her. "The evil spirit is in his own domain up there."

"Did I say otherwise?" demanded Hans. "Anybody who has passed a night near the Jung Frau must have heard him more than once roaring under the glaciers; but what of that? I have faced him in his dwelling for

eleven years, and as long as I have my hatchet and my gun I shall not want anyone's help against him."

Freneli looked at Hans in amazement. Brought up as she had been in the belief of the valleys, she looked upon those regions of eternal snow as a land of formidable horrors, into which man could only risk going with timid precaution and under the protection of God. Thus the audacity of Hans seemed profanity to her, and this feeling was without doubt shared by Ulrich and the old woman.

Trina shook her head and said, half aloud:

"One must not irritate the invisible enemy, Hans."

Hans, carried away by a spirit of bravado, sprang to his feet, and, striking his fist on the table, cried impetuously:

"By my soul, Aunt Trina, I care as much for him of whom you speak as for the mountain rat that squeals in the rocks of the Scheideck. Listen to what I promise you, and you others listen, too. Before ten days have passed, there shall be on this table a quarter of that emperor that I have just been pursuing."

Hans glanced at Freneli with a look that made Ulrich tremble. The promises of Hans were never lightly made, and this seemed a sort of engagement with himself which he would accomplish at whatever price. This rash vow was followed by a long silence.

## CHAPTER V.

Meantime he had drawn a chair to the table and had seated himself before the scanty meal made ready by the grandmother. It consisted only of the remains of a black loaf and a piece of dry cheese.

"I expect my cousin is not hungry enough for a hunter's meal. I would not dare ask him to take part in such poor fare," said Hans ironically.

"Who talks of poor fare?" interrupted a voice at the threshold.