

"Yes, yes! it is worth while, that you three—together and undivided—should do it."

Then dropping their hands each turned to her bridegroom.

Veronica spoke to her lover:

"If my lover permits the Winter King to leave our walls alive, I would rather be the slain victim of the Winter King than his bride. So help me God with his blessing!"

Franziska spoke to her lover:

"If my lover lets the Winter King live over this night, I would sooner wed a corpse than him; and he may forever expect the wedding day in vain. So help me God with his blessing!"

Jacobea spoke to her lover:

"The key of my bridal chamber will now and forever be lost, if the morning does not bring my heart's best loved, his war sword purpled with the blood of the Winter King."

The three bridegrooms were startled; but they soon recovered their spirits, on seeing the three young ladies standing before them, anxiously awaiting their reply. None wished to draw back, and each was desirous of being the first to prove the ardor of his love by some heroic deed. Therefore they promised that the Winter King should never again behold the sun. They now took leave of their brides, who exulting, sat conversing of the deathless glory of their lovers, of their courage, their tenderness, and finally of the carlism and its territories, and the manner in which they should divide it.

The young men conferred together, and immediately went to the Inn of the Dragon, called for drink, enquired affably amongst the strangers who the Knight might be, where he would sleep, and if he would have a fine room. They knew every nook and corner in the house, and they drank till late in the night.

At daybreak twelve of the strangers rode hastily away in the stormy weather. The thirteenth lay dead in bed, bathed in his blood; he had three mortal wounds. None knew who he was, nevertheless the host asserted that he was not the King; and he was right; for the Winter King fortunately escaped to Holland, where he lived many years.

The Dead Guest was interred that day, but not in the holy ground, the accustomed place for Catholic Christians; but, as a probable heretic, at the cross roads, without hymn or prayer.

The three young ladies were, in the meantime, anxiously awaiting the arrival of their lovers, to give them the sweet reward—but they came not. They sent after them in all the streets and houses; but no one had seen them after midnight. The host, his wife, and his servant man said nothing about where they were gone, and what they knew

of them. The poor young maidens grieved bitterly, and wept night and day, regretting the vain and frivolous origin of the request they had demanded of men, so handsome, and so true. The merry Jacobea was the most severely afflicted, for she, for their enjoyment, had originated the dangerous design on the life of the Winter King. Two days had elapsed since the night of misfortune; the third was rapidly drawing to a close, and neither the young ladies nor their parents had learned anything concerning the young men. On the evening of the third day there was a knock at Jacobea's door, and a strange gentleman entered, and enquired for Jacobea, who was sitting by her parents, weeping. The stranger presented a letter, which a young man had given him on the way, and which he had promised to deliver. Oh! how great was the joy of Jacobea! the letter was from her lover.

It was fast getting dark, and the mother hastened to light two lamps, in order to read the letter, and to have a better view of the stranger. He was a man about thirty years of age, tall and slender in figure, clothed entirely in black, and, in accordance with the fashion of those times, from his hat waved a long black plume—his doublet was black, with a large pointed collar on his shoulders—his under garments were black, but his boots were white—at his side he wore a sword, whose hilt was gold, ornamented with precious stones. On his fingers were rings gemmed with brilliants of immense value. The fire of his black eyes displayed the impetuosity of his disposition. His complexion, which was pale, seemed still more so, from the contrast his attire afforded. His appearance was princely and noble. He sat down while the father read the letter which was couched in the following terms:

"We have hit the wrong person, nevertheless sweet-heart, be of good cheer. I go to join the army against Bohemia because I lost the key of your bridal chamber; and I will search for another bride who will not ask of her lover a reddened sword. Comfort yourself as I do myself. I return you your ring."

The ring dropped from the letter. As her father went on reading the letter, Jacobea nearly fainted.

The father and mother consoled their poor daughter, and the stranger gracefully said:

"If I had known that the wicked fellow made me the bearer of such evil tidings, as sure as I am the Count of Grabern,* I would have bestowed on him the blessing of Jacobea, with my good sword. Dry your beautiful eyes, sweet girl! a

* Grabern—Grave Diggers.—Translator's Note.