ALLEN GRANT

LINNET: A ROMANCE

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
"TO INTRODUCE MR FLORIAN WOOD"

'Twas at Zell in the Zillerthal.

Now, whoever knows the Alps, knows the Zillerthal well as the centre of all that is most Tyrolese in the Tyrol. From that beautiful green valley, softly smiling below, majestically grand and ice-clad in its upper forks and branches, issue forth from time to time all the itinerant zither-players and picturesquely-clad singers who pervade every capital and every spa in Europe. Born and bred among the rich lawns of their upland villages, they come down in due time, with a feather in their hats and a jodel in their throats, true modern troubadours, setting out on the untried ocean of the outer world – their voice for their fortune – in search of wealth and adventures. Guitar on back and green braces on shoulders, they start blithely from home with a few copper kreuzers in their leather belts, and return again after a year or two, changed men to behold, their pockets full to bursting with dollars or louis or good English sovereigns.

Not that you must expect to see the Tyrolese peasant of sober reality masquerading about in that extremely operatic and brigand-like costume in the upper Zillerthal. The Alpine minstrel in the sugar-loaf hat, much-gartered as to the legs, and clad in a Joseph's coat of many colours, with whom we are all so familiar in cosmopolitan concert-halls, has donned his romantic polychromatic costume as an integral part of the business, and would be regarded with surprise, not unmixed with contempt, were he to appear in it among the pastures of his native valley. The ladies in corset-bodices and loose white lawn sleeves, who trill out startling notes from the back attics of their larynx, or elicit sweet harmonies from mediæval-looking mandolines in Kursaals and Alcazars, have purchased their Tyrolese dress direct from some Parisian *costumier*. The real cowherds and milkmaids of the actual Zillerthal are much more prosaic, not to say commonplace, creatures. A green string for a hat-band, with a blackcock's plume stuck jauntily or saucily at the back of the hat, and a dirty red lappel to the threadbare coat, is all that distinguishes the Tyrolese mountaineer of solid fact from the universal peasant of European Christendom. Indeed, is it not true, after all, that the stage has led us to expect far too much – in costume and otherwise – from the tillers of the soil everywhere? Is it not true that the agricultural and pastoral classes all the world over, in spite of Theocritus and Thomas Hardy, are apt, when one observes them impartially in the flesh, to be earthy, grimy, dull-eyed, and unintelligent?

Florian Wood didn't think so, however, or affected not to think so – which in his case was probably very much the same thing; for what he *really* thought about anything on earth, affectation aside, it would have puzzled even himself not a little to determine. He was a tiny man of elegant proportions: so tiny, so elegant, that one felt inclined to put him under a glass case and stick him on a mantelpiece. He leant his small arms upon the parapet of a wall as they were approaching Zell, shifted the knapsack on his back with sylph-like grace, and murmured ecstatically, with a side glance at the stalwart peasant-women carrying basketfuls of fodder in huge creels on their backs in the field close by, "How delicious! How charming! How essentially picturesque! How characteristically Tyrolean!"

His companion scanned him up and down with an air of some passing amusement. "Why, I didn't know you'd ever been in the Tyrol before," he objected, bluntly. And, in point of fact, when they started together from Munich that morning on their autumn tour, Florian Wood had never yet crossed the Austrian frontier. But what of that? He had got out of the train some five hours back at

Jenbach station, and walked the sixteen miles from there to Zell; and in the course of the tramp he had matured his views on the characteristics of the Tyrol.

But he waved one lily-white hand over the earth none the less with airy dismissal of his friend's implied criticism. "How often shall I have to tell you, my dear Deverill," he said blandly, in his lofty didactic tone – the tone which, as often happens with very small men, came most familiarly of all to him – "that you unduly subordinate the ideal to the real, where you ought rather to subordinate the real to the ideal. This, you say, is the Tyrol – the solid, uncompromising, geographically definite Tyrol of the tax-gatherer, the post-master, and the commercial traveller – bounded on the north by Bavaria, on the south by Italy, on the east by the rude Carinthian boor, and on the west by the collection of hotels and pensions marked down on the map as the Swiss Republic. Very well then; let me see if there's anything Tyrolese at all to be found in it. I have instinctive within me a picture of the true, the ideal Tyrol. I know well its green pastures, its upland slopes, its innocent peasantry, its fearless chamois-hunters, its beautiful, guileless, fair-haired maidens. Arriving by rail to-day in this its prosaic prototype – cast up, as it were, from the train on the sea-coast of this Bohemia – I turn my eyes with interest upon the imitation Tyrol of real life, and strive earnestly to discover some faint points of resemblance, if such there be, with the genuine article as immediately revealed to me."

"And you find none?" Deverill put in, smiling.

Florian waved that dainty Dresden china hand expansively once more over the landscape before him, as if it belonged to him. "Pardon me," he said, sententiously; "in many things, I admit, the reality might be improved upon. The mountains, for example, should be higher, their forms more varied, their peaks more jagged, their sides more precipitous; the snow should drape them with more uniform white, regardless of the petty restrictions of gravity; the river should tear down far rockier ravines, in more visible cataracts. But Nature has sometimes her happy moments, too. And I call this one of them! Those women, now, so Millet-like in their patient toil – how sympathetic! how charming! A less primitive society, a less idyllic folk, would have imposed such burdens upon a horse or a donkey. The Tyrol knows better. It is more naïve, more picturesque – in one word, more original. It imposes them on the willing neck of beautiful woman!"

"It's terribly hard work for them," Deverill answered, observing them with half a sigh.

"For *them*? Ah, yes, I admit it, of course, poor souls! – but for *me*, my dear fellow – for *me*, just consider! It gives me a thrill of the intensest sensibility. In the first place, the picture is a beautiful one in itself – the figures, the baskets, the frame, the setting. In the second place, it suggests to the observant mind an Arcadian life, a true Dorian simplicity. In the third place – which is perhaps the most important of all – it affords me an opportunity for the luxury of sympathy. What is the trifling inconvenience of a heavy load on their backs to these poor ignorant creatures, compared with the refined and artistic pleasure – of an altruistic kind – which I derive from pitying them?"

"Florian!" his friend said, surveying him comically from head to foot, "you really are *impayable*. It's no use arguing with you; it only flatters you. You know very well in your heart you never mean a word of anything you say; so stop your nonsense and put yourself in marching order again. Let's get on to Zell, and see what sort of quarters we can find in the village."

Florian Wood came down at once from his epicurean clouds, and strode out with his little legs in the direction of their resting-place. In spite of his tininess, he was a capital walker. If Nature, as he averred, has sometimes her happy moments, she certainly had one when she created her critic. Florian Wood was a young man of a delicate habit of mind and body – a just and pleasing compromise between a philosopher and a butterfly. His figure was small but extremely graceful; his limbs were dainty but well-knit and gazelle-like; his face, though small-featured, was very intelligent, and distinctly good-humoured; his voice was melodious and exquisitely modulated. And what Nature had left undone, his godfathers and godmothers did for him at his baptism when they christened him Florian. As plain John Wood, to be sure, he would have been nobody at all; as William or Thomas or Henry or George, he would have been lost in the multitudinous deep sea of London. But his parents

had the glorious inspiration of dubbing him Florian, and it acted like a charm: all went well in life with him. A baronetcy would have been a far less valuable social passport – for there are many baronets, but only one Florian. Before the romantic rarity of that unique Christian name, the need for a surname paled and faded away into utter nothingness. Nobody ever dreamt of calling him "Wood": they spoke of Florian as they once spoke of "Randolph." On this somewhat illogical but very natural ground, he became from his schooldays upward the spoiled child of society. He was a toy – a plaything. Clubs hung on his clear voice; women petted and made much of him. When you talk of a man always by his Christian name alone, depend upon it, he becomes in the end as one of the family: mere association of ideas begets in you at last a friendly – nay, almost a fraternal feeling towards him.

They walked along briskly in the direction of Zell, Florian humming as he went a few stray snatches of Tyrolese songs (or what pass in the world for such), by way of putting himself in emotional harmony with the environment. For Florian was modern, intensely modern. He played with science as he played with everything else; and he could talk of the environment by the hour with the best of them, in his airy style, as if environments and he had been lifelong companions. But Zell itself, when they got to it, failed somehow to come up to either of their expectations. Florian would have made the valley narrower, or transplanted the village three hundred feet higher up the slope of the hill. As for Will Deverill, less critical of Nature's handicraft, he found the inns over-civilised; the *Post* and the *Bräu* were too fine for his taste: they had come thus far in search of solitude and Alpine wilds, and they lighted instead on a sort of miniature Grindelwald, with half-a-dozen inns, a respectable café, experienced (or in other words extortionate) guides, and a regular tourist-trap for the sale of chamois-horns and carved models of châlets. "This will never do!" Will Deverill exclaimed, gazing round him in disgust at the Greiderer Hotel and the comfortable Welschwirth. "This is pure civilisation!"

And Florian, looking down instinctively at his dust-encumbered boots, murmured with a faint sigh, "A perfect Bond Street!" For Florian loved to do everything "consummately," – 'twas his own pet adverb; he aimed at universality, but he aimed quite as much at perfection in detail of the most Pharisaical description. In Piccadilly, he went clad in a faultless miniature frock-coat, surmounted by the silken sheen of Lincoln and Bennet's glossiest; but if he made up his mind to Alps and snow-fields, then Alps he would have, pure, simple, and unadulterated. No half-way houses for him! He would commune at first hand with the eternal hills; he would behold the free life of the mountain folk in all its unsophisticated and primitive simplicity.

So he gazed at his Tom Thumb boots with a regretful eye, and murmured pensively once more, "A perfect Bond Street!"

"What shall we do now?" Will Deverill asked, stopping short and glancing ahead towards the glaciers that close the valley.

"See that village on the left there," Florian answered, in a rapt tone of sudden inspiration, seizing his arm theatrically; " – no, *not* the lower one on the edge of the level, but that high-perched group of little wooden houses with the green steeple by the edge of the ravine: what a magnificent view of the snow-fields to the south! From there, one must look at a single glance over all the spreading fingers and ramifications of the valley."

"Perhaps there's no inn there," Will responded, dubiously.

"No inn! You prate to me of inns?" Florian exclaimed, striking an attitude. "In full view of these virgin peaks, you venture to raise a question of mere earthly bedrooms – landlord, waiter, chambermaid! Who cares where he sleeps – or whether he sleeps at all – in such a village as that?" He struck his stick on the ground hard to enforce and emphasise the absoluteness of his determination. "The die is cast," he cried, with the Caesaric firmness of five-feet-nothing. "We cross the stream at once, and we make for the village!"

"Well, there's probably somewhere we can put up for the night and reconnoitre the neighbourhood," Will Deverill answered, as he followed his friend's lead. "If the worst comes to the worst, we can fall back upon Zell; but the priest will most likely find us a lodging."

No sooner said than done. They mounted the steep slope, and rose by gentle zig-zags towards the upland hamlet. At each step they took, the view over the glacier-bound peaks that close the glen to southward, opened wider and wider. Near an Alpine farmhouse they paused for breath. It was built of brown wood, toned and darkened by age, with projecting eaves and basking southern front, where endless cobs of Indian corn in treble tiers and rows hung out drying in the sunshine. Florian drank in the pretty picture with the intense enjoyment of youth and health and a rich sensuous nature. There was a human element, too, giving life to the foreground. Three Tyrolese children, a boy and two girls, in costumes more obtrusively national than they had yet observed, stood playing with one another on the platform in front of the farmhouse. Florian beamed on them, enchanted. "What innocence!" he cried, ecstatically. "What untrammelled forms! What freedom of limb! What Hellenic suppleness! How different from the cramped motions of our London-bred children! You can see in a moment those vigorous young muscles have strengthened themselves from the cradle in the bracing air of the mountains – so fresh they are, so lithe, so gracious, so lissom! I recognise there at once the true note of the Tyrol."

As he spoke, the younger girl, playing roughly with the boy, gave him a violent push which nearly sent him over into a neighbouring puddle. At that, the elder sister clutched her hard by the wrist and gave her a good shaking, observing at the same time in very familiar accents:

"Naow then, Mariar-Ann, if you do like that to 'Arry agin, I'll tike you stright in, an' tell your mother."

It was the genuine unmistakable Cockney dialect!

In an agony of injured nerves, Florian seized the elder girl by the collar of her dress, and, holding her at arm's-length, as one might do some venomous reptile, demanded of her, sternly, in his severest tone: "Now, where on earth did you ever learn English?"

The little Tyrolese, trembling violently in his grasp, stammered out in deadly fear: "Wy, o' course, in London."

"Pa was a waiter at the Criterion," the younger sister volunteered in a shrill little voice from a safe distance; "and ma's an Englishwoman. We've come 'ere to retire. Pa's tiken the farm. But *we* can't none of us speak any German."

Florian relaxed his grasp, a dejected, dispirited, disappointed mannikin. "Go, wretched little mudlark!" he exclaimed, with a frank gesture of discomfiture, flinging her from him as he spoke. "There isn't, there never was, any objective Tyrol!"

The child retreated prudently to the safe shelter of the doorway, before venturing on a repartee. Then she put out her tongue and took up a stone in her hand. "Who are you a-callin' a mudlark?" she answered, with the just indignation of injured innocence. "If my pa was 'ere 'e'd punch yer bloomin' 'ead for yer."

It ill became Florian Wood, that man of taste, to bandy words before the eternal hills with social waifs from the slums of Drury Lane. He strode on up the path in moody silence. It was some minutes, indeed, before he had sufficiently recovered from this crushing blow to murmur in a subdued voice: "What an incongruous circumstance!"

"Not so unusual as you'd suppose, though," his companion answered with a smile; for he knew the Tyrol. "There are no people on earth so vagrant in their ways as the Tyrolese. They go away as pedlars, musicians, or waiters; but when they've made their pile, almost without exception, they come back in the end to their native valleys. I've more than once met hunters or farmers in these upland glens who spoke to me in English, not always without a tinge of American accent. Perhaps it's not so much that these people emigrate as that they always come back again. They think other countries good enough to make money in, but the Zillerthal's the one place where they'd care to spend it."

Florian answered nothing. He strode on, sore distressed. The only Tyrol worth tuppence, he now knew to his cost, was the one he had erected, anterior to experience, in his own imagination.

CHAPTER II
A FRESH ACQUAINTANCE

It was a steep pull up to the little village on the hill, which Florian had selected by pure intuition for their immediate headquarters. But once they had arrived there the glorious panorama which disclosed itself in one burst to their enchanted eyes made them forget the fatigues of their long tramp to reach it. The village was a tiny one, but comely and prosperous; composed of great farm-houses with big boulders piled high on their shingled roofs to keep them in place, and a quaint old church, whose tall and tapering spire was prettily tiled with bright green slates, after the country fashion. Moreover, what was more important just then to the footsore travellers, a hospitable *wirthshaus* or village inn occupied a place of honour on the small green in the centre. It was cheerful though homely, and clean in a certain rough countrified way; and it faced due south, toward the sun and the snow-fields. Florian saw at a glance there would be a ravishing outlook from the bedroom windows; and Will Deverill, more practical, and better accustomed to these out-of-the-way nooks, felt inclined to believe they might count at least on decent beds, plain wholesome fare, fresh trout from the stream, and sweet venison from the mountains.

The name over the door was Andreas Hausberger. Will entered the inn with a polite inclination of the head, and inquired in his very best German of the first man he saw if he could speak with the landlord.

"I am he," the stranger said, drawing himself up with much dignity. "This inn is my Schloss. My name is Hausberger."

Will Deverill surveyed him with a critical air. He had seen such men before; they are not uncommon in the rural Tyrol. Tall, powerful, big-built, with a resolute face and a determined mien, he looked like a man well able to keep order among the noisy frequenters of his rustic tavern. For the *wirth* or innkeeper of these remote villages is often, after the priest, the most important personage of the little community: he represents the temporal as the *pfarrer* represents the spiritual authority. The owner of four or five horses, the entertainer of strange guests, the dispenser of liquor to the countryside, the organiser of festivals, marriage-feasts, and dances, the proprietor of the one club and assembly-room of the village, the *wirth* is necessarily a man of mark and of local position, beyond anything that is usual with his kind elsewhere. In the communal council his voice is supreme; the parlour is his court-house: he settles all quarrels, attests all deeds, arranges all assemblies, and assists, as a matter of course, at all rural ceremonies.

"Can we have rooms here for a week?" Will inquired, still in German.

The landlord led them upstairs and showed them two bedrooms on the first floor, roughly furnished, but neat, and, as Florian had foreseen, with a glorious outlook. Will proceeded to inquire, as interpreter for the party, about various details of price, possibilities as to meals, excursions in the neighbourhood, and other practical matters. The landlord answered all in the same self-respecting and almost haughty tone as before, assuring him in few words as to the excellence of the bread and the meat, the cleanliness of the beds, the soundness of the beer, and the advantages and respectability of his establishment in general. "You will be as well here," he said, summing up, "as in New York or London – a little less luxury, perhaps, but quite as much real and solid comfort."

"What does he say?" Florian asked, languidly, as the landlord finished. For, though in his capacity as man of culture, the philosopher of taste was prepared to give a critical opinion offhand at any moment, on Goethe or Heine, the Minnesänger, or the Nibelungenlied, he was innocent of even the faintest acquaintance with the German language. Two words in it amply served his turn: with *wieviel* and *ja wohl*, he made the tour of the Fatherland.

Will explained to him in brief, and in the vulgar tongue, the nature of the landlord's somewhat high-flown commendations.

By way of answer Florian unslung his knapsack, which he flung on the bed with as much iron determination as his height permitted. "This'll do," he said, decisively – this time in his character as the man of impulse. "I like the house; I like the place; I like the view; I like the landlord. He's a dignified looking old boy in his way, the landlord, with that independence of mien and that manly chivalry which forms an integral part of my mental conception of the Tyrolese character. No bowing and scraping there; no civilised flunkeydom. And that scar on his face, you observe; what a history it conceals: some free fight on the hills, no doubt, or some tussle with a wounded bear in his native forest!"

"Wal, no; not pre-cisely that," the landlord answered, in very Teutonic English, strangely tinged with an under-current of a most Western flavour. "I got that mark in a scrimmage one day on a Mississippi steamer. It was a pretty hard fight, with a pretty hard lot, too – he was a real rough customer – one of these professional monte-sharpers that go up and down on the boats on the lookout for flats; but I settled him, anyway. He didn't want another when we'd squared accounts over that gash on my face. He retired into private life at the St Louis hospital for the next few voyages."

Poor Florian collapsed. This was too, too much! He sank on the sofa with a dejected face, drew a very long breath from the innermost depths of his manly bosom, and at last gasped out with a violent effort: "Are there no Tyrolese in the Tyrol at all, then?"

The landlord smiled, a restrained and cautious smile. He was a self-contained sort of man, very large and roomy. "Why, I'm a Tyroler, myself," he said, opening the second window, and bustling about the room a little – "as Tyrolese as they make 'em; but I've been around the world a bit, for all that, both in Europe and America."

"You play the zither?" Will inquired, guessing at once what quest was most likely to have taken him there.

The landlord shook his head. "No; I sing," he answered. "It was in charge of a troupe that I went over the water. You know Ludwig Rainer?"

"Who has an hotel on the Achensee?" Will replied. "The well-known jodel singer? Yes; I've stayed there and heard him."

"Wal, *he* set the thing going," Herr Andreas Hausberger continued, still bustling about the room; "he took over a troupe to New York and Chicawgo. The first time, he fell in with a pack of scoundrels who cheated him of everything he made by the trip. The second time, he came back with a few hundred dollars. The third time, he got into a very good thing, and made money enough out of his tour to start the Seehof. So *I* followed suit, but I only saved enough on my first venture to set me up here in this house in the village. It's a one-horse affair for a man like me. Next time, I hope I shall make a little capital to start a big hotel for foreign tourists and kur-guests at Meran or Innsbruck."

"Then you mean to go again?" Will Deverill asked, sitting down.

"Why, certainly," the landlord answered, retreating to the door, "as soon as ever I can get another good troupe together again." And with a ceremonious bow, like a courtly gentleman that he was, he retired downstairs to superintend the preparation of those fresh mountain trout he had promised them for dinner.

As soon as he was gone, Florian raised himself on one elbow like a startled butterfly, with an air of studious vacancy, and stared hard at Will Deverill. "What an extraordinary country," he murmured, with a pensive sigh. "It's Babel reversed. Everybody seems to speak and understand every European language. The very babes and sucklings call one names as one passes, in vile gutter English. It's really quite uncanny. Who'd have thought, now, of meeting in an out-of-the-way lost corner of earth like this, a village innkeeper who's a man of the world, a distinguished traveller, an accomplished linguist, and an intelligent impresario? The ways of Providence are truly mysterious! What a place to bury such a shining light! Why dump him down so, in this untrodden valley?"

"Oh, it's not by any means such a singular case as you suppose," Will answered, looking up from the knapsack he was engaged in unpacking – "above all, in the Zillerthal. I've never been here before myself, but I've always been told in other parts of the Tyrol that the Zillerthalers, men and girls, are every one of them born musicians. And as for our landlord here, the Tyrolese *wirth* is always a man of light and leading in his own society. He opposes the priest, and heads the liberal party. All the popular leaders in the war of independence in the Tyrol were monks or innkeepers. Andreas Hofer, himself, you know, had an inn of his own in the Passer valley."

"Ah, to be sure," Florian ejaculated, in an acquiescent tone of a peculiar calibre, which showed his friend at once he hadn't the remotest idea who Andreas Hofer was, or why one should be expected to know anything about him. Now, want of knowledge on such a point is, of course, most natural and pardonable in a stranger; but there was no sufficient reason, Will Deverill thought, for Florian's pretence at its possession where he really knew nothing. That, however, was poor Florian's foible. He couldn't bear to have it thought he was ignorant of anything, from mathematics or music to esoteric Buddhism. If a native of Siberia had addressed him casually in the Ostiak dialect of the Tungusian language, Florian would have nodded and smiled a non-committing assent, as though Ostiak had always been his mother-tongue, and he had drunk in Tungusian at his nurse's bosom.

"You know who Andreas Hofer was, of course?" Deverill went on, persistently. He was a devil of a fellow for not letting you off when he caught you out in an innocent little piece of social pretension, was Deverill.

Florian, thus hard pressed, found himself compelled to do what he hated most in the world – confess his ignorance. "I remember the gentleman's respected name, of course!" he said, dubiously, with a sickly smile and a little forced pleasantry; "but his precise claims to distinction, as *Men of the Time* puts it in its cheerful circular, entirely escape my memory for the moment."

"He was the leader of the spontaneous Tyrolese peasant movement, you know, for the expulsion of the French and their Bavarian allies in 1808 or thereabouts," Will went on, still unpacking. "Napoleon caught him at last, and had him shot at Mantua. You'll see his tomb when you go to Innsbruck, and lots of other mementos of him all over the country everywhere. He pervades the place. He's the national hero, in fact – the martyr of independence – a sort of later and more historical William Wallace."

"Dear me, yes; how stupid of me!" Florian cried, clapping his hand to his head in a sudden burst of pretended recollection. "It comes back to me now, of course. Good old Andreas Hofer! How could I ever forget him? The Tyrolese William Tell! The Hampden of the Alps! The undaunted Caractacus of these snow-clad mountains!"

Deverill pulled off his coat. "If I were you," he said, drily, "instead of rhapsodising here, I'd go into my own room, have a jolly good wash, and get ready for dinner. We must have walked about twenty-two miles since we got out at Jenbach, and this bracing air gives one a positively Gargantuan appetite."

Florian roused himself with a yawn, for though vigorous enough for his size, he was a lazy creature, and when once he sat down it was with difficulty he could be prevailed upon to put himself in motion again. Ten minutes later they were seated at the white-covered table in the tidy little salon, doing the fullest justice to the delicious broiled trout, the foaming amber ale, the fresh laid eggs, and the excellent home-made bread, provided, according to promise, by Herr Andreas Hausberger.

CHAPTER III
WITHIN SIGHT OF A HEROINE

Next morning early, aroused by the cloister bell, Will Deverill rose, and looked out of his window. Oh, such an exquisite day! In that clear, crisp air the summits of the Floitenspitze, the Löffler, and the Turnerkamp glistened like diamonds in the full morning sunlight. 'Twas a sight to rejoice his poetic soul. For Will Deverill, though too modest to give himself airs, like Florian, was a poet by birth, and a journalist by trade. Nature had designed him for an immortal bard; circumstances had turned him into an occasional leader-writer. He stood there entranced for many minutes together. He had pushed the leaded window open wide when he first rose, and the keen mountain air blew in at it most refreshingly. All, all was beautiful. He looked out on the fresh green pastures, the deep glen below, the white stream in its midst, the still whiter tops of the virgin mountains beyond it. A stanza for his new poem rose spontaneous in his mind as he leaned his arms on the low sill and gazed out upon the great glaciers:

"I found it not where solemn Alps and grey
Draw crimson glories from the new-born day,
  Nor where huge sombre pines loom overhanging
Niagara's rainbow spray."

He was just feeling in his pocket for a pencil to jot down the rough draft of these few lines, when of a sudden, at the window in the next room at the side, what should he see but Florian's pale face peeping forth most piteously.

"What's the matter? Haven't you slept?" Will inquired of his disconsolate friend with a sympathetic nod.

The epicurean philosopher shook a sad, slow head with a painfully cheerful air of stoical resignation. "Not a wink since three o'clock," he answered, gloomily. "Those dreadful creatures have bothered me without ceasing."

"Surely," Will began, somewhat surprised, "not – "

Florian shook his head wearily. "No, no; not *them*," he murmured with melancholy emphasis. "I don't mind about *them*. They, at least, are silent, and, besides, if you like, you can get up and catch them. Bells, bells! my dear fellow; bells, bells, all the morning. They've been tinkling in my ear every blessed minute since the clock struck three. It's unendurable, horrible."

"Oh, the cow-bells!" Will answered, laughing. "Why, for my part, I like them. They're a feature of the place; they sound so countrified. I hardly hear them at all, or if I hear them, they come to me drowsily through the haze of my dreams like the murmur of water or a nurse's lullaby. I find them, to tell you the truth, positively soothing. Besides," he added, mischievously, with a malicious little smile, "in such a village as this, who cares where he sleeps, or whether he sleeps at all? He should be able to subsist here on scenery and the affections."

At the words, Florian's head disappeared incontinently. That, surely, was the unkindest cut of all. Thus convicted out of his own mouth, by his familiar friend, he could but retire abashed to complete his toilet. That Deverill should have slept all night long, while he lay awake, and tossed, and turned, and wished ill to the whole ill-omened race of cows, was bad enough in all conscience; but that he should pretend he *liked* those disgusting bells was nothing short of atrocious.

He descended a little later to the homely parlour. Will was down there before him, and had succeeded in ferreting out an old violin from a corner cupboard. He was musical, was Will – not, to be sure, in the grand perceptive and critical way, like Florian himself, who played no instrument and

understood all perfectly, but, after the inferior fashion of the mere dexterous executant, who possesses a certain physical suppleness and deftness of fingers to elicit from dumb strings the most delicate fancies of a Mendelssohn or a Chopin. In pursuance of this lesser gift of his – "the common faculty of the fiddler," as Florian called it – Will was just then engaged by the open window in playing over to himself a pretty little song by some unknown composer. He played it very well, too, Florian admitted, condescendingly; Will had a capital ear, indeed, and was not without feeling of a sort, for the finer touches in musical composition – up to a certain point, you know; not quite, of course, to the high and delicate level of Florian's own cultivated and refined perceptions. It was a charming piece, however – a very charming piece – and, after a while, Will began singing the words to it. Florian listened with pleasure and a forgiving smile to the clever twists and turns of that well-arranged melody.

As he stood there, listening, a little behind, one impressive forefinger held up in an attitude of discriminative attention, he was aware of two voices in the street outside catching up the tune naturally, and fitting it as if in sport to shapeless syllables of their own invention. They were women's voices, too, young and rich and powerful; and what was odder still, to Florian's immense surprise, they took up their proper parts as second and third in a concerted piece, like trained musicians. Strange to find such finished vocalists in a mere peasant hamlet! – but, there, no doubt they were some of Herr Hausberger's Transatlantic performers. Florian moved closer to the window to observe the unknown but silvery-tongued strangers. As he did so, two plump and rosy-cheeked mountain lasses, in homespun kirtles, fled, blushing and giggling, with their hands to their mouths, away from the close scrutiny of the foreign Herrschaft. Accustomed as he was by this time to marvellous incongruities in this land of surprises, Florian could hardly believe his own eyes when he further observed that the two girls with the divine voices were driving cows home from the pasture to the milking shed. Great heavens, yes! there was no gainsaying it. Shade of Wagner, incredible! The accomplished vocalists whose fine sense of melody so delighted his acute and critical ear were nothing but a pair of common country milkmaids!

Will Deverill, too, had risen, and, with a friendly nod, was gazing out appreciation at his unknown accompanists. Florian turned to him, all amazement. "They *must* have practised it before," he cried. "They must know it all of old. It must certainly be one of their own national pieces."

"Oh, no," the poet replied in a very confident voice. "They can't possibly have heard it. It's quite, quite new. I'm sure about that. It's never yet been published."

"But, my dear fellow," Florian exclaimed, with much argumentative heat, "I assure you, none but the most instructed musicians could possibly take up the right chords like that, and sing them second and third, without having practised them beforehand. Allow me to know *something* of the musical art. Even Patti herself – "

"Why, the song's my own," Will broke in, much amused, and unable to restrain himself. "I ought to know; it was I who wrote it."

"The words! ah, yes, to be sure; the words are nothing. They didn't sing *them*, of course; 'twas the melody they caught at. And the melody, I venture to assert, without fear of contradiction – the melody, from the peculiar way it modulates into the sub-dominant, must certainly be one of their own love songs."

"But I composed the tune too," Will made answer with a quiet smile. "It's never been played before. It came up into my head in the railway carriage yesterday, and seeing this old fiddle in the cupboard this morning, I thought I'd try it over before scoring it down, just to hear how it sounded."

"*You* wrote it!" Florian repeated, dazzled and stunned at the news. "You compose as well as rhyme! You set your own songs to music, do you? Well, upon my soul, Deverill, I hadn't till this moment the slightest idea you had such an accomplishment."

"Oh, I'm only a beginner," Will answered, with a faint blush, laying down the violin, – "or rather an amateur, for I've always dabbled in it. But I've only published one song. I just strum to

amuse myself. Good morning, Herr Hausberger; what an exquisite day! We'd better take advantage of it for a climb up the Rauhenkopf."

The landlord, dish in hand, bowed his courteous and courtly bow. There was deference in it, without a tinge of servility. Florian noted with approbation that mixture of independence and a just self-respect which formed a component part of his preconceived idea of the Tyrolese character. Andreas Hausberger was "right," because he was very much as Florian would have pictured him. "Yes; a very good day for the ascent," the landlord said, quietly. "We will put up some lunch – cold meat and Pilsener. You'll get a fine view, if you start in good time, over the Zementhal glaciers."

Florian sat down to the table, a trifle crestfallen; but the poached eggs were excellent, and the coffee fragrant; and he consoled himself for the cow-bells and the mishap about the song by the reflection that, after all, these idyllic milkmaids, with the voice of a prima donna and the manners of Arcadia, were in exact accordance with the operatic ideal of his own imagined Tyrol. They sang like the Chorus of Happy Peasants; they behaved as the mountain lass of poetry ought always to behave, and as the mountain lass of reality often utterly fails to do.

That morning on the Rauhenkopf was to Florian a day of unmixed delights. He was At Home with Nature. In a vague sort of way, without troubling himself much to know anything about them, the town-bred philosopher loved the fragrant fields, the beautiful flowers, the mossy rocks, the bright birds, the chirping insects. And Will Deverill knew them all – their names, and where to find them. The ragged, sweet-scented pinks still loitered late in deep clefts of the glacier-worn rock; a few stray sky-blue gentians still starred the rich patches of Alpine pasture; emperors and orange-tips still flaunted their gaudy wings in full autumn sunshine. Florian drank in all these things with pure sensuous delight; the sweet sounds of the fields, the smell of tedded kine filled his æsthetic soul, not so much with direct pleasure, as with some faint afterglow of literary reminiscence.

At one of the little alp-huts among the higher pastures, Will Deverill murmured a cheerful "Guten Morgen," as he passed, to a buxom peasant lass in a woollen kirtle, who stood busy at her churn by the door of her châlet. The girl curtseyed, and looked back at them with such a good-humoured smile that Florian, as an admirer of female beauty, couldn't resist the temptation of standing still for a moment to take a good long gaze at her. "What's she doing up here alone?" he asked at last, turning curiously to Will, as the girl still smiled at him. "Does she come up here every day? It's a fearful long pull for her. But then – this charming air! such strength! such agility!"

"Why, she lives here," Will answered, surprised that anyone shouldn't know what to him was such an obvious and familiar fact. "She doesn't come up at all, except once in the spring; and in autumn she goes down again. It must be nearly time for her to go down now, I should say. There's not much fodder left in these upper alps here."

"Lives here!" Florian exclaimed, taken aback. "What? – and sleeps here as well? You don't mean to say she sleeps in that little wooden box there?"

"Certainly. She's a *sennerin*, you know; it's her business to do it. All the alp girls live like that; they've been born and brought up to it."

In his innermost soul, Florian was dying to know what manner of wild beast a *sennerin* might be – being undecided in his own mind as to whether it was most probably the name of a race, a religion, a caste, or a profession. But it would have been treason to his principles to confess this fact, so he compromised with his curiosity by murmuring blandly in reply, "Oh, ay, to be sure, a *sennerin*! I might have guessed it! Do you think now, Deverill, if we asked her very nicely, she'd let us go in and inspect her châlet?"

"I'm sure she would," Will answered, half repressing a smile. "They see so little of any outsiders while they're up here on their alps that they're only too glad, as a rule, when a stranger visits them. We'll give her a couple of kreuzers for a glass of milk; that'll serve as an introduction."

He raised his hat jauntily, and approached the hut with a few words of apology. The *sennerin* smiled in return, bobbed, curtseying low, and welcomed them affably to her hospitable shelter. After

a minute's parley with Will, the good-humoured young woman brought out a jug of fresh milk, still frothy from the cow, and poured it out for them liberally in a blue stoneware mug. Will drank his off at a draught; Florian hated milk, but as admirer of female beauty – she was a good-looking wench – he gulped it down to the dregs without even a grimace, and handed the mug back again. Then Deverill talked for a while with their sunburnt entertainer in that unknown tongue which Florian didn't understand; though he could see from their laughing faces and their quick tones of repartee that she was a merry brown lass, shy and bashful indeed before the foreign gentlefolk, but frank and fearless for all that as his soul could wish, and absolutely free from the absurd conventionalities and *mauvaise honte* of the women who dwell in our too civilised cities. She was no more afraid of men than of oxen. Florian liked that well. Here, at least, was true freedom; here, at least, was ancestral simplicity of life; here the woman held her own on equal terms with the man; here love was unfettered by law or by gold, untrammelled by those hampering inconvenient restraints of parental supervision, society, or priestcraft, which impede its true course in our too complex communities. Florian's lungs breathed freer in this rarified air: he had risen above the zone of Mrs Grundy.

At the end of their brisk colloquy, which he followed but in part, the *sennerin*, with a gesture of countrified courtesy, turned to the door with a pretty smile and waved Florian into her châlet. "She says you may look over it and welcome," Will Deverill explained, interrupting. Florian, nothing daunted, entered and gazed around. It was a rough log hut, divided into two rooms by a wooden partition – a big one, with a door behind, for the cows and calves; and a little one, with a door in front, for the *sennerin's* own bedchamber, kitchen, and parlour. The chief article of furniture seemed to him to consist of a great black cauldron, suspended from a crane over the open fireplace, and used – so Will assured him – as the principal utensil in the manufacture of cheese. The fire itself blazed in a hole, dug roughly in the floor of native turf; the edge of this hole, cut out into a rude seat, did duty as sofa, couch, chair, and chimney-corner. Florian sniffed somewhat dubiously. "And she sleeps here all alone?" he said, with a suppressed shudder. This was Arcadian simplicity, he felt, with quite too much of the bloom off.

"Yes; she sleeps here all alone," Will answered, undisturbed. "Comes up in May, when the snow first melts, and goes down in October, when it begins to lie thick again."

The *sennerin*, laughing aloud, confirmed his report with many nods and shrugs, and much good-humoured merriment. It amused her to see the stranger's half-incredulous astonishment.

"And aren't you frightened?" Florian asked, Will interpreting the question for him.

The *sennerin* laughed the bare idea to scorn. "Why should I be?" she exclaimed, brimming over with smiles of naïve surprise at such a grotesque notion. "There are plenty more girls in all the other huts on the alps round about. This hut's Andreas Hausberger's, and so are that and that. He owns all these pastures; we come up and herd cows for him."

"Isn't it terribly lonely, though?" Florian inquired with open eyes, reflecting silently to himself that after all there were advantages – of a sort – in Bond Street.

"Lonely!" the *sennerin* cried, in her own country dialect. "We've no time to be lonely. We have to mind the cows, don't you see, worthy well-born Herr, and give milk to the calves, and make cheese and butter, and clean our pots and pans, and do everything ourselves for our food and washing. I can tell you we're tired enough when the day's well over, and we can creep into our loft, and fall asleep on the straw there."

"And she has no Society?" Florian exclaimed, all aghast at the thought. For to him the companionship of his brother man, and perhaps even more of his sister woman, was a necessary of existence.

The girl's eye brightened with an unwonted fire as Will explained the remark to her. "Ah, yes," she said half-saucily, with a very coquettish toss of her pretty black head; "when Saturday night comes round then sure enough our mountain lads climb up from the valley below to visit us. We have Sunday

to ourselves – and them – till Monday morning; for you know the song says – ” and she trilled it out archly in clear, quick notes —

> “With my pouch unhung,
> And my rifle slung,
> And away to my black-eyed alp-girl!”

She sang it expressively, in a rich full voice, far sweeter than could have been expected from so stalwart a maiden. Florian saw an opportunity for bringing out one stray phrase from his slender stock of German. “Das ist schön,” he cried, clapping his hands; “sehr schön! So schön!” Then he relapsed into his mother-tongue. “And you sing it admirably!”

Their evident appreciation touched the alp-girl’s vanity. Like most of her class she had no false modesty. She broke out at once spontaneously into another native song, with a wild free lilt, which exactly suited both her voice and character. It was excellently rendered; even Florian, that stern critic, admitted as much; and as soon as she ended both men clapped their hands in sincere applause of her unpremeditated performance. The *sennerin* looked down modestly when Will praised her singing. “Ah, you should just hear Linnet!” she cried, in unaffected self-depreciation.

“And who’s Linnet?” Will asked, smiling at the girl’s perfect frankness.

“Oh, she’s one of Herr Hausberger’s cow-girls,” the *sennerin* answered, with a little shake of her saucy head. “But you needn’t ask *her*; she’s a great deal too shy; she won’t give you a chance; she never sings before strangers.”

“That’s a pity,” Will replied, lightly, not much thinking what he said; “for if she sings better than you, worthy friend, she must be well worth hearing.”

The *sennerin* looked down again. Her ruddy cheek glowed ruddier. Such praise from such lips discomposed her serenity. Will glanced at his watch. “We must be going, Florian,” he said. “Half-past twelve already! I’ve no coppers in my pocket. Have you anything you can offer this lady gay for her agreeable entertainment?”

Florian pulled out his purse, and took from it gingerly a well-worn twenty-kreuzer piece – one of those flimsy silvered shams which the Austrian Government in its paternal stinginess imposes as money upon its faithful lieges. The *sennerin* accepted it with a profusion of thanks, and smothered the generous donor’s hand with unstinted kisses. So much happiness may a man diffuse in this world of woe with a fourpenny bit, bestowed in due season! But Florian mistook that customary symbol of thanks on the alp-girl’s part for an expression of her most heart-felt personal consideration; and not to be outdone when it came to idyllic courtship, he lifted her hand in return to his own gracious lips and kissed it gallantly. Will raised his hat and smiled, without commenting on this misconception, and with a cheery “Auf wiedersehen!” they went on their way rejoicing once more up the slopes of the mountain.

CHAPTER IV
ENTER LINNET

Lunch on the summit was delicious that day, and the view was glorious. But when they returned in the evening to the inn at St Valentin – that was the name of their village – and described to Andreas Hausberger how an alp-girl had sung for them in a mountain hut, the *wirth* listened to the description with a deprecatory smile, and then said with a little shrug: "Ah, that was Philippina; she can't do very much. Her high notes are too shrill. You should just hear Linnet!"

"Is Linnet such a songstress then?" Florian cried, with that dubious smile of his.

The *wirth* looked grave. "She can *sing*," he said, pointedly. His dignity was hurt by the young man's half-sceptical, half-bantering tone. And your Tyroler is above all things conservative of his dignity.

These repeated commendations of this unknown Linnet, however, with her quaintly pretty un-German-sounding name, piqued the two Englishmen's curiosity in no small degree as to her personality and powers, so that when the *wirth* next morning announced after breakfast, with a self-satisfied smile, "Linnet's coming down to-day," Florian and Will looked across at each other with one accord, and exclaimed in unison, "Ah, now then, we shall see her!"

And, sure enough, about five o'clock that afternoon, as the strangers were returning from a long stroll on the wooded heights that overhang the village, they came unexpectedly, at a turn of the mountain footpath, where two roads ran together, upon a quaint and picturesque Arcadian procession. A long string of patient cows, in the cream-coloured coats of all Tyrolese cattle, wound their way with cautious steps down the cobble-paved zig-zags. A tinkling bell hung by a leather belt from the neck of each; garlands of wild flowers festooned their horns; a group of peasant children assisted at the rude pageant. In front walked a boy, with a wreath slung across his right shoulder like a sash, leading the foremost cow most unceremoniously by the horns; the rear was brought up by a pretty sunburnt girl, with a bunch of soft pasque-flowers stuck daintily in her brown hair, and a nosegay of bluebells peeping coquettishly out of her full round bosom. Though vigorous-looking in figure, and bronzed in face by the sun and the open air, she was of finer mould and more delicate fibre, Will saw at a glance, than most of the common peasant women in that workaday valley. Her features were full but regular; her mouth, though large and very rich in the lips (as is often the case with singers), was yet rosy and attractive; her eyes were full of fire, after the true Tyrolese fashion; her rounded throat, just then trembling with song, had a waxy softness of outline in its curves and quivers that betrayed in a moment a deep musical nature. For she was singing as she went, to the jingling accompaniment of some thirty cow-bells; and not even the sweet distraction of that rustic discord could hide from Will Deverill's quick, appreciative ear the fact that he stood here face to face with a vocalist of rare natural gifts, and some homespun training.

He paused, behind the wall, as the procession wound round a long double bend, and listened, all ears, to a verse or two of her simple but exquisite music.

"This *must* be Linnet!" he cried at last, turning abruptly to Florian.

And the boy at the head of the procession, now opposite him by the bend, catching at the general drift of the words with real Tyrolese quickness, called out with a loud laugh to the singer just above: "Sagt er, das musz ja Linnet seyn!" and then exploded with merriment at the bare idea that the Herrschaft should have heard the name and fame of his companion.

As for the girl herself, surprised and taken aback at this sudden interruption, she stood still and hesitated. For a moment she paused, leaning hard on the long stick with which she guided and admonished her vagrant cows; then she looked up and drew a long breath, looked down and blushed, looked up once more and smiled, looked down and blushed again. They had overtaken her unawares

where the paths ran together; but as each was enclosed with a high wall of granite boulders, overgrown with brambles, she had no chance of perceiving them till they were close upon her. She broke off her song at once, and stood crimson-faced beside them.

"Ah, sing again!" Florian cried, folding two dainty palms in a rapture on his breast, and putting his delicate head on one side in a transport of enchantment "Why, Deverill, how she sings! what a linnet, indeed! and how pretty she is, too! For the first time in my life, I really regret I can't speak German!"

The singer, looking up, all tremulous to have overheard this unfeigned homage, made answer, to Florian's equal delight and surprise, "I can speak a little English."

It would be more correct, perhaps, to put it that what she actually said, was: "Ei kann schpiek a liddle Ennglisch"; but Florian, in his joy that any means of inter-communication existed between them at all, paid small heed at the time to these slight Teutonic defects in her delivery of our language.

"You can speak English!" he exclaimed, overjoyed, for it would have been a real calamity to him to find a pretty girl in the place, with a beautiful voice, and he unable to converse in any known tongue with her. "How delightful! How charming! How quite too unexpected! I'm so glad to know that! For had it been otherwise, I should really have had to learn German to talk with you!"

This overstrained compliment, though it rose quite naturally to Florian's practised lips, and was far more genuine than a great deal of his talk, made the girl blush and stammer with extreme embarrassment. She was unaccustomed, indeed, to such lavish praise, above all from the gentlefolk. Was the *gnädige Herr* making fun of her, she wondered? She grew hot and uncomfortable. Fortunately for her self-possession, however, Will Deverill intervened with a more practical remark. "You speak English, do you?" he repeated. "That's odd, in these parts. One would hardly have thought that! How did you come to learn it?"

"My father was a guide," the girl answered, slowly, making a pause at each word, and picking her way with difficulty through the insidious pit-falls of British pronunciation. (She called it *fahder*.) "He taked plenty Ennglish gentlemen up the mountains before time. I learn so well from him, as also from many of the Ennglish gentlemen. Then, too, I take lesson from Herr Hausberger in winters, and from Ennglish young lady at the farm by Martinsbrunn."

Florian gazed at his companion with an agonised look of mingled alarm and horror. "Do you know who she means?" he cried, seizing Will's arm. "This is too, too terrible! The girl on the hillside who sticks out her tongue! that horrible little Cockney! She'll teach this innocent child to say 'naow,' and 'lidy'! At last I feel I have a mission in life. We must save her from this fate! We must instruct her ourselves in pure educated English!"

"And how do you come to be called Linnet?" Will inquired with some interest, a new light breaking in upon him. "That's surely an English name. Who was it first called you so?"

"An Ennglish gentleman when I was all quite small," the girl replied, with much difficulty, searching her phrases with studious care. "He stop at my father's hut on our alp many nights – I know not how man says it – so must he go up the mountains. I sing to him often when he come down at evening. My right name is called in German, Lina; but the gentleman, says he, that I sing like a bird. A linnet, that is in Ennglish a singing-bird. Therefore, Linnet he call me. The name please my father much, who make a great deal of me; so from that time in forwards, all folk in the village call me also Linnet."

Will broke out into German. "They're quite right," he said, politely, though with less ecstasy than Florian; "for you do indeed sing like a real song-bird. I'm so sorry we interrupted you; pray go on with your song again."

But Linnet hung her head. "No, no," she answered, hastily, in her own native tongue, glad to find he spoke German. "I didn't know I was overheard. If I'd been singing for such as you, I'd not have chosen a little country song like that. And besides" – she broke off suddenly, with a coy wave of her brown hand, "I can't sing before strangers the same as I can before my own people." And she tapped

the hindmost heifer with her rod as she spoke, to set the line in motion; for the cows, after their kind, had taken advantage of the pause to put down their heads to the ground, and browse placidly at the green weeds that bordered the wayside.

At one touch of her wand the bells tinkled once more; the long string got under way; the children by the side recommenced their loud shouts of rustic merry-making. For the return of the cows from the alp is a little festival in the villages; it ends the long summer's work on the mountain side, and brings back the unmarried girls from their upland exile to their homes in the valley. Linnet drove her herd now, however, more soberly and staidly. The free merriment of Arcadia had faded out of the ceremony. One touch of civilisation had dispelled the dream. She knew she was observed; she knew the two strangers were waiting to hear if she would trill forth her wild song again, for they followed close at her heels, talking rapidly among themselves in their own language – so rapidly, indeed, that Linnet could hardly snatch here and there by the way a single word of their earnest conversation. Once or twice she looked back at them, half-timidly, half-provokingly.

"Sing again!" Florian cried, clasping his hands in entreaty.

But the wayward alp-girl only laughed her coy refusal.

"No, no," she said in her patois, with a little shake of her beautiful head; "that must not be so. I sing no more now. I must drive home my cows. They are tired from the mountains."

"But, I say," Florian cried at last, bursting in upon his mountain nymph with this very colloquial and unpoetic adjuration; "look here, you know, Fräulein Linnet, you say you learn English from our landlord, Herr Hausberger. Now, what does he want to teach you for?"

Linnet turned round to him with a naïve air of unaffected surprise. "Why, when he teach me Ennglish songs," she said, "I will know what mean the words. Also, I have remembered a little – a very little – since the Ennglish gentleman teach me at my father's. Besides, too, shall I not need it when I go to Enngland?"

"Go to England!" Florian repeated, all amazed at the frank remark. She seemed to take it for granted they must know all her plans. "When you go to England! Oh, he means to take you there, then! You're one of his troupe, I suppose; or you're going to be one."

"I am not gone away yet," Linnet answered, not a little abashed to find herself the centre of so much unwonted interest; "but I go next time; I will sing with his band. All summers, I stop on the mountain and milk; with the winter, come I down to the house to practise."

"But you don't mean to say," Will put in, in German (it was easier so for Linnet to answer him), "he lets a singer like you live out by herself in a châlet on the hills with the cows all summer?"

Linnet held up her hands, palm outward, with a pretty little gesture of polite deprecation. Her movements were always naturally graceful. "Why not?" she said, brightly, in German, with no little suppressed merriment at his astonished face. "That's Andreas Hausberger's plan; he believes in that way; he calls it his system. He says we Zillerthalers owe our beautiful voices – for they tell us we can sing a great deal better than the people in any other valley about – to our open-air life on the very high mountains. The air there is thin, and it suits our throats, he says." She clasped her hand to her own as she spoke, that beautiful, well-developed, clear-toned organ, with a natural gesture of unconscious reverence. "It develops them – that's his word; he believes there's nothing like it. *Entwickelung; entwickelung!* I get more good, he thinks, for my voice in the summer on the alp than I get from all my lessons in the winter in the valley. For the throat itself comes first – that's what Andreas holds – and afterwards the teaching. Not for worlds would he let me miss my summer life on the mountains."

"And how long has he been training you?" Will inquired with real interest. This was so strange a page of life thus laid open before him.

"Oh, for years and years, *gnädige Herr*," Linnet answered, shyly, for so much open attention on the young man's part made her awkwardly self-conscious. "Ever since my father died, he has always been teaching me."

"Has your father been dead long?" Will inquired.

Linnet crossed herself devoutly. "He was killed eight years ago on the 20th of August last," she said, looking up as she spoke towards the forest-clad mountains. "May Our Dear Lady and all holy saints deliver his honoured soul from the fires of purgatory!"

"But your mother's alive still, I suppose, Fräulein," Florian put in with a killing smile; he had been straining his ears, and was delighted to have caught the general drift of the conversation.

"Yes; thanks to the Blessed Virgin, my mother live still," Linnet answered in English. "And I keep her comfortable, as for a widow woman, from that which Andreas Hausberger pay me for the summer, as also for the singing. But for what, mein Herr, do you make to call me Fräulein? Do you wish to mock at me? I am only an alp-girl, and I am call just Linnet."

She flushed as she spoke, and turned hastily to Will. "Tell him," she said in German, with an impatient little toss of one hand towards Florian, "that it isn't pretty of him to make fun of poor peasant girls like that. Why does he call me such names? He knows very well I am no real Fräulein."

Florian raised his hat at once in his dimpled small hand, with that courtly bow and smile so much admired in Bond Street. "Pardon me," he said, with more truth and feeling than was usual with him; "you have a superb voice; with a gift like that, you are a Fräulein indeed. It extorts our homage. Heaven only knows to what height it may some day lead you."

CHAPTER V
THE WIRTH'S THEORY

In the evening, while they dined, the landlord came in to see how they fared, and wish them good appetite: 'tis the custom with distinguished guests in the Tyrol. The moment he entered, Florian, all agog, attacked him at once on the subject of their wonderful find that afternoon on the hillside. "Well, Herr Hausberger," he cried in his high-flown way, "we've seen and heard your Linnet – heard her warbling her native wood-notes wild, to the tune of her own cow-bells on her lonely mountains. Now, what do you mean, sir, by turning out a divine singer like that – I'm a musical critic myself, and I know what I'm talking about – what do you mean by turning her out to make butter and cheese in a solitary hut on an Alpine pasture? It's sheer desecration, I tell you – sheer wicked desecration; there's nothing, almost, that girl couldn't do with her voice. She's a genius – a prodigy; she ought to be clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day on champagne and turtle. And *you*, sir – you send her up to herd cows all alone, in an inclement clime, on a barren hill-top!"

Andreas Hausberger gazed at him with a self-contained smile that was extremely characteristic. He bowed a sarcastic bow which Florian misinterpreted for polite subservience. "Are *you* running this show or am I?" he asked, after a fresh pause, with a quaint reminiscence of his Western experience.

"*You* are, undoubtedly," Florian answered, taken aback at this unexpected assault. "But you ought to run it, all the same, on rational and humane and intelligent principles. You owe this girl's voice, as a delight and a treasure, to US, the enlightened and critical connoisseurs of two eager continents. Nature produced it that *we* might enjoy it. It was intended to give us some of those exquisite moments of artistic pleasure which are the sole excuse creative caprice can plead for the manifold defects of the Universe."

Andreas Hausberger looked down at him with a half-pitying curl on those stern thin lips of his. Florian had attacked him lightly where his position was strongest. "That's all right," he said, slowly, with a chilly drawl – 'twas his favourite expression. "And do you think then," he went on, bursting forth almost scornfully, in spite of his outward deference, "we Zillerthalers get our fine singing voices and our musical ears by pure chance and accident? Not so, you may be sure of it. It's no mere coincidence that our men and women can almost without exception sing like birds from their childhood upwards by the light of Nature. What gives them this power? Why, they live their lives long, in summer especially, in the thin clear atmosphere of our higher mountains. There isn't much sour-stuff in it – what do you call it in English? – oh, oxygen, don't you? Wal, there isn't much oxygen in that thin upper air – rarefied, I think you say – and therefore they're obliged to fill their lungs well and expand their chests" – he swelled himself out as he spoke, and showed off his own splendid girth to the fullest advantage – "and that gives them large reservoirs and rich, pure-toned voices."

"I never thought of that before," Will Deverill interposed, much struck by the landlord's plausible reasoning. "I suppose that's why mountain races, like the Welsh and the Tyrolese, are so often musical. The rarefied air must tend to strengthen and develop the larynx."

"No; you never thought of that before," Andreas Hausberger echoed. "You haven't had to think of it. And you haven't had to select and train a choir of our Tyrolese peasants. But I have thought of it for years, and satisfied myself it's true. Is it for nothing, do you suppose, that on our cold mountain tops the vocal chords, as they say, are braced up and tightened? Is it for nothing that in that clear, pure, limpid air the very nerves of the ear, strained hard to catch quickly at distant sounds, are exercised and educated? Do you think, if I wanted to pick out voices for a musical troupe, I would go for them to Holland, or to Lombardy, or to Hamburg? No, no; I would go right away to the *gründe* there, the upper forks of the Zillerthal, in the crystal air just below the glaciers, and pick out my best singers from the cow-boys and the alp-girls."

He spoke of what he knew and had long reflected upon. Acquaintance with his subject supplied in part the unimportant deficiencies of his English vocabulary; and, besides, he had said the same things before a dozen times over, to other English travellers.

"Perhaps you may be right," Florian responded, blandly, as the *wirth* paused for breath in his eager harangue. It was a way of Florian's to be bland when he saw he was getting the worst of an argument.

"Right!" Andreas Hausberger repeated. "Never mind about that! You'd know I was right if only you'd seen as much of these people as I have. Look here, Mr Wood, you say it's desecration to send a girl like Linnet after butter and cheese in a sennerin's hut on the lonely mountains. You say I owe her voice as a treasure to humanity. Wal, I acknowledge the debt, and I try to discharge it to the best of my ability. I send her to the hills – the free open hills – where she will breathe fresh air, develop her throat and lungs, eat wholesome food, grow strong and brown and hearty. If I clothed her in purple and fine linen, as you wish, and fed her every day on champagne and turtle, do you really imagine I'd be doing her a good turn? I'd be ruining her voice for her. In the summer, she gains breath and good health on the grassy mountains; in the winter, she gets training and advice and assistance from Lindner and myself, and whatever other teachers we can find in the Zillerthal."

"I surrender at discretion," Florian answered, with a yawn, rising up and flinging his small person lazily on the home-made sofa. "I admit your contention. You interest me strangely. Your peasants and your country girls have finely developed ears and capital voices. No doubt you're correct in attributing these splendid gifts to the clearness of the atmosphere and the wild life of the mountains. I'm a musical critic in London myself, and I know what a voice is the moment I hear it. Indeed, after all, what does it matter in the end if these divine creatures spend a joyless life for years in sordid and squalid surroundings, provided only, when they burst forth at last in the full effulgence of their musical prime, they afford *us*, who can appreciate them, and for whose sake they exist, one vivid thrill of pure artistic enjoyment?" And he stroked his own smooth and girlish cheek with one plump hand, lovingly.

"You're a musical critic, are you?" Andreas Hausberger repeated, with marked interest, disregarding the last few words of Florian's flowing rhapsody. "Then you shall hear Linnet sing. You can say after that whether I'm right in my system or not." He opened the door hastily. "Linnet, Linnet," he called out in the Tyrolese dialect, "come in here at once. I want the Herrschaft to hear you singing."

For a minute after he spoke, there was a flutter and a rustling at the door outside; somebody seemed to be pushing some unwilling person bit by bit along the passage. A murmur of whispered voices in the local dialect floated faintly to Will's ears. "You must!" "But I can't." "You shall!" "I won't." "He says you are to." "Ah, no; I'm ashamed! Not before those gentlemen!"

In the end, as it seemed, the first voice had its way. The door opened brusquely, and Linnet, all trembling, her face in her hands, and crimson with shame, was pushed bodily forward by unseen arms into the strangers' presence. For a moment she stood there like a frightened child. Will's cheek burned hot with sympathetic tingling. Florian leaned back philosophically as he lay, and regarded this pretty picture of beauty in distress with observant complacency. She was charming, so, to be sure! That red flush became her.

"Sing to the gentlemen," Andreas Hausberger said, calmly, in a tone of command. "Take your hands from your face at once; don't behave like a baby."

He spoke in German, but Florian followed him all the same. 'Twas delicious to watch this pretty little comedy of rustic ingenuousness.

"Oh, I can't!" Linnet cried, all abashed, removing her hands for a second from her burning cheeks, and clasping them hard on her throbbing breast for one fiery moment before she clapped them up hastily again. "To bid one like this! It's so hard! It's so dreadful!"

"Don't ask her just now," Will Deverill put in pleadingly. "One can see she has such a natural shrinking and disinclination at first. Some other night, perhaps. When we've been here a little longer, she may be less afraid of us."

Linnet let her hand drop once more, and gave him a grateful glance, sidling away towards the door like a timid child in her misery. But Andreas Hausberger, for his part, was not so to be put off. "No, no," he said, sternly, fixing his eye with a determined gaze on the poor shrinking girl; "she must sing if I tell her to. That's all right. This shyness is absurd. How can she ever appear on a platform, I should like to know, before a couple of hundred people, if she won't sing here when she's told before just you two Englishmen? Do as I bid you, Linnet! No nonsense, my girl! Stand here by the table, and give us 'The Bride of Hinter-Dux.' "

Thus authoritatively commanded, poor Linnet took her stand where Andreas Hausberger motioned her, steadied herself with one trembling little fist on the edge of the table, raised her eyes to the ceiling away from the two young men, and, drawing a deep breath, with her throat held out and her mouth opened tremulously, began to trill forth, in her rich, silvery voice, a deep bell-like song of her own native mountain. For the first minute or two she was nervous, and quivered and paused unduly; after awhile, however, inborn artistic instinct overcame her nervousness: she let her eyes drop and rest in a flash once or twice on Will Deverill's. They were kindly eyes, Will's; they reassured and encouraged her. "Bravo!" they seemed to say; "you're rendering it admirably." Emboldened by his friendly glance, she took heart and went through with it. Towards the end, her courage and self-possession returned, for, like all Tyrolese, she was brave and self-reliant in her inmost soul, though shy at first sight, and bashful on the surface. The two last stanzas she sang to perfection. As she finished, Will looked up and said simply, "Thank you; that was beautiful, beautiful." But Florian clapped his hands in obtrusive applause. "Well done!" he cried; "well done! you have given us such a treat. We can forgive Herr Hausberger now for insisting on a performance."

"And you must accustom yourself to an audience," the *wirth* said in German, with that same quiet air of iron resolution Will had already marked in him. "If ever you're to face a whole roomful of people, you must be able first to come in upon the platform without all this silly fuss and hang-back nonsense."

Linnet's nostrils quivered. She steadied herself with her hand on the table once more, and made answer boldly, "I think I could more easily face a roomful of people I'd never seen than sing before two in the parlour of the inn here; that seems less personal. But," she added shyly, with half an appealing glance towards Will, "I'm not so nervous now. If this gentleman wishes, I – I would sing another song to him?"

And so she did – a second and a third. As she went on, she grew braver, and sang each time more naturally. At last the *wirth* dismissed her. Linnet curtsied, and disappeared. "Well, what do you say to her now?" the landlord asked in a tone of triumph, turning round to the young men as the door closed behind her.

Florian assumed his most studiously judicial air. The perfect critic should, above all things, be critical. Before Linnet's face, indeed, he had been enthusiastic enough, as politeness and due respect for her sex demanded; but behind her back, and in her teacher's presence, regard for his reputation compelled him to adopt the severest tone of incorruptible impartiality. "I think," he said slowly, fingering his chin in one hand, and speaking with great deliberation, like a recognised authority, "with time and training she ought to serve your purpose well for popular entertainments. Her organ, though undeveloped, is not wholly without some natural power and compass."

"And *I* think," Will Deverill added, with a glow of generous enthusiasm, "you've lighted on one of the very finest voices in all Europe."

CHAPTER VI
THE ROBBLER

A day or two passed, and the young men from time to time saw, by glimpses and snatches, a good deal of Linnet. For now the summer season on the hills was over, and the cows had come back to their stall-fed existence, the musical alp-girl had leisure on her hands for household duties. In the morning she helped in the general work of the inn; in the afternoon she practised much in the parlour upstairs with Andreas Hausberger and his little company. But in the evenings, – ah, then, the landlord brought her in more than once, by special request, to sing her native songs to Will Deverill's accompaniment on the lame old fiddle from the corner cupboard. Those were pleasant meetings enough. Gradually the mountain lass grew less afraid of the strangers; she talked German more freely with Will Deverill now, and considerably enlarged her English vocabulary by listening to Florian's richly-worded harangues on men, women, and things, and the musical glasses. It surprised Florian not a little, however, to see that this child of Nature, unlike the ladies of culture in London drawing-rooms, positively preferred Will's society to his own, if such a fact seems credible; though he explained away in part this unaccountable defect of taste and instinct in one female heart by the reflection that, after all, Will was able to converse with her in her own language. His own finer points she could hardly understand; his words were too deep, his thoughts were too high for her. Still, it annoyed him that even an unsophisticated alp-girl should display so singular and so marked a predilection for any other man when *he* was present. Indeed, he half made up his mind, irksome as he felt sure the task would prove, to learn German at once, as a safeguard against so humiliating a *contretemps* in future.

In the early part of the next week, Will proposed one day they should mount the hills behind St Valentin, in search of a rare fern he was anxious to secure before the snows of winter. Andreas Hausberger, nodding his head, had heard of it before. It was a well-known rarity; all botanists who came to the Zillerthal, he said, were sure to go in search of it. "But I'm not a botanist," Will burst out deprecatingly, for to admit that fell impeachment is to number yourself outright in the dismal roll of scientific Dryasdusts; "I only want the plants because I love them."

"That's all right," Andreas answered, in his accustomed phrase. "You want the plant, anyway. That's the chief thing, ain't it? Wal, there's only one place anywhere about St Valentin that it ever grows, and that's the Tuxerloch; without somebody to guide you there you'd never find it."

"Oh, I won't have a guide," Will responded, hastily. "I hate to be guided. It's too ignominious. If I can't find my own way about low mountains like these, in the forest region, I'd prefer to lose it; and I certainly won't pay a man to show me where the fern is."

"Certainly not," the *wirth* answered, with true Tyrolese thrift. "I didn't mean that. Why waste your money on one of the regular guides, who charge you five florins for eating half your lunch for you? But Linnet knows the way as well as any trained guide of them. It's not a hard road; she'll go along with you and show you it."

"Oh, dear no," Will replied, with a little hurried embarrassment, for he felt it would be awkward to be thrown all day into the society of a young girl in so equivocal a position. "I'm sure we can find the way all right ourselves. There are woodcutters on the hills we can ask about the path; and if it comes to that, I really don't mind whether I find it or not – it's only by way of goal for a day's expedition."

Andreas Hausberger, however, was an imperious soul. "Linnet shall go," he said, shortly, without making more words about it. "She has nothing else to do. It's bad for her to be cooped up in the house too much. A long walk on the hills will be no end of good for her. That's what I always say; when young women come down from the mountains in winter, they do themselves harm by changing their mode of life all at once too suddenly, and living in close rooms without half the exercise they used to take on the alp with their milking and churning."

So, whether they would or not, the two young men were compelled in the end to put up as best they might with Linnet's guidance and company. No great hardship either, Will thought to himself, as Linnet, bare-headed, but in her Sunday best, led the way up the green slopes behind the village inn, with the bounding gait of a holiday alp-girl. As to Florian, his soul was in the seventh heavens. To see that Oread's light foot trip gracefully over the lawns was to him pure joy – a stray breath of Hellas. What Hellas was like, to be sure – the arid Hellas of reality – with its dusty dry hills and its basking rocks, Florian had not in his own soul the very faintest conception. But still, the Hellenic ideal was none the less near and dear to him. From stray scraps of Theocritus and his inner consciousness he had constructed for himself an Arcadia of quite Alpine greenness, and had peopled it with lithe maidens of uncircumscribed affections. So, whenever he wanted to give anything in heaven or earth the highest praise in his power, he observed with an innocent smile that it was utterly Hellenic.

Linnet led them on, talking unaffectedly as she went, by long ridge-like spurs, up vague trails through the woods, and over spongy pastures. As elsewhere on their walks, Florian noted here and there little whitewashed shrines at every turn of the road, and endless rude crucifixes where ghastly white limbs seemed to writhe and struggle in realistic torture. Of a sudden, by one of these, Linnet dropped on her knees – all at once without a word of warning; she dropped as if mechanically, her lips moving meanwhile in muttered prayer. Florian gazed at her curiously; Will stood by expectant, in a reverent and mutely sympathetic attitude. For some minutes the girl knelt there, murmuring low to herself. As she rose from her knees, she turned gravely to Will. "Here my father has died," she said, with solemn slowness in her broken English. "He has slipped from that rock. The fall has killed him. Will you say, for his soul's repose, before you go, a *Vaterunser*?"

She looked up at him pleadingly, as if she thought the prayers of so great a gentleman must carry weight of their own in Our Lady's councils. With infinite gentleness, Will bowed his head in acquiescence, and, after a moment's hesitation, not to hurt her feelings, dropped on his knees himself and bent his neck in silent prayer before the tawdry little oratory. It was one of those rough shrines, painted by unskilled fingers, where naked souls in rude flames of purgatory plead for aid with clasped hands and outstretched arms to placidly unheeding blue-robed Madonnas. Underneath, an inscription, with N's turned the wrong way, and capitals mixed with smaller letters, informed the passer-by that, "Here, on the 20th of August 188-, the virtuous guide and experienced woodcutter, Josef Telser of St Valentin, perished by a fall from a slippery rock during a dangerous thunderstorm. The pious wanderer is hereby implored to say three Paternosters, of his charitable good-will, to redeem a tortured soul from the fires of purgatory."

Will knelt there for a minute or two, muttering the Paternosters out of pure consideration for Linnet's sensitive feelings. When he rose from his knees again, he saw the girl herself had moved off a little way to pick a few bright ragworts and Michaelmas daisies that still lingered on these bare heights, for a bouquet to lay before the shrine of Our Lady. Like all her countrywomen, she was profoundly religious – or, if you choose to put it so, profoundly superstitious. ('Tis the point of view alone that makes all the difference.) Florian, a little apart, with his hand on his cheek and his head on one side, eyed the oratory sentimentally. "How sweet it is," he said, after a pause, with an expansive smile, "to see this poor child, with her childlike faith, thus throwing herself on her knees in filial submission before her father's cenotaph! How delightful is the sentiment that prompts such respect for the memory of the dead! How eloquent must be the words of her simple colophon!" Florian was fond of colophons; he didn't know what they were, but he always thought them so very Hellenic!

Will's face was graver. With one finger he pointed to the uncompromising flames of that most material purgatory. "I'm afraid," he said, seriously, "to her, poor child, this act of worship envisages itself in a very different fashion. She prays to hasten the escape of her father's soul from what she takes to be a place of very genuine torture."

Florian looked closer. As yet, he had never observed the subsidiary episode of the spirits in their throes of fiery torment, which forms a component part of all these wayside oratories. He inspected

the rude design with distant philosophical interest. “This is quaint,” he said, “most quaint. I admire its art immensely. The point about it all that particularly appeals to me is the charming superiority of Our Lady’s calm soul to the essentially modern vice of pity. There she sits on her throne, unswerved and unswerving, not even deigning to contemplate with that marked squint in her eye the extremely unpleasant and uncomfortable position of her petitioners beneath her. I admire it very much. I find it quite Etruscan.”

“To you and me – yes, quaint – nothing more than that,” Will responded, soberly; “but to Linnet, it’s all real – fire, flames, and torments; she believes what she sees there.”

As he spoke, the girl came back, with her nosegay in her hand, and, tying it round with a thread from a little roll in her pocket, laid it reverently on the shrine with a very low obeisance. “You see,” she said to Will, speaking in English once more, for Andreas Hausberger wished her to take advantage of this unusual opportunity for acquiring the language, “my poor father is killed in the middle of his sins; he falls from the rock and is taken up dead; there is no priest close by; he has not confessed; he has not had absolution; he has no viaticum; no oil to anoint him. That makes it that he must go straight down to purgatory.” And she clasped her hands as she spoke in very genuine sympathy.

“Then all these shrines,” Florian said, looking up a little surprised, “are they all of them where somebody has been killed by accident?”

“The most of them,” Linnet answered, as who should say *of course*; “so many of our people are that way killed, you see; it is thunderstorms, or snow-slides, or trees that fall, or floods on rivers, things that I cannot say, for I know not the names how to speak them in English. And, as no priest is by, so shall they go to purgatory. For that, we make shrines to release them from their torments.”

They had gone on their way by this time, and reached a corner of the path where it turned abruptly in zig-zags round a great rocky precipice. Just as they drew abreast of it, and were passing the corner, a young man came suddenly on them from the opposite direction. He was a fiery young man, dressed in the native Tyrolese costume of real life; his hand held a rifle; his conical hat was gaily decked behind, like most of his countrymen’s, with a blackcock’s feather. The stranger’s mien was bold – nay, saucy and defiant. He looked every inch a typical Alpine jäger. As he confronted them he paused, and glared for a moment at Linnet. Next instant he raised his hat with half-sarcastic politeness; then, in a very rapid voice, he said something to their companion in a *patois* so pronounced that Will Deverill himself, familiar as he was with land and people, could make nothing out of it. But Linnet, unabashed, answered him back once or twice in the same uncouth dialect. Their colloquy grew warm. The stranger seemed angry; he waved his hand toward the Englishmen, and appeared, as Will judged, to be asking their pretty guide what she did in such company. As for Linnet, her answers were evidently of the sort which turneth away wrath, though on this hot-headed young man they were ineffectually bestowed. He stamped his foot once or twice; then he turned to Will Deverill.

“Who sent you out with the *sennerin*?” he asked, haughtily, in good German.

Will answered him back with calm but cold politeness. “Herr Hausberger, our *wirth*,” he said, “asked the Fräulein to accompany us, as she knew the place where a certain fern I wished to find on the hills was growing.”

“I know where it grows myself,” the *jäger* replied, with a defiant air. “Let her go back to the inn; it is far for her to walk. I can show you the way to it.”

“Certainly *not*,” Will retorted, in most decided tones. “The Fräulein has been good enough to accompany us thus far; I can’t allow her now to go back alone to the village.”

“She’s used to it,” the man said, gruffly, with half a sneer, his fingers twitching.

“That may be,” Will retorted, with quiet self-possession; “but *I’m* not used to allowing her to do so.”

For a minute the stranger put one sturdy foot forward, held his head haughtily, with his hat on one side, and half lifted his fist, as if inclined to rush forthwith upon the offending Englishman, and settle the question between them then and there by open violence. But Linnet, biting her lip

and knitting her brow in suspense, rushed in to separate them. “Take care what you do,” she cried hurriedly in English to Will. “Don’t let him strike. Stand away of him. He’s a Robbler!”

“A *what*?” Will replied, half smiling at her eagerness, for he was not at all alarmed himself by her truculent fellow-countryman.

“A Robbler,” Linnet repeated, looking up at him pleadingly. “You know not what that is? Then will I tell you quickly. The feather in his hat, it is turned the wrong way. When a Tyrolese does so, he wills thereby to say he will make himself a Robbler. Therefore, if any one speaks angry to him, it is known he will strike back. It is – I cannot say what it means in English, but it invites to fight; it is the sign of a challenge.”

“Well, Robbler or no Robbler, I’m not afraid of him,” Will answered, with quiet determination; “and if he *will* fight, why, of course, he must take what he gets for it.”

“Perhaps,” Linnet said, simply, gazing back at him, much surprised, “in your own country you are also a Robbler.”

The *naïveté* of her remark made Will laugh in spite of himself. That laugh saved bloodshed. The Tyrolese, on his part, seeing the absurdity of the situation all at once, broke into a smile himself; and, with that unlucky smile, his sole claim to Robblerhood vanished incontinently. Linnet saw her advantage. In a moment, she had poured into the young man’s ear a perfect flood of explanatory eloquence in their native dialect. Gradually the Robbler’s defiant attitude relaxed; his face grew calmer; he accepted her account. Then he turned to Will with a more mollified manner: “You may go on,” he said, graciously, with a regal nod of his head; “I allow the *sennerin* to continue her way with you.”

As for Will, he felt half inclined, at first, to resent the lordly air of the Robbler’s concession. On second thoughts, however, for Linnet’s sake, in his ignorance of who the young man might be, and the nature of his claim upon her, he judged it better to avoid any quarrel of any sort with a native of the valley. So he raised his hat courteously, and let the stranger depart, with a very bad grace, along the road to the village.

“What did you tell him?” he asked of Linnet, as the Robbler went his way, singing defiantly to himself, down the grassy zig-zag.

“Oh, I told him,” Linnet answered, with a little flush of excitement, “Andreas Hausberger had sent me that you might teach me English.”

“Is he your brother?” Will asked, not that he thought that likely, but because it was less pointed than if he had asked her outright, “Is this young man your lover?”

Linnet shook her head. “Ah, no,” she answered, with a very decided air; “he’s nothing at all to me – not even my friend. I do not so much as care for him. He’s only Franz Lindner. But then, he was jealous because he see that I walk with you. He has no right of that; I am not anything to him; yet still he must be jealous if somebody speak to me. It is because he is a Robbler, and must do like that. A Robbler shall always fight if any man shall walk or talk with his maiden. Though I am *not* his maiden, but he would have me to be it. So will he fight with anyone who shall walk or talk with me. But when I tell him Andreas Hausberger send me that I may learn English, then he go away quietly. For Franz Lindner, or any other Robbler, will not fight with a stranger so well as with a Tyroler.”

CHAPTER VII
WAGER OF BATTLE

That evening at the *Wirthshaus*, as things turned out, Will and Florian had an excellent opportunity afforded them of observing for themselves the manners and customs of the Tyrolese Robbler. There was a dance at the inn – a prodigious dance, of truly national severity. It was the eve of a wedding, and, as is usual on such occasions, the peasants of the neighbourhood had assembled in full force to drink good luck to the forthcoming union. The *Gaststube* or bar-room was crowded with a gay throng of bright and merry faces. The young men were there, jaunty, bold, and defiant; the old men, austere and stern of feature from the hardships of long life among the grim-faced mountains. Groups of black-eyed lasses stood about the room and bandied repartee with their gaily-dressed admirers; matrons, unspoilt by conventional restraint, instead of checking their mirth, looked on smiling and abetting them. Through the midst, the Herr Vicar strolled, stout and complaisant, an easy-going man; not his to stem the tide of their innocent merriment; so long as they confessed twelve times a year, and subscribed to release their parents' souls from purgatory, he sanctified by his presence the beer and the dances. Andreas Hausberger, too, flitted here and there through the crowd with an anxious eye; 'twas his task to provide for and protect the bodies of his guests, as 'twas the Herr Vicar's to save their priceless souls from undue temptation.

At one end of the room, on a little raised platform, the music sat installed; – a trombone, a zither, and a wooden hackbrettle made up the whole orchestra. Scarcely had the performers struck up an enlivening tune when the men, selecting as partners the girls of their choice, began to dance round the hall in the very peculiar and (to say the whole truth) extremely ungraceful Tyrolean fashion. Will and Florian had heard from the landlord beforehand of the expected feast, to which they were not invited; but, "at the sound of the harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music," as Florian phrased it, their curiosity was so deeply aroused that they crept from their sitting-room and peeped cautiously in at the door of the *Tanzboden*. The sight that met their eyes in that close-packed hall was sufficiently striking. Even Florian allowed this was utterly Arcadian. For a minute or two, just at first, the young men and maidens, grasping each other wildly round the neck and waist with both their arms, in a sort of bear-like death-hug, whirled and eddied in a maze round and round the room, stamping their heavy boots, till Will almost trembled for the stability of the rafters. For some time that was all: they twisted and twirled in closely-coupled pairs, clasped breast to breast, like so many dancing dervishes. But, of a sudden, at a change of the music, as if by magic, with one accord, the whole figure altered. Each man, letting his partner go, began suddenly to perform a series of strange antics and evolutions around her, the relics of some pre-historic dance, of which the snapping of fingers and uttering of *heuchs* in a Highland fling are but a faint and colourless reminiscence. As the reel went on, the music grew gradually faster and faster, and the motions of the men still more savage and fantastic. The two Englishmen looked on in astonishment and admiration. Such agility and such verve they had never before seen or even dreamt of. Could these rustic cavaliers be really made of india-rubber? They twisted and turned and contorted themselves all the time with such obliviousness of their bones, and such extraordinary energy! They smacked their lips and tongues as they went; they jumped high into the air; they bent back till their heads touched the ground behind; they bounded upright once more to regain their position like elastic puppets, and, in between whiles, they slapped their resounding thighs with their horny hands; they crowed like cocks; they whistled like capercailzie; they stamped on the ground with their hob-nailed shoes; they shouted and sang, and clicked their tongues in their cheeks, and made unearthly noises deep down in their throats for which language has as yet no articulate equivalent. Florian gazed and glowered. And well he might; 'twas an orgie of strange sound, a phantasmagoria of whirling and eddying motion.

While all this was going on, the two young Englishmen stood undecided and observant by the lintel of the door, even Florian half-abashed at so much unwonted merriment. But after a while, the Herr Vicar, whose acquaintance they had already made among the stones of the churchyard, spied them out by the entrance, and, with one hospitable fat forefinger extended and crooked, beckoned them into the *Tanzboden*. "Come on," he cried, "come on; there's room enough for all; our people are still glad to entertain the Herr strangers: for some, unawares, have thus entertained angels."

So encouraged by the authorised mouthpiece of the parish, Will and Florian stepped boldly into the crowded room, and watched the little groups of stalwart young men and nut-brown lasses with all the interest of unexpected novelty. The scene was indeed a picturesque and curious one. Every Tyrolese is, or has been, or wishes to be thought, a mountain hunter. So each man wore his hat, adorned with the trophies of his prowess in the chase; with some, 'twas a *gamsbart*, or so-called chamois' beard – the tuft of coarse hair that grows high like a crest along the creature's back in the pairing season; with others, 'twas the tail-feathers of the glossy blackcock, stuck saucily on one side, with that perky air of self-satisfied assurance so characteristic of hot youth in the true-born Tyroler. Glancing around the room, however, Will saw at a single look that two young men alone among that eager crowd wore their feathers with a difference – the "hook" being turned round in the opposite direction from all their neighbours'. One of these two was a tall and big-built young man of very florid complexion, with a scar on his forehead; the other was their fiery friend of that morning on the hills, Franz Lindner. From what Linnet had said, Will guessed at once by the turn of the feather that both young men went in for being considered Robblers.

As he turned to impart his conjecture to Florian, Linnet caught his eye mutely from a corner by the mantelpiece. She wasn't taking part in the reel herself, so, undaunted by his experience of Franz Lindner that day, Will strolled over to her side, followed close at heel by Florian. "You don't dance?" he said, bending over her with as marked politeness as he would have shown to a lady in a London drawing-room.

"No; I may not," Linnet answered, in her pretty broken English, with a smile of not unnatural womanly pleasure that the strangers should thus single her out before all her folk for so much personal attention. "I have refuse Franz Lindner, so may I not dance this time with any one. It is our custom so. When a girl shall refuse to dance with a man first, she may not that turn accept any other. Nor may he, in turn, ask her again that evening."

"How delightful!" Florian cried, effusively. "Franz Lindner's loss is our gain, Fräulein Linnet. No; don't frown at me like that; it *must* be Fräulein; I've too much respect for you to call you otherwise. But, anyhow, we'll sit out this dance and talk with you."

"And I," Will put in with a quiet smile, "I'll call you Linnet, because you prefer it."

"Thank you," Linnet said, shyly, with a grateful flash of her eyes, and a side glance towards Franz Lindner; "it seems less as if you mock at me."

As they spoke, the figure changed of a sudden once more to a still stranger movement. The women, falling apart, massed themselves together in a central group, in attitudes expressive of studied indifference and inattention to the men; their partners, on the contrary, placing themselves full in front of them, began a series of most extraordinary twists and twirls, accompanied by loud cries or snapping of fingers, and endeavoured by every means in the power, both of lungs and limbs, to compel their disdainful coquettes to take notice of their antics. While they stood there and watched – Linnet with eyes askance on Franz Lindner's face – Andreas Hausberger strolled up, and took his place beside them.

"Why, that's the blackcock's call!" Will exclaimed, with a start of recognition, as the dancers, with one accord, uttered all in a chorus a shrill and piercing note of challenge and defiance. "I've heard it on the mountains."

"Yes," the *wirth* assented; "that's the blackcock's call, and this, that they're doing, is the blackcock's love-dance. In the springtime, on the mountains, you know, the blackcocks and the grey

hens assemble in their dancing place – their *Tanzboden* we call it, just the same as we call this one. There, the hens stand aside, and pretend to be coy, and take no notice of their mates, like the girls in this dance here; while the blackcock caper in front of them, and flap their wings, and fluff their necks, and do all they know to display their strength and beauty. Whoever dances the most and best, gets most of the hens to join his harem. So our young men have got up this love-dance to imitate them; they flap their arms the same way, and give the blackcock's challenge. Nature's pretty much the same above and below, I guess – especially here in the Tyrol, where we haven't yet learned to hide our feelings under smooth silk hats as you do in England. But it's all good for trade, and that's the great thing. It makes them thirsty. You'll see, after this bout, the beer will flow like water."

And, sure enough, the *wirth* was right. As soon as the dance was ended, young men and maidens, with equal zest, betook themselves, all alike, to the consolations of the beer-jug. Their thirst was mighty. And no wonder, indeed, for this Tyrolese dancing is no drawing-room game, but hard muscular exercise. Andreas Hausberger looked on with a cynical smile on those thin, cold lips of his. "It's good for trade," he murmured again, half to himself, once or twice, as the girls at the bar filled the beer-mugs merrily; "very good for trade. So are all amusements. That's the way the foolish get rid of their money – and the wise get hold of it."

After the beer came a pause, a long, deep-drawn pause; and then two young men, standing out from the throng, began to sing alternately at one another in short Tyrolese stanzas. One of them was Franz Lindner; the other was the young man with the scar on his forehead, whom Linnet described as her cousin Fridolin. What they sang, neither Florian nor Will could make out, for the words of the song were in the roughest form of the mountain dialect; but it was clear from their manner, and the way they flung out their words point blank at one another's heads, that they improvised as they went, like Virgilian shepherds, and that their remarks were by no means either polite or complimentary in substance or character. The rest stood round in a circle and listened, laughing heartily at times as each in turn scored a point now and then off his angry rival; while Linnet and the other girls blushed again and again at some audacious retort, though the bolder among the women only tittered to themselves or looked up with arch glances at each risky allusion. Andreas Hausberger too, stood by, all alert to keep the peace; it was plain from the quick light in his resolute eye, and the rapid upward movement of his twitching hand, he was ready at a moment's notice to intervene between the combatants, and put a stop in the nick of time to the scoffing contest of defiance and derision.

The song, however, passed off without serious breach of the peace. Then more dances followed, more beer, and more bucolic contests. As the evening wore on, the fun grew fast and furious. On the stroke of twelve, the Herr Vicar withdrew – not one hour too early; his flock were fast getting beyond control of his counsels. Linnet and a few others of the more modest-looking girls now sat out from the dance; the rest continued to whirl round and round the room in still wilder and more fantastic movements than ever. Andreas Hausberger was now yet more clearly on the alert. A stray spark would raise a flame in that magazine of gunpowder. Suddenly, at the end of the first dance after the priest's departure, the young man with the scar on his forehead, called Cousin Fridolin, came forward unexpectedly to where Linnet sat aside between Will Deverill and Florian. He had danced with her once before in the course of the evening, and Will observed that through that dance Franz Lindner's eyes had never been taken off his rival and Linnet. But now the tall young man came forward with a dash, and without one word of warning, placed his conical hat, blackcock's feather and all, with a jodel of challenge, on Linnet's forehead. They had seen the same thing done before more than once that evening, and Linnet had explained to them that the custom was equivalent to a declaration of love for the lady so honoured – 'twas as much as to say, "This girl is mine; who disputes it?" But as the tall young man stood back with a smile of triumph on his handsome lips, one hand on his hip, staring fixedly at Linnet, Franz Lindner sprang forth with a face as black as night, and a brow like thunder. Trembling with rage, he seized the hat from her head, and tore hastily from its band the offending plume. "Was kost die Feder?" he cried, in a tone of angry contempt, holding it

up in his hand before the eyes of its owner; “Was kost die Feder?” which is, being interpreted, “How much for your feather?”

Quick as lightning, the answer rang out, “Fünf Finger und ein Griff” – “Five fingers and a grip.” It is the customary challenge of the Tyrolese Robbler, and the customary acceptance.

Before Will had time to understand what was happening next, in the crack of a finger, in the twinkle of an eye, the two young men had closed, with hands and arms and bodies, and were grappling with each other in a deadly struggle. All night long they had been watching and provoking one another; all night long they had vied in their attentions to Linnet, and their studious interchange of mutual insults. Sooner or later a fight seemed inevitable. Now, flown with insolence and beer, and heated from the dance, they flung themselves together, with one accord, like two tigers in their fury. Linnet clapped her hands to her ears, and shut her eyes in horror. For a minute or two, it seemed to every looker-on as though there would be bloodshed in the inn that evening. Florian observed this little episode with philosophic interest; ’twas pleasant to watch these simple dramas of the primary emotions – love, jealousy, passion – still working themselves out as on the stage of Hellas. He had never before seen them so untrammelled in their play; he stood here face to face with Homeric simplicity.

In five minutes, however, to his keen disappointment, the whole scene was finished. Andreas Hausberger, that cool, calm man of the world, perceiving at a glance that such contests in his inn were very bad for trade, and that ’twould be a pity for him to lose by a violent death so good a singer, or so constant a customer, interposed his heavy hand between the angry combatants. Your half-tipsy man, be he even a Tyrolese, though often quarrelsome, is usually placable. A short explanation soon set everything right again. Constrained by Herr Andreas, with his imperious will, the two Robblers consented, after terms interchanged, to drown their differences in more mugs of beer, and then retire for the evening. The young man with the scar, whom they called Cousin Fridolin, regretted that he had interfered with Franz Lindner’s maiden, but excused his act as a mere hasty excess of cousinly feeling. Franz Lindner in return, not to be outdone in magnanimity, though still with flashing eyes, and keen side-glance at Linnet, regretted that he had offered such indignity in his haste to the dishonoured symbol of his comrade’s championship. Hands were shaken all round; cuts and bruises were tended; and, almost as soon as said, to Florian’s infinite disgust, the whole party had settled down by the tables once more, on an amicable basis, to beer and conversation.

But before they retired from that evening’s revel, Linnet murmured to Will in a tone of remonstrance very real and aggrieved, “Franz Lindner had no right to call me his *Mädchen*.”

CHAPTER VIII
THE HUMAN HEART

Next morning Will woke of himself very early. He jumped out of bed at once, and crossed, as he stood, to the open window. The sun had just risen. Light wisps of white cloud crawled slowly up the mountains; the dewdrops on the grass-blades sparkled in the silent rays like innumerable opals. 'Twas the very time for an early stroll! But the air, though keen, had the rawness and chill of an autumn morning. Will sniffed at it dubiously. He had half a mind to turn in again and take an hour's more sleep. Should he dress and go out, or let the world have time to get warmed and aired before venturing abroad in it?

As he debated and shivered, however, a sight met his eye which determined him at once on the more heroic course of action. It was Linnet, in her simple little peasant dress, turning up the hill-path that led behind the *wirthshaus*. Now, a chance of seeing Linnet alone without Florian was not to be despised; she interested him so much, and, besides, he wanted to ask her the whole truth about the Robblers. Without more ado, therefore, he dressed himself hastily, and strolled out of the inn. She hadn't gone far, he felt sure; he would find her close by, sitting by herself on the open grass-slope beyond the belt of pinewood.

And so, sure enough, he did. He came upon her unseen. She was seated with her back to him on a round boulder of grey stone, pouring her full throat in spontaneous music. For a minute or two, Will stood still, and listened and looked at her. He could see from his point of vantage, a little on one side behind the boulder, the rise and fall of her swelling bosom, the delicate trills under her rich brown chin. And then – oh, what melody! Will drank it in greedily. He was loth to disturb her, so delicious was this outpouring of her soul in song. For, like her namesake of the woods, Linnet sang best when she sang of her own accord, delivering her full heart of pure internal impulse.

At last she ceased, and turned. Her eye fell upon Will She started and blushed; she had expected no such audience. The young man raised his hat. "You're alone," he said, "Linnet?"

The girl looked up all crimson. "Yes; I came out that I should be alone," she answered, shyly, "I did not wish to see anyone. I wished for time to think many things over."

"Then you don't want me to stop?" Will broke in, somewhat crestfallen, yet drawing a step nearer.

"Oh, no; I do not mean that," Linnet answered in haste, laying her hand on her bosom. Then she burst into German, which came so much easier to her. "I wanted to get away from all the others," she said, looking up at him pleadingly – and, as she looked, Will saw for the first time that big tears stood brimming in her lustrous eyes; "I knew they would tease me about – about what happened last evening, and I didn't wish to hear it till I had thought over with myself what way I should answer them."

"Then you're not afraid of *me*?" Will asked, with a little thrill. She was only an alp-girl, but she sang like a goddess; and it's always pleasant, you know, to find a woman trusts one.

"I want you to stop," Linnet answered, simply.

She motioned him with one hand to a seat on a little heap of dry stones hard by. Will threw himself down on the heap in instant obedience to her mute command, and leaned eagerly forward. "Well, so this Robbler man wants to have you, Linnet," he said, with some earnestness; "and you don't want to have him. And he would have fought for you last night, against the man with the scar; and the girls in the inn will tease you about it this morning."

"Yes; the girls will tease me," Linnet answered, "and will say cruel things, for some of them are not fond of me, because, you see, Franz Lindner and the other man, my cousin Fridolin, are both of them Robblers, and would both of them fight for me. Now, a village that has a Robbler is always very proud of him; he's its champion and head; and if a Robbler pays attention to a girl, it's a very

great honour. So some of the other girls don't like it at all, that the Robblers of two villages should quarrel about *me*. Though Gott in Himmel knows I've not encouraged either of them."

"And would you marry Franz Lindner?" Will asked, with genuine interest. It seemed to him a pity – nay, almost a desecration – that this beautiful girl, with her splendid voice, and all the possibilities it might enclose for the future, should throw herself away upon a Tyrolese hunter, whom the self-confidence engendered by mere muscular strength had turned for local eyes into a petty hero.

"No; I don't think I would *marry* him," Linnet answered, after a short pause, with a deliberative air, as though weighing well in her own mind all the pros and cons of it. "He'd take me if I chose, no doubt, and so also would Fridolin. Franz says he has left three other girls for me. But I don't like him, of course, any better for that. He ought to have kept to them."

"And you like him?" Will went on, drawing circles with his stick on the grass as he spoke, and glancing timidly askance at her.

"Yes; I like him – well enough," Linnet responded, doubtfully. "I liked him better once, perhaps. But of late, I care less for him. I never cared for him much indeed; I was never his *Mädchen*. He had no right to say that, no right at all, at all – for with us, you know, in Tyrol, that means a great deal. How much, I couldn't tell you. But I never gave him any cause at all to say so."

"And of late you like him less?" Will inquired, pressing her hard with this awkward question. Yet he spoke sympathetically. He had no reason for what he said, to be sure – no reason on earth. He spoke at random, out of that pure instinctive impulse which leads every man in a pretty girl's presence, mean he little or much, to make at least the best of every passing advantage. 'Tis pure virility that: the natural Adam within us. I wouldn't give ten cents for the too virtuous man who by "ethical culture" has educated it out of him.

Linnet looked down at her shoes – for she possessed those luxuries. "Yes; of late I like him less," she answered, somewhat tremulously.

"Why so?" Will insisted. His lips, too, quivered.

Linnet raised her dark eyes and met his for one instant. "I've seen other people since; perhaps I like other people better," she answered, candidly.

"What other people?" Will asked, all on fire.

"Oh, that would be telling," Linnet answered, with an arch look. "Perhaps my cousin Fridolin – or perhaps the young man with the yellow beard – or perhaps the gnädige Herr's honoured friend, Herr Florian."

Will drew figures with his stick on the grass for a minute or two. Then he looked up and spoke again. "But, in any case," he said, "you don't mean, whatever comes, to marry Franz Lindner?" It grieved him to think she should so throw herself away upon a village bully.

Linnet plucked a yellow ragwort and pulled out the ray-florets one by one as she answered, "I shan't have the chance. For, to tell you the truth, I think Andreas Hausberger means himself to marry me."

At the words, simply spoken, Will drew back, all aghast. The very notion revolted him. As yet, he was not the least little bit in his own soul aware he was in love with Linnet. He only knew he admired her voice very much; for the rest, she was but a simple, beautiful, unlettered peasant girl. It doesn't occur, of course, to an English gentleman in Will Deverill's position, to fall in love at first sight with a Tyrolese milkmaid. But Andreas Hausberger! the bare idea distressed him. The man was so cold, so cynical, so austere, so unlovable! and Will more than half-suspected him of avaricious money-grubbing. The girl was so beautiful, so simple-hearted, so young, and Heaven only knew to what point of success that voice might lead her. "Oh no," he burst out, impetuously; "you can't really mean that? – you never could dream – don't tell me you could – of accepting that man Andreas Hausberger as a husband!"

"Why not?" the girl said, calmly. "He's rich and well to do. I could keep my mother in such comfort then, and pay for such masses for my father's soul – far more than if I took Franz Lindner or

my cousin Fridolin, who are only *jägers*. Andreas Hausberger's a *wirth*, the richest man in St Valentin; he has horses and cows and lands and pastures. And if he says I must, how can I well refuse him?"

She looked up at him with a look of childlike appeal. In a moment, though with an effort, Will realised to himself how the question looked to her. Andreas Hausberger was her master, and had always been her master. She must do as he bid, for he was very masterful. He was her teacher, too, and would help her to make her fortune as a singer in the world, if ever she made it. He was rich, as the folk of the village counted riches, and could manage that things should be pleasant or unpleasant for her, as it suited his fancy. In a community where men still fought with bodily arms for their brides, Andreas Hausberger's will might well seem law to his *sennerin* in any such matter.

"Besides," Linnet went on, plucking another ragwort, and similarly demolishing it, "if I didn't want to take him, the Herr Vicar would make me. For the Herr Vicar would do, of course, as Andreas Hausberger wished him. And how could I dare disobey the Herr Vicar's orders?"

To this subtle question of religion and morals Will Deverill, for his part, had no ready-made answer. Church and State, it was clear, were arrayed against him. So, after casting about for a while in his own mind in vain for a reply, he contented himself at last with going off obliquely on a collateral issue. "And you think," he said, "Andreas Hausberger really wants to marry you?"

"Well, he never quite *told* me so," Linnet replied, half-deprecatingly, as who fears to arrogate to herself too great an honour, "and perhaps I'm wrong; but still I *think* he means it. And I think it'll perhaps depend in part upon how he finds the foreign Herrschaft like my singing. For that, he says little to me about it at present. But if he sees I do well, and am worth making his wife – for he's the best husband a girl could get in St Valentin – in that case, ja wohl, I believe he'll ask me."

She said it all naturally, as so much matter of course. But Will's poetic soul rebelled against the sacrifice. "Surely," he cried, "you must love some one else; and why not, then, take the man you love, whoever he may be, and leave Andreas Hausberger's money to perish with him?"

"So!" Linnet said quickly – the pretty German "so!" Her fingers trembled as she twitched at the rays of the ragwort. She plucked the florets in haste, and flung them away one by one. First love's conversation deals largely in pauses. "The man one might love," she murmured at last with a petulant air, "doesn't always love one. How should he, indeed? It is not in nature. For, doesn't the song say, 'Who loves me, love I not; whom I love, loves me not?' But what would the Herr Vicar say if he heard me talking like this with the foreign gentlefolk? He'd tell me it was sin. A girl should not speak of her heart to strangers. I have spoken too much. But I couldn't help it, somehow. The *gnädige Herr* is always so kind to me. You lead me on to confess. You can understand these things, I think, so much better than the others."

She rose, half-hesitating. Will Deverill, for his part, rose in turn and faced her. For a second each paused; they looked shyly at one another. Will thought her a charming girl – for a common milkmaid. Linnet thought him a kind, good friend – for one of the great unapproachable foreign Herrschaft. Will held out one frank hand. Linnet gave him the tips of her brown fingers timidly. He clasped them in his own while a man might count ten. "Shall you be here.. to-morrow.. about the same time?" he inquired, before he let them drop, half hesitating.

"Perhaps," Linnet answered, looking down demurely. Then blushing, she nodded at him, half curtsied, and sprang away. She gave a rapid glance to right and left, to see if she was perceived, darted lightly down the hill, and hurried back to the *wirthshaus*.

But all that day long, Will was moody and silent. He thought much to himself of this strange idea that Andreas Hausberger, that saturnine man, was to marry this beautiful musical alp-girl.

CHAPTER IX
THE MAN OF THE WORLD

For some four or five mornings after this hillside interview, Florian noticed every day a most unaccountable fancy on Will Deverill's part for solitary walks at early dawn before breakfast. Neither dew nor hoar-frost seemed to damp his ardour. Florian rose betimes himself, to be sure, but Will had always already distanced him. And on every one of those five mornings, when Will said farewell to Linnet by the big grey boulder, he used the same familiar formula of leave-taking, "You'll be here again to-morrow?" And every time, Linnet, thrilling and trembling inwardly, answered back the same one conscience-salving word, "Perhaps," which oracular and highly hypothetical promise she nevertheless most amply fulfilled with great regularity on the following morning. For, when Will arrived at the trysting-place, he always found Linnet was there before him; and she rose from her rocky seat with a blush of downcast welcome, which a less modest man than he might easily have attributed to its true motive. To Will, however, most unassuming of men and poets, she was only an interesting alp-girl, who liked to meet him on the hillside for a lesson in English. Though, to be sure, why it was necessary to give the lesson alone in the open air at six o'clock in the morning, and, still more, why the professor should have thought it needful to hold the pupil's hand in his own for many minutes together, to enforce his points, Will himself would no doubt have been hard put to explain on philological principles. Moreover, strange to say, for Linnet's sake, the conversation was conducted mostly in German.

Lookers-on, however, see most of the game. On the sixth such morning, it occurred casually to Florian as he lay abed and reflected, to get up early himself and go out on the hillside. Not that the airy epicurean philosopher was by any means afflicted with the essentially vulgar vice of curiosity. He was far too deeply occupied with Mr Florian Wood to think of expending much valuable attention on the habits and manners of less-interesting personalities. But in this particular case he felt he had a positive Duty to perform. Now, a Duty had for Florian all the luxury of novelty. He was troubled with few such, and whenever he found one, he made the most of it. Just at present, he was persuaded Will Deverill was on the eve of "getting himself into an entanglement" with the beautiful milkmaid who so paradoxically preferred his society to Florian's. Plain Duty, therefore, to Will himself, to Mrs Deverill *mère*, to the just expectations of the ladies of England (who had clearly a prior claim on Will's fortune and affection), compelled Florian to interfere before things went too far, so as to save his friend from the consequences of his own possible folly. Animated by these noble impulses, Florian did not even shrink from leaving a very snug bed at five o'clock that cold morning, and waiting at the window, like a private detective, till Will took his way up the path to the hillside.

About six, Will emerged from the door of the inn. Florian gave him law, five minutes law – just rope enough to hang himself. Then, marking from the back window which way Will had gone, he followed the trail up hill with all the novel zest of an amateur policeman. Skulking along the pinewood, he came upon them from behind, by the same path which Will himself had taken on the morning when he followed Linnet first to the boulder in the pasture. Then, treading softly over the green turf with muffled footfall, he was close upon the unconscious pair before they knew or suspected it. The ill-advised young people were seated side by side on a little ledge of rock that protruded from the green-sward. Will leant eagerly forward, holding Linnet's hand, and looking hard into her eyes; the girl herself drew back, and cast down her glance, as if half fearing the ardour of his evident advances. Respect for the conventions made Florian cough lightly before disturbing their interview. At the sound, both looked up. Some five feet nothing of airy observant humanity beamed blandly down upon them. Linnet gave a little cry, started up in surprise, hid her crimson face hurriedly

between two soft brown hands, and then, yielding to the first impulse of her shy rustic nature, fled away without one word, leaving Will face to face with that accusing moralist.

The epicurean philosopher seated himself, like stern justice in miniature, beside his erring friend. His face was grave: when Florian did gravity, he did it, as life did everything else, "consummately." For a minute or two he only stared hard at Will, slowly nodding his head like an earthenware mandarin, and stroking his smooth chin in profound meditation. At the end of that time, he delivered his bolt, point blank. "Tomorrow," he said, calmly, "we go on to Innsbruck."

"Why so?" Will asked, with a dogged air of dissent.

"Because," Florian answered, with crushing dialectic, "we never intended to spend our whole time on the upper Zillerthal, did we?"

This sudden flank movement took Will fairly by surprise. For Florian was quite right. Their plan of campaign on leaving London included the South Tyrol, Verona, and Milan. "But a day or two longer," he put in, half-imploringly, thus caught off his guard. "Just a day or two longer to.. to settle things up a bit."

Stern justice was inexorable. "Not one other night," Florian answered, severely. "The lotus has by this time been sufficiently eaten. I see what this means. I know now why you've kept me here so long at St Valentin. With Innsbruck and Cortina and the untrodden Dolomites beckoning me on to come, you've planted me plump in this hole, and kept me here at your side – all for the sake of one Tyrolese cow-girl. In the name of common morality," and Florian frowned like a very puisne judge, "I protest against these most irregular and improper proceedings."

"I never meant the girl any harm," Will answered, with a faint flush.

"That's just it, my dear fellow. I know very well you didn't. That's the head and front of your offending. If you *had* meant her harm, of course I could much more readily have forgiven you."

"Florian," Will said, looking up, "let's be serious, please, for once. This is a serious matter."

Florian pursed his thin lips, and knitted his white brow judicially. "H'm, h'm," he said, with slow deliberateness. "It's as bad as that, is it? Why, Deverill, I assure you, I've rarely – if ever – been as serious as this in all my life before. Don't look at me like that. I mean just what I say. I'm not thinking about the girl, but about *you*, my dear fellow. The morals of these parts, as you very well know, are primitive – primitive. It won't do *her* much harm, even if it gets noised about, to have been seen on the hills, alone in the grey dawn, hand in hand with an Englishman. This is no place for Oriental seclusion of women. Indeed, from what I hear, the Arcadian relations of these unchaperoned alp-girls with their lovers from the plains must be something truly sweet in their unaffected simplicity. Herr Hausberger was telling me last night that when an alp-girl marries, all the hunters and peasants, her discarded lovers, whom she has admitted to the intimacy of her châlet on the mountains, leave a cradle at the door of her chosen husband on the night of the wedding. The good man wakes up the morning after his marriage to find staring him in the face, on his own threshold, these tangible proofs of his wife's little slips in her spinster existence… It's a charming custom. I find it quite economical. He knows the worst at once. It saves him the trouble, so common among ourselves, of finding them out for himself piecemeal in the course of his later relations."

"You are wandering from the question," Will interrupted, testily. He didn't quite relish these generalised innuendoes against poor Linnet's character.

"Not at all, not at all," Florian went on very gravely. "The point of these remarks lies in the application thereof, as Captain Cuttle puts it… When Linnet marries, you mean, I suppose, to increase the number of the delicate little offerings presented at her door by – "

Will started up and glared at him. "You shall not speak like that," he cried in a very angry voice, "of such a girl as Linnet."

The little man waved one dainty white hand with a deprecating gesture towards his excited friend. "This is too bad," he said, sighing, "very bad indeed, far worse than I imagined. I said it on purpose, just to see what you were driving at. And I find out the worst. If you mean the girl no harm,

and take a slighting little jest on her to heart like that, why your case is desperate – an aggravated attack, complicated by incipient matrimonial symptoms. You need change of air, change of scene, change of company. Law of Medes and Persians, it's Innsbruck to-morrow! You go with me as I bid, or I go without you. Demur, and I leave you at once to your fate. You may stop with your cow-girl."

"Don't speak of her by that name!" Will broke in, half-angrily.

But Florian, for his part, was provokingly cool. "All A is A," he said, calmly, with irresistible logic – "and every cow-girl's a cow-girl. I'll call her a boutrophista, or a neat-herding Phyllis, if it gives you any pleasure. That's neither here nor there. The point's just this – You mean the girl no harm: then what the deuce *do* you mean? Are you going to marry her?"

"No; certainly not," Will answered. She was a very nice girl, and he loved to talk with her – there was something so sweetly unsophisticated in her ways that she charmed and attracted him. But marry her? No; the very word surprised him; he had never even dreamt of it. In the first place (though as yet he hadn't as much as thought about that), he had nothing to marry upon. And in the second place, if he had, could he take a Tyrolese milkmaid fresh from the cowsheds in his tow to London, and present her to his friends as Mrs Will Deverill?

"Then what the deuce *do* you mean?" Florian repeated, persistently. His sound common-sense, when he chose to let it loose from his veneer of affectation, was no mean commodity.

Thus driven to bay, Will was forced to reply with a somewhat sheepish air, "I don't know that I mean anything. I've never tried to formulate my state of mind to myself. She's a very nice girl.. for her class and sort.. and I like to talk to her."

"And when you talk to her, you like to hold her hand and lean forward like this, and stare with all your eyes, and look for all the world as if you wanted to devour her! Oh yes; I've seen you. No, no, Will, it won't do; I've been there myself, and I know all about it. Looking at the matter impartially, as a man of the world" – and Florian, drawing himself up, assumed automatically, as those words rolled out, his most magisterial attitude – "what I'm really afraid of is that you'll get gradually dragged into this rustic syren's vortex, and be swallowed up before you know it in the treacherous sea of matrimony. However, *you* don't believe that, and I know enough of the world to know very well it's no use, therefore, arguing out that aspect of the case with you. No fellow will ever believe *he* can be such a fool – till he catches himself in church face to face at last with the awful reality. I prefer, accordingly, to go on the other tack with you. If you don't mean to marry the girl, then, whether you know it or not, you mean no good to her. I dare say you've got all sorts of conventional notions in your head – which, thank heaven, I don't share – about honour and so forth.. how a cow-girl's virtue – I beg your pardon, a boutrophista's, or a neat-herding Phyllis's – is as sacred at your hands as the eldest daughter's of a hundred marquises. But that's neither here nor there. If you don't *marry* the girl, and you don't *ruin* the girl, there's only one thing left possible – you must break the girl's heart for her. Between ourselves, being, I flatter myself, a tolerable psychologist, I don't for a moment suppose that's what would actually happen; you'd get yourself entangled, and you'd go on and on, and you'd flounder and struggle, and you'd marry her in the end, just to save the girl misery. But we'll do poojah to your intellect at the expense of your heart, and we'll put it the other way, as you seem to prefer it. Very well, then; sooner or later you'll have to leave this place. No doubt, after what I've seen this morning, it'll cost the girl a wrench – her vanity must be flattered by receiving so much undisguised attention from a real live gentleman. But, sooner or later, as I say, come it must, of course; and sooner, on the whole, will be better for her than later. The longer you stop, the more she'll fall in love with you; the quicker you get away from her the less it'll hurt her."

He spoke the words of wisdom – according to his kind. Will rose again with an effort, and started homeward. As they walked down the pasture, and through the belt of pinewood, he said never a word. But he thought all the more on Florian's counsel. Till that morning, he had never tried to face the question himself: he liked the girl – that was all; she sang like a linnet; and he loved to be near her. But the longer he stopped, the harder for her would be the inevitable breaking off. Just beyond

the pinewood Florian halted and fronted him. “See here, Will,” he said, kindly, but with the world’s common sense, “it isn’t that I care twopence myself what becomes of the girl – girls like that are just made for you and me to play skittles with; if you meant her any harm I wouldn’t for the world interfere with any other man’s little fancies. All I want is to get you away from the place before you’ve time to commit yourself. I use the other argument as an *argumentum ad hominem* only. But as that it has its weight. The longer you stop, the harder it’ll be in the end for her.”

Will drew a deep breath. His mind was made up now. “Very well, then,” he said, slowly, though with an evident struggle; “if I must go, I must go. I won’t haggle over a day. Let us make it to-morrow.”

CHAPTER X
HAIL, COLUMBIA!

And next morning, indeed, saw them safe at Innsbruck.

'Twas a pull to get away; Will frankly admitted to his own soul he felt it so. But he saw it was right, and he went accordingly. Linnet, he knew, had grown fond of him in those few days; when he asked her once how it was she liked Franz Lindner less now than formerly, she looked up at him with an arch smile, and, after a second's pause, made the frank avowal: "Perhaps it's because now.. I think Englishmen nicer." At the moment his heart had come up in his mouth with pleasure, as will happen with all of us when a pretty woman lets us see for ourselves she really likes us. But he must go all the same: for Linnet's sake – he must go: if illusion there were, he must at once disillusion her.

As for Linnet herself, she accepted the separation much more readily, to say the truth, than Will ever imagined she could. It half-piqued him, indeed, to find how easily she seemed to acquiesce in the inevitable. She trembled when he told her, to be sure, and tears started to her eyes; but she answered, none the less, in a fairly firm voice, that she always knew the *gnädige Herr* must go away in the end; that she hoped he would remember her wherever he went; and *she* – with a deep sigh – she could never forget his kindness. That, however, was all. Just a pressure of her fingers, just a kiss on his hand, just a tear that dropped wet on his outstretched palm as she bent her head over it in customary obeisance, and Linnet was gone, and he saw no more of her that evening. In the morning when he stood at the door to bid farewell to the household, he fancied her eyes looked red with crying. But she grasped his hand hard, for all that, and said goodbye without flinching. He gave a florin or two as *Trinkgeld* to each of the servants at the inn; but to Linnet he felt he couldn't give anything. She was of different mould. Linnet noticed the omission herself, with a glistening eye – and took it, as it was meant, for a social distinction.

The plain truth was, she had always expected Will must soon go away from her. Nor was she indeed as yet what one might fairly call quite in love with him. The very distance between them seemed to forbid the feeling. He was kind, he was sympathetic, he was musical, he was a gentleman, he divined her better qualities, her deeper feelings; he spoke to her more deferentially and with truer respect than any of her own equals had ever yet spoken to her; she couldn't help feeling flattered that he should like to come out upon the hillside to talk with her; but, as yet, she hardly said to herself she loved him. If she had, what good? Was it likely such a great gentleman from over the seas would care to marry a mere Tyrolese milkmaid? Was it likely, if he did, the *wirth* and the priest would allow her to marry a Protestant Englishman?

So, from the very outset, save as a passing affection, Will Deverill stood wholly outside poor Linnet's horizon. She regarded him as a pleasant but short-lived episode. Besides, light loves are the rule with the alp-girl. It was quite in the nature of things for Linnet that a man should take a liking to her, should pay her brief court, should expect from her far greater favours than ever Will Deverill expected, and should give her up in the end for a mere freak of fancy. That was the way of the Zillerthal! So, though the thorn had gone deep, she accepted her fate as just what one might have anticipated, and hardly cried for an hour in her own bed at night, to think those sweet mornings on the pasture by the pinewood were to be over for ever. For of course, in the end, if the *wirth* so willed, she must marry herself contentedly to Andreas Hausberger.

Acting on Florian's advice, Will did not even tell his tremulous little friend he was going to Innsbruck. "Better break it off at once," Florian said, with practical common-sense, "once for all and absolutely. No chance of letters or any nonsense of that sort – if the dulcinea can write, which of course is doubtful." And Will, having made up his mind to the wrench, acquiesced in this sage council. So for Linnet, the two strangers who had loomed so large, and played so leading a part on

the stage of her little life for one rapturous fortnight, vanished utterly, as it were, at a single breath, like a dissolving cloud, into the infinite and the unknowable.

By seven that night, the young Englishmen found themselves once more in the full flood of civilisation. The electric light shed its beams on their hotel; a Parisian *chef de cuisine* turned out sweetbreads and ices of elaborate art to pamper their palates. Once more, Florian donned with joy the black coat of Bond Street. They had penetrated the Zillerthal with their knapsacks on their backs; but two leather portmanteaus, enclosing the fuller garb of civilised life, awaited their advent at Innsbruck. Thus restored to society, with a rosebud in his buttonhole, the dainty little man descended radiant to the *salle-à-manger*. He welcomed the change; after three whole weeks of unadulterated Nature, he had tired of Arcadia. And he loved *tables-d'hôte*: 'twas a field for the prosecution of social conquests. "A man goes there on his merits," he said briskly to Will, as they dressed for dinner, "neither handicapped nor yet unduly weighted. Nobody knows who he is, and he knows nobody. So he starts there on the flat, without fear or favour; and if at the end of ten minutes he hasn't managed to make himself the centre of a conversational circle, he may retire into private life as a social failure."

On this particular evening, however, in spite of several brilliant and manful efforts, Florian didn't somehow succeed in attracting an audience quite so readily as usual. The environment was against him. On his right sat a lady whom he discovered by a side glance at the name written legibly on the napkin ring by her plate, to be the Honourable Mrs Medway, and who was so profoundly filled with a sense of the importance of her own Honourableness that she feared to contaminate herself or her daughter by conversation with her neighbours till she had satisfied her mind by sure and certain warranty that they too belonged to the Right Set in England. Pending proof to that effect, her answers to his questions were both curt and monosyllabic. This nettled Florian, who prided himself with truth on his extensive knowledge of all the "smart people." To his left, beyond Will, on the other hand, sat a stolid-looking gentleman of nonconformist exterior and provincial garb, whose conversation, though ample, betrayed at times the inelegant idiom and accent of the Humber. Him Florian the silver-tongued carefully avoided. Opposite, was a vacant place, on either side of which sat two young girls of seventeen or thereabouts in the acutest stage of giggling inarticulateness. Florian listened, and despaired. Here was a coterie, indeed, for a brilliant talker and a man of culture!

But just as they finished the soup, to his intense relief, a ray of light seemed to pierce of a sudden the gathering gloom of the dinner table. The drawing-room door opened, and through its portal a Vision of Beauty in an evening dress floated, Hellenic goddess-wise, into the *salle-à-manger*. It made its way straight to the vacant chair, nodded and smiled recognition to the bread-and-butter gigglers and the Honourable Mrs Medway, bowed demurely, continental-way, to the newly come strangers, and glided off at once, without a pause or break, into a general flow all round of graceful, easy conversation. Florian gazed, and succumbed. This was a real live woman! Ripe, but not too ripe, soft and rounded of outline, with a bewitching mouth, a row of pearly teeth, and a cheek that wore only its own natural roses, she might have impressed at first sight a less susceptible heart by far than the epicurean sage's. As she seated herself, she drew from her pocket a little cardboard box, which she handed with a charming smile to one of the giggling inarticulates. "Those are the set you admired, I think," she said, with unconscious grace. "I hope I've got the right ones. I was passing the shop on my way back from my drive, and I thought I'd just drop in and bring them back as you liked them so."

The giggling inarticulate gave a jerky little scream of unmixed delight as she opened the box and took out from it with tremulous hands a pretty set of coral necklet, brooch, and earrings. "Not for *me*!" she cried, gasping; "not for me – for a present! You don't really mean to *give* them to *me*! They're too lovely, too delicious!"

"Yes, I do," the Vision of Beauty responded, beaming. "I wanted to give you some little souvenir some time before you went, and I didn't know what you'd like; so, as you said you admired these, I thought I'd best go in at once as I passed and buy them. They're pretty, aren't they?"

Florian eyed them with the lenient glance of a man of taste who appraises and appreciates a beautiful woman's selection. When the bread-and-butter gigglers had exhausted upon them their slender stock of laudatory adjectives – their *oh's* and *just look's*, and *dear me, aren't they beautiful's* – he broke in with his bland smile, and, laying the necklet in a curve on the white tablecloth before him, began to discourse with much unction in the Florianic tongue, on the æsthetic points of this pretty trifle. For it *was* a pretty necklet, there was no denying that; its lance-like pendants were delicately shaped and most gracefully arranged; it was one of those simple half-barbaric designs which retain to our day all the naïve beauty of primitive unsophisticated human workmanship. Florian found in it reminiscences of Eve in Eden. And he said so in that luxuriantly florid style of which he was so great and so practical a master. He called attention with suave tones to the distinctly precious suggestions of archaic influence in the shaping of the pendants; to the exquisite nature of coral as a decorative object, cast up blushing on our shores by the ungarnered sea – a material whose use we inherit from our innocent ancestors, when wild in woods the noble savage ran, his limbs untrammelled by clinging draperies – when beauty unadorned was adorned the most in the subtle and sinuous curves of its own lissome figure. Necklets and armlets, he observed, with one demonstrative white forefinger held poised above the salmon, are the string-courses, so to speak, of this our natural human architecture; they serve to emphasise and throw out into stronger relief the structural points of the grand design, to call attention to the exquisite native fulness of a faultless torso.

The giggling inarticulates dropped their chins and stared. They were not quite sure whether such talk was proper. But the Vision of Beauty, more at home in the world, was not in the least alarmed at Florian's torrent of eloquence. On the contrary, she answered him back, as he himself remarked a little later to Will, like the lords of the council, with grace, wisdom, and understanding. Florian brightened, and flowed on. He loved a listener who could toss the ball back to him as fast as he tossed it. And the Vision of Beauty answered him back with lightning speed, and bore her share with credit in the conversation. It was evident as she went on that she knew her Europe. Was it Munich Florian touched upon with the light hand of his craft? – she discoursed of the Van der Weydens and Crivellis in the Pinakothek, like one to the manner born, and had views of her own which were bold, if not prudent, about the meaning and arrangement of the Aeginetan marbles. Was it Florence he attacked? – she was at home at San Marco, and knew her way like a Baedeker round the rooms at the Pitti. Will listened and marvelled, talking little himself, but giving Florian and the Vision of Beauty their heads. It surprised him much to find one female brain could store in its teeming cells so much miscellaneous knowledge.

At last, at a brief break in Florian's flood of speech, Will found space to inquire, for a purpose of his own, "Would you mind my asking where you got that necklet?"

The Vision of Beauty handed the lid of the box to him. It bore, on a label, the name and address of the jeweller at whose shop she had bought it. "It's on the way up," she said, carelessly, "to this hotel from the city."

That one Shibboleth betrayed her. Florian started in surprise. "Why," he cried with open eyes, "then you must be an American."

The beautiful stranger smiled and nodded. "Yes, *sir*," she said with marked emphasis, as if to clinch the assertion of her western nationality. "I *am* an American, and I don't want to hide it. But you pay what you consider a compliment to the purity of my English all the same, if you mean that till now you haven't even suspected it."

Florian made some politely condescending remark, of the sort so obnoxious to the late Mr Lowell, as to the correctness and delicacy of her English accent, and then, in order to show himself quite abreast of the times, inquired expansively if she knew the Van Rensselaers.

"No; I haven't had that pleasure," the Vision of Beauty answered, curtly.

"The Livingstones, perhaps?" Florian adventured, in tentative tones.

The Vision shook her head.

"My friends the Vanderbilts?" Florian essayed once more, eager to find a connecting link. "I stayed with them at Newport."

"No; nor yet the Vanderbilts," the Vision answered, smiling.

Florian paused and reflected. "Ah, then, you're from Boston, no doubt," he suggested, with charitable promptitude. The fine friends he had mentioned, at whose houses he had stopped, were all New Yorkers.

"No; not from Boston," the Vision answered with prompt negation.

"Washington, I suppose?" Florian adventured again. They were the only three places a self-respecting American could admit she came from without shipwreck of her dignity. He would not pay so much grace and eloquence the very bad compliment, as it seemed to him, of supposing it could "register" from St Louis or New Orleans.

The pretty woman smiled once more, a self-restrained smile. "I come from New York," she said, simply. "I've lived there long. It's my native place. But there are a good many of us there who don't aspire to know the Roosevelts or the Livingstones."

Florian withdrew, with quiet tact, from this false departure. He led aside the conversation, by graceful degrees, to the old Dutch families, the New England stock – Emerson, Longfellow, Channing, the Concord set: Howells, James, and Stedman, the later American poets. On these last he waxed warm. But the Vision of Beauty, herself cosmopolitan to the core, was all for our newest school of English bards. She doted on Lang and Austin Dobson.

"And have you seen the last *Illustrated*?" she asked, after awhile, with a burst of enthusiasm. "It's on the table in the *salon* there. And there are three, oh, such lovely, lovely stanzas in it, – 'Among Alps,' by Will Deverill."

Her words sent a thrill of pleasure through Will's modest soul. He had published but little, and 'twas seldom he heard his own name thus familiarly unhandled. Still, a harassing doubt possessed his soul. Could the Vision of Beauty have seen his name in the visitors' book of the hotel, noticed the coincidence with the lines in the *Illustrated*, which he had sent from the Zillerthal, and managed this little *coup* with feminine adroitness, on purpose to deceive him? Yet she didn't look guileful. With poetic trustfulness, he cast the evil suggestion at once behind him. "I'm so glad you liked them," he said, timidly, looking down at his plate, and playing in nervous jerks with his fork in the chicken. "I wrote them in the Tyrol here. They're fresh-fed from the glaciers."

The Vision laid down her knife and fork and stared at him, speechless. "You're not Will Deverill," she exclaimed, in some excitement, after a moment's pause.

"That's my name," Will answered, somewhat abashed, still perusing his plate. "But I'm very little used to – to – to meeting people who have heard of it."

The pretty American clasped her hands with delight "Well, I *am* glad to meet you," she said, "though I'd have given you the benefit of the Mr, of course, if I'd known it was you. I just love your verses. I have 'Voices from the Hills' in my box upstairs, bound in calf, this minute."

"No; not really?" Will cried, with a young author's delight at unexpected recognition.

"I'll go upstairs after dinner and fetch it down to show you," his pretty admirer answered, with some pride. "And your friend, too, is he a poet?"

"In soul; in soul only!" Florian interposed, airily, dashing in at a tangent; for it irked him thus to play second fiddle to Will's first hand, and he longed to assert his "proper position." "I string no sonnets; I play no harmonies; I take the higher place. I sit on a critical throne, weighing and appraising all arts impartially. Deverill rhymes; another man paints; a third man strums; a fourth acts, or carves stone – and all for *me*. I exercise none of these base handicrafts myself; but I live supreme in the Palace of Art they build, subordinating each in due place to my soul's delight, like a subtle architect."

"Just the same as all the rest of us," the pretty American put in, interrupting his period. "We all do that. We sit still and listen. The difficulty is – to produce, like Mr Deverill."

Florian stood aghast. To think a mere woman should thus slight his pretensions! But the pretty American, disregarding him, turned to Will once more. “And your friend’s name?” she said, interrogatively.

“My friend’s name,” Will answered, “is Florian Wood. You must know it.”

“Ah, Mr Florian Wood,” the pretty stranger echoed; “I’ve heard of him, of course. I’m glad to meet him. It’s so nice to see people in the flesh at last one has often heard talked about.”

“But *you’ve* heard about everybody, Mrs Palmer,” the first giggling inarticulate interposed, with a gurgle of admiration.

Florian clapped his hand to his head in theatrical disappointment. “*Mrs* Palmer!” he cried, markedly. “Did I hear aright, *Mrs* Palmer? This is indeed a blow! Then, I take it, you’re married!”

From anyone else on earth, the remark would have been rude; from Florian, it was only exaggerated compliment. The Vision of Beauty accepted it as such with American frankness.

“Well, you needn’t go and take a draught of cold poison offhand,” she retorted, a little saucily, “for there’s still a chance for you. Remember, a woman may be maid, wife… or widow.”

“Dear me,” Florian ejaculated, half-choking himself in his haste, “I never thought of that. You don’t mean to say – ”

“Yes, I do,” Mrs Palmer responded, cutting him short with a merry nod. “Any time these last five years. Now, you’re sorry you spoke. Mr Deverill, may I trouble you to pass the mustard?”

CHAPTER XI
PRIVATE INQUIRY

During the rest of the young men's stay at Innsbruck the pretty American was, as Florian remarked, "a distinct feature." Such is the fickleness of man, indeed, that she almost superseded poor Linnet in their minds as an object of interest. She was attractive beyond a doubt; she was clever; she was lively; and she was so delighted to make a real live poet's acquaintance, that Will hardly knew how to receive her almost obtrusive attentions. She brought him butter in a lordly dish, as Florian phrased it. That same evening, in the *salon*, according to promise, she came down with "Voices from the Hills," Will's thin little volume of fugitive verse, which she had had gorgeously bound in red calf in Paris, and made that sensitive young bard blush up to his eyes with modesty, by insisting on pointing out which pieces she liked best, in a voice that was audible to half the guests in the establishment. *Ossian's Tomb* was her favourite – she knew that one by heart; but *Khosru Khan* was sweet too; and *Sister Clare* made her cry; and then *Gwyn*! – ah, that dear *Gwyn* was just too lovely for anything!

And yet, Will liked her. In spite of her open praise, and his blushes, he liked her. The surest way to a poet's heart is to speak well of his poetry. And besides, he said to himself, Mrs Palmer had discrimination. She noted in his verse the metrical variety, the pictorial skill, the strong sense of colour – just the qualities of his poor muse on which he himself most prided himself. No artist cares for praise except for those characteristics of his art which he feels to be his strong ones. Mrs Palmer gave Will that, and he liked the incense.

Florian had said at St Valentin that Will needed change of air, change of scene, change of company. And at Innsbruck he got them. The pretty American, having found her poet, didn't mean to let him slip again too soon from her clutches. With the pertinacity of her compatriots, she fastened herself at once upon the two young Englishmen. Not obtrusively, to be sure, not ungracefully, not awkwardly, not as a European woman might have done the same thing, but with that occidental frankness and oblivion of sex which makes up half the charm of the charming American. The very next morning, at the early breakfast, she happened to occupy a small table close by them. They chatted together through the meal; at the end of it Will mentioned, in a casual sort of way that he was going down the street to the shop where Mrs Palmer had bought the coral necklet. The dainty young widow seized her cue. "I am going down that way myself," she said. "Let me come and show you. I won't take a minute to run up for my hat. I'm not one of those women who can never go out for a morning stroll without spending half-an-hour before their mirrors, tittivating." And, in spite of Will's assurance that he could find the shop very well by himself, she was as good as her word, and insisted on accompanying them.

She had been charming in evening dress; she was more charming still in her girlish straw hat and neat tailor-made costume, as she tripped lightly downstairs to them. Florian, by her side, while they walked through the streets, cast sheep's eyes askance up at her. Even Will, more mindful of poor Linnet's desertion, was not wholly insensible to that taking smile, those pearly white teeth, that dainty small nose, those rounded contours. They turned down the road in the direction of the Maria-Theresien Strasse. Will knew of old that quaintest and most picturesque of European High Streets, with its queer gabled roofs, its rococo façades, its mediæval towers, its arcades and pillars. But to Florian, it all came with the added charm of novelty. Twice or thrice on their way, the spirit moved him to stop and perorate. Each time, the pretty widow cut him short at once with some quick retort of truly American practicality. At the shop, Will selected a second necklet, exactly like the one Mrs Palmer had chosen. "I gave her nothing before I came away," he said, turning to Florian, and only indicating by that very indefinite pronoun, the intended recipient of his beautiful gift. "One couldn't

give her *money*. 'Twould have been a positive insult. But this ought to look well on that smooth brown neck of hers."

"For your sister, *of course*," Mrs Palmer said, pointedly.

"No; not for my sister," Will admitted, with a quiet smile. "For a girl at the inn we've just left at St Valentin."

Mrs Palmer said "Oh!" 'Twas an American *oh*. It deprecated the fact – and closed the episode. Cosmopolitan though she was, it surprised her not a little that Will should allude to such persons in a lady's company. But there! these poets, you know – so many things must be condoned to them. Because they have loved much, much must be forgiven them. They have licence to break hearts and the most brittle of the commandments, with far less chance of blame than their even Christians.

Will's transaction completed, Mrs Palmer proceeded to buy a second similar set on her own account, for presentation to the second of the giggling inarticulates. "Poor girl!" she said, good-humouredly, "she looked so envious last night when I gave the other to Eva Powell, I couldn't bear to think I'd left her out in the cold. Thirty florins, I think you said? Ah, yes; that's twelve dollars. Not much to make a poor little girl so happy!"

From this, and various other circumstances which occurred in the course of their first few days at Innsbruck, it began to dawn dimly upon Florian's open mind that their American friend, though she knew not the Van Rensselaers, the Vanderbilts, and the Livingstones, must have been "comfortably left" by the late Mr Palmer. It was clear she had money for every whim and fancy. She took frequent drives, up the Brenner or down the Innthal, in a roomy two-horse carriage specially ordered from the livery stables; and she always gave a seat to one at least of the giggling inarticulates; and then, "on the girl's account, you know," with good-natured zeal, asked Will and Florian to take part in the expedition. "It's so good for them, of course," she said, "to see a little, when they can, of young men's society. They're each of them here with an invalid mamma – throat and lungs, poor things – you know the kind of person; and before I came, they had nobody to talk to, not even one another, for they were far too much afraid of a mutual snub ever to utter a syllable. I've tried to bring them out a bit, and make life worth living for them. But without a young man – at that age – no amusement's worth anything. *Do* come, Mr Deverill – there's a good soul, just to humour them."

And Will and Florian, it must be candidly allowed, fell in with a good grace with her philanthropic projects. Though, to be sure, when once the carriage got under way, they seemed much more desirous of amusing the pretty American herself, than of seconding her schemes for drawing out the latent conversational powers of the giggling inarticulates, who contented themselves chiefly with leaning back in their seats, and listening open-mouthed to Florian's flamboyant disquisitions. That, however, is a detail. Will attempted at first to pay his share of the carriage; but such interference with her plans Mrs Palmer most manfully and successfully resisted. She wanted to give the girls a little outing, she said; Will might come or he might stop; but she wasn't going to let any other person pay for her well-meant attention to her poor little protégées. To that point she stuck hard, through thick and thin. They must come as her guests if they came as anything.

From this, and sundry other events that came under his knowledge by occulter channels, Florian grew strengthened in his idea that the late Mr Palmer, whoever he might have been, had at least "cut up well," and, what was more to the point, had cut up entirely in his widow's favour. Now this was business; for Florian, incurious as he was by nature where mere gossip was concerned, liked to know what was what in the matrimonial market. As he was wont to put it sweetly to his friends at the Savile, he wasn't going to throw himself away on a woman for nothing. He had an income of his own, just sufficient to supply him with the bare necessaries of life – such as stalls at the opera and hansoms *ad libitum*; and, this being so, he had no intention of giving up that singular franchise which young men call "their liberty," except in return for valuable consideration. But if good things were going, he liked at least to know of them; some day, perhaps, if some lady bribed him high enough, he might possibly consent to retire by her side into the Philistine gloom of wedded respectability.

So he pushed his inquiries hard into the Vision's antecedents, wholly without effect, during the first few days of their stay at Innsbruck.

A few nights later, however, as they sat in the *salon* after a long day's tramp to the summit of the Patscher Kopf, Florian found himself cast casually into conversation with an American old maid, belonging to the most virulent type and class of old maidhood – "of the cat-kind, catty," he said afterwards to Will Deverill; one of those remarkable persons who have pervaded cosmopolitan hotels for years together, and are on intimate terms with the domestic skeletons in every cupboard. Miss Beard, as she was called, favoured Florian at full length with the histories and antecedents of the giggling inarticulates, their papas and mammas, and all their forebears; informing him with much gusto how one of them had paid ninepence in the pound to his creditors, and another had been cashiered from the navy for embezzlement. Then she proceeded in the same strain to demolish the unprepossessing gentleman of nonconformist exterior, who had been guilty, it seemed, of the social crime of retail business. Miss Beard was inclined, indeed, to believe he was nothing more than a retired chemist; but she wasn't even sure – with hushed and bated breath – that it mightn't be as bad as grocery and provisions. All these, and many other unimportant details, Florian's soul endured, possessing itself in patience for many minutes together, in the fervent hope that at last this living encyclopædia of genealogical knowledge would come round to the character of the Vision of Beauty.

"And Mrs Palmer, who sits opposite me," he adventured gently after awhile, when Miss Beard reached a pause in her caustic comments; "she seems a nice little thing in her way, though, of course, a mere butterfly. She comes from New York. I suppose you know her?"

Miss Beard drew herself up with that offended dignity which only an American woman of the "very best class" can exhibit in perfection when you suspect her of an acquaintance with a person moving in a social grade less exalted than the sphere she herself revolves in. "I don't *know* her," she said, markedly, "but I know, of course, who she is. She's the widow of Palmer – the well-known Palmer – the notorious Palmer, who – but there! – you've been in the States; you must know all about him."

"Not Palmer the murderer!" Florian exclaimed in surprise. "She's too young for that, surely."

"No; *not* Palmer the murderer," Miss Beard responded in a very shrill voice with considerable acerbity. "*He* was at least a *gentleman*. I can't say as much for this lady's husband. She's the widow of Palmer, the dry-goodsman in Broadway."

"Oh, indeed," Florian cried, deeply interested in this discovery – for it meant much money. "I remember the place well – a palatial building in the Renaissance style at the corner of a street near the junction with Fifth Avenue. These princes of commerce in your Western world represent in our midst to-day the great signiors of the Adriatic who held the gorgeous East in fee, and whose Gothic façades, rich in arch and tracery, still line the long curve of the Grand Canal for us. They are the satraps of finance. The world in our times is ruled once more – as in Venice of old, in the heyday of its splendour – by the signet-ring of the merchant. Palmer was one of these – a paladin of silken bales, a Doge Dandolo of Manhattan, a potentate in the crowded marts of the Samarcand of the Occident."

"I don't know what you mean," Miss Beard retorted in an acrid tone, eyeing him sternly through her *pince-nez*, "but I say he was a dry-goodsman."

Florian descended at a bound from the open empyrean to the solid earth of commonplace. "Well, at any rate, he was rich," he said, letting the paladins slide. "He must have died worth millions."

"His estate was proved," Miss Beard said, curtly, "at a sum in dollars which totals out – let me see – fives into 35 – ah, yes, to exactly seven hundred and eighty-four thousand pounds sterling."

Florian gave a little gasp. "That'll do," he said, with slow emphasis. "And he left it?" he suggested, after a second's pause, with an interrogative raising of his broad white forehead.

"And he left it, every cent," Miss Beard responded, "without deduction of any sort, to that fly-away little inanity."

Florian drew a deep breath. “Then she’s rich,” he said, musing; “rich beyond the utmost dreams of avarice.”

“Well, of course she is,” Miss Beard answered, with a sharp little snap, as though every one knew that. “If she wasn’t, could she go tearing about Europe as she does, herself and her maid, buying everything she sees, and making presents right and left – to everyone she comes across. She’d give her own soul away if anybody asked her for it. Little empty-headed fool! She’s not fit to be trusted with the use of money. But, of course, one can’t *know* her, however rich she may be. We draw the line in the States at keeping shop. And, besides, she was never brought up among cultivated people.”

As she spoke, Florian noted several things silently to himself. He noted, first, that Mrs Palmer spoke the English tongue many degrees more correctly, and more pleasantly as well, than her would-be critic. He noted, second, that her very generosity was counted for blame to her by this narrower nature. He noted, third, that in republican America, even more than in monarchical and aristocratic England, Mrs Palmer’s cleverness, her information, her reading, her culture, were as dust in the balance in Society’s eyes, compared with the damning and indelible fact that her late lamented husband had owned a dry-goods store. But, being a worldly-wise man, Florian noted these things in his own heart alone. Externally, he took no overt notice of them. On the contrary, he continued his talk in the same bland and honey-sweet tone as ever. “Still, she’d be a catch in her way,” he said, with a condescending smile, “for any man who didn’t object to swallow her antecedents.”

“She would,” Miss Beard replied, with austere self-respect, “if people care to mix in that sort of society. For myself, I’ve been used to a different kind of life. *I* couldn’t put up with it.”

Florian was audacious. He posed the one last question he still wished to ask, boldly. “And there’s no awkward clause, I suppose,” he said, without even the apology of a blush, “in her husband’s will, of that nasty so-long-as-my-said-wife-remains-unmarried character?”

Miss Beard took up her Galignani with crushing coldness. She didn’t care to discuss such people’s prospects from such a standpoint. Their matrimonial affairs were beneath her notice. For fine old crusted prejudice of a social sort, commend me, so far as my poor knowledge goes, to the members of good New Yorker families. “To the best of my knowledge and belief,” she murmured, acridly, without raising her eyes, “the property’s left for her own sole use and benefit, without any restriction. But I’m sure I don’t know. If you want to find out you’d better ask her. I don’t burden my mind with these people’s business.”

Then Florian knew the Vision of Beauty was a catch not to be despised by a man of culture. Such wealth as that, no gentleman could decline, in justice to himself, if she gave him the refusal of it.

CHAPTER XII
THE MADDING CROWD

Andreas Hausberger was a dictator. He kept his own counsel till the moment of action grew ripe for birth in the womb of time; then, heeding no man, he gave his orders. Three days after Will Deverill's departure from St Valentin, he called up Linnet to his office suddenly. "The dressmaker has brought home your new costume," he said in his curt way. "Go upstairs and put it on. Then come down and let me see you."

Linnet, much wondering what this mood might portend, went up to her own room and tried on her new gew-gaws. Puffed white sleeves, laced corset, crimson kirtle, high shoes, flowered kerchief at her bosom, silver dirk in her hair; Linnet wasn't over-vain, as girls go in this world, but tricked out in such finery, she gazed in her glass, and, to tell the whole truth, admired herself consumedly. If only her Englishman could have seen her in that dress! But she stifled her sigh, and tripped lightly downstairs again, with the buoyancy of youth, when conscious of a perfectly becoming costume, for Andreas Hausberger's scrutiny.

The *wirth* scanned her, well satisfied. "On Monday," he said, briefly, in that iron voice, "we set out on our tour, and go first to Innsbruck."

It was earlier by a week than he at first intended; but he saw it would be hard, if he stopped at St Valentin, to keep Fridolin's hands from Franz's throat much longer. So, by way of minimising the adverse chances, he made up his mind to start as soon as possible for his winter season. He meant to begin modestly with entertainments at hotels among the Tyrolese winter resorts, and the towns of the Riviera; and then, when his troupe had got over its first access of stage fright, and grown used to an audience, to go across for the summer to England or America.

So, for the next few days Linnet was busy as a bee with preparations for her first journey into the great wide world outside the Zillerthal. As yet, her native valley had bounded her view – she had never gone even as far as Jenbach. Expectation and preparation kept her mind well employed during that busy week, and prevented it from dwelling too much or too long on the kindly Engländer, who had vanished from her ken across the sea to England. For, that he had gone straight home, Linnet never even doubted. On the afternoon of Andreas Hausberger's exciting announcement, indeed, a little registered parcel came by post for her to St Valentin. It bore the postmark of Wilten, where Will had intentionally dropped it into the letter-box, on purpose to conceal from her his exact whereabouts. Linnet scanned it close, and read the name correctly, but was too innocent of the topography of her native country to know that Wilten is the name of a village on the outskirts of Innsbruck. When she asked Andreas Hausberger where Wilten was, a little later in the day, without showing him the postmark, he confirmed her belief by answering at once that 'twas a town in England, not far from Salisbury. So he had thought of her over sea, then, and sent her this beautiful costly present from his own country. She tried it on that night before her tiny square mirror. As Will had rightly judged, it set off the rich tints of her creamy brown neck to the best advantage.

A beautiful gift! A real lady might have worn it! Later on, when Linnet had diamonds and rubies at command, there was no trinket she prized among all her jewels like Will Deverill's coral.

At last the eventful morning itself arrived. The little troupe set out on foot down the mountain to Mairhofen. There, their boxes, sent on over-night, awaited them. They drove in a large open brake to Jenbach – Andreas Hausberger, Franz Lindner, Linnet herself, Philippina, and the two other singers who composed the party. At Jenbach, they descended at the door of the railway station. For the first time in her life, Linnet saw, half-alarmed, a puffing and snorting machine, a sort of iron devil, breathing flames like purgatory, burst with smoke and stench upon the crowd by the waiting-room. Though she had heard all about it often enough before, and could see for herself that this great

scurrying creature, for all its noise and bustle, kept rigidly to the rails as it approached the platform, she yet drew back in pure physical terror and surprise at the swiftness and irresistibility of the fire-fiend's motion.

She had scant time to think, however, for scarce had it come to rest when Andreas Hausberger, little heeding, bundled them all unceremoniously into a third-class compartment; and before Linnet had leisure to recover her self-possession, the engine had uttered one wild discordant shriek, and with ringing of bells and rattlings of wheels in her ears, she found herself, willy-nilly, beyond hope of release, whirled along at the break-neck pace of what you and I know as an Austrian slow train, over the jolting rails, up the broad Inn valley.

In spite of her terror – for she knew the railway as yet chiefly by hearing reports of collisions and accidents – Linnet enjoyed to the full that first steam-borne journey. She whirled past turreted towers like Hall and Volders, which to you and me commend themselves as the absolute quintessence of old-world quaintness, but which, to Linnet's young eyes, accustomed only to St Valentin and the grassy Alps, envisaged themselves rather in glowing hues as the kingdoms of the world and all their glory. They had been late to start, and their drive from Mairhofen had been tolerably leisurely, so dusk was closing in when they arrived at Innsbruck. Oh, the bustle, the din, the whirling awe of that arrival! Electric lamps lighted up the broad Platz in front of the station; on either side rose great hotels, grander and more palatial than any buildings on earth Linnet's poor little fancy had ever yet dreamed of. Not to one of these, however, of course, did Andreas Hausberger take his little troupe of minstrels. But even the humbler inn on the south side of the Theresien Strasse, to which they repaired on foot, bearing their boxes between them, seemed to Linnet's inexperienced and impressionable eye a most princely caravanserai. After the noise and bustle in that busy railway junction, which made her brain whirl with the unaccustomed dizziness of a great city, the comparative rest and quiet of the Golden Eagle seemed a positive relief both of mind and body. That night she slept little. Her head swam with excitement; for this was the first step on her journey through the world, which might lead her perhaps at last to England. And in England, she thought to herself once or twice with a little thrill, who could tell but peradventure she might meet.. Will Deverill?

For she knew little as yet of how big the world is, and how long you may live in it, going to and fro, without necessarily knocking up against this one or that of its component units.

Next morning they rose betimes, and went out into the street to view the city. For to Linnet, as to Mrs Palmer, a city it was – and a very great one. Such streets and streets seemed to frighten and appal her. Florian had admired in that picturesque old capital of a mountain land, the antiquated tone, the eighteenth-century flavour, the mediæval survivals, the air as of a world elsewhere gone from us utterly. But to Linnet, though it was beautiful and impressive too, it was above all things magnificent, grandiose, stately, imposing. She gazed with open eyes at the Golden Roof, admired the bronze statues at the base of the Anna Column, looked up with silent awe at the front of the Landhaus, and thought the Rudolfsbrunnen, with its attendant griffins and dragons, a wonderful work of art for the world's delectation.

Philippina went with her, her companion on the alp. Linnet noticed with much surprise – for she knew not as yet the difference in fibre between them – that Philippina, though as interested as herself in the shops and their contents, seemed wholly unimpressed by these other and vastly more attractive features of a civilised city. For Linnet had been gifted by nature, to the fullest degree, with the profound Tyrolese artistic susceptibility. Though her mind came to art as a blank page, it responded to the stimulus, once presented to its ken, as the sensitive plate of a photographic camera responds in every line to the inspiring picture.

As they strolled through the town, by Andreas Hausberger's express desire – for the wise impresario had arranged their first appearance for that very evening, and wished the girls to come to it fresh, after a morning's exercise – they paid comparatively little heed to what most of us regard as by far the most striking characteristic of Innsbruck – the great limestone crags that seem on every side to

tower and overhang the very roofs of the city. They were accustomed, indeed, to crags, and made very small case of them. It was the houses, the shops, the noise, the crowd, the gaiety, that chiefly struck them. Innsbruck to Linnet was as a little Paris. But as they went on their way through the bustling streets, they came at last to a church door, which Linnet's profound religious nature could hardly pass by without one minute's prayer for Our Lady's aid at this critical turning-point of her artistic history.

Philippina, nothing loth, for her part, opined it could do them no harm to make favour above with the blessed saints for this evening's work by a little Pater Noster. The blessed saints dearly love attentions: much may be done with them by a small wax candle! So they opened the door, and stepped into the Hofkirche.

Even those of us who know well the world and its art, can remember vividly the strange start of surprise with which we gazed round for the first time on that oddest and most bizarre of Christian temples. It isn't so much beautiful, indeed, as unexpected and startling. To push open the church door and find oneself at once ringed round and guarded close, as it were, by that great circle of mailed knights and bronze-wimpled ladies, who watch the long sleep of the kneeling Maximilian on his cenotaph in the centre, gives one a thrill of a novel sort from which some tinge of dim awe can hardly ever be wholly absent. There they stand, on their low pedestals, a congregation of bronze ancestors round their descendant's tomb – Theodoric the Ostrogoth and King Arthur the Briton, Mary of Burgundy and Eleonora of Portugal – strange efforts of struggling art in its first faint steps towards the attainment of the beautiful – naïf, ungainly, crude, rising only once or twice within measurable distance of the ideal in the few figures cast in metal by Peter Vischer of Nuremberg. But to Linnet, a woman grown, instinct with the innate artistic taste of her countrymen, yet innocent till then of all forms of art save the saints and purgatories of her mountain chapels, the Hofkirche was a glimpse of some new and unseen world of infinite possibilities. She went through it all piecemeal with open-mouthed interest. Philippina could only laugh at the quaint vizors of the knights, the quainter dresses of the ladies. But Linnet was almost shocked Philippina should laugh at them. She herself half forgot her intended prayer to Our Lady in her delight and surprise at those wonderful figures and those beautiful bas-reliefs. She read all the names on the bases conscientiously; they didn't mean much to her, to be sure – her historical ideas didn't get as far as "Clovis, King of the Franks," or even as "Count Frederick of Tyrol with the Empty Pockets"; but in a vague sort of way she gathered for herself that these were statues of archdukes and mighty heroes, keeping watch and ward silently round the great dead emperor who knelt in the centre on his marble sarcophagus. Good luck, too, attended them. The little hump-backed sacristan, seeing two pretty girls looking through the grating at the reliefs on its sides, relaxed his stony heart without the customary kreuzers, and admitted them within the railing to inspect at their leisure those exquisite pictures in marble which Thorwaldsen declared the most perfect work of their kind in the whole of Christendom. Philippina found the dresses quite grotesquely old-fashioned; but Linnet, hardly knowing why she lingered so long, gazed at each scene in detail with the profoundest interest.

While down in the town Linnet was thus engaged, high up in the hills Will Deverill sat alone by Mrs Palmer's side on an outcrop of rock near the summit of the Lanser Kopf. Florian had gone off for a minute or two round the corner by the mountain indicator, with the giggling inarticulates. Mrs Palmer, pointing her moral with the ferrule of her parasol on the grass in front of her, was discoursing to Will earnestly of his work and his prospects. "I want to see you do something really great, Mr Deverill," she said, with genuine fervour, looking deep into his eyes; "something larger in scale and more worthy of your genius – something that gives full scope to your dramatic element. I don't like to see you frittering away your talents on these exquisite little lyrics – beautiful gems in their way, to be sure, but that way not the highest. I want to see you settled down for a long spell of hard work at some big undertaking – an epic, a play, a grand opera, a masterpiece. I know you could do it if only you took the time. You should go to some quiet place where there's nothing to distract you, and

make your mind up to work, to write something more lasting than even that lovely *Gwyn*, or that exquisite *Ossian*!"

Will looked down and sighed. 'Tis pleasant to be appreciated by a beautiful woman. And every man thinks, if he had but the chance, he could show the world yet the sort of stuff that's in him. "I only wish I could," he answered, regretfully. "But I've my living to earn. That ties me down still to the treadmill of journalism. When my holiday's over – the first for two years – I must get back once more, well content, to Fleet Street and drudgery."

Mrs Palmer sighed too. She felt his difficulty. Her parasol played more nervously on the grass than before. She answered nothing, but she thought a great deal. How small a matter for her to secure this young poet whom she admired so much, six months of leisure for an immortal work – and yet, how impossible! There was only one way, she knew that very well; and the first step towards that way must come, not from her, but from this modest Will Deverill.

'Twas a passing thought, half formed, or scarce half formed, in the pretty widow's mind. But nothing came of it. As she paused, and sighed, and played trembling with her parasol, and doubted what to answer him, Florian came up once more with the giggling inarticulates, "Well, Mr Wood?" she said, looking up, just by way of saying something, for the pause was an awkward one.

"Pardon me," the mannikin of culture answered in his impressive way; "my name is Florian."

"But *I* can't call you so," Mrs Palmer answered, recovering herself, with a merry little laugh.

"It's usual in Society," Florian responded with truth. "Just ask Will Deverill."

Will nodded assent. "Quite true," he admitted. "Men and women alike in London know him only as Florian. It's a sort of privilege he has, an attribute of his own. He's arrogated it to himself, and the world at large acquiesces in his whim, and grants it."

"It makes things seem so much more real and agreeable, you see, as Dick Swiveller said to the marchioness," Florian continued blandly. "Now suppose we five form an elective family, a little brotherhood of our own, a freemasonry of culture, and call one another, like brothers and sisters, by our Christian names only! Wouldn't that be delightful! I've just been explaining to Ethel and Eva that I mean henceforth to Ethel and Eva them. Soul gets nearer to soul without these flimsy barriers. I'm Florian; this is Will; and you, Mrs Palmer, your Christian name is – ?"

The pretty widow drew back with a little look of alarm. "Oh no," she said, shortly; "I never could tell you my given name for anything. It's much too dreadful." She pulled out a pencil from the pocket at her side. "See here," she said to Will, writing down one word for him on the silver-cased tablets that hung pendant from her delicate Oriental chatelaine, "there's a name, if you like, for two Puritan parents to burden the life of their poor innocent child with! Don't tell Mr Wood – or Florian if he wishes it; he'd make fun of it behind my back, I'm perfectly certain. I know his way. To him nothing, not even a woman's name, is sacred."

Will glanced at the word curiously. He couldn't forbear a quiet smile. "It's bad enough, I must admit," he answered, perforce. The Vision of Beauty had been christened Jerusha!

"But I make it *Rue* for short," she added, after a moment, with a deprecating smile.

Florian caught at the word, enraptured. "The very thing!" he cried, eagerly. "Capital, capital, capital! 'There's rue for you, and here's some for me: we may call it herb-o'-grace o' Sundays.' But Rue shall be your weekday name for the Brotherhood. Let's read the roll-call! Florian, Will, Rue, Ethel, Eva! Those are our names henceforth among ourselves. We scorn formalities! No mystery for us. We abolish the *misters*!"

And so indeed it was. As Will, Rue, and Florian, those three of the Elective House knew each other thereafter.

CHAPTER XIII
A FIRST NIGHT

'Twas with no little trepidation that Linnet arrayed herself that eventful night for her first appearance on this or any other public platform. When her hair was dressed and her costume complete, Philippina declared, with good-humoured admiration, she looked just lovely – for Philippina at least was never jealous of her. And Philippina was right: Linnet did look beautiful. She had tied her crossed kerchief very low about the neck, so as to leave her throat bare for the better display of Will Deverill's corals. They became her admirably. Andreas Hausberger inspected his prima donna with well-satisfied eye. The wise impresario had heard, of course, where the necklet came from; but that didn't in the least disturb his serenity. Will Deverill was gone, evaporated into space; and the coral at least was "good for trade," inasmuch as it enhanced and set off to the utmost the nut-brown alp-girl's almost gipsy-like beauty. For the sake of trade, Andreas could pardon much. And Will Deverill in England was no serious rival.

At eight o'clock sharp the concert was to begin at one of the big hotels. To the guests in the house it was just a matter of "some music, I hear, to-night – the usual thing, don't you know – Tyrolese singers with a zither in the *salon*." But to Linnet, oh, the difference! It was the most important musical event, the most momentous performance in the world's history. She trembled like a child at the thought of standing forth and singing her simple mountain songs alone, in a fine-furnished room, before all those grand well-dressed and well-fed Britons. She would have given thousands (in kreuzers), if only she had them, to forego that ordeal. But Andreas Hausberger said "You must," and she had to obey him. And the blessed Madonna, in Britannia metal, on an oval pendant, gave her courage for the trial.

By eight o'clock sharp, then, the troupe trooped in. Electric light, red velveted chairs, soft carpet on the floor, gilded mirrors by the mantelpiece and opposite console. So much grandeur and magnificence fairly took poor Linnet's breath away. 'Twas with difficulty she faltered across the open space to a chair by the table which was placed at one end of the room for the use of the performers. Then she raised her eyes timidly – to know the worst. Some twenty-five people, more or less listless all of them, composed the audience. Some leaned back in their chairs and crossed their hands resignedly, as who expects to be bored, and makes up his mind betimes to bear his boredom patiently. Some read the latest *Times* or the Vienna papers, hardly deigning to look up as the performers entered. 'Twas a lugubrious function; more chilling reception prima donna never met with. Linnet clutched the blessed Madonna in her pocket convulsively. One breath of mild applause alone reached her ears. "Pretty girl," one stout Briton observed aloud in his own tongue to his plentiful mate. Linnet looked down and blushed, for he was staring straight at her.

"Let's sit it out, here," Florian exclaimed in the smoking-room. The folding doors stood open, so that all might hear; but their group sat a little apart – Will, Rue, and he – in the farther corner, away from the draught, and out of sight of the musicians. "It's more comfortable so – just the family by itself; and besides, I've a theory of my own that one should hear the zither through an open door; it mitigates and modifies the metallic twang of the instrument."

Will and Rue were all acquiescence. Next to a *tête-à-tête*, a *parti-à-trois* is the pleasantest form of society. So they kept their seats still, in the rocking-chairs by the corner, and let the sound float idly in to them through the open portal.

Linnet waited, all trembling. Thank heaven, it wasn't her part to begin. Franz Lindner came first with a solo on the zither. Bold, confident, defiant, with his hat stuck a little on one side of his head, and his feather in his band, turned Robbler-wise, wrong way, quite as jaunty as ever, Franz faced his audience as if his life had been passed in first-class hotels, and an Edison light had been the lamp of

his childhood. Nothing daunted or disconcerted by the novelty of the circumstances, he played his piece through with a certain reckless brilliancy, wholly in keeping with the keynote of the Tyrolese character. Florian observed outside, with connoiseur complacency, that the fellow had *brio*. But the audience went on unmoved with its *Times* and its *Tagblatt*. The audience was chilling; Franz Lindner, accustomed to his own mercurial and magnetic fellow-countrymen, could hardly understand it. His self-love was mortified. He had expected a triumph, a sudden burst of wild applause; he received instead a faint clap of the hands from Ethel and Eva, and an encouraging nod from the mercantile gentleman of nonconformist exterior.

Franz sat down – a smouldering and seething volcano.

Then came Linnet's turn. She rose, all tremulous, in her pretty costume, with her beautiful face and her shrinking timidity. Old gentlemen peeped askance over the edge of their papers at the good-looking girl; young ladies took stock of her abundant black hair and her dainty kerchief. "She's going to sing," Ethel whispered. "Isn't she pretty, Eva? And just look, how very odd, she's got a necklet exactly like the ones Mrs Palmer gave us!"

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