





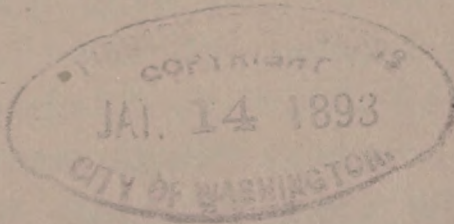
A SECRET QUEST

BY

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A SECRET QUEST.

CHAPTER I.

“How could I have been such a fool as to write them?”

Lord Desborough was seated in his official chair at his morocco leather covered table in Downing Street—a table heaped with parliamentary papers and blue books, whose perusal he had left to stare blankly at a couple of letters, both of which were in a formal clerkly hand, with the word “copy” written in the top left corner of each.

“I must have been mad.”

His lordship gave each letter an angry flip, folded it, and carefully replaced it in the inner fold of his pocket-book, which he thrust into his breast; and then sat with puckered brow—a handsome man of eight-and-thirty, white-haired and black bearded—gazing straight before him into space, where he was mapping out his future career.

“Yes; better take a dose and make my quietus,” he said, half aloud. “Why the deuce doesn’t he come?”

He drew himself up, for at that moment the

door was opened and an attendant brought in a card.

“Show him in.”

The attendant went noiselessly out over the thick Turkey carpet, and Lord Desborough threw down the slip of cardboard, snatched up a parliamentary paper, and began to peruse it rapidly as the door was again opened. A keen-looking dark man, with peculiar puckers at the corners of his mouth, as if he were trying to suppress a smile, was ushered in.

The new-comer advanced silently two or three steps; the door closed behind him, and he stood slowly swinging a new glossy hat, regarding through his thick brows the reader of the paper.

“You miserable humbug!” said the visitor to himself.

“Ahem!” coughed Lord Desborough; then, with an affected start, “Ah, my dear Mr. Anderson, I did not hear you come in.”

“Pray do not apologize, my lord. The State’s business needs no excuse.”

“Thank you, Anderson; you are very good; but they must wait for a while. I want to consult you about a bit of business of my own.”

“Woman in the case for a fiver,” said the visitor to himself.

“Sit down, Anderson,” continued his lordship, pointing to a chair and swinging his own round so as to give himself room to cross one leg over his knee and hold it with both hands.

Then the two keen men of the world sat gazing in each other’s eyes as if trying to read one an-

other's thoughts. There was a pause of quite a minute, before Lord Desborough spoke.

"Well, Anderson," he said. "I suppose I must make a clean breast of it."

"Best way, my lord, with the social doctors."

"Social doctors? Yes, that's what you lawyers are, confound you!"

Lord Desborough wrinkled his face as he placed one white finger to his lips, and then began to bite his nails, but snatched his hand away with an angry ejaculation.

"I—I hardly know how to begin," he said, impatiently.

"It is very simple, my lord. I suppose you trust me?"

"Of course I do, Anderson, or I should not have sent for you; but er—but er——"

"As your confidential adviser may I venture—a lady in the case?"

"Confound it! Yes, of course there is. They're at the bottom of all trouble. The fact is, in an hour of folly, Anderson, I wrote a letter or two—to a lady; and a confounded meddling friend is holding them over me *in terrorem*."

"H'm! question of money?" said the lawyer.

"No, hang it! If it had been that I should have snarled, written my check, and paid; but this man threatens exposure."

"Which, seeing the position you occupy—a minor post in the Government, and a future that may mean perhaps the leadership—would be political ruin."

“Exactly, Anderson, exactly. Now, you see, I want you to get those letters.”

“How many are there?”

“Only two. The others are of no importance whatever. To put it plainly—if you will bring me my two letters, I will pay you two thousand pounds for them: a thousand apiece to see them burnt to ashes before my eyes.”

“Well, my lord, you may command me. Now for the particulars.”

“I need tell you little. You may remember that two years ago the Princess Lani Va was over in England.”

“I remember: to make some appeal to the Government about her late father’s territory. Rajah of—Rajah of——”

“Villipore. Yes, that’s right,” said his lordship, impatiently. “Well, she was received in society and petted as the new lioness. I was introduced, and met her several times. We corresponded, and I acted like an idiotic boy. The woman took things *au sérieux*, and finally appealed to an old friend of her father.”

“Indeed!” said the lawyer, raising his dark brows a little.

“Yes; one Colonel Denton.”

“Colonel John Barrow Denton,” said the lawyer to himself.

“He was resident many years at her father’s court; and—confound him!—he has got the letters, and has been writing me communications that are maddening.”

“Threatening *exposé*?”

“Exactly; and those letters I must have.”

“But he is sure to have copies.”

“Hang his copies! Only let me get the originals. I could laugh at the others as forgeries—party malice, anything.”

“But you say he does not put a price on them?”

“No; he’s rich enough; so is the woman. He takes what he calls high ground—wants reparation. The old scoundrel has me at his mercy, and may spring a mine upon me at any time. No, he will wait till I am well before the country, and then fire his fuse. I am at his mercy, and he has none.”

“It is awkward.”

“Awkward? I tell you it is utter destruction to me. My political career will be ruined.”

“Absolutely.”

“Now, Anderson, for goodness sake do not take that tone,” said his lordship, impatiently. “I sent for you to help me, not to make matters worse.”

“Not I. Look here,” said the lawyer, eagerly; “why not have set a clever detective to work. He might have got hold of the letters.”

“My dear sir!” cried his lordship, impatiently; “don’t come here and suggest all those trite dodges. I have tried everything of that kind. His apartments and the hotels at which he has stayed have been searched again and again.”

“Then you come to me as a fortune-teller?”

“Of course I do, and you are the right man. If

I had wanted shrewd clerks, or people of that class, I could have had hundreds. Something out of the ordinary line must be tried, and I want you to take it up yourself."

"And my practice?"

"Hang your practice, man! Succeed in this, and you shall not want for practice. I mean to rise—high, Anderson; and so shall you. I will not be ungrateful. There, I have told you what I will pay for the letters; but money is no object. You will charge me for your time and expenses, of course."

"Thanks. Then what do you want me to do first?"

"Confound it all, man! how should I know? That's your business. I've given time to it till I have neglected the country's affairs, and now I relegate it all to you."

"Where is this man?"

"I don't know. He has slipped through my fingers. That is the last card he has played after telling me to beware."

"Let me see; there was an old Indian officer of that name staying, three weeks ago, at the Grand Hotel, Brighton."

"Was," said Lord Desborough, bitterly; "but he is gone—no one knows where."

"H—m! You are sure he has the letters?"

"Perfectly. He sent me copies. Here they are."

He took the notes from his pocket-book, and the lawyer perused them with the shadow of a grim smile on his lip.

“Yes; they are ugly—for you,” said the lawyer, returning them.

“As if I did not know that.”

“What sort of a man is he?”

“Fiery old Indian officer, great invalid and hypochondriac.”

Anderson sat with his head bent, and his eyes fixed on the carpet, as his lordship continued:

“Travels about a great deal for his health, and takes physic by the gallon. Ah, if he would only poison himself some day!”

“Creaking doors hang longest, my lord,” said Anderson, dryly.

“Yes, confound him! Let me see, he has a daughter who travels with him.”

“Also a friend of your lordship’s?” said Anderson, gazing at the handsome diplomat in a peculiarly searching manner.

“Hang it, man, no! Never seen her; and don’t want to. Now, then, I’m very busy—a hundred important things waiting. What more do you want?”

“Let me see: I know the name—Colonel John Barrow Denton.”

“I did not say so—only Denton.”

“Must be the same. Well-known man. Resident of Villipore. No, I don’t think you can help me any more. Gone away, you think, to avoid you?”

“Yes, and because my people have been hunting him, and made him suspicious. His last letter was posted in London; but that would be done by

some friend. Depend upon it, he has left England for a time. You will want some money."

"Yes, but I need not trouble you yet."

"And you will get me these letters?"

"If they are in existence."

"That's right. Good-morning."

"Good-morning, my lord. I will write as soon as I have news."

"And you will devote yourself to the task?"

"Nothing else shall occupy my mind, my lord. Good-day."

"Only one other thing and that will hold its own," thought Lawrence Anderson, as he went slowly out into Whitehall. "But how strange! What a little world it is, and how curiously Fate works her ways! Just as I was going down to try and see her again. H'm! Left Brighton, have they? Well, the world is not big enough for any one to hide in these days. Try some new plan? There it is, my lord, already shaped out. Beautiful Hester once softened, it would be very strange if I could not get hold of the letters."

He raised his umbrella to a cabman, sprang into the vehicle, said "Charing Cross" shortly and then sank back, musing.

"A pleasant jaunt. Gone abroad, of course. Well, I want a holiday—to make love. Where will it be? Scotland? The Lakes? South Devon? Stop!" He checked the cabman. "Go to Craig's Court."

He was driven there; for a sudden thought had occurred to him. Colonel Denton, as an old

Indian officer, would be sure to have had dealings with an army agent and banker. So Anderson tried first one and then another, till he found the right one in a street close by Charing Cross.

The rest was plain, and Lawrence Anderson smiled as he thought how easy a discovery is to the man whose well-worked brain suggests a right clew.

"Hester," he said more than once that night; and his mind's eye was full of a sweet English face—one of those which made men turn when they have passed it.

CHAPTER II.

"It's of no use; it's all over, Hester. Just as I have at last found a new interest in life, and can redress the wrongs of that poor woman. Oh, my leg, my leg!"

"Are you in so much pain, papa, dear?"

"Pain? Don't you see I am in agony? Pain? Pshaw!"

"Let me alter your position a little, and put that cushion to support your back."

"What? Don't touch me; let me die in peace."

"Oh, papa!"

"Let me die in peace, I say. It's all over now; it's the death pangs coming on. How could you be so heartless as to drag me away from Brighton to this dreary desolate valley? Ugh! it's horrible. Shiver, shiver, shiver. May; and the snow and ice up there hemming us in as if it was the North pole."

"But, papa, dear, you know how you were complaining of the heat yesterday."

"Yes; internal heat. Fever. Where's my thermometer?"

Hester Denton ran to a side table in the pretty room of the *chalet* where her father, Colonel John Barrow Denton, a fine bronzed officer, lay back on

his couch, and returned with a tiny morocco case, whose clasp she hastily opened.

"Mind!" cried the Colonel, "it isn't a toy. You'll break it—give it to me. I'm dying—going off fast. Not a doctor within five hours' walk. Oh, why did I let you drag me here?"

"How can you be so cruel to me, papa? You know you insisted upon coming abroad, and chose this out-of-the-way valley yourself."

"That's right, madam. Go on."

"Well, papa, dear, you said you must come abroad for special reasons, and yet you blame me."

"Oh, my leg—my leg!"

"Let me——"

"Ah! Don't touch me, or I shall go off like a blown-out candle. That's right; trample on me now I'm helpless. Of course; I was obliged to come abroad. Do you think I was going to stop in England and be hunted and watched by detectives. Oh dear—oh dear! To die this dog's death, out here under these mountains, with the snow ready to crush us, and that cursed cataract always roaring in my ears. There, give me the thermometer."

"I did give it to you, papa," said Hester, whose eyes were red with weeping, her face drawn and puckered with anxiety as she bent over the invalid's couch, her sweet, animated face full of sympathy.

"Ah! yes, I forgot."

The Colonel drew out the fragile thermometer, and with trembling hands placed the little silvery

bulb beneath his tongue, and lay back with his handsome face full of pain and anxiety, twitching, too, now and then, as some spasm shot through him.

For a few minutes there was silence in the room, through which came a deep-toned roar, as of some mighty organ. The sun shone brightly; the sweet, lemony scent of the pines floated in by the open window, and through an opening in the trees could be seen, in all its dazzling purity, a snow-covered peak, glittering in the morning sun.

But Hester Denton heard and saw nothing but her invalid father, broken and suffering from the consequences of thirty years' residence in India; and there was nothing droll to her in his aspect, as he lay there with his crisp silver hair brushed fiercely above his high forehead, apparently smoking the tube of a small glass pipe.

"Now then, look quickly, my girl," he said, as he removed the thermometer, and held it with trembling fingers. "What is it? Hundred and seven, I know. Another degree, and I shall be a dead man."

"Papa! it's only ninety-eight; that's about blood heat, isn't it?"

"Nonsense! I'm burnt up with the cursed old jungle fever. Look again: hundred and seven, I'm sure."

"It is not, dear; look."

"Then it's this wretched, cold, snowy climate keeps the mercury down in the bulb. Put it away."

“Yes, papa.”

He threw his head back, and closed his eyes with so deep a groan that his child bent down over him again, her soft gray eyes wild with terror. Then she rushed from the room, and out of the cottage, to where, seated beneath a clump of pines, a plump, pleasant-looking little lady of about five-and-thirty, dressed in half mourning, was dividing her time between stitching and placidly gazing up at the great snow slope away above the back of the *chalet*.

“Aunt—Aunt Ecclesia,” cried the girl excitedly; “come quickly: papa’s dying.”

“Stuff! my dear,” said the little lady, smiling. “He’s always dying.”

“But, aunt, he is very, very bad, indeed!”

“Of course he is, my dear. He would have that Swiss champagne yesterday,” said the lady, rising.

“I never saw him so bad before.”

“Nonsense, my dear. He makes a terrible fuss about it. I do not go on like that when I have neuralgia so badly.”

By this time they were at the door, and as they hurried into the room—

“Well, John, dear; is your leg so bad?”

There was a deep groan, and a spasm of pain convulsed the sufferer’s countenance, making him open his eyes for a moment before he closed them again tightly.

“How are you now, papa? Shall I send at once for a doctor?”

“Dying—dying—dying!” groaned the sufferer.

"You are not, John, dear. It's all stuff and nonsense," said the little lady, bending down and kissing his forehead, quickly. "Why, your head's as cool as cool."

"It'll be colder soon," said the Colonel.

"Oh, papa!" sobbed Hester, as she flung her arms round him, and burst into a wild fit of sobbing, which made him draw her closely to his side.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, John," said the little lady, calmly. "You'll break poor Hetty's heart. It's too bad making so much fuss over a bit of pain."

"Fuss?" cried the Colonel, in anything but a dying man's voice.

"Yes: fuss. You know how delicate you are, and what a state your liver is in, and yet you will persist in eating and drinking what is not good for you. Dying? Stuff! You'll outlive me."

"Oh, if I were only strong again, madam, and this was India instead of this wretched gash in a hideous Swiss mountain, I would outlive you, for I'd hand you over to the Thugs."

"No, you wouldn't, John, dear," said the little lady, composedly, settling herself in a comfortable lounge, one of many luxuries the Colonel had had brought from Berne; "you're too fond of me."

"Fond of you, you miserable, smooth, plump Persian cat of a woman!"

"Aunt, dear, pray be silent. Papa, do—do be calm. You are making yourself worse."

"No, my dear, I shall not be silent," said the little lady, stitching away, "I'm doing him good."

"Hetty," cried the Colonel, lifting himself up a little, and shaking his fist at the pretty pink and white fair-haired lady in her easy-chair, "look at that woman. See how soft and smooth she is, with her claws hidden under the fur, and her white teeth all ready to bite. She tempted your poor Uncle Sam into marrying her, and then she made his life a misery, and worried him to death."

"Don't you believe him, Hetty. If I had been such a wretch, papa wouldn't have had me here to pet and make such a fuss over me as he does."

"She did—a false, smooth, white cat, Hetty," roared the Colonel.

"He was very fond of me, as you know, Hetty; and I was very fond of him."

"Bah! Nothing of the kind. You married him for his money."

"No, John, dear. I married him because he asked me to come and make his old life happy, and I tried to do my duty by him while he lived."

"Aunt, dear—pray, pray," whispered Hester, looking piteously from one to the other.

"Hetty, give me a glass of that Kirsch in a tumbler of Apollinaris," said the Colonel.

"Ought you to take it, papa?"

"What, are you going to rebel against me now? Quick!"

The liqueur and mineral water were mixed, and the "dying" man drained the tumbler, drew a long breath, and then uttered a deep sigh.

"Yes, you were a dear good girl to him, Eccle-

sia," he said. "Oh, dear me! I do wish I wasn't such a beast!"

"Papa, dear!" cried Hester, excitedly; "is the pain better?"

"Gone, my dear. It was just like a wolf at my leg till he gave a final shake with his teeth and left me."

"And you will not die this time, John dear," said the little lady, merrily.

"I won't; I'll live to look after you; for I'm not blind."

"John, what do you mean?" cried Aunt Ecclesia, changing color a little and altering her tone.

"What do I mean? Here have we been two months in this valley, and it's having a bad effect upon you."

"John!"

"Oh yes, I know. Read your Tennyson."

"I don't understand you, sir."

"And you too, Hetty. I tell you I'm not blind."

"Papa, dear, what are you thinking?"

"Ask your aunt."

"Oh, nonsense. I don't know, John," said the little lady, sticking her needle into the fabric she worked quite viciously.

"Then ask Hetty. Here have I come out to Switzerland and chosen the most out-of-the-way place in all the country to avoid one trouble, and find myself over head and ears in another."

"Hetty, my dear, your papa's going to have another fit."

“Not to-day, my dear. But look here: I don't approve of these two mountaineering chaps hanging about at this little hotel.”

“Don't be absurd, John,” said Aunt Ecclesia; “the place is free to everybody.”

“I wasn't speaking to you; but I'm going to now. I don't approve of you making eyes at that big, good-looking guide fellow—*berg führer*, as he calls himself.”

“John!”

“It would be a terrible *mésalliance*, and I will not have it.”

“Oh, I cannot sit here to be insulted!” cried Aunt Ecclesia, jumping up with flaming cheeks. “It is positively disgraceful, John—that it is.”

She rustled out of the room, and hurried back to her seat under the firs.

“Look at her,” said the Colonel; “just like a white bantam hen which has seen a frog.”

“Papa, you should not tease her like that.”

“Then she should not come and torment me when I am in such agony. There, I'm better now. Come out and have a walk, Pussy, and then I'll write my Lord Desborough such a letter as shall make him squirm.”

“Papa dear, why do you worry yourself about that matter?”

“Eh? Because it does me good. I'm not going to rust myself away. Oh, if this were only the good old times!”

“They were not better than the present, dear.”

“That they were. Fifty or sixty years ago, a gentleman could call out a scoundrel and shoot him. That’s just what I should do to my lord. There, come along and let’s go and have a look at the waterfall.”

CHAPTER III.

COLONEL JOHN BARROW DENTON strode out of the *chalet* by his daughter's side, as soon as she had covered her rich auburn hair with a simple straw hat; and a stranger who had encountered the slim, handsome, upright, elderly man—quite the *beau sabreur*, who had led a regiment of irregular horse scores of times to victory—would have been hard set to believe it was the same man who had been groaning on his couch an hour before.

“By Jove, Hetty!” he cried; “this country makes one feel elastic. I shall begin climbing a mountain before long.”

“Then it isn't a dreadful gash in the mountains, papa, and horribly cold,” said Hester, mischievously.

“Now, now, now!” he cried; “don't you trample on me, Hetty; that's Aunt Ecclesia's prerogative. My word,” he continued, stopping to take off his sun helmet and wiping his brow, “the sun does come down hot!”

“Listen,” said Hester, holding up one finger as, from far distant, right up where the snow spread down to the creeping fir and whortleberry bushes, there came the sweet, melodious chiming of the cow-bells, their wearers looking as small as goats, while a herd of these latter in the distance, on the

other side of the valley, seemed to be dwarfed to the size of rabbits.

“Lovely place, Hetty, lovely,” said the Colonel. “One seems to live again here.”

“Do you think we could climb up there, papa?” said Hester, after a pause, during which they had been drinking in the beauty of this lovely, retired spot.

As Hester spoke she pointed at the piled-up precipices behind the *chalet*, where the pure, white snow lay on the slope and deep in many a *couloir*—farther and farther for miles, till all was glacier, *firn*, and the newly fallen snow of a few nights before.

“Well, I don’t know, my dear. An hour ago I felt as if I could never walk up to my bedroom again; now I could do anything.”

“It would be very beautiful.”

“Lovely. We’ll see some day. That’s the way they go to the big glacier, isn’t it?”

“I think so.”

They walked on over the springy heather, amid patches of wild flowers, and then through the tall spruce firs, from whose branches hung heavy gray lichen, and as they went on the deep, sonorous roar of falling water grew louder and louder. Among the mossy rocks, tumbled down from the valley side ages before, the tender green of the young ferns was peeping; and a rough plank over which they stepped crossed a stream of thick gray milky water, the outpourings of one of the stone-grinding glaciers far above their heads;

while a hundred yards farther their course was beside the waters of a spring clear as crystal, and sparkling in the sun as the stream hurried on to join the river which rushed down the valley. This river tore down the narrow valley with headlong violence, till it reached a spot where the rocks closed in, and then made one bound into a terrific chasm, two hundred feet in depth. A wooden bridge crossed the gulf just where the river dropped, carrying with it stones, roots of trees, and often great trunks, some of which lay wedged in among the rocks, battered, ragged, and torn, bombarded as they were by the furious fall.

"The sun is just right," said Hester, "and we shall have the iris in perfection; and——"

"Confound them!" said the Colonel, gruffly. "Look here, Hetty; if those fellows are going to stop loafing about that little hotel any longer, I'm going away. I believe they are spies."

"Oh, papa! you don't think so."

"Yes, I do."

"Good-morning."

"Good-morning."

The utterances of two gentlemen in the familiar dress of young Englishmen on a mountaineering excursion; their heavy-greased and nailed boots, and the ice axes they carried, wearing a well-used look that told of hard work—signs indorsed by their brown faces.

The Colonel touched his helmet stiffly, and marched on with his daughter, who courteously returned the salutes.

“*Morgen.*”

“Morning, morning,” said the Colonel, unbending now to the salute of a handsome, dark fellow, whose felt hat was decorated with a cluster of freshly-plucked edelweiss, which he quickly pulled out and stood, hat in hand, as he offered it with a smile to Hester.

“*Danke schön,*” she said, taking the tribute.

The man shifted the coil of rope slung over his shoulder as he stood smiling at them—a fine, honest-looking specimen of a Swiss peasant guide, while the Colonel thrust his hand into his pocket.

“*Sehr gut,*” said the guide, resting on his ice-axe, whose head he used as a walking-stick. “*Fraiche pick!*” as he pointed high up toward a gap on the other side of the valley.

“He has been up the mountain and picked them, papa,” said Hester.

“*Ja, ja,*” cried the guide eagerly, who seemed to understand her words; “*pick—morgen—berg höchste spitz.*”

“They have been making an ascent of the Schnee Horn.”

“And welcome,” said the Colonel. “Here, get yourself a glass.”

He held out a franc; but the guide frowned, shook his head, and strode on after the two young Englishmen.

“You have hurt his feelings, papa,” said Hester, quickly.

“Pride of the cobbler’s dog,” grumbled the Col-

onel, taking out a handsome cigar case. "Here, hi! have a cigar?"

The man turned, and his face lit up with smiles, took the cigar offered to him, raised his hat again to both, and turned to go; but stopped short, tucked his ice-axe under his arm, and held out the rope, which he untwisted a little to show a red strand running through it.

"Anglischer," he said, smiling; "*sehr gut.*"

"I hope so," said the Colonel, as the man walked on after his employers; "but I pity the poor fellow who has to hang on it over a crevice. There, Hetty, our walk's over. Those two fellows are humbugs; they've engaged the guide, who seems an honest fellow, but they're here to watch me. Detectives in disguise."

"Surely not, papa," said Hester, coloring a little, and the more deeply as she tried to hide it. "Gretchen said they were English gentlemen, staying at the little *chalet* hotel. But let's go on for our walk."

"What does Gretchen know about it? Every foreigner with money is a gentleman to those people. Here, let's go back."

"Back, papa?"

"Yes. 'Diamond cut diamond.' If those scoundrels are going to watch me, I'm going to watch them."

"But, papa, you are mistaken," said Hester, uneasily.

"I never am mistaken," cried the Colonel, angrily, as he began to retrace his steps. "Those

fellows are dogging me. They have found their way out here, and I am just going to see whether they take the way back to the hotel."

"But it will look so strange," said Hester, uneasily.

"Let it. Come along."

He drew his child's hand through his arm, and they followed the guide slowly, seeing him hurry on to join the two young men in front. As the trio reached the path which led up to where the *chalet* stood upon its verdant shelf, they all stopped and stood gazing at it.

"There," said the Colonel, who was in the shelter of a clump of pines; "what did I say? Yes, we shall have to leave here; but I can fight Master Desborough with his own weapons. Have they gone up to the *chalet*? Then it's to question Aunt Ecclesia, or else to make a search. Here they think they have caught me napping; but I've such a flank movement for them as shall be a startler."

"But they have gone on toward the hotel, dear," said Hester, with a sigh of relief.

"Eh! never mind: I'll see if they do go there after all."

The Colonel increased his pace as well as the rugged path would allow till they came abreast of an opening in the side of the valley running up to the right, and here they had to cross and meet the little side streams. They were down now below huge masses of rocks which shut out the rift run-

ning up toward the great snow slopes and the glacier in the chasm above, and the party in front were some distance ahead.

"They're hiding," said the Colonel, suspiciously, as he stopped short.

"No, no, papa; there is one of them climbing that slope. You must, indeed, be wrong here; let's go back and see the cascade."

"What's that? Thunder?" said the Colonel.

The day was brilliant; not a cloud to be seen; but a terrific roar, as of many thunders, came booming from the chasm up to their right, chilling both with horror as they realized what was upon them. The Colonel caught Hester's hand. Then he pointed, and they set off over the rugged path, to get beyond the opening of the little lateral valley; but a horse at full gallop could not have reached the place in time. The deafening roar increased, and as they gazed wildly up, there was what seemed to be a huge storm of spray rushing toward them, with the shrieking of wind, the crashing of trees, and the booming of rocks forced on by the huge mass of ice and snow, which, with rapidly gathering speed, swept down the ravine, and literally leaped into the lower valley.

Hester Denton was conscious of a sudden stunning blow; then all was darkness, insensibility, and a stillness in the valley that was awful.

Three miles up in the ice fields the sun had loosened a few frozen stones. These had fallen and dislodged a little snow; the snow had dropped

on to a steep slope, where what seemed to be a bed of hailstones lay, a couple of score feet deep. These began to move, gathered impetus and speed, and in a few minutes the mighty avalanche had swept down the hollow, carrying before it ruin, devastation and death.

CHAPTER IV.

“Look here, old man, if you are going to carry on these games, let’s go back to the hotel, pay the bill, shake hands and separate.”

“What games?” said Adam Deane, frowning.

“Bless his innocency!” cried Aleck Frant, giving his ice-axe a swing, and cutting off the head of a plant.

“Can’t a man say a few civil words to a pretty girl without being bullied for ‘carrying on these games,’ as you call it? Besides, little Gretchen is Valter’s sweetheart.”

Aleck Frant, a little Hercules of a fellow, uttered a snort, tapped his black briar-wood pipe on a rock, and began to refill it.

“Valter! Why can’t you say Walter?”

“Because he calls himself the former,” said Adam Deane, quietly watching his friend as he filled his pipe.

“Don’t be an humbug, old man. You know what I mean; and, I say, look back: there’s the brave Swiss guide presenting the lady with that bunch of noble white we got up yonder.”

“Well, ladies like flowers.”

Frant laughed mockingly, as he struck a match.

“I saw how green you looked as we passed. Did you see the old boy’s face?”

"No," said Adam, thoughtfully.

"Of course you didn't! I suppose the hunt for the old mines will be all over now, and I may do my climbing alone."

"Do you wish to?"

"Of course I don't; and I should be sorry to see you going hopelessly to the bad. I did think that out in this wilderness there would be no petticoats to attract you."

"I'm thinking, Aleck, that we are going all wrong."

"I'm thinking you are going all wrong."

"And that we ought to try the other side of the valley.—Ah! here comes Valter. I say, what a brick of a fellow he is. The more I climb with him, the more I like him."

"Yes, he is a thoroughly unspoiled, manly fellow; but I wish he wasn't quite so fond of trying his English."

"I dare say he thinks the same about our German. Well, to set aside all chaff, you think we ought to try the other side up yonder. Suits me; but it's bad for your theory."

"Why?"

"Look at the snow and ice."

"Yes," said Adam, stopping to gaze upward through the narrow gorge; "but I am beginning to think that it is up some *thal* such as that the place lies."

"But it would be covered in by snow."

"Exactly! and that's why it has never been found."

“Very likely; and that’s why it never will be found until the snow and ice all melt away in some great alteration-change, as the Germans would call it. Light your pipe and sit down here; we shall see a snow-fall.”

“Without stopping to light my pipe,” said Adam, “look, there it comes.”

He pointed up the gorge to what seemed to be a cataract that was pouring down from the heights, and a dull bellowing noise came echoing from the mountains.

“Looks just like water,” said Frant, quietly. “Good big one, too. I should like to see a regular bumper come down. Hullo! what is the matter with the noble *berg* scaler?”

For the guide, evidently wild with excitement, came tearing up the road after them, shouting in German—

“Run! run!” he cried. “The snow! the snow!”

“But it can’t reach us,” said Adam, incredulously. Then, catching the infection from the guide, the two young men ran some fifty yards, as with a mighty rush the fall of snow, rocks, and shattered trees swept on, completely burying the rock round which their way had been, while the roar, echoing from side to side of the valley, died slowly away.

“Why, Valter,” cried Adam, as with blanched face he turned to the panting guide; “that was a narrow escape.”

“Herr,” said the man, solemnly, as he took off

his hat, "half a minute later, and we should all have been in Heaven."

"Open to question," said Frant, dryly; and he took off his hat, too, and wiped his brow. "Deane, old man; that was a narrow squeak for us."

"Yes; thank God it did not come down near the *chalet*."

His eyes were fixed on Colonel Denton's abode as he spoke, where it stood some hundred yards or so above the waste of snow and rock. "Great heavens!"

"What's the matter? Hit!" cried Frant, catching his friend's arm, for he reeled as if he had been struck by a flying stone.

"Those two!" gasped Deane; then turning to the guide: "The lady—the gentleman?"

"*Ach Himmel!*" yelled the man, and turning suddenly he waved his hand to them to follow as he leaped from rock to rock and down on to the snow. The two young men needed no shout, for they were already close upon his heels, the trio making their way down toward the spot where the Colonel and his daughter had been last seen.

But the spot was no longer there. In place of the path leading down to the wooden bridge which crossed the falls there was now ice and snow in drifts, piled up masses, and slopes full of debris.

Valter, in spite of the activity of the young men, kept far ahead, looking sharply to right and left as he went on, seeking for landmarks where there existed none, save at a distance, for the face of nature had been completely changed.

At last he stopped, and as he stood knee deep in snow at a spot where it lay loose, though on either hand it had been solidated by pressure, he exclaimed frantically in his own tongue:

“The path forked here; that way to the *chalet*, this way to the hotel.”

“They may have reached home, then, and are safe,” cried Deane.

“No, I looked back; they were following us toward the hotel.”

“Then—you think——”

Valter made a despairing gesture.

“Then the path is this way,” cried Frant, excitedly.

“No, no, lower down; then it went up here, then down again into the hollow, and ascended up among the trees.”

To add to their horror, they saw two female figures hurrying down from the *chalet*.

“Have you seen the master—the young lady?” shouted the younger, a thick-set, rosy lass of about twenty.

“Don’t ask me, Gretchen,” cried Valter, frantically. “They were here—here.”

He stamped his foot upon the snow, and the girl uttered a piteous wail.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen,” panted Aunt Ecclesia, “for heaven’s sake don’t tell me that—that——”

She could say no more, but stood by with blanched face, gazing from one to the other.

Deane made a deprecatory motion with his hands, and then caught Valter’s arm.

“Try and guess,” he said, huskily, “whereabouts would they be?”

The guide shook his head in a hopeless way, but gazed sharply round, then sprang to one side, fixed his eyes on the slopes of the valley, and on the *chalet*, and then turned his back.

“Yes,” he said, quickly, “the path forked here. They were following—they must have been below the big rocks, for they were near them when I looked back.”

“Yes, I remember the big rocks where the water trickled out of the rift,” cried Deane. “But quick, man—where was that?”

He held the guide’s arm in a grip as of iron as he spoke, but there was no reply for a few minutes.

“Come,” said the latter, at last, and climbing and sliding along for some distance, he suddenly stopped. “The rocks should be here. Stand back.”

Throwing off his hat, the coil of rope and his jacket, he swung his ice-axe and struck the snow, sending the icy particles flying glittering in the sunshine; then he began to strike down and probe with the spike at the end of the handle.

“Yes,” he cried, “the edge must be down here.” He raised the axe again high in the air and struck, each time feeling that there was something solid below; but at the third stroke the blade went right down out of sight, breaking through an icy crust, and making a hole big enough for a man to pass through.

“He’s right,” cried Frant.

"The path is down there," cried Valter, and at that moment there was a shout from the hotel path beyond the snow, where a party of six or seven men and women came running, the roar of the avalanche having given warning of the catastrophe.

Valter waved his hand to them to hasten, and then prepared to lower himself down through the hole, the snow below the mass of rock which sheltered the path like a wall being there loose enough. The crust through which he had broken was solid ice.

It was a vain effort, and he climbed back on to the surface with the look of despair deepening in his eyes.

"Can we do nothing?" cried Deane. "Great heavens! They are here somewhere."

"If half the commune was here to dig, herr," said the guide, sadly, "they could not save them. Tell me what to do."

Deane looked wildly round, and the scene fully indorsed the man's words. Everywhere about them was the piled-up, consolidated snow, hard now as ice, and mingled with the *débris* that had been torn from the upper valley and swept down. Masses of rock, a hundred tons in weight, had been carried from above like pebbles, and it seemed impossible that any one overtaken by the avalanche could be still living.

"Come this way, herr," cried the guide. "They may have been swept down before the snow;" and, leading on down among the stones and shattered

pine trees, he descended rapidly toward where the river ran.

It was a difficult descent, now slipping on the ice, now falling into some hollow, and then dropping through into a gap lightly covered by snow. But before they had gone many yards it was to find that the edge of the fall was reached.

"They could not have been swept down here," said Frant, sadly, as they paused where a clump of firs was standing in almost their natural position, but bent over toward the river by a great heap of the white crystals whose course they had stayed.

At that moment Deane uttered a wild cry and sprang to his left, the guide and Frant following, for his action needed no explanation.

There, not ten yards away, visible above the surface, was a man's clenched hand, with the sleeve torn back from the wrist and arm, and lying upon the snow.

"No, no; let me," cried the guide. "Let's see which way he lies."

He uttered a shout for help as he began working, tearing among the snow with the ice-axe, and indicating to the young men how they could best help.

"Work, Frant, work," panted Deane, as he tore away at the snow, which, providentially, was free of the pressure which bore on other parts and turned it into solid ice; so that before many minutes had passed they had thrown aside their axes as being too dangerous, and were scooping away the crystals with their hands.

“Mind, mind,” Valter kept whispering, as the position in which the Colonel lay was made out; and then he uttered a triumphant shout, for another arm was laid bare—thrown round the Colonel’s breast—and after a few more minutes’ toil Deane was able to pass his arm beneath Hester and raise her a little. But her face was buried in her father’s breast, his left arm being about her waist.

The sufferers were hastily borne up to the cottage, where all seemed to give way naturally to the man who alone displayed a knowledge of what ought to be done under such circumstances—a knowledge gained in mountain accidents during his career as guide.

“One seems so helpless in a case like this,” cried Deane, as he paced the little garden in front of the *chalet* with Frant, who smoked on now composedly enough.

“Well, it isn’t our trade,” he said.

“But Valter is wrong, and we were idiots to listen to him and the landlord. We ought to have sent for the doctor at first.”

“Couldn’t have got him here till to-morrow, man. Valter knows what to do. Besides, the aunt and the hotel landlady are with him.”

“Yes, yes, man, I know; but they may be letting them slip through their fingers. Good heavens! it is unbearable. Ah—here he is.”

For Valter came out of the *chalet*, and walked toward them.

“Well!” cried Deane, catching his wrist; “are they recovering?”

The guide drew back sharply, took off his hat, placed his hand behind his ear, and sent forth a wild musical cry, full of changes and variations.

“You idiot!” cried Deane. “Why don’t you speak?”

“That’s plain enough, old man,” said Frant, smiling. “Let him shout. It’s his *pæan* of triumph and praise.”

“Yes, herr,” said Valter, joyously; “they are both—the Herr Colonel and the young lady—better and gone into rest-giving ease and comfort-bestowing sleep.”

“Thank God!” said Deane, turning away and meeting Aunt Ecclesia as she came to the door fanning her heated face.

“Oh, yes,” she said, “both sleeping comfortably. Thank you and your friend so very, very much. My brother-in-law will thank you himself as soon as he is well. Tell your friend how grateful we are.”

“No need, ma’am,” said Frant, quietly. “I can hear what you say. Nothing to thank us for.”

“But can we be of any further assistance?” said Deane.

“Oh no: not now. Your attendant—that Swiss—said they ought to sleep; and—and if you will excuse me now.”

Aunt Ecclesia seemed to have become confused, and she backed away into the house, while the young men exchanged glances.

“I suppose we had better go,” said Deane, dubiously.

“Yes. I suppose no other poor creatures have been hurt.”

“Ah, here’s old Valter. Come on to the hotel, anyhow, and have a glass of Rothwein. No, hang it, you shall have one of champagne—eh, Deane?”

“Yes, yes, of course,” said the latter, as he looked hard at the guide. “You think they can be left, and without a doctor?”

“What good to have a doctor, herr?” said the guide, smiling. “The Herr Colonel and the beautiful maiden could not breathe for the snow; now they can breathe again. They are not ill.”

“What an escape!”

“Yes, herr. They were swept down, and the snow was thin and open; but we only got to them in time.”

The three men had reached the chaos of rocks, snow and trees, about which a few more people had gathered; but the spot was so secluded that there were not a dozen in all, and after Valter had recovered his rope and axe they stood gazing at the devastation around.

“And all so beautiful only this morning!” said Deane, dreamily; and he glanced back toward the *chalet*.

“Yes, made a pretty mess,” said Frant, refilling his pipe. “I say, Valter, how is this to be cleared away?”

“Cleared away, herr?” said the guide, showing his white teeth. “The snow will melt; the rocks will be covered in time with moss; and fresh trees will grow. That is all.”

“Look here,” said Frant; “we want to go up there to-morrow and see where the fall began.”

“Good, herr,” said the guide, quietly; “we will go.”

“And I say, Deane, old fellow: this may have uncovered your old mines.”

Deane made no reply, but walked quietly on toward the little hotel, where they had been staying for the past month.

CHAPTER V.

“FEEL ill? Of course I do. A man can't be buried under tons of snow for hours without feeling ill.”

“Papa! there was not much snow over us, and they say we were only there a few minutes.”

“Long enough, too. What's this? I knew it. They've floored me. Why, confound them! They contrived that snowfall to give them the opportunity.”

It was the day after the avalanche, and, very little the worse for the accident, Colonel Denton was seated in the parlor overlooking the snowy chaos below. He had suddenly grown excited, and was searching his pockets with despairing gestures.

“Have you lost something?”

“Lost? Yes. I am right—they contrived it so as to get an opportunity to rob me. They are on the way to Calais by now.”

“What is the matter?” cried Aunt Ecclesia, entering the room.

“Those spies have robbed me and gone.”

“What spies?”

“Those scoundrels who sent that snow down upon us there. I knew it—I foresaw it all.”

“Papa, what are you talking about?”

"Those men from the hotel. They have been watching us for days."

"Papa! They are gentlemen."

"Yes, I know: private detectives. It is becoming an aristocratic pursuit now. Well, the police shall soon be on their track. Gone! I knew it."

"But I saw them near the place an hour ago."

"What do I say?" cried the Colonel. "You indorse my words."

"Well, John, you are the most unreasonable man I ever knew," cried Aunt Ecclesia. "Those gentlemen saved your lives; their man attended you better than a doctor; and now you say they robbed you."

Aunt Ecclesia's face was unusually red, and she spoke excitedly—a novel thing in her—while her eyes were flashing as they encountered those of her niece, who also looked indignant and disturbed.

"Well, madam, I have good reason for saying they robbed me—a pair of confounded spies!"

"And that they brought down the avalanche!" cried Aunt Ecclesia. "For shame! Did they take your purse as well as your watch?"

"Who said they took my purse and watch? I said my cigar case."

"Oh! I stole that, papa," said Hester, merrily. "It was in the coat sent out to be dried, and I put it in that closet."

The Colonel thrust it into his pocket with a sigh of satisfaction.

"I wouldn't have lost that for a fortune," he said.

“Oh! Then I think you ought to apologize—eh, Hester.”

“Certainly, aunt,” replied Hester, smiling.

“Humph! Then I shall not apologize; and—why, confound them! They’ll never have the insolence to come here!”

He was looking fiercely through the window, and Hester made an effort to appear composed as Deane and Frant came up to the door.

“Oh, yes! Show them in,” said the Colonel; “but leave them to me,” he continued, as the fresh-colored maid entered with the gentlemen’s cards and left the room again. “They have delivered their assault, and I am ready. I like it better than being mined.”

“Papa!”

A look silenced Hester, and the next minute the two young men entered, Deane gazing anxiously at Hester, and drawing a breath full of relief as he saw that she was quite recovered.

“Good-morning,” said the Colonel, shortly. “Very good of you to call, gentlemen. I ought to make you both a long speech to thank you for er—er—saving our lives.”

“No,” said Deane quickly; “we only helped. The credit is due to our guide.”

“Indeed! Well, thank you for what you did, and if you will send him up I will give him a suitable reward.”

“Better not,” said Frant, shortly; “there’s a good deal of the gentleman in some of these Swiss guides.”

"Indeed!" said the Colonel, looking fiercely at the speaker, who returned the gaze not in the least abashed.

"They are very simple, good-hearted fellows, sir," interposed Deane, hastily; "and I honestly believe the man's satisfaction at helping you out of so terrible a predicament will be sufficient reward."

"Allow me to be the best judge about that," said the Colonel, shortly. "Staying here long, gentlemen? Just came after I had taken this place, I think?"

"Oh, no," replied Deane. "I think we are older inhabitants by a week."

"Humph! Like the country?"

"Oh, yes. Delightful place for a holiday. We are making investigations."

"Oh," said the Colonel, giving a sharp glance at each in turn; "and may I ask, without impertinence, what your investigations may be?"

"Certainly," said Deane, frankly, and his eyes met Hester's for a moment.

"I'll tell you," said Frant.

"No. Pray let the gentleman speak for himself."

"The fact is, then," said Deane, "the Romans used to cross the pass yonder from Northern Italy, and I find from old chronicles that there were mining settlements in this valley."

"Coal mining settlements?" said the Colonel, sarcastically.

"No; they worked a vein of gold, and I am trying to find out the spots."

"Bah!"

"I don't say it is true," said Deane, rather warmly, for the Colonel's dictatorial manner nettled him. "I give you the tradition for what it is worth. I think it very likely, for gold is being mined now on the Italian side "

"What, sir? where?"

"Off the Val Anzasca, I believe."

"Well, sir, have you found the old mines?"

"No. But it is a very interesting search, and gives piquancy to one's stay in the mountains. The gold is there, or it is not. The probability is that it exists, for there is plenty of room for it."

"Little better than madness," said the Colonel, in spite of a deprecating sign from his daughter. "I never could see any wisdom in these ascents."

"Oh, they please a fellow, and give him something to do," said Frant.

"And I think it very brave," added Aunt Ecclesia, who colored as soon as she had spoken, and went on rapidly with her work.

"But there is really a great deal of interest in an ascent, Miss Denton," said Deane, coming to the rescue; "and it calls for a good deal of patient endurance, besides giving health and strength."

"Humph! And so you came to Switzerland to hunt for gold," said the Colonel.

"Yes, and it would do you good, sir, to join us."

"What!" said the Colonel; and Hester and her aunt looked terrified, while Deane gave his companion a look that was not seen.

"I say it would do you good," repeated Frant,

who in his stubborn manner and aspect resembled a Brittany bull. "You're only about fifty-five."

The Colonel ground his teeth this time, for as Frant's words reached his temper, a gouty pain came in throbs and went through his agonized nerves.

"You climb a great deal, do you not?" said Hester quickly, for she read the signs of the coming storm in her father's countenance.

"Oh, yes, I'm always out on the mountains."

"May I ask who called me a great invalid?" said the Colonel with forced calmness.

"Oh, it was only a casual remark, Colonel, made at the hotel," said Deane, hastily. "You old Indian officers——"

"May I ask how you know that I am an old Indian officer and a Colonel?"

"Eh? Oh, I'm sure I don't know how," continued Frant; "but, as I was saying, a simple regimen, plenty of fresh air and exercise, and such a tramp as I could give you every day, would——"

The explosion came, and Aleck Frant stared. In spite of an agonizing pain, the Colonel sprang to his feet and pointed to the door.

"Papa! Pray—pray!" whispered Hester, as she darted to his side, and laid her hand upon his breast; but he only passed his arm round her and pointed still to the door.

"John, dear," began Aunt Ecclesia.

"Silence!" he roared. "And you, both of you, leave my house, and never dare enter it again. If it had not been for yesterday's business, confound

it! I'd have said ten times more. Do you think I'm blind? Do you think I do not see through you both? But it will not do, all this blundering assumption of the tourist. Go back to England and tell them what I say. No, stop at Paris, gentlemen, and take a few lessons of the French *mouchards*."

"Colonel Denton, I beg——" began Deane.

"No, no; enough. There's the door. I tell you I am not blind. I was suspicious; now I am certain. Good-day, gentlemen. Go at once, or I am sure I shall lose my temper."

"The old man's mad as a March hare," said Frant, as they strode down the path to the snow fall.

"You blundering fool!" cried Deane, passionately.

"What—have you got it, too? What is it? Reaction from the accident yesterday?"

"Could you not see that you were touching on delicate ground, upsetting the susceptibilities of an eccentric invalid?"

"Rubbish!"

"But why did you speak?"

"Because I did not want him to take us for a pair of noodles. Adam Deane, I was ashamed of you! Sat there, you did, making eyes at the girl. Not a word to say for yourself. Why, you looked a regular milksop."

"Upset everything, you have," cried Deane, without heeding him. "Suspects my object. Well, I suppose so. I don't disown it. But for

you to go and upset him like that! Here, let's go back and apologize."

"What!" cried Frant, looking more like a bull than ever. "Apologize for saving the old pepper-pot's life, and then giving him a bit of good advice! Do I look like the sort of man that would?"

He certainly did not, but Deane did not say so, for he was thinking of Hester's eyes—how appealingly they had looked into his and how vain had been his efforts to stay his friend's eloquence.

"My dear John, you really are insufferable!" cried Aunt Ecclesia, who seemed to be unusually excited.

"Hold your tongue!" cried the Colonel. "Oh, this cursed pain! Well, what have you to say?"

"Only that it is a pity, papa," sighed Hester. "They behaved so bravely yesterday."

"Yes," said the Colonel, wincing; "that's the worst of it. But I believe," he added, after bending down to hold his leg, "yes, I believe it was only to carry out their schemes. If I had been lost under that snow they couldn't have got what they want, and if they didn't get it they wouldn't be paid."

"Papa! It is impossible they can be what you say."

"Of course they cannot, Hester, my dear," said Aunt Ecclesia.

"Deal you know about it, madam. I'm right—I know I'm right. A pair of spies in Lord Des-

borough's employ. By George! I wish I had brought a pistol with me."

"Hush, John, dear, pray!" cried Aunt Ecclesia; "here is a gentleman coming up."

"Another of them?" cried the Colonel. "Well, I'm up now, and I'd face a dozen if it were necessary. Oh, my leg—my leg!"

He stamped to the door, threw it open, and strode out—to face a well-dressed gentleman standing, stick in hand, on the veranda, while he swung an ivory-tubed field-glass by his left side. The new-comer started slightly, for the encounter had come upon him suddenly.

"I beg your pardon," he said, quickly. "I ought to have known better; but I thought this was a peasant's *chalet*."

"Pardon granted, sir," said the Colonel, shortly, as his eye took in the stranger's appearance. "It is a peasant's *chalet*, but my residence for the moment."

"My porter is behind with my portmanteau," said the stranger. "I was walking on. There is a little hotel somewhere here, is there not?"

"Yes, a mile on up the valley, across that snow-fall."

"I thank you. Good-day. But—may I ask for a glass of water—it is very hot."

"Of course," said the Colonel, who had now grown calm as the shooting pains in his leg died out. "Come in. Ecclesia, my dear," he shouted, "a glass or two, and the sherry."

"No, no, I beg——"

“No apology, sir. If ever Englishmen ought to be hospitable it is when they meet abroad.”

“Hetty,” whispered Aunt Ecclesia; “it is that gentleman who used to stare at you down at Brighton.”

But Hester had already recognized him, and a sensation of dread which she could not master made her shrink toward the inner door.

But she was too late. The Colonel was asking the visitor into the room.

“My daughter—my sister-in-law. Mr.——I beg your pardon?”

“Anderson,” said the visitor, quietly. “Lawrence Anderson, of Bedford Row.”

CHAPTER VI.

“WHAT! Does he know them?” said Deane, wonderingly, as he stood at the side of the little hotel with Frant and the guide.

They were just about to start for a long climb in the gorge down which the avalanche had rushed, when Frant drew attention to a party coming along the path, and Deane had involuntarily drawn back to let them pass, hesitating about showing himself after the angry scene with the Colonel. The party consisted of the little family from the *chalet*, the ladies on mules, and the Colonel upon a stout cob, the animals being in charge of two guides. As they came nearer, Valter said, “The English military herr says he shall not leave the *chalet*, for the snow has all come down from the gletscher, and there is nothing to fear.”

“How do you know he said that?” cried Deane.

Valter’s handsome rustic face turned red as a blushing girl’s, and he said in a confused way:

“I happened to be there last night—Gretchen told me. Ah, look,” he added, hastily; “the beautiful maiden is riding Fritz’s mule, Beelzebub. He is a demon.”

“Is he dangerous?” said Deane, anxiously, as he gazed through the trees at the little advancing party.

"Dangerous for the lady? Oh, no; but dangerous to go near. He bites and kicks. He is a demon."

Just then the new visitor to the hotel—the quiet, keen-looking Englishman who had arrived on the previous evening—appeared, lighting his cigar in the broad veranda; and then, catching sight of the mounted party, hastily threw his Havana away and walked down toward the path, hat in hand.

"Seems like it," said Frant. "Ah! the old man is treating him more civilly than he did us."

For the Colonel seemed to receive the new-comer pleasantly enough as he checked his cob. The ladies entered into conversation, and Deane winced as he saw the stranger raise his hand to pat the great sleek mule upon which Hester was mounted. A grim smile crossed his face as the mule swung round his head and gave a vicious snap at the new-comer, making him leap back in alarm. There was a burst of conversation then, the new-comer drew back bowing, and the little party went on.

"They are going up the high path by the zig-zag," said Valter, "to see down into the little *thal* where the snow fell."

"But that's taking a leaf out of our book," cried Frant.

"No," said the guide, smiling; "they keep to the mule path; we take to the mountain."

"Yes," said Frant, "it would bother them to keep with us."

Just then Anderson came slowly toward them, smiling with satisfaction and lighting a fresh cigar.

"A fine morning, gentlemen.—Climbing?"

"Yes," said Deane, carelessly, "just for a few hours. Going on to the Rhone Valley?"

"I? well, no; not at present. To a man seeking health this place seems inviting for a stay. You have had an accident, it seems, there where I crossed the *débris* of the snowfall. The landlord tells me that a lady and gentleman were buried."

"Yes, a narrow escape," said Deane.

"No more risk—no more danger?" inquired Anderson.

"Oh, I don't know," interposed Frant, dryly. "Rather an avalanchy place."

"Well, I'll risk it," said Anderson, smiling; "at all events, for a few days. And so you are going to climb?" he continued, looking curiously at their ice-axes and the guide's rope. "Are any of the ascents dangerous?"

"Tidy," said Frant. "Come and see."

"I? Oh, dear, no. Quite an invalid, my dear sir. I'll sit outside here and smoke and see you climb. I dare say I can follow you with my glass."

"*Au revoir*, then," cried Frant.

"I hope not," said Deane to himself, as he bowed and then made a sign to Valter to lead on.

"Staying here," said Anderson, as he stood with his head a little bent, gazing at the departing climbers through his thick brows. "Rather good-looking for neighbors; but they don't seem to know them. Hah! Things shape well. Fate is propitious. Right in the camp at once!"

He paused and looked at the glittering snow-

peaks through the thin blue cloud of smoke ascending from his lips.

“Beautiful as ever,” he mused. “How strange that at my time of life I should be so moved. Well, the passion was only waiting. It was there. Love—the business of the idle, the idleness of the busy. Let me be idle for a while. Yes, and busy too. I wonder where he keeps those letters. At home! Not he. He has them with him in some pocket-book or belt.”

He threw himself into one of the wooden chairs out in the sunshine, and sat back to watch the route Deane and his companions had taken. “There they go,” he muttered. “Young fools engaged in their break-neck work. One of these days both of them will perhaps slip and drag down that sturdy guide—the whole party hurled by a false step to destruction. Well, serve the young idiots right. What business have they to be young and good-looking, and strong. Bah! they are nothing to me. Let them live. They will not cross my path; they had better not. Hester—Hester Denton; beautiful and heart-whole as yet. Well, the sweeter task to teach her to conjugate the verb ‘to love.’ But how? I must get the letters—I must win her. The old man is as fierce as a watch-dog, and I’ll be bound to say as suspicious—and as blundering. I must be careful. Pooh! I can *finesse* this little affair when I have thought it out more.”

He lay back, smoking and watching, as Deane

and his companions appeared and disappeared, always rising.

“It does not look high,” he continued, turning as he saw the three young men passing along a mere ledge of precipice; “but it is. If they had taken the same route as the Colonel, I should have followed. How long will it be before she returns? Shall I go after them? No, it would be unwise. I must play the retiring *rôle* of the invalid, and let the Colonel draw me out. *Festina lente*. Bah! what an execrable cigar.”

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE, of course perfectly ignorant of the planning going on below, Deane was trudging slowly up the steep slope, last of the trio, thinking of the new-comer to the hotel, and not pleasantly, for the man seemed to repel him.

Young men who have formed attachments, and before they have fettered the lady with a promise, look upon every stranger who approaches La Belle as a possible rival.

Deane dismissed the thought merrily, but it refused to be cast aside, coming back with the most extreme pertinacity—perhaps from the fact that Lawrence Anderson, down by the hotel, was thinking of him. People laugh at these things, and call them accidental coincidences; but judging from the singular facts constantly brought to notice it seems as if one mind, irrespective of distance, does influence another.

“Take care, herr, take care!” shouted Valter, reproachfully, for Deane was brought from the land of day-dreams back to the present by an ugly slip, consequent upon placing one foot where he ought never to have stepped.

“What’s the matter with the herr?” whispered Valter to Frant as they climbed higher.

“Eh?”

"The herr. He always did go dreaming on about those old gold pits that we have not found; but now he thinks of other things so much that I shall be afraid to guide without the rope."

"Got your complaint, Valter, my lad."

"My complaint, herr—the aches from my old fall down the crevasse?"

"No," said Frant, with a peculiar look. "Gretchen."

The guide started as if he had been stung, and turned red as a school-boy.

"What fools fellows are when they've got lady on the brain," said Frant, beginning to whistle.

A minute or two later Valter reached a perpendicular stone, threw up his ice-axe, clambered up, and then lay down on the top to extend his hand to help Frant. His face was bright and smiling now, and as he drew the young man up he whispered:

"I see, now, herr—the beautiful young lady at the *chalet*."

"Hush," said Frant, sternly; "a still tongue maketh a wise head. English proverb, man of muscles."

"I think so, herr—yes, I do."

"Right. Come along, Adam, old man. Rather steep here: how am I to get up?"

"Give me your hand, herr," said the guide; "put your foot on that piece that stands out. Now."

He exerted his great strength as he spoke, and aided by the active efforts of the young Englishman, landed him safely by his side.

"There!" he cried the next minute, as he led the friends to the edge of a precipice, where the rock went down sheer for a couple of thousand feet; "the herr can see now where the snow fell."

He pointed along the terrible chasm below, to where, piled up, slope beyond slope, lay the snow of ages glistening in its purity—patches miles across, looking like soft white cushions. They stood gazing at the magnificent spectacle before them, the point they had won being isolated so that it afforded a view of a perfect panorama of peak and ice-field, ridge and hollow, dazzling white in the clear sunshine, in shadow, of the most perfect blue.

"Pity the poor beggar who can't climb," cried Frant, suddenly. "Makes me feel as religious as a saint."

"Glorious, glorious!" said Deane, softly; but this exultation passed away and a feeling of disappointment came over him because some one was not with him to share the wonders of that scene.

"I think your gold mines are down there, Adam," cried Frant, pointing to where the rocks had been swept bare by the passing of the avalanche.

"Possibly. We'll go down and see. How shall we go, Valter!"

The guide was silent for a few minutes, and stood shading his eyes with his hand. Then, in a quick decisive way—

"Will the herr be careful?"

"Of course."

"Then we'll go down yonder, cross the glet-

schers, and after getting down to the *thal*, go round home by the mule path."

"But it will not be there," said Deane, hastily, and looking to see if Frant was watching; but he was not, for he was pushing stones over the edge, to watch them go thundering down, leaping and bounding from rock to rock, striking fire sometimes, and disappearing at last in the gloomy gorge.

"Yes, a good hour farther. We can easily reach it from there."

"Go on, then."

The guide started at a good pace right along the edge of the gorge, till at the end of an hour he stopped again where they could gaze down a steep slope at one of those wonders of nature—a glacier—a frozen river, winding down between two slopes, and crossed and riven in all directions by crevices, down one of which a torrent rushed with a roar that sounded musical as it rose to where they stood, and reappearing a small distance from the end of the glacier, making its outlet through a cavern of celestial blue.

"Shall we rope together?" said Deane.

"Not necessary," cried Frant.

"Better, herr," said the guide, who was already uncoiling the stout cord, wound across his chest; and as soon as this was secured from one to the other he set off, picking his way over the ice, zig-zagging among the cracks that were too wide to leap, till they reached at last the great crevice down which the snow water poured with a heavy metallic roar.

“Not too near, herr,” said Valter, as, attracted by the terrible place, Deane peered down through the transparent blue to where all was absolutely black.

“Terrible!” said Deane, with a shudder. “Get that piece of ice loose and let it go down.”

The guide nodded, the piece toppled over, and seemed to fall slowly down.

For a space during which one might have counted forty there was nothing heard but the roar of the falling water; then came a dull echoing crash, followed by a sharp ringing sound and a repetition of the crash, fainter and fainter, till the sound died away in a whisper.

“Here, come along, old fellow,” said Frant; and, mounting a spur of the ridge beyond them, Valter led them panting and breathless to where they could descend into the Schneethal and reach the mule path.

It was a stiff descent, but there was plenty of foothold on the many stream beds which scored the rocky sides; and as the guide leaped at length on the path, closely followed by the two young men, he uttered a triumphant shout, which was answered from beyond a curve of the valley some fifty yards away.

They were not long kept in doubt as to who had responded, for a hanger-on at the hotel, whom Deane recognized at once as one of the mule drivers who had accompanied the Colonel that morning, suddenly appeared before them and shouted to them to come on.

“There has been some accident,” said Deane; and setting off at a sharp run, closely followed by his companions, he came the next minute upon the party he had seen set off just before they themselves had started.

Deane was about to check himself; as far as he could see nothing was wrong. The Colonel, Aunt Ecclesia, and Hester were mounted on their respective steeds, the second guide holding Hester’s mule by the head; but this animal suddenly uttered a doleful sound, half neigh, half bray, and began to struggle vigorously.

The Colonel frowned as Deane stopped short.

“Is there anything the matter, sir?” he said, distantly; “do you want help?”

“My good sir, can you not see?” cried the Colonel, testily. “That mule has wedged its hoof in a crack of the rock, and we cannot get it free.”

“Had not the lady better dismount?”

“No,” said the Colonel, fiercely. “At the first attempt the brute kicks and plunges frightfully, and we are on the edge of a precipice.”

“It is madness to let her stay where she is,” said Deane, firmly. “Excuse me, madam.”

As he spoke, he stepped up to the side of the mule, took Hester by the waist, and lifted her off; the girl, after a frightened glance at her father, letting herself drop into Deane’s arms.

“How dare you!” roared the Colonel. Then changing his tone: “Thank you, sir; you were quite right. The brute plunged furiously when it was tried before. There—you see.”

The animal now threw out its heels viciously, snorting and squealing as it literally thrashed the air with savage kicks.

“Son of Beelzebub!” muttered Valter; “what a demon he is.”

“Mind—mind!” cried the Colonel, catching Hester’s hand. “The brute will scare the others. We shall be over the precipice directly.”

The path was too wide for there to be any real danger; being guarded, too, on the side of the precipice by sturdy pine trees, which had somehow managed to strike root in the mountain side.

“I thank you, sir—good-day,” said the Colonel, haughtily, as he raised his hat after dismounting.

“Don’t mention it, pray,” replied Deane, coldly; and he turned away to examine the crevice in which the mule’s hoof was fast.

“Let me help you down, Ecclesia,” continued the Colonel. “We must walk back.”

“Oh! dear me,” said the lady addressed, making a grimace. “Walk back? This terrible path.”

“If you wait a few minutes, sir,” said Deane, quietly, “it may not be necessary. Let’s see,” said Deane, going down on one knee by the pinioned hoof—a liberty resented by the mule, which tried to kick with the near hind leg, failed, and made up for the failure by a vicious attempt to bite.

“Quiet!” shouted Frant, and he gave the brute a rap on the nose with the handle of his ice-axe. Then he seized one end of the bit and held the animal’s head fast.

It was risky work; but Deane seized the leg, and taking his geological hammer and chisel from his pocket, he began to split off great flakes of the laminated rock, widening the crevice rapidly, with such good effect that at the end of a few minutes the mule dragged his hoof out with no more harm than a few scratches and a loosened shoe.

“*Ach himmel!*” ejaculated one of the men. “The English are a wonderful race.”

“Stop a moment,” said Deane, replacing his chisel, and lifting the mule’s hoof. “Keep a tight hold of his head, you fellows,” and with a few smart taps he tightened the nails of the shoe, set the mule’s leg down, and drew back as the animal kicked, plunged, squealed, and then began to munch greedily at some grass on the side of the path.

“There, sir,” said Deane, coldly; “you have no occasion to walk back.”

“I thank you,” said the Colonel, raising his hat; “but the brute is not fit for my daughter to mount.”

“But he is like a lamb now, herr,” cried the owner, plaintively; “he will not kick again. That was his joy at being free.”

The Colonel hesitated, and looked at Deane inquiringly, and against his will.

“I think the man is right, sir,” said Deane. “Good-day;” and without trusting himself to look at Hester, he raised his hat and passed on with his companions.

“Confound him!” muttered the Colonel, gnawing at a bit of his gray mustache.

"They might have offered to help us on to the things again," said Aunt Ecclesia, pettishly.

"Nonsense! Here, Hester, my child, mount up on this piece of stone. Yes, that's right," he continued, as the man led the mule alongside. "You are not afraid to ride?"

"Oh! no," cried the girl, smiling.

"There is no need to fear; he will go like a lamb now, herr."

And so it proved, the mule finding its way down the mountain path, and all going well save with the Colonel, who fidgeted his horse by tugging at the bit as he thought over the scene again.

"Confound him! Behaved like a gentleman, after all. But no; I can't be wrong. If I were sure, I'd go at once; but I don't quite like to on suspicion. Oh, it's all a trick. Too much of the mechanic to be a gentleman."

Just then a thought struck the Colonel, and he behaved as men do who have something about them they wish to keep secret: his hand went involuntarily to his breast, as if he doubted. But he drew a long breath full of relief; and feeling free from pain, he chatted merrily with Hester about their adventure till they reached the little hotel where Anderson was still seated outside in the sun, Baedeker in hand,

CHAPTER VIII.

“REALLY, Hester, my dear, I cannot understand your papa.”

“You ought to by this time, aunt,” replied the girl, looking up ingenuously. “You know how he suffers—what agony he is in sometimes. Of course, he does speak petulantly then.”

“Petulantly? Oh, my dear child; if you call that petulance, what would it be if he were in a passion. Ah, there he is talking to that invalid gentleman about mineral waters and baths. Do you like this Mr. Anderson?”

“No, aunt, not at all.”

“That’s right, my dear. Really, I quite detest him. He is too smooth and polite. I wonder at your father taking to him so.”

“Yes, I have been surprised,” said Hester, “seeing how averse he is to strangers.”

“Well, I can tell you why. It is because he flattered your father by asking his advice about his health. There, they are coming in.”

“Didn’t you say you would like a walk, aunt?” said Hester, rather hastily.

“Yes; but we cannot go now. It would look so rude, my dear.”

“Oh, no, aunt; they will be talking together. Let’s go at once.”

“I’m quite willing, my dear; only let me get my pressing boards and the Alpenstock.”

“They are here, aunt, dear. We can slip out through the window.”

Hester caught the little strapped-up boards, with their botanical paper inside; their hats were on the little table, and as Anderson and the Colonel came up to the door, they passed out of the window, stepping at once on to the mountain pathway, and in among the trees, so that they were hidden from any one in the cottage.

“Come in,” said the Colonel. “Here, Hester, my dear, I have brought you in a visitor. Eh? not here! Upstairs, I suppose. You will take a cigar, Mr. Anderson?” he continued, as he drew out a handsome Russia-leather case.

“Thanks; no, not in-doors. But you were saying that you have derived great benefit from the air in this place.”

“Very great, I can assure you; and—let me see, you have been here nearly a fortnight.”

“Almost,” replied Anderson, smiling. “The time glides away very rapidly when one is upon a holiday excursion.”

“Yes, I suppose so. I never take holidays, and never did. But you certainly are stronger and better than when you came.”

“Do you think so?”

“Decidedly. Your walk is firmer, and I notice that you go farther.”

“Oh, I didn’t know.”

"I think I do. Where did you say you were going?"

"To Andermatt; and from thence I shall make my way to the Engadine."

"Ah, yes! Very highly praised place; but I don't think it is any better than this Schneethal."

"I wonder whether we are alone," thought Anderson, as he sat back and watched his host through half-closed eyes. "The letters are in that pocket-book, for a wager. If we were quite alone, how easily one might give him a stunning blow and be off down the valley. But I am not quite sure about the notes in the pocket-book. Bah! It is only his cigar-case. He must have an inner pocket somewhere. Perhaps sewed up in a belt."

The Colonel walked to the door in happy ignorance of the fact that he was being attentively watched, and called up the stairs—

"Hester! Ecclesia! are you coming down?"

"The ladies have gone out to pick flowers, sir," cried a maid.

"Hah!" ejaculated Anderson, as if relieved; and he wiped his dewy brow, for the temptation had been strong upon him, and he had not felt sanguine of success. But he felt annoyed; for it flashed across his mind that he had been asked in twice before, to find Hester absent.

"Surely it is not to avoid me," he thought.

"They are always collecting," said the Colonel, peevishly. "I cannot think what pleasure women

can find in picking and drying the wretched weeds they find about here."

"Still, if it affords them pleasure, it gives a zest to their walks."

"Yes; but they are too fond of going out," said the Colonel, crossing to the window and looking up the mountain side. "Here, let's go and see if we can find them."

"Certainly," replied Anderson, rising. "But really," he continued, in a hesitating tone; "I—perhaps you would prefer being alone."

"If I did, sir, I should not have proposed our going together."

Anderson made a deprecating gesture.

"I beg your pardon. A little touch of my complaint; it makes me speak irritably. Come along; the fresh air may do us good."

"Pray, do not apologize," said Anderson, sighing. "I know too well what it is to be in pain. Why, my dear sir, that is one reason why I came out here. The irritation I have displayed has, I know, annoyed my friends, but not one hundredth part so much as it has vexed me."

"Exactly; that is it," cried the Colonel, hastily. "I find myself speaking to my child and sister-in-law in a way that I am sure hurts their feelings. Then why do I speak so, you may say. I cannot help it. But come along; don't let's talk about our ailments on a day like this."

In the mean time, Hester had hurried her aunt along through the pine wood, and up and up till they reached the shelf-like path along the side of

the valley, and neared the spot where the accident had befallen the mule. Here Aunt Ecclesia plumped herself down upon a rock.

"Not a step farther, my dear," she said, panting, and wiping her scarlet face. "The way you have raced me up here is terrible. Why, one would have thought that the geological gentleman from the hotel was pursuing you."

"Aunt, how absurd!" cried Hester, flushing more deeply than the occasion warranted.

"Oh, I am not blind, my dear; and certainly I have seen him looking at you in a very particular way."

"If I thought what you say was true," cried Hester, with spirit, "I should beg papa to leave here at once."

"And if you did, my dear, what good would that do? Of course, he would follow us."

"Aunt!" cried Hester, with a stamp of the foot, and her eyes flashed.

"Gracious! Why, child, you are getting as passionate as your father. I only spoke the truth."

"It is not the truth, aunt. It cannot be the truth. We have hardly spoken to each other. I might—I might just as well say that I have seen that other gentleman looking particularly at you."

"Hester, my child! Oh, this is too shocking! Really, I must request that you never address me in such a way as that again."

Hester did not reply, but began culling the wild flowers that abounded up the slope, while her aunt took the other side of the path, where the

mountain descended gently for some distance, and then dropped sheer down to the valley, forming a cliff many hundred feet in height.

"Be careful, aunt dear; the grass is rather slippery in places."

"Oh, yes, I'll take care," was the reply; and specimen after specimen was picked and laid between the leaves. Aunt Ecclesia was tempted on and on, till a cluster of gentians just beyond a young pine caught her eye.

"I must have them," she said to herself; "they are the best I have seen."

The task of picking them was easy enough, and passing her arm round the pine, she stooped down, stretching out her right hand to reach them. But as she bent forward, she suddenly realized that she had descended right to the edge of the precipice, close where the water took its leap; and as she gazed over the flowers she sought, her eyes swept down to where, seven or eight hundred feet below, the *chalets* looked like so many wooden bee-hives.

She was in no danger. All she had to do was to quietly retrace her steps, passing between the pines till she reached the path, some fifty feet above her head. But the power to move was gone; her eyes dilated and grew fixed, and all she could do was to breathe hard and cling tightly to the pine trunk, listening all the while to the whisper of the falling water.

"It is drawing me down," she whispered to herself; "it is drawing me down!"

For Aunt Ecclesia's nerve was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

“AUNT! aunt! where are you?”

As she spoke she caught a glimpse of a white dress through the trees, and stepped off the path to descend.

“Oh! aunt; is that not too near the edge?” she said, merrily. “Come back, madam. It is my turn to scold now.”

As Hester spoke she descended slowly from pine to pine, and then stopped short as she came fully in sight of her aunt, clinging to the tree and staring with a peculiar fixed expression down into the valley.

“Aunt, what is the matter? Come back from there.”

But there was no reply. It was as if the figure before her were paralyzed, or suffering from some terrible attack of nightmare, so motionless and fixed did it seem.

For a few moments the strange nervous affection seemed to have attacked Hester; but she mastered it, and, fully realizing the danger, now began to descend cautiously toward where the paralyzed woman clung. But she had not gone many yards before a voice from above roared “Stop!” and Deane and Frant came hurrying down from where they had been perched, some eighty or a hundred yards away.

Hester obeyed the call to stop, and looked back in a frightened way from where she stood on the steep grassy slope down which Deane rapidly came.

“You don’t know how dangerous this place is,” he cried. “Pray come back.”

For answer Hester pointed to her aunt.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Deane; “she must be mad!” and seizing Hester’s wrist he pressed her toward a tree. “Hold that,” he cried, “till I come back.”

“Take her up, man, yourself,” said Frant, who brushed by him, and the pair stood watching excitedly as the sturdy little fellow descended to where Aunt Ecclesia clung to the pine.

The spell was broken as Frant caught her arm and drew her back. She closed her eyes, uttered a sob, and her legs gave way beneath her.

“No, no,” said Frant, roughly, “don’t faint.” There was no reply, the frightened woman being for the moment utterly helpless. “Look here,” continued Frant, “put your arm round my neck and hold tight; I’ll carry you back to the path.”

Aunt Ecclesia uttered another low sigh, shivered, and then obeyed, Frant taking tight hold of the pine with his right hand and lifting the lady by passing his left arm round her waist.

“Steady a moment, herr,” cried Valter. “I’m coming down.”

“No need,” said Frant, and drawing a long breath, he loosened his hold of the pine and climbed back steadily with his load to where Hes-

ter and Deane stood, the former half hysterical with emotion.

“One minute’s rest,” said Frant, quietly. “Hold tight, please, ma’am. Now, then, all together.”

The rest of the way was climbed, and the group had just gathered upon the mule-path, where Aunt Ecclesia had burst into a passionate flood of tears, when the Colonel and Anderson appeared on the scene, the former starting angrily and increasing his pace, while Anderson followed, frowning heavily.

“What is the meaning of all this?” cried the Colonel, fiercely. “Was this planned in advance?”

“The ladies are ignorant of the dangers of these mountains, sir,” said Deane, coldly.

“Oh, thank you,” sobbed out Aunt Ecclesia, extending her hand. “You have saved my life.”

“Oh, nonsense!” said Frant, bluffly. “But I wouldn’t go down like that again. Good-day.”

He nodded to the Colonel, and followed Deane, saying, “Come on, old fellow, I want to finish my pipe.”

“Here,” said the Colonel, making a sign to Valter; “come on and see me to-night; I want a few words with you.”

Valter touched his hat and walked away after his employers.

“I shall not go,” he said to himself. “I don’t want to be paid for getting them out of the snow. How can he be the father of such a maiden as that? No! I will not go. Yes, I will,” he added, after a pause; “Gretchen is there.”

CHAPTER X.

THAT same evening, Colonel Denton walked up to the hotel where Anderson was seated in the veranda, sipping his coffee. Deane and Frant were perched upon a mass of rock, watching the Alpenglow on the snowy peaks.

Anderson rose as the Colonel passed him with a short nod, and then subsided in his chair.

"Have I offended him?" he wondered.

But surprise changed to annoyance as he saw the Colonel continue his way toward the group on the rocks. Deane and Frant saw the old officer's approach with surprise, and the latter whispered: "We're in for it, Adam. Old man's going to challenge us for daring to meddle with his household."

"Be quiet; he'll hear," said Deane, uneasily.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said the Colonel, shortly. "Ahem. That is the Alpen glow, is it not?"

"Yes," replied Deane, gravely; "you wished to speak to me?"

"Yes, thank you. That is precise and military, sir. I do want to speak to you, but the matter is a delicate one, and out of my way. I did not know how to begin."

"I cannot offer you a seat," said Deane.

"Eh—no—of course not," said the Colonel, taking out his cigar case. "Excuse me, gentlemen, but you smoke frightful tobacco; will you take a cigar?"

"Thanks, no," said Deane, quietly; "I prefer my pipe."

"And the frightful tobacco," added Frant.

"As you will, gentlemen," said the Colonel, uneasily. He lit his own cigar and smoked in silence for a few minutes, gazing at the wondrous crimson tints upon the mountains.

"Yes," he said at last, "glorious."

"You wished to speak to me, sir, I think you said."

"Well, yes," said the Colonel, "I do. The fact is, gentlemen, I have to ask your pardon."

"It is not necessary, sir."

"I differ from you, sir. It is. You and your friend have done me and mine two or three very excellent services, and I am afraid I have met them with a good deal of ingratitude."

"Colonel Denton is at liberty to select his own acquaintances," said Deane, coldly; and his distant manner seemed to please the Colonel, who exclaimed, quickly:

"Gentlemen, I apologize for my rudeness, and I am greatly obliged for all that you have done."

"Oh!" said Frant, "that's it. Very well then, I'll take one of those cigars."

The Colonel frowned, then smiled as he held out his case.

"Would you mind telling me your name again?"

“Frant.”

“And you are the son of——”

“Admiral Frant, R. N.”

“And yours, sir?” continued the Colonel. “Far be it from me to act churlishly toward my fellow-countrymen; but, frankly—the fact is, I have been sadly pestered of late by spies.”

“Old man has a crack,” said Frant to himself.

“Indeed!” said Deane, more genially. “I am afraid my father thinks me an unworthy son, as I did not select the army for a profession; but I have not disgraced him by being a spy.”

“Was your father in the army, sir?” said the Colonel, eagerly.

“My father, General Deane, is in the army, sir.”

“General Deane is in India,” said the Colonel, sharply.

“He was at Calcutta a month ago,” said Deane, quietly.

“My dear Mr. Deane, I beg your pardon,” cried the Colonel, shaking hands warmly, happily unconscious of the fact that Anderson was watching them through his overhanging brows. “The fact is, gentlemen, I have been under a great misapprehension. Circumstances have made me suspicious, and—there, as a gentleman, I ask you to forgive me.”

“There is no need to say another word, sir,” said Deane, whose face lit up. “I must confess that I was puzzled.”

“Puzzled, sir! I behaved like a boor.”

"I think I will follow my friend's example, sir," said Deane, smiling: "I will take one of your cigars."

"Many a one, I hope," cried the Colonel, eagerly, handing his case. "Take one, too, my lad," he continued, passing the case in turn to the guide, who smiled, took one of the rolls of tobacco, and raised his hat.

"You are a connoisseur in cigars, I see," said Deane.

"Ah! you appreciate a good one," said the Colonel, watching Deane narrowly. "By the way, we generally have coffee about this time; will you walk with me to the cottage, and join us?"

Deane hesitated and glanced at Frant.

"Of course we will," said Frant, rising. "Come along, Adam. We look disreputable enough, in our rough tweeds and greased boots, to be——"

"Not swell mobsmen," said Deane, smiling.

"No," said Frant, dryly; "spies—detectives in very plain clothes indeed. I say, sir, you asked a pretty blunt question; it's our turn now. Pray, what have you been doing to have detectives hunting you?"

"Humph! You're a plain-spoken young gentleman," said the Colonel, stiffly.

"I am," said Frant. "My father is a sailor, and more plain-spoken still."

"Well, I don't like you any the worse for it; but I can't answer your question. Let me tell you, however, that it was nothing unworthy of an officer and a gentleman."

"I am sure of that, sir," cried Deane, warmly. "I apologize for my friend's words."

"There is no need, Mr. Deane," said the old officer, with stately courtesy, and there was something very winning about his stern countenance. "But come along, and we will finish our cigars in the little veranda. Hah!" he continued, taking a long breath as they passed the little hotel where Anderson was seated with his coffee and book; "this is a delicious country, is it not? One moment—our guide. Oh, I see, he is following us. I was about to ask him to go into the hotel and have some wine."

"He's all right, sir," said Frant, dryly; "you need not trouble about him."

It was quite true. Valter was following at a distance, with his mental gaze upon the kitchen at the *chalet*; but he started and looked round sharply, for in a low, suppressed whisper, some one uttered an oath full of malignant passion. But Valter did not see who it was, for the invalid visitor who had lately come to the hotel was bending over his book, the print of which was small, and the light was beginning to fail in the valley; but there was light in more than one heart, as, talking loudly, the Colonel walked slowly on with his companions toward the *chalet*, pausing a while as they reached the debris of the avalanche.

"Yes," said the Colonel, "that fall, and the unpleasant suspicions I had, made me think of changing my camp; but we are quite safe where we are, and I dare say I shall stay here for

months. Ah, Hester, my dear—Ecclesia—our friends here have come for a cup of coffee.”

The Alpenglow seemed to be lingering still on Hester's sweet, fair face; and there was a vestige, too, on Aunt Ecclesia's cheeks. Perhaps there was more shadow in the hotel veranda, for there Lawrence Anderson's countenance was ghastly pale as he said to himself: “Yes, it's deeper than I thought; but nothing shall stay me there.”

CHAPTER XI.

"GOING to give up the hunt for the old gold mine now?" said Frant the next morning.

"Give up," cried Deane; "no, why should I?"

"Thought you were going to turn lap-dog, perhaps. I say, old fellow, you'll have the old man asking your intentions before long."

"My dear Aleck, you had better give up chaffing. Your wit is as blunt as the point of my alpenstock."

"Possibly," said Frant; "my appetite is not—pass that honey."

"Where are we going this morning?" said Deane, hurriedly, to change the conversation.

"Where you like, old fellow; but I thought you would like to be off to the *chalet* directly after you had made so bad a breakfast."

"I shall go to the *chalet* again when I am asked. What do you say to crossing the glacier and having a look over the other side of the ridge?"

"The very thing. There'll be a nice bit of a climb first."

"I have an idea that the old workings lie somewhere over in that direction."

"Very likely. I wish they would make coffee like this at home. Hullo: here's the invalid."

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said Anderson, en-

tering the veranda where the young men were breakfasting. "You begin meals early."

"Want 'em in this fresh air."

"Yes, it is wonderful; my appetite is not like the same since I have been here."

He took his seat at the next table, looking longingly toward theirs.

"Plenty of room here," said Frant with his mouth full.

"Thank you, if I should not be incommoding you," said Anderson, looking at Deane to indorse his friend's invitation. "It is dull for an invalid."

"Not at all," said Deane, quietly. "Have you been ill long?"

"During the past year," said Anderson, seating himself. "Over-work. My physician said I should be all right if I gave up everything and had a good brain rest, and exercised my limbs well in the mountains. Thanks, yes," he continued to the maid who attended; "coffee and fish."

"Nothing like climbing to put a fellow right," said Frant.

"Ah, yes, I should like to," said Anderson, commencing his breakfast and looking timidly from one to the other.

The meal went on in silence for a few minutes.

"Should I be rude if I asked in which direction you make your excursion this morning?"

"By no means," replied Deane; while Frant made so peculiar a grimace—with his face averted

from the table—that the maid stared at him open-mouthed; then, catching his eye, she turned scarlet, and rushed into the *salle-à-manger*.

“We were thinking of going up the narrow rift you see yonder beyond the pines; then over a ridge to the valley that runs into this at right angles, and crossing the glacier.”

“Indeed?”

“Then we ascend this ridge, and go down into a gorge on the other side.”

“Ah! then there is a large glacier so near?”

“Thumper!” said Frant, “with some rattling great crevasses and a good fall as well.”

“How interesting,” said Anderson, sitting balancing the spoon on the edge of his coffee cup. “But it requires a trained mountaineer to climb to such an elevation as that?”

“Oh no,” replied Deane. “You could easily do it if you took time.”

“Because I was thinking I might try and go part of the way, and see you as you came back.”

“Oh, we’ll see you up to the glacier,” said Deane, good-humoredly. “If you took a sandwich with you, there would be plenty to interest you while we crossed, and we’d come back the same way and pick you up. Eh, Aleck?”

“All right, I’m open to anything, so long as it’s a climb.”

“A climb? Yes,” said Anderson; “but surely I should be giving you too much trouble. I am such a bad walker.”

“Make yourself a better one. Our guide shall

help you over the rough bits. It will be easier coming back."

"But, really—if you think I should not incommode you!"

"Not a bit. Pray come."

"Really, I cannot find words to express my gratitude."

"Don't try," said Frant, bluntly. "Save your wind; you'll want it all going up there."

"Then, if you will not mind, I think I will avail myself of your kindness; but only on one condition."

"And what is that?" said Frant.

"That if my company proves irksome, or hinders you, I am to be left behind."

"Agreed," said Deane.

"Yet another stipulation, gentlemen."

"We're making big bones of a very small matter," said Frant, taking out his pipe.

"I stipulate that you shall be my guests this evening at dinner."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Frant.

"But——"

"And Mr. Anderson will pay us the same compliment to-morrow."

"With the greatest pleasure," cried their companion. "How soon do you start?"

"As soon as you have finished breakfast and ordered your sandwich," replied Deane. "Get your flask filled, too."

"Yes, of course. I will not be long. I ought to wear thick boots, ought I not?"

“Well, if you went out in those patent leather things you’d come back barefoot,” said Frant, laughing. “Put on the stoutest pair you have, and bring an alpenstock.”

Anderson nodded and went into the house, while Frant turned to his companion. “Look here, old chap, I’m such a good young man that I can’t swear—I mean I won’t; but this is too bad. I’d rather give a fiver than have that chap with us. I don’t like him.”

“Well, really, Aleck,” said Deane, thoughtfully, “I don’t think I do.”

“And yet you’ve done the civil to him. I don’t like his eyes; there’s a shiftiness about them that isn’t nice.”

“Nonsense, man, prejudice!”

“Oh, no, it isn’t. My father always said that I was more like a bulldog than a boy; and I believe he was right, for I feel as if I want to sniff round that chap, and the more I sniffed the less I should like him. Hush, here he is.”

Anderson re-entered the veranda, looking very eager and pale with excitement, to announce that he would not be five minutes, and disappeared again.

“No; I’m sure I don’t like him.”

“Ah, well,” said Deane, who felt in the humor to be friendly with all the world, “you need not like him. We can be civil to the poor fellow as he is so lonely.”

“All right, and if he becomes much of a bore we can take him up some tough bits and soon

sicken him of wanting to come with us—walk him off his legs, eh?”

Deane laughed, and shouted to Valter that they were ready to start. Then walking carelessly out of the veranda he began to ascend the slope at the back.

“Gone to look whether he can see the goddess at the *chalet* window,” muttered Frant. “Poor old man! he’s gone there. Wonder whether the old man will stand it. Hallo! you there?” Frant started, for Anderson had returned quietly and was standing at his elbow, accoutred for the climb.

“Yes, I am quite ready now. Where is your friend?”

“Up yonder,” and he indicated the spot where Deane stood. “Confound him,” he added to himself; “why did he steal upon me like that?”

Anderson’s face was like marble, but there was a peculiar look in his eyes which Frant did not see. If he had seen it he would have liked his new friend less.

“He has gone up there,” thought Anderson, as if inspired by Frant’s own thoughts, “to see if she is at the window.”

CHAPTER XII.

“WHY, you’re not half a bad hand as a climber,” said Frant, a couple of hours later, as they stood beside the dirty gray water which came roaring from a low arched ice grotto at the foot of the glacier.

“It is not so difficult as I thought it would be.”

“We brought you farther round, and up the little side valley,” said Deane, smiling.

“I see. And then there is the air. It is so crisp and invigorating.”

“To be sure it is,” cried Frant. “Why, in six months I could make you as strong here as Valter.”

Anderson sighed and shook his head as he began to inspect the low grotto from which the water roared, peering in to a soft bluish twilight which grew darker into purple and then black.

“What an awful-looking place,” he said. “From where does all this water come?”

“Up above, miles away,” said Frant, amused by his curiosity. “Melting of the snow and ice from the mountains.”

“Where are we going now?”

“To climb up the side of the gorge here, and get on the glacier,” replied Deane, pointing up to the right. “We shall leave you yonder, on that

sunny slope, where you will be able to see the great glacier at your feet. You will have enough to look at till we return."

"Is there any danger?"

"Not the slightest, unless you wilfully walk into it. Now Valter, vorwärts!"

The guide led the way to where the glacier touched the side of the gorge. And so they climbed on over the rocks, alternating their course by taking at times to the glacier, which descended for miles like a vast frozen waterfall whose foam and waves had suddenly congealed. Every now and then they were stopped by a huge crack, where the ice had split across. These crevasses had a strange fascination for Anderson, who peered down into their blue depths and listened to the whispering gurgle of the water that trickled down from the surface melted with the heat of the sun. It was the prevalence of these great rifts which forced the party to take to the rocks at the side from time to time; but as soon as the crevasse was passed they dropped on to the ice again; for with all its ruggedness, it was easier going than the precipitous side of the gorge.

For quite two hours they climbed on, up and up, very slowly, Anderson pausing from time to time to express his delight at the wonderful tints of the ice. Ever and again they threaded their way in and out among blocks, crags, and pinnacles which had fallen from above, and some of which were so lightly poised that Valter urged caution, and spoke in whispers.

“Is he not making a needless fuss?” said Anderson. “Surely there is no danger.”

Almost as he spoke there was a terrific crash—a splintering, rending sound—and hundreds of tons of ice-crag went gliding down some hundred yards or so to their left.

“Bit dangerous that,” said Frant, dryly.

“Never try that side of the gletscher, gentlemen,” said Valter, quietly. “The ice is always rotten there.”

Anderson said nothing, but toiled on, perspiring profusely, till at last they came to where the ice towered up, rugged and splintered, thawed by many mid-day suns into jagged forms ready to topple down at a touch. Here Valter pointed to the rock at the side.

“Here is your stiffest bit of climbing,” said Deane. “Valter and I will go up first, and lower down the rope for you to have fastened round your waist. We’ll pull you up if you do not care to venture and climb.”

“Let me see you go up first,” said Anderson, quietly.

“Look here, you know,” said Frant, “perhaps you’ve had enough of it; would you like to go back now?”

“Oh, no. Let me see you climb.”

Valter attained the rugged slope, and went easily up, seizing the different projections, and mounting about sixty feet, to where the rock was split into a broad opening forming a gully, easy of ascent. Deane was after him directly, but he

used his ice-axe as a hook, inserting the pointed end of the head in horizontal crevices and easily joining the guide.

"Wait a minute," he said; "we'll send down the end of the rope."

"There is no necessity, I think," said Anderson; and without hesitation he began to climb, varying a little from Deane's course, and taking more time, but reaching the others in safety, and not realizing till he was by them that Frant had followed close behind.

"Only going to spread-eagle you if you had lost your nerve," he said, laughing. "I say, that's not so very bad for an invalid. Why, you'll be ready to do one of the peaks directly."

"Oh, perhaps with practice I might in time," said Anderson, hastily. "By the way, are you going to climb one of the important mountains?"

"Done the lot," said Frant, coolly: "Jungfrau, Wetterhorn, Eiger, Mönch, Mischebelhorn, Weisshorn, Rosa, Matterhorn, and most of the little ones about here. Try 'em again if you're on."

Anderson shook his head and set his teeth, for the climb was stiff now; but it was only over a huge buttress which jutted out over the chaos of ice-masses below, and as they carefully descended on the other side it was to where the glacier wound round comparatively smoothly, and a deep roar came to their ears.

"Are you going down on the ice again?" asked Anderson.

"Yes; to show you the great crevasse yonder where there is a moulin."

"A moulin—a mill?"

"They call it so where a big stream of water passes down. It is one of the streams which helps to make the torrent you saw coming out of the ice cavern at the foot of the glacier."

The lawyer nodded at Deane.

"Yes," he said, "I should like to see that."

A quarter of a mile upward along the glacier, and they were at the edge of the terrific crack which the friends had examined the day after the avalanche, and as they approached, Anderson involuntarily shrank back and listened, awe-stricken, to the deep musical roar of the falling water.

"Take my hand," said Deane, smilingly. "You will soon master that shrinking. Mind where you place your feet. It is worth seeing."

Anderson set his teeth, declined the proffered hand, and advanced slowly to the very edge. Frant gave a sharp glance, and the guide nodded and crept closer, thrusting his ice-axe behind in his belt, so as to have his hands at liberty, and stood watchfully near while Anderson gazed down into the awful chasm whose sides were of a deep blue where the spray of the falling water did not hide them as in a mist.

"Where does this water come from?" asked Anderson, after a few minutes, in a husky voice.

Deane pointed to a gully in the mountain-side a hundred yards away.

"I see. Is this crevasse deep?"

"Hundreds of feet, eh, Valter?"

"More than five," was the reply. "Right down through the ice to the rock."

"Now then," said Deane, "we propose that you climb up that sunny slope, and you can rest or have a nap if you like."

"There are no wild beasts—no bears," said Anderson.

"By George, no!" cried Frant; "I only wish there were."

"There's nothing whatever to fear," said Deane. "You will rest there while we cross the glacier, and go over the ridge on the other side to descend into a deep valley there."

"Gold hunting!" said Frant, merrily. "And look here, sir. You see that point with the ice on it?—that sharp pyramid?"

"Yes."

"Well, in two hours' time I'm going to wave my hat to you from there. Valter and I mean to go on while friend Deane here grubs after Roman remains. Won't come, I suppose."

"I? Not this time," replied Anderson. "I must confess to feeling tired. But you will return to me. I fear that I should be in difficulties if I went back alone."

"My word's my bond," said Frant, quietly. "Now then, have you got your sandwiches, flask, cigars and matches?"

"Yes; all safe."

"Then off you go; and don't come too close to this crevasse while we are away;" and they went

off along the lower lip of the crevasse, while Anderson slowly climbed the side of the gorge through which the frozen river ran. In half an hour the two young men and the guide had crossed the glacier and mounted rapidly to the ridge above it, whence they looked back to see Anderson snugly ensconced in a nook, full in the bright sunshine.

"Eating his lunch," said Frant, and they went on and began to descend into the deep gorge which had attracted Deane before.

"Take care of yourself, old man," cried Frant, as they reached a gully up which he and Valter were to climb to the peak.

"Never fear," was the reply.

"Mind the kobolds and goblins who guard the gold, and don't go mad if you find too much."

"I'll take care," said Deane, who was thinking of the glint of gold in Hester's luxuriant hair.

"Better get back to him as soon as you've had your squint round, and we'll drop down on to the glacier higher up. Save time."

"Very well," replied Deane, and they parted—he to go down a tremendous slope where all was black and bare; Frant and the guide to ascend higher and higher till, within five minutes of the time foretold, he stuck his hat on the top of his ice-axe, and waved it from the snow on the peak.

"See him, Valter?"

"Yes, herr; he is waving his handkerchief. No, it is the sun shining on a patch of slate. I cannot see him."

“Never mind,” said Frant, looking at his watch.
“We did it. Come on down.”

They plunged at once into a deep gully, which led them at last by many a zig-zag to where the tiny stream at the bottom flowed on the glacier far above the gully; crossing this they climbed along the side of the gorge, and in four hours from setting out reached Anderson, stretched out on a patch of heather apparently fast asleep.

“Yo-ho-ho-ho!” shouted Frant; and Anderson started up as if alarmed. “Back again, you see. Where’s Deane?”

“Deane? Your friend? I have not seen him. Is he not with you?”

Frant glanced sharply at Valter, who responded with a peculiarly wild look in his dark eyes.

“Something has happened, herr,” he said.
“Back at once.”

CHAPTER XIII.

“HAPPENED?” cried Anderson, excitedly; “you don’t think——”

He did not finish his sentence, but stared at Frant.

“No, I don’t think,” said the latter, peevishly, “I try to act,” and he started off down the slope once more to reach the glacier.

“Shall I come with you?” cried Anderson after them.

“No,” shouted back Frant; “we can go twice as fast without you. Stay there. We may come back by another way.”

Anderson drew his breath between his teeth with a hissing sound. Taking a step or two along the slope to where he could rest one hand upon a rugged stone, he shaded his eyes with the other, and leaned forward, gazing eagerly over the great frozen river that swept by him, and searching the piled-up masses, his eyes noting the pitfall-like cracks and chasm in the ice—slippery portals to the great unknown land.

There was a strange expression on the man’s thin, keen face. It was not anxiety, but a peculiar look of eagerness and joy. For an obstacle of great power had sprung up in his path; difficulties

had risen that had seemed insurmountable, and he had even begun to make plans for ridding himself of them; when now it was as if fate was playing into his hand.

“It is too good to believe,” he said with a cynical smile. “But why not? These venturesome fools come to grief sooner or later. Why not sooner—now?”

He leaned back against the rock in the glowing sunshine and closed his eyes. Not to shut out a terrible picture of one who had left him, some three or four hours before, full of youthful life and strength, now perhaps lying broken and disfigured at the bottom of a precipice; but to keep in the vision that rose up before him of Hester Denton, bright in her girlish grace—the woman who had first stirred the pulses of the middle-aged man whose existence had been one long fostering of ambition.

“Yes, why not?” he said, aloud; and at last he opened his eyes again, to see that Frant and the guide had disappeared. “I have nothing against him but that,” said Anderson, smiling. “The world is wide enough. He might have lived on but for that; but in the path I have marked out there is not room for us both. Why should it be too good to be true?”

The sun was getting well now toward the west, and he knew that he had two hours' walk back to the hotel. They said there was another way; but he doubted his ability to find it, and a slight shiver ran through him as he recalled the steep precipice

he had climbed that morning—one he would have to descend alone.

“How long had I better stop?” he asked himself at the end of an hour. “I cannot be expected to stay here till the evening is close at hand. It would be madness to stay longer! What’s that?”

A curious sound had come from a distance, seeming for a moment to dominate the deep-toned roar of the torrent. It was the guide’s *jodel*, and turning his eyes to the left he saw three figures coming down the opposite side of the gorge.

“Bah! I need not break my heart about him,” he said, mockingly. “Not even hurt,” he muttered. “Well, perhaps it is better so.”

As he stood watching the little party come across the glacier, crossing the various obstacles with a display of activity that excited his envy, he took off his hat and waved it to them, and went down part of the way to meet them with a smile.

“You quite startled me,” he said; “I was afraid something terrible had happened.”

“So there had,” cried Frant, pettishly; “Deane had found a round stone with a hole in it, and if we had not shouted at him he would have been dreaming over it till dark.”

“A round stone?”

“Don’t take any notice of him, Mr. Anderson,” said Deane, merrily; “I am looking for some of the old mine workings, and I think I have come upon traces over yonder.”

“Gammon!” cried Frant. “Come, push on,

old chap; I want some of our friend's dinner. Go ahead, Valter."

They began the return journey, and Anderson, who was close behind Deane, asked what the traces were.

"Show him," shouted Frant from the front.

"Oh, there is nothing to show but this," said Deane, and he produced a heavy stone about the size and shape of a small cocoanut, perforated as if it had once had a stick thrust through it as a handle.

"But that might have accidentally been formed in that shape," remarked Anderson.

"Oh, dear me, no," cried Frant, banteringly. "Ask him, and he'll tell you it was a crusher used by some old barbarian laborer working for our friends, the Romans."

"Why not?" said Deane, quietly.

"Ah, to be sure; why not? You come again, old man, and see if you can't find Mr. Barbarian's bones!"

As they walked back Anderson continued the conversation with Deane *apropos* of the Roman remains; but his eyes were wandering from side to side, and he realized how he might have rambled about for hours without freeing himself from the wilderness of ice and frozen snow, with the probability that he would have stepped inadvertently into one of the crevices as the darkness fell.

"I wonder what my clients in town would say if they had seen me hanging at the end of that rope, or stumbling and slipping about here in this wintry chaos," he said, at last, laughingly.

“Only that you had got a touch of the Alpine fever,” said Deane. “We all catch it out here.”

“Yes, I must have some more trips like this,” cried Anderson, enthusiastically. “It is grand.”

“Dinner’s a grander subject to my mind now,” cried Frant. “Mr. Anderson, in anticipation, I drink your health, and muscularity to your legs.”

Anderson laughed merrily, but he was scanning the way carefully, and trying to impress it on his memory ready for future use.

“This is the longer way back, though, is it not?” he said, at last, as they were nearing the main valley.

“Yes; but it’s getting dark,” replied Deane, “and we felt that this would be safer.”

CHAPTER XIV.

“Now, really, John, I am surprised at you—and before Hester, too.”

Colonel Denton sat back in his chair and laughed. It was reaction day, after a very severe fit of pain, during which he had sent Hester out of the room in tears after declaring a dozen times over that his last day had really come. Then he had had a severe encounter with Aunt Ecclesia, who had not found herself able to stand her ground so well as in general; in fact, it had been a stormy day. Deane and Frant had been up to the *chalet*, but had been delicately warned off by Hester, who apologetically suggested that as papa was so unwell it would be better for them to call again. And when, later on, Anderson had strolled up to the place to ask the Colonel whether he had recommended the use of Sprudel salts twice or four times a week, the sound of the old officer's voice roaring furiously warned him that it would be better if he deferred his call.

The storm having passed, the Colonel's guilty conscience needed no accuser. He was trying hard to efface the recollections of the previous day, and after bringing smiles once more to Hester's pale face, he was bantering his sister-in-law till she grew quite ruffled.

"Well," he said; "I suppose it's natural, and I don't see why you should not marry again, Ecclesia."

"John, will you be quiet!" cried the little lady, whose face was now scarlet.

"No—why should I? Not blind, my dear! What I was going to say is——"

"Nothing at all. Hester, my dear, if your papa persists in going on like this I shall think seriously of going back to England."

"Not you. Wouldn't have the heart. What I was going to say is that I am not surprised at your feeling disposed to marry again. But I am surprised that you should contemplate such a *mesalliance*."

"John, how dare you?"

"For the honor of our family—for Hester's sake."

"Really you are too dreadful, John. What do you mean?"

"Of course, I know that he is well built, sturdy, good looking, and evidently very healthy. Then, I suppose he is about your own age?"

"Oh, Hester, this is dreadful," cried Aunt Ecclesia, springing up and looking hot as well as red.

"Ah! If you attempt to leave the room, madam, I'll lock the door."

"Then I insist upon your being silent. When Hester is not here, John, I will talk to you."

"Sit still, Hetty, my dear. Your aunt must be brought to see this contemplated folly as other people see it."

"I tell you I don't contemplate any folly," cried the little lady with a stamp of the foot.

"Oh, come, come!" cried the Colonel, "it's as plain as a pike-staff. Of course, you are your own mistress, and have your fortune at your command. But—shall you settle here, in the valley?"

"What do you mean, John?"

"And keep cows?"

Aunt Ecclesia took up some work and began to stitch viciously.

"Of course, you could cultivate the cheese trade, and let apartments in the season."

"Is your papa going mad, Hester?" said Aunt Ecclesia.

"Not a bit of it—I am only sorry. But you are such a good, patient, dear little woman, Ecclesia, that we will not throw you over. Hetty and I will come and take lodgings with you every summer."

"I declare, John, it is too bad."

"But though I grant the necessity for a woman of your years to have a guide, I am surprised that you should have chosen a Swiss of his class."

"Oh, this is getting beyond a joke," cried Aunt Ecclesia, who was now angry. "John, what do you mean?"

"I mean about your carryings on with that fellow Valter."

"John!"

"Oh, come, it's of no use to deny it! You know it was all nonsense when you were holding on to that tree."

"It was not nonsense, John. I was utterly unnerved."

"Stuff! You could have walked back easily enough, only you wanted Master Valter to come and help!"

"John, it is not true."

"What!" cried the Colonel. "Why, you had better deny that he took you in his arms and waded with you across the stream."

"I don't deny it, sir; but he carried Hester over afterward; and then he carried you—and—very ridiculous you looked."

"I did, my dear, very. A man of my years does not look well carried pick-a-back; but I did not want to wet my feet. There; I hear that Mr. Anderson came up yesterday when I was ill, so I think I will walk up to the hotel and have a chat with him. Are we going for a walk this afternoon? You'll come, of course, Ecclesia?"

"I shall stay here," said the lady, shortly.

"Nonsense! you must come with us. There was some talk of going as far as the glacier, and the guides will be with us."

Aunt Ecclesia frowned.

"I don't suppose I shall be very long," continued the Colonel, and he went out.

"Oh, Hester, my child," cried Aunt Ecclesia, "it is too dreadful. Can your father really believe such a thing of me?"

"Why, of course not, auntie; he was teasing you all the time. But——"

"But what?"

"I was only thinking, dear, that all the time papa meant some one else."

Aunt Ecclesia started up indignantly, then sank back into her chair and burst into tears.

"Auntie, auntie!" cried Hester, tenderly, "what have I done? I can't help seeing that you like him."

"And if I do, dear, I never let him see it; and I never reproach you for liking Mr. Deane."

"Aunt, dear, for shame!" cried Hester, flushing, and rising from where she had been kneeling with her arms about her aunt's waist. She went to the window, but only to start back, for Deane and Frant were just crossing the *debris* of the avalanche.

"Aunt, dear," said Hester, "are we not talking in a very foolish, unprofitable way?"

"I don't know, my dear. I must speak to you, though."

"What about, aunt?"

"Hetty, I will never give my consent to your accepting Mr. Anderson!"

"How absurd, aunt! Surely you do not think he means that?"

"I hope not. He is far too old for *me*; for you, it would be absurd."

"Yes, aunt," said Hester, with a sigh of relief; "absurd!"

"I am relieved to hear that, my dear."

CHAPTER XV.

It was a full month now since Anderson had come, and he had not been able to blind himself to the fact that Hester had been warm and cool by turns, while there was not room for a doubt as to the lawyer's intentions. He had gradually wound himself more and more into the Colonel's confidence, asking his advice on questions of health, and treating the said advice with the greatest deference. And now they had reached a point when he was the Colonel's constant companion in his walks. He was daily in Hester's society, and it seemed as if Deane's love affair had met with a severe check, and the lady was ready to accept the middle-aged visitor as her suitor.

All this had soured Deane. One day he was hopeful, hanging on a smile or a look; the next despondent, and ready to take his ice-axe and dash off into some out-of-the-way *thal* where he could be alone with nature in her most savage moods. But not for long; Frant and Valter invariably hunted him out, the former to speak to him cheerily, and the latter to lecture him on the danger of making such venturous expeditions without a guide.

On this day, after the morning's disappointment

regarding an expedition that had been half promised during a whist party at the Colonel's, Deane had hurried off, with the sun blazing down, and was overtaken a couple of hours later by Frant.

After that they had plunged into a wilder spot than usual, in opposition to Valter's advice; he had detected signs of a storm in the distance crossing the great peaks of the Oberland, till at last the threatenings became so ominous that they were obliged to make for the shelter of the hotel; but only to find that they had turned too late. The distance was greater than Deane, in his excitement, had realized, and before they were half way back down came the storm, covering everything in a few minutes with a wintry mantle.

The two young men trudged on in silence, Frant hoping that before long, as they got lower, the snow would become rain. On the contrary, the weather grew worse, and it seemed as if they would never get down into the main valley or reach the hotel.

"*Schneethal*," grumbled Frant at last, after a few minutes' shelter in a hollow, while they had a sip of brandy and lit their pipes; "why this ought to be the snow valley, Valter."

"Yes, herr."

"Talk about June—why it's December."

"The herr forgets that it is always December in the mountains if he goes high enough up."

"Let's get on," said Deane, and they proceeded with their walk, which became almost perilous, for the evening was near at hand. A quarter of

an hour passed, and they were walking abreast now, crunch, crunch through the snow, which emitted a creaking sound as it was compressed. Deane had been silent, and Frant had tried to enliven the way by whistling and shouting a word from time to time at Valter, who was leading, when Deane, after making several efforts to bring himself to speak, suddenly said—

“You do not honestly think that they were going for a walk to-day, Aleck?”

“Come, that’s more like you,” was the reply. “Yes, old fellow, I honestly do.”

There was a pause of some minutes’ duration, and it required a greater effort before Deane spoke again.

“Why do you think so?”

“Because Mrs. Lindley said she was sure they would, and suggested that we should stay.”

Deane drew his breath hard and there was silence. The wind shrieked and roared above their heads, while the snow came in blinding puffs in their faces.

“Are we going right, Valter?” shouted Frant.

“Right, herr? Oh, yes,” said the guide, in a tone which inspired confidence.

“Toddle along, then. We’ll keep close behind. It all seems new ground to me in this snow. I say, Adam—not very nice to sleep in a snow hovel to-night.”

Deane did not answer; he felt on fire with jealousy.

“I should look out for a *sehn hutte*, and ask the

hospitality of some cow. It would be warm, and one might get some milk."

"They surely would have seen signs of the coming storm," said Deane, at length, "and have stayed back."

"Oh, yes, I should think so," replied Frant.

"How much farther is it, Valter?" shouted Deane, after a long interval of battling with the snow.

"A half hour, herr—not more," was the cheering reply. "Can you walk faster?"

"Yes, yes—go on," said Deane, hoarsely.

Still they did not go faster, but more slowly, for the snow grew deeper in the narrow path they had now reached; but in an interval of the raging wind there came up from below the deep-toned roar of the falls just beyond the hotel, and at last the bridge was reached. They passed over to where, on its broad platform, the Chalet Hotel stood—that they had left a few hours before in the midst of summer, and had returned to find in a complete wintry garb.

"Hurrah! lights!" cried Frant, as there was a gleam from one of the windows, dimly seen through the fast-falling snow.

Deane gazed up to the right to try and make out the lights in the Colonel's cottage, but in vain.

Just then Valter sent forth the familiar Swiss *jodel*, which was answered from a little way before them, and in a few minutes the three white figures reached the open doorway of the hotel.

Quite a little group was ready to welcome them,

and, amid an eager burst of inquiry, Mrs. Lindley came hurriedly from the dining-room.

"Oh, I am so glad you are both safe," she cried, and then stopped short, panted, and exclaimed: "Where are the others?"

"The others?" cried Deane, excitedly. "They are not out."

"Yes, yes. I thought you would see them."

"Good heavens! Which way did they go?"

"Up toward the pass."

"Miss Denton?"

"Yes, and Mr. Anderson."

"Alone!" shouted Deane.

"No, no; my brother-in-law was with them. They went at twelve."

Deane turned from her toward the door, but Frant darted at him and caught his arm.

"Don't—don't do that!" cried Deane, shaking himself free.

"But listen, man," said Frant, hoarsely, as a burst of exclamation arose from the landlord, his wife, and those around. "Here, I say: has any one gone to meet them?"

"No, herr," cried the landlord. "We have expected them moment by moment."

"Valter, lad," cried Frant, "what have you to say?"

"It is like walking to one's death to go up the pass to-night, herr," he said, gravely. "The path is covered with snow."

"Do you hear, Adam?" whispered Frant.

"Hear!" he replied. "It is as if a trumpet had blared it in my ears. Are you my friend?"

Frant gripped his hand firmly.

"Then come on."

"Mr. Frant!" cried Aunt Ecclesia, wildly; but he was already out in the snow, where Adam Deane's dimly-seen figure was disappearing beyond the narrow range of the lights; and, after a moment's hesitation, Valter caught up the lantern standing ready lit, and dashed off after them, shouting them to stay.

CHAPTER XVI.

FRANT laid his hand on Deane's shoulder as he overtook him.

"What are you going to do?" he said.

"Can you ask?"

"You know, I suppose, that up the pass the snow will be very deep?"

"Yes. Don't waste time with questions."

"You hardly know the way. The path will be covered."

"Yes."

"And the risk will be terrible."

"Man, I know all that," cried Deane. "Come on; or go back, if you like. We are losing time."

"One minute. You know there is the old hospice up in the pass—hotel now."

"Yes."

"And that there are several refuges where they may be in safety."

"I know, too, that they may not have reached the hospice or refuges, and are perhaps helpless in the snow. Are you coming, or going to stay?"

"Coming," said Frant, quietly. "Ah," he added joyously, as there was a glow of light close to them, "here is Valter."

"Are you going up the pass, herrs?" he said, sharply.

"Yes," cried Frant. "We must find these people. Are you going to venture too!"

"I am your guide, gentlemen," said the man, simply. "What would they say about here if I let my herrs go alone?"

"Ten pounds for to-night's work, Valter, if we find them," cried Deane.

"Twenty pounds would not make me go, herr," said the man, quietly. "I am going to help save those poor souls."

Deane caught the guide's hand in his, gripped it hard for a moment, and then pointed forward.

"One minute, herr," said Valter. "Your flask?"

"Three parts full of brandy."

"And mine half," cried Frant.

Without another word the guide opened the lantern, trimmed the light a little, closed the snow-flecked glass with a snap, and started up the valley along by the swift torrent, which came roaring down, black now as ink by contrast with the snow.

"Quicker," said Deane, who was next, after they had gone some distance.

"No, herr," said Valter, quietly, his voice being swept away as the snow-laden wind rushed down the *thal*. "Slow and steady. We shall want all our strength. Quicker means breaking down before we are half way up the pass."

Deane drew a deep breath, for he recalled how they had been tramping all day, and felt the truth of the man's words.

"Can you hear me," shouted Valter.

"Yes; go on."

"The path, as you know, keeps on all the way by the river, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other."

"Yes."

"They cannot very well have strayed from it except where it forks and runs up into the mountains."

"And there are only two places between here and the *col*."

"Four, herr," said the guide, quietly. "There is the eastern path up to the Schwartz *grat*, and the western which leads up to the Ewigesfirn."

"Yes, I had forgotten those," said Deane.

"But they are not likely to have gone up there. If they had strayed away in the blinding snow, they would know they were wrong because it is so steep, and have come back to the path."

"If they could," muttered Deane, as he tramped heavily on through the snow.

"Oh, my poor dinner!" said Frant to himself; "and not had time to light a pipe. Seems a hard thing to do—this. But there, one always feels at one's best when trying to do something hard. Can't talk to poor old Deane now, so must talk to myself. Wish I could light my pipe."

They pressed on, with the snow seeming to blind them as it swept down; but the spirit within their breasts kept them sternly bent to their task, and the trio went a mile of their way without incident, listening to the rush of the waters deep down on their left. At times the rocky path was fairly clear, but in the hollows the snow was fast

growing deeper, and as every step carried them higher up the gorge, beyond the growth of pine and shrub, to the desolate wilderness of barren rocks, they knew that their difficulties would increase.

They forgot their weariness, however, in the excitement, and Frant, still last, went on musing with his head bent, rather liking the parts of their walk where there was a difficulty to surmount.

"Poor girl!" he said to himself. "Poor little darling! I am sorry I called her a coquette. Some disagreeable people would say this served me right, and was a judgment on me. Well, I can't do that. She's too nice. But I am wild with her for taking to that lean-faced 'Stopheles instead of poor old Deane."

"Poor old Adam!" he continued, after ridding his boot-soles of two rounded masses of ice; "he's too good for her. Women are so silly."

Then he began thinking about Mrs. Lindley.

"So am I," he mused, "to get thinking about that round, pleasant little woman; but how can a fellow help it when he has carried her in his arms and had hers tight round his neck? What a cry she gave, too, as I ran out. It was as if she was afraid I should get into danger, and wanted me to stay. Enough to make any man run away. No," he continued, after a pause, during which the wind came with terrific force, driving the snow-drift in his teeth; "that sort of thing won't do. I'm not a marrying man. Make the poor little

thing a widow again by breaking my miserable neck, as they say I shall some day. Break her heart if she was growing to care for me. By George! I hope we shall find these poor creatures. It's cold enough to kill a horse. Hullo! anything the matter?"

"No, sir," shouted Valter, who had halted and was holding the light above his head, "I was only thinking. There's one of the turnings up into the mountains; but they could hardly have strayed up there."

"No," said Deane, "forward!"

The tramp, tramp, over the creaking snow continued.

For the next half-hour not a word was spoken. The toilsome nature of the walking and the depth of the drifts through which now and then they had to struggle, took away the disposition to converse, more especially as the wind smote them so heavily that they had to pant for breath.

At last, the agony Deane had suppressed so far, as he pictured a hundred perils for the woman he dearly loved, would seek some alleviation, and he pressed near to the guide as he trudged on with head bent and eyes wandering from side to side where the snow was faintly illumined by the moving lamp.

"Valter!" he cried.

"Herr?"

"No, no, don't stop. I'll try and make you hear me. I've been thinking. They must have been a long way up the pass here. The Colonel

said he should go up to the top some day, so as to see the view in the Rhone Valley; and as they saw the storm coming on—you remember a few flakes were falling for quite an hour before the wind descended so fiercely?"

"Yes, herr, I remember."

"So they must have gone on to the old hospice to take shelter till the snow had ceased."

Valter tramped on in silence, and his dimly seen figure looked weird and strange, the lantern shedding a halo round the guide against which his dark figure was seen.

"Well," shouted Deane, "why don't you speak?" But he was trembling with dread at the man's manner, for Valter was no pessimist, and always took a cheerful view of their troubles when they were climbing.

"Speak, herr?"

"Yes. You think they have taken shelter there?"

"No, herr, I do not," said the man, gravely.

"But why not? What could be more likely?"

"It is likely that they would go there hoping for shelter; but it is early in the season, herr. The hospice hotel does not open for a fortnight yet. It has been shut up all the winter."

"And no one there?" groaned Deane. "I ought to have known."

There was an interval of toilsome labor now, as they tramped on, the despair Deane felt chilling him more than the icy blast. But he took heart again.

"They must have gone up there," he said, "Look here, Valter."

"I am listening, herr."

"They would have found the place closed, but there are stables and out-buildings that would have given them shelter."

"No, herr. Everything would have been tightly closed up, and I was told last week that the snow lay many feet deep about the place—the snow of February's storm."

"Then they would have gone on over the pass and down into the Rhone Valley. They would soon get shelter there."

"No people like those three could have climbed up the *col* in the face of this storm. It would take strong men to do it, and they must be people who know the way. I should have thought it madness to go up there. You know what a savage place it is."

Deane was silent. He remembered well how they had been overtaken on a fine day by a mist, and how difficult they had found it to avoid a fall in the labyrinth of mighty rocks and hollows bewildering in the extreme at such a time.

"But you have some idea, man. You think they have taken shelter?"

"There's no shelter except in the refuges, sir. Perhaps they are in one of them. Stop!"

He started back, for all at once, high upon their right, there was a roar as of thunder strangely muffled by the wind and snow.

"The good God spare our lives!" he whispered,

with prayerful simplicity and faith, as the trio stood awe-stricken, knowing that the weight of the newly-fallen snow higher had set some of the *firn* in motion, and that it was sweeping down toward them. They felt as one man that to move might be to rush right into the peril they sought to avoid.

The roar increased till it was one deep overpowering boom, which died off in a smothered groan; and then the wind seemed to rise again with a triumphant shriek.

“A fall from the Etzlifirn, herr,” shouted Valter. “There is no danger now. Forward.”

For three hours more they plodded on, with increasing difficulty; for as they rose higher—from four to five, and thence to six thousand feet above the sea level—it was more and more into the region of furious wintry storm, and there was yet another thousand feet of slow tedious climb before they would reach the first refuge. It was approaching midnight when, panting and exhausted, the little rescue party struggled up the slope to a narrow platform, a hundred feet from the track, where a stone tent was built into a niche in a perpendicular wall of rock.

“Courage, herr, courage!” panted Valter, as, with the lantern swaying, he waded through a drift of snow whose surface was level with his waist. “Keep to my steps; mayhap they are here.”

“No,” groaned Deane, “they could never have found this place in the face of the storm.”

Frant said nothing, but he thought the same as he stooped and entered the rugged hut, whose floor was covered with drifted snow.

The place looked ghastly and strange by the light of the lantern. Chilly as it was, it felt comparatively warm, and the light ceased to flicker as the guide shook off the snow from his garb.

"Forward to the next," said Deane.

"In five minutes, herr," said the guide.

"Yes, we must get breath. You will break down, old man," said Frant, producing his flask.

"Here, have a drop."

"For heaven's sake, no," said Deane, passionately; "save every drop. That may mean the saving of their lives."

"I have more here," said Valter, tapping his breast, "than we dare give them. Drink, gentlemen; we want all our strength."

Deane tossed off the portion handed to him, and started again to the door, to stand gazing out at the black solidity that spread before him, flecked with the huge flakes of snow which swept by.

"Shall I?" said Frant, inquiringly, of the guide, as he took out his pipe and pouch.

"Yes. We must have rest and strength, herr. Make him smoke, too."

Frant nodded, took out his pocket-book, and drew from its folds an excellent cigar.

"Here, Deane," he said; "take this."

"What? No—no. Man!—man! Don't stay trifling here. Come on."

"We are a quarter hour from the next refuge,

herr, and the snow will be deeper. You must gain strength. Smoke and drink again," said Valter. "I say you should. I am your guide."

Deane drank again; the door of the lantern was opened, and directly after the pungent smoke from cigar and pipe began to fill the hut.

Deane smoked on furiously, tramping up and down the narrow place, while the wind that rushed wildly along among the piled-up rocks about them, and smote heavily upon the face of the precipice, gave forth shrieks which sounded like those of human beings in distress, followed by exulting roars and yells as from a pack of demons of the storm.

"Yes," said Valter, as if in answer to a question asked by Frant, just as one of these wild choruses died away in the distance, "the poor people in the mountains say that the tempest fiends raise these storms, and ride down the valleys among the *sehne hutte* and tear up the pines. It is not so; but it sounds as if they were all loose from hades on a night like this."

Once more out into the wild night, the wind tearing at them as it rushed snow-laden down the rapidly narrowing gorge, forcing the little party to shelter behind a mass of stone tumbled down from above. Growing exhausted now with their many hours of battling with the elements, everything about them seemed to be unreal and strange, and as they staggered on toward the second refuge, Deane looked in vain for objects that would recall previous visits to the pass.

All appeared changed; and growing minute by minute more confused, and stunned by the buffeting of the storm and the constant exhausting effort at plodding through the snow, he was in nowise surprised at Valter stopping short at the first place where they could get a little shelter and wiping the snow from his eyes.

"Tired?" panted Frant.

"No, herr; but I fear I have lost my way!"

"Impossible!" cried Frant. "We can't have gone off the path. The only way is along there."

He pointed as he spoke to where the torrent foamed along, a couple of hundred feet beneath the path.

"I mean, I'm afraid I have passed the second snow hut."

"I have been thinking so, too," said Deane, bitterly; "but I trusted you."

The guide started as if he had been stung.

"Come along, herrs," he said; "perhaps we have not passed it. We had to fight so hard against the snow and wind that it may have seemed longer. It ought to be near here."

"What's that heap of snow there?" said Frant, as he tried to peer through the darkness.

"That?" cried Valter, dubiously. "Ah!" he added, joyously, the next moment, "I am right. Behold the place."

He hurried up, stumbled twice in his weariness, and then they saw him tearing at the snow, which gave way and fell inward, while as the man thrust in the lantern he uttered a shout of joy.

"They are there!" cried Deane, following quickly into the hut, whose entrance was half blocked by the drift.

"It is the Herr Colonel," cried Valter, excitedly; and the old officer struggled up from a corner into a half recumbent position, to stare with half closed eyes at the light.

"Where am—Ah, my child! Help! help!" he gasped.

"Yes, we are come," cried Deane, excitedly. "Where is she?"

"Hester? Hester?" said the Colonel, with a blank look indicative of the stupor brought on by cold and exhaustion.

"Yes. Where is she, sir? For God's sake, speak."

"She—they were here—just now—I could go no further—I don't know—I must have slept. Brandy."

Frant's flask was already at his lips, and he drank eagerly, but only to sink back afterward with a sigh, and they could not extract another word.

"Listen," said Deane, as he took off the rolled-up cape he bore swung from a strap—for in spite of the storm he had remained uncovered so as to leave himself free to walk—"he said he could go no farther. They must have left him in shelter while they went on for help."

"Upward?" said the guide. "We must have seen them if they had come down."

"Unless," thought Deane, "they slipped and were carried away by the torrent."

“Unless,” thought Frant, “we have passed them, or perhaps trampled over them lying buried in the snow.”

“Vorwärts!” shouted Valter, excitedly. “We shall find them yet;” and after covering the Colonel with the macintosh cape he had unrolled, Deane stepped out once more to resume the battle with the raging storm and try to beat down the agonizing thought that tortured him—the thought of Hester alone with this man away here in the mountains.

“But if I can only save her life,” he groaned; and then staggered with exhaustion.

“Hold up, man,” shouted Frant, as he gripped his arm. “Another inch and you would have fallen headlong into the stream.”

“And been swept away to be at rest,” thought Deane, as he bent once more to his task to save Hester—for another,

CHAPTER XVII.

"SAY no," said the Colonel.

"But, papa, the little expedition was arranged for," pleaded Hester, and Aunt Ecclesia looked at her brother-in-law and tightened her lips.

"I don't care if a dozen were arranged for, I'm general in command here. Hang it all, if orders are given for an advance, the officer has a perfect right to alter it into a retreat. We won't go."

"But, papa!"

"There, it's coming on," said the Colonel, fiercely. "I've another attack threatening, and if you begin to oppose me I shall be in agony directly."

"Really, though, John dear, it would be like insulting Mr. Deane to draw back now."

"Hear that, Hetty. Your aunt wants to go climbing, with the Swiss mesalliance to keep on pulling her up the steep bits."

"John! How can you?"

"Papa, dear, do reconsider your determination. You quite led Mr. Frant to think that we expected them; and it is such a fine morning."

"I don't care if it's the finest morning the sun ever warmed; and besides, it was not Frant I promised to go, but Deane."

“Then you ought not to break your promise, John.”

“I’m out here for a change, madam, and I shall do as I please. It’s horrible going for walks with those fellows. I shan’t have any legs left soon. What with Deane and his long shanks, and that dumpy fellow with his miserably short ones, every walk is spoiled.”

Aunt Ecclesia uttered a sound that was uncommonly like a snort, and stabbed her sewing viciously as she bent over it. The Colonel noticed her annoyance, and after a mischievous look at Hester, continued:

“That fellow Frant’s tremendously strong—strong as that kicking mule of yours, Hetty; but his legs are ridiculous.”

“But you will go, papa?”

“No, I shall not. Let them go and walk the soles of their greasy boots off, and climb and balance themselves on the highest point. I’m going to have a quiet stroll up toward the old hospice with Mr. Anderson.”

Hester’s brow wrinkled a little, but she said nothing. Aunt Ecclesia was not so reticent.

“Really, John; if we are abroad, we ought to retain our politeness.”

“What, and be dragged up the side of the mountain to see views that are always smothered by clouds, or have that Frant trotting by one’s side like a two-legged bull-dog, droning into my ears accounts of the different mountains he has climbed! Hang him and his mountains! I wished last time

that there was not a single mountain left on the face of the earth, or else that he'd slip into some hole and be smothered."

"Ugh!" ejaculated Aunt Ecclesia. Then aloud, "You are not obliged to walk with Mr. Frant."

"With whom then, pray? That Deane? Bah! I haven't patience with his absurdities about the Romans working for gold. Humbug. They never worked for anything. Only waited till they saw some one had found what was worth having, and then they went and knocked him on the head. Deane is a perfect bore."

It was Hester's turn now to look conscious, and glancing at her aunt, she found Aunt Ecclesia was looking at her, and she blushed.

"No. I'm shaky, and disposed to have another of my fits—jungle fever this time, I expect. They may go and climb and find gold if they like; I'm for a quiet walk with Anderson."

Aunt Ecclesia half rose, but at an imploring glance from Hester she sank back, just as Deane and Frant came up the path to remind them of the proposed ramble—which was declined, Hester having the task of informing them of the change. The Colonel had retired to his room.

It was not a pleasant task, and Hester sent them both away with the impression that the change was entirely her own doing, making Deane smart with jealousy, and Frant bluntly declare later on that the girl was a heartless coquette.

"Oh, Hester, what have you done?" cried her aunt, as soon as they were alone.

"Done, aunt?" faltered the girl, who looked pale.

"Yes. You've made Mr. Deane go away thinking that you preferred a walk up the pass with Mr. Anderson."

"Oh, aunt!"

"And if it wanted indorsing, here comes Mr. Anderson. Ah, there he is bowing to them and smiling, as if he knew there was something wrong, and they have gone on almost without speaking."

Hester's brow grew wrinkled, and a look of misery contracted her eyes.

"Oh, how I dislike that man, my dear, and we shall have him and his smooth oily politeness all day. There, I can't meet him now, or I shall say something rude."

"Aunt, aunt!" cried Hester, catching her arm; "you must not go."

"Why not?"

"I wouldn't be alone with him for all the world."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because I am sure, aunt, he wants to say something to me that I should not like."

"He had better," said Aunt Ecclesia, ruffling up like a soft white dove. "I wish he'd say it to me."

"Aunt!"

"I do indeed, my child; I'd take the conceit out of him."

"You will stay?"

"Oh, well, if you feel like that, I suppose I had better. Oh, dear me, why were such men as he ever made?"

The object of her remark was close to the window now, and directly after tapped with his stick on one of the veranda posts.

"Come in," shouted the Colonel from his room; "down directly."

Anderson entered smiling. He ignored the cool reception he received from Aunt Ecclesia, and Hester's conscious and distant manners.

"Ah, ladies," he said, "it is a sin against nature to be at home on a morning like this. You ought to be out breathing the delicious air. I seem to gain new life every day."

"I wonder you do not go for a long walk, Mr. Anderson."

"I am longing for one," said the lawyer, smiling; "but there is something wanting—companionship."

"Morning, Anderson," said the Colonel entering; "ready for a walk?"

"Yes, I was just suggesting it. Will you go?"

"To be sure. Come, Ecclesia, get on your hat and big boots."

"Not this morning, John, dear. I am not quite well."

"Indigestion—too much breakfast," said the Colonel, banteringly.

"Oh, aunt!" exclaimed Hester to herself, in agony, as she foresaw what was to come.

"Go and lie down for an hour or two," continued the Colonel. "Come, Hetty, my dear, get ready, and be smart."

"I think I will stay with aunt, papa."

“Eh? Nonsense!—she is best alone.”

“But, papa, it will be unkind.”

“To stop and worry her when she has one of her attacks of indigestion. You know how irritable it makes her when she is like that.”

“Really, my dear John!” cried Aunt Ecclesia, warmly.

“There, you see,” cried the Colonel. “Now, no nonsense; go and get ready.”

There was a great deal of his old military decision in his voice as he spoke, and, not venturing to disobey, Hester left the room to prepare for the journey.

“Lovely morning,” said the Colonel. “Let me see, I may as well take my flask and some cigars.”

“I have mine,” said Anderson.

“So much the better; but I will be independent,” said the Colonel.

“Perhaps, after all, a walk would do me good,” said Aunt Ecclesia, rising. “I’ll go and get ready.”

“My dear Ecclesia, you will do nothing of the sort,” cried the Colonel, shortly. “I am not going to have you taken ill up in the mountains.”

“Oh, there is no fear of that.”

“Isn’t there? My dear Ecclesia, ill-health has forced me to study human nature a good deal. You know the proverb, Anderson: ‘A man is either a fool or a physician at forty.’”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Well, I do not profess too much as to the absence of folly in my nature, but I have picked up a little medical lore.”

"I don't want to flatter," said Anderson, smiling, "but your advice certainly has benefited me largely."

"Well, a little, perhaps," said the Colonel. "As for you, Ecclesia, you will be far better at home; in other words, I shall not allow you to go."

Aunt Ecclesia's countenance was a study, and she looked daggers at Anderson, who watched the Colonel as he went to a case upon a side table and took out a few cigars, with which he filled up his case. From thence he crossed to where a tin dispatch box was standing, opened it with one of a small bunch of keys, and Anderson's half-closed eyes glittered as the Colonel stood with his back to him talking about the weather, perfectly unconscious of how his actions were watched.

"There," said the Colonel, "I'm ready. Nothing like being prepared for one's campaign. Hah! a box of lights. Where are the matches, Ecclesia?"

"Here are some, dear; and really I think I will go. Hester will be so dull."

"I'll take care she is not dull. Quite out of the question. Stop at home. I dare say we shall go farther than you would be able to walk. Ah, here is Hester. Which way shall we go, Anderson?"

"That I leave to you—or rather to Miss Denton. Shall we take one of the narrow valleys, to-day?"

"What do you say, my dear?"

"I would rather leave the choice to you, papa."

"Nonsense, my dear. We wish you to choose."

"Then straight up the valley toward the pass,

papa," said Hester, hastily, as she dashed at the most frequented of the little traversed roads.

"To be sure!—excellent!" said Anderson. "A delightful walk up toward the source of the river. We might perhaps reach the glacier or the hospice. It is a good road all the way, I believe, and we shall want no guide."

"Oh, aunt, how could you hang back like this!" whispered Hester, as the gentlemen moved to the door.

"I didn't, my dear; I've tried so hard to go, but you know what your father is."

"Come, my dear," cried the Colonel from outside.

The next minute they were descending to the snow, over which a good track had now been trampled, and on past the hotel, along the narrow shelf-like path formed above the torrent, which came rushing and foaming down from the glaciers, gray with stony mud ground off by the intense pressure of the ice upon the limestone rocks.

It was a glorious walk, rising higher by slow degrees up into the clear keen air which came down from the everlasting snow. The Colonel forgot to grow tired as hour after hour passed, and Anderson, who was as wiry and as active as a goat, led them on.

In spite of herself, Hester could not help being interested in the walk, for Anderson talked well. He was full of apt allusions, and seemed to be a keen admirer of Nature. There was much to consider, too, in the differences in plant life as they

gradually rose, leaving behind the spreading pines, and getting into a region where vegetation began to be represented by mosses, which found a precarious existence among the stones. Then the traces along the sides of the vast gorge took Anderson's attention, and he proved that he knew enough of geology to show his companions how the smoothly ground rocks, right up to a hundred feet above their heads, had been formed by the vast glacier which in earlier ages had filled the pass they were ascending.

To Hester his manner was all that was gentlemanly. There was a quiet deference in his words that was never impressive enough to make her retire within herself, and by degrees she began to tell herself that her alarm was needless, and that their companion was only treating her in the fatherly way adopted by so many middle-aged men toward young girls.

With the Colonel his management was perfect. Every remark made was listened to with the greatest respect, and the old officer had so much to say that they were far up toward the head of the *col* when he pulled out his watch and exclaimed:

“Good heavens!—so late. No wonder I feel hungry. I say, Anderson, how far is it to the next inn?”

“Oh, not far. There is the old hospice—a small hotel now. Suppose we make that the extreme point of the journey, lunch, and then return leisurely? It will be all down-hill, too.”

Almost as he spoke, there came an icy blast of wind, laden with tiny flakes of snow.

"Better hurry on," said Anderson, quietly, "and get into shelter. Bit of a shower. It will not be much."

"Yes; too far to go back," assented the Colonel, and they pressed on; but the storm came sweeping down with magical swiftness, and in ten minutes they were panting and struggling on against the furious gusts which battered and buffeted them. The blinding snow came in clouds, the path was obliterated, and for an hour they toiled on steadily, with the Colonel's strength visibly failing and a horrible dread of danger attacking Hester as they struggled on.

The confusion engendered by the shrieking of the hurricane, the great drain upon the strength, and the curious sensation of faintness and sickness, all tended to render the little party more and more helpless; and at last Hester, after fighting her best, was fain to accept Anderson's arm; and though she shrank when he supported her more and more, and finally held her up as they won their way step by step, she was at last unable to resist, and was glad to lean upon him more and more, as his arm was passed round her, and she was drawn to his side.

The snow grew rapidly deeper, and then to her horror the Colonel slipped and fell, struggled up and fell again and again, to realize at last that he could go no further.

"For heaven's sake try, sir," cried Anderson,

who was now alarmed. "The hospice cannot be far. And—yes, I know, the guide-book says there are four refuge huts along here. Come."

His words were hardly heard in the wild shrieking of the storm, but the Colonel made an effort; but again he fell, and Hester knelt by him in the snow. The courage was there, but strength failed, and he was at last about to drop for what would in all probability have been the last time, when Anderson uttered a shout of joy, for they were close to an open doorway, through which, with Hester's help, the fainting man was dragged, almost too much exhausted to drink the brandy pressed upon him, after which, with his child kneeling by him, and supporting his head, he dropped into a stupor like sleep.

"My chance," thought Anderson as he gazed at the insensible man. "He has those papers on him, and——"

He stopped short as his eyes rested in the faint light on Hester, and the papers were forgotten in a stronger passion. He felt giddy, and he drank heavily of the brandy in his flask.

The effect was instantaneous, for his veins were already throbbing. He repeated to himself the words of his guide-book concerning the other refuges, and the hospice farther on. A curious feeling of madness came over him, and bending over Hester, he held the flask to her.

"Drink," he said.

"No, no," she cried, shrinking away.

"Drink!" he said again, firmly. "The cold here may mean your death."

"No, Mr. Anderson."

"I insist," he said. "It is life where all around is death."

He pressed the flask to her lips, and in spite of her resistance she swallowed a little of the burning liquid.

"Now," he said, raising her and holding her in his arms.

She shrank from him, but was as helpless as a child, faint and exhausted as she felt from the struggle that had been going on. "Now," he said, as the tempest raged on, and the drifting snow made the entrance seem almost black in its darkness: "now, come."

"Come?" she said. "He cannot stir, so I must wait."

"For him to die?" said Anderson, huskily. "No, we must struggle on to the hospice and get help."

"It is impossible," said Hester, faintly.

"No, it is possible. It is to save his life. We must have help. Come."

Faint, bewildered, and with her head throbbing with agony at the idea of her father perishing where he lay, Hester resisted no longer, but yielded to her companion as he drew her toward the door.

The next minute they were out again in the blinding snow, with the wind shrieking in their ears; and Anderson's arm was round the trembling girl's waist as he half bore her on.

CHAPTER XVIII.

POSSIBLY Lawrence Anderson could not have analyzed his own thoughts and feelings at that time, when a tempest as wild as that sweeping down the pass was raging in his heart. Heretofore a calm, scheming, clear-headed man, whose help and counsel had been sought by those known as "the world" in all kinds of social entanglements, he had grown to middle age feeling a kind of pitiful contempt for his ordinary fellow-creatures, and looking upon woman generally as a poor, weak object, born to be man's victim. Love was something to be thought of with scorn. He laughed at the idea of his ever being touched by what he contemptuously called the "fools' measles," till he saw Hester Denton, and suddenly found that measles, though a trivial fever to the young, is a dangerous disease to those well advanced in life.

Now, carried away by a fit of madness, he dared all the perils of the storm in the wild idea that his opportunity had come. Hester had seemed more gentle and confiding with him that day, and he felt that she knew he loved her. During their struggle up to the refuge, he had hugged himself with the belief that what was really weakness and exhaustion was trust and confidence in him—a

kind of *abandon* on Hester's part, as she rested more and more on his arm, yielded to him as he passed his arm around her, and let him assist her till they were in the shelter.

After the Colonel had sunk down in the stupor of exhaustion, he had told himself that all was fair in love and war, and that he must seize the opportunity. He was deceiving her, for there was no help to be obtained; but there were the other refuges, and there was the hospice. He would get her there, that they might be alone—that, utterly helpless, she might rest in his arms, sheltered, protected from the destroying snow, retaining life from the warmth he gave, and waking at last when the storm was past to know that she owed everything to him. Then, alone there in that wild pass—shut in, perhaps, for days by the snow drifts—she could not do otherwise than accept him, even if she were disposed to fight against it. Her position, from a social point of view, would be sufficient to make her look upon the acceptance of the man who had saved her life as a necessity. But she was not made of such stern metal, he told himself; and, wild with excitement, he uttered his lying words as he hurried her along, and observed Hester growing weaker moment by moment, while for the time being he felt himself endued with almost superhuman strength.

Once only he thought of the Colonel lying helpless in the refuge, and of the possibility that he might die. Well, if he did, the position would not be complicated. He was a soldier, and had

escaped so far. If he died, Hester would be the more helpless—thrown the more in his power; and with an exulting laugh he lifted the nearly insensible girl in his arms and struggled on with her against the blinding snow.

How long this took he never knew, for it was like some feverish dream in which from time to time he had to stop and rest, sheltered by the rock wall or by some mass of stone that had fallen from above; and here, as he panted with exhaustion, there was a joyous exultation in his breast, to which he tightly held his now unconscious burden.

Then on again, with the storm shrieking in his ears and at times forcing him to stop breathless. He passed each of the refuges in turn, so buried and covered in with snow as to be unrecognizable to a stranger. But he hardly gave them a thought. He had the woman he worshipped closely held in his arms, and he staggered on and on. Sooner or later he knew that he would find shelter, and in spite of his exhaustion he was not eager to reach one and end the wild sensation of delight that made him glow. For he felt that Hester was half insensible—that she no longer suffered; and, clasped tightly to his breast, he had no fear of the cold proving dangerous.

But at last his strange accession of strength began to fail. There was more effort required to stagger on, and once he would have fallen if he had not been close under the great wall of rock which rose upon his right, and against which he supported himself while he recovered breath.

Again and again he nearly lost his footing, and was within an ace of falling headlong into the torrent that roared on his left. But still he struggled on, dimly conscious of the path suddenly turning at right angles, and that he had to sink down upon his knees as a resistless blast came down the narrow gorge and nearly hurled him into the torrent. It was only after the wind had ceased for a few moments, and he had contrived to get a few yards further, that he fully realized the peril through which they had passed; for he had been crossing a narrow stone bridge, and his way upward was now with the great wall of rock on his left, the path running on the opposite side of the stream.

The rest of his struggle onward was a wild confused effort through the fierce, hissing snow and the beating blasts, till, utterly exhausted, he stood ready to sink down with his burden, listening to a sharp sound which kept coming from somewhere on his left. He was too much stunned now to realize what the sound could be, and with the dreamy sensation that attacked him increasing fast, his next act was almost as much mechanical as the result of mind. It was, however, the saving of their lives. By a great effort he managed to get the flask he carried from his breast, and hold the top in his teeth as he screwed the vessel round till a portion of the potent spirit gurgled between his lips and gave him power to think as the sound came again, apparently close at hand.

It was a door banging heavily as it was caught

by the blast. Struggling on once more in the coming darkness, he found himself sheltered fully from the furious blast, and wading along knee deep in snow. Another sharp sound, as he stumbled close up to some building and received a sharp blow; but not from the door. A shutter had been torn loose from its fastenings, and was swinging to and fro.

Now, for the first time, he let Hester sink from his arms down into the soft snow, then pressed on and wildly dashed his hands through the window, thrust in his arm, succeeded in finding the fastening, and pressed the casement open.

He had just strength enough to get back to where Hester lay, to carry her to the window, to let her glide through, and to climb in before a curious sensation of giddiness attacked him; and he fell heavily on the floor.

It was some minutes after he came to before he could make out where he was. Instinctively he sought the flask to drink a few of its invigorating drops, every one of which seemed to send life through his exhausted frame. Then came the reality like a flash. Groping about through the darkness, he felt for the window, and closed it against the snow, which had drifted in, and which still came floating through the broken pane.

His next thought was to obtain light, and his wet, half-frozen hands fumbled for his match-box; but he wasted several matches before one blazed up, when he saw that they were in a low, bare dining-room, with roughly frescoed walls. A

long table ran down the centre on which were piled bent wood chairs.

But something else caught his eye; as the match died out he felt his way toward it, and then ran his hand over the icy sides of a huge earthenware stove till he found the doorway. He threw it open, and to his delight found it full of wood and ready for lighting.

Fortunately the wood was dry, and the pine twigs rapidly caught from the next match he lit, blazed up, and shed a long glare along one side of the room as they burned with a humming roar.

His next task was to tear down a curtain and stuff it through the broken pane. Then bending over Hester, he lifted her up and placed her in an arm-chair by the stove, where he let her head fall back over his arm. He trickled a few drops of brandy between her lips, tenderly laid her head back against the chair back, and began to shake away the clinging snow, which fell around, melted slowly, and sank into the white boards to form dark patches.

He took off her hat and scarf, to lay them on the stove, where they began to steam; and the fire sending forth now an enlivening glow, he spread her dress wide, stopping from time to time to gaze rapturously at the beautiful face. With loving reverence he loosened her hair, which fell in clusters heavily clogged with snow.

“My darling!” he whispered; “my own, now—my very own!” and he caught up first one cold hand and then another to break away the buttons

and slip off the clinging wet gloves, holding the benumbed fingers between his palms, and chafing them and kissing them by turns.

“How beautiful!” he said, hoarsely, as he bent over her; then drew aside, lest he should intercept any of the warmth, for the glow from the humming stove seemed to send a flush to the pallid cheeks. “Yes, mine now!” he whispered again, “my very own.”

The tempest roared round the place, and from time to time strange sounds as of thunder boomed close at hand, while the shutters rattled and the place literally quivered and seemed threatened with destruction at every blast. Every now and then it was as if the spirits of the air had swooped down from the mountain and were careering round and round the building, yelling and shrieking, the sounds dying slowly away, as if the rout had swept on down the valley. But Anderson heard nothing, saw nothing but the face with the warm glowing light about it as it lay silent before him, till he came back from his wild dream of adoration to the reality of their position; and a sensation of dread assailed him.

For she was so long insensible. Was there danger? He took one of her hands in his again, and held it to his lips. It was cold; but it was not the clammy coldness of approaching death, and he took heart again. He turned to the stove, and, with the steam rising from his garments, picked up from a great basket piece after piece of pine root to throw into the centre, each piece as it

caught sending forth a fresh glow of light into the long, blank room.

Turning to Hester, once more he rearranged her wet dress and shook out her long hair, now drying fast and glistening in the golden light.

As he bent over her, the recollection of his mission came to him for a moment, but he laughed as he thought that it would prove easy now. Hester would be his, and once recovered, he cared little for the Colonel's anger should he discover the truth.

At last he began to grow uneasy at the long-continued stupor in which Hester was plunged. He took her hands in his once more, to be reassured directly; for they were now warm, and, unable to resist the temptation any longer, he knelt beside her and pressed them to his lips.

"Hester, dearest," he whispered, and at the sound of his voice she moved uneasily and made an effort to sit up, but sank back with a sigh of uneasiness.

"Look up," he whispered; "Hester, dearest; the danger is past."

She opened her eyes wildly and gazed at him, as if unable to comprehend the meaning of her position there. Then she glanced at the stove, with its glowing interior, and drew her hands from his grasp to hold them to her aching forehead.

"Do not be alarmed," he said, tenderly. "We are in safety now. Hester——"

He ceased speaking, for there was a fiercer blast

than ever as the wind seemed to seize the building and shake it, while, as it passed on, shrieking and moaning, the window was shaken in turn, and then came a sharp tapping on one of the snow-covered panes.

Anderson sprang to his feet, startled for the moment, but attributing the sound to a drift of snow being driven sharply against the window. He was turning away again when the tapping was repeated, and a voice shouted, "Open!" the cry sounding smothered in the rushing wind.

Anderson muttered an oath and stepped angrily to the window, which looked black to him till he was close up, when he could make out a white face indistinctly through the blurred pane.

"Quick, man, open!" was shouted. "Open the door."

As if forced by the imperative nature of the tones, Anderson unfastened the window.

"What is it? Who are you?" he cried. "Mr. Deane?"

"Yes, Mr. Deane," said Adam, hoarsely. "Do you want us to perish in the snow?" he added as his eyes seemed to glow in the light cast by the stove.

"Get in quickly," came from behind him. Deane clambered in, covered with snow; and as Anderson drew back he was followed by Frant and the guide.

"You are safe, then?" said Frant, shortly, for Deane was silent, gazing from Anderson to Hester and back, while his breath seemed to come

heavily, as if he were still suffering from some great exertion.

"Yes," said Anderson; "we had a terrible struggle; but we reached here at last."

"That's right," said Frant, cynically. "Shut that window, Valter, my lad," he continued. "Hope you are none the worse for this terrible storm, Miss Denton."

Hester sat back in her chair, gazing at him as if she had not heard his words. Frant looked sharply at Anderson and then at Deane.

"I think she hardly understands you yet," said Anderson. "We had a terrible adventure."

"So had we," said Frant, gruffly. "Here, Valter, ring the bell and order some food and brandy. Heavens! what a night! Come, Deane, man, get nearer the stove, for we are fast."

"And the Colonel?" said Deane, gravely.

"God help him!" replied Frant. "I'm a strongish fellow, but I can't go back yet. What do you say, Valter?"

"It is impossible, herr; we should fall and be buried in the snow."

"Of course we should; but ring, man—ring for the people—or we shall be having murder done," he added to himself as he saw his companion's wild looks.

"There is no one here, herr," replied Valter.

"No; I had to break in," said Anderson, hastily, and resuming his customary suave way of speaking; "how, I cannot tell, but I succeeded in strug-

gling up here. At one time I thought we must have perished."

"Well, you found good quarters," said Frant, gruffly.

"Yes; there was the stove and firewood."

"But, Miss Denton, do you feel ill?" continued Frant.

She did not reply, but looked from one to the other in a strangely confused way.

"And the Colonel," said Anderson, eagerly; "have you seen him?"

"We left him in the hut yonder, and came on to search for you," said Frant; "and you are both safe. Cold, Adam, lad?"

Deane made no reply. He could not speak; his brain swam with the agony he felt. A wild desire to fling himself on Anderson, seize him by the throat and strangle him, had nearly mastered.

"Come up to the stove, man," said Frant, sharply. "You, too, Valter, my lad; come and smoke. We shall be here for hours yet. Come, let's have some brandy. I'd give anything for food. Miss Denton, I want to behave like a gentleman, but this is a case when breaches of etiquette might be forgiven. Would you mind if I lit my pipe?"

Hester looked at him wildly again, shivered, and cowered toward the open stove.

"I don't understand all this," muttered Frant, who crossed to where Deane was standing and took him by the arm. "Come up to the fire, man," he

whispered, "and for heaven's sake contain yourself. You look as if you were going mad."

Deane drew a long breath and then gazed piteously in his friend's eyes.

"I feel so," he said, softly; "but it's over now."

"Miss Denton—pray sit still," cried Anderson just then, for Hester had risen from the seat and was looking wildly about the place.

As Anderson spoke she turned upon him sharply, her face deeply flushed, and a curious light in her eyes. But she looked from him to Frant directly, and gave her head a sharp twitch.

"Open the window and look out," she said, quickly. "We must be going very fast. Where do we stop next?"

"Are you unwell?" said Frant, taking a step forward and holding out his hand.

"No," she said, quietly; "but I don't like—such a terrible speed, it—it——"

She stopped, held her hand to her forehead and closed her eyes.

"I think she is a little overcome by the exertion and excitement," said Anderson, quietly. "My dear Miss Denton, will you sit down again near the fire?"

She looked at him quickly, her hand falling to her side as he spoke, but she turned away from him again and looked inquiringly at Frant.

"Is papa in the smoking carriage?" she said. "He is so fond of a cigar. And——"

She reeled suddenly and would have fallen but for Frant's ready hands.

"Poor little lady; she is half delirious," he said. "Here, Valter—Deane—this must be the hotel; see if there's a couch or a mattress and some blankets."

"Yes, of course, of course," cried Anderson. "Allow me, Mr. Frant."

"Thanks, no," said the latter; "she's all right," and lifting her lightly he replaced her in the chair. "Perhaps you would not mind helping our man. Valter, can you get a light? And, for goodness' sake, try and find some wood."

Valter nodded. Signing to Anderson to follow him, he went to the door.

Anderson hesitated, glanced from one to the other, and then followed the guide into the open hall.

"Pull yourself together, man, and don't glower like that," said Frant, in a quick whisper. "Help, and act like a human being. It's very ugly; but what can we do?"

"Kill him!" said Deane, as if speaking to himself.

"What for—something you fancy? Come, act like a man."

"Candles, herr," cried Valter, eagerly, as he hurried in with a couple. "And there is an ample supply of wood."

"But, confound you! a couch—a mattress—anything. Valter, man, see what you can find. Here, Deane, lad, stop here and mind Miss Denton does not fall forward! I don't think it will last. I've seen men so after a struggle in the snow before now."

Deane took his place and stood by Hester's chair, hard and stern-looking as if frozen, neither speaking nor moving, but listening to the faintly whispered mutterings which passed the insensible girl's lips from time to time. The noises made by the coming and going of the men seemed to rouse her a little, but only to sink into a state of stupor as the room became silent again.

In a few minutes a couch had been found and carried into the room, to be placed by the stove. This was supplemented by an armful of blankets which Valter had brought. Many visits to the place had made him acquainted with its interior. In a few minutes Hester was gently covered by Frant, laid down totally unconscious, and fell into a heavy sleep.

Valter made a couple more excursions, brought more blankets, glasses, and water, which he heated, so that hot liquor was mixed and drunk with avidity; after which the little party settled themselves close to the stove and commenced their vigil.

A few words were spoken, but it was in a constrained way, and soon all were listening to the rushing of the wind, Anderson, in spite of his efforts to preserve a calm exterior, starting and darting a jealous look at Frant every time he moved to see if Hester was sleeping.

Valter rose from time to time to gaze out at the night, returning directly with a significant shrug of the shoulders, and ending by rolling himself in a blanket upon the floor.

The wind howled and shrieked. There was

from time to time a heavy thud, as of falling snow, and Frant and Deane whispered together concerning the Colonel's fate, the latter feeling full of self-reproach that they had made no effort to bring him on. But the guide declared it would have been throwing away their lives to try.

At last all was silent, and a heavy breathing told that Anderson had yielded to the warmth and the hot brandy he had taken, his exhaustion making him the more susceptible. Deane looked at him with angry contempt, and then found, from the deep breathing close by, that the guide also was sleeping. In another minute Frant had sunk sidewise in his seat.

It was a bitter vigil for Deane. He thought of all that had passed, and of the scene that night, till his brow throbbed and then seemed to refuse to think. His ideas became mixed up with the struggles of the day. He was fighting to get the Colonel on there from the hut, and then telling Frant that he should end by killing Anderson, though his love was now eternally at an end.

But it did not seem to be Frant, but Valter who was pressing his shoulder.

"Hist! don't speak, herr; the lady is sleeping peacefully now. The storm is gone, and the morning is lovely."

Deane started from his seat, feeling stiff and cold, to see that it was broad daylight, the snow sending in a bright, cold glare.

"Have I been asleep?" he whispered, excitedly.

"We have all been asleep, herr. But come, I

have some brandy; perhaps we can reach the herr Colonel and bring him on."

Deane glanced at Hester and Anderson as the guide roused Frant, who rose at once.

"I cannot go," he said, in a hoarse whisper.

"You must, lad," said Frant. "The old man will have nearly perished. Bah!—they will be both sleeping when we get back. Come on."

Deane obeyed, and they left the house by one of the windows, stepping down into three feet of snow.

"No," he said, suddenly. "Go on; I shall stay."

"And leave that old fellow to his fate?"

"You are going to his help," said Deane, quietly. "If he had to judge between us, he would say: 'Leave me, and watch over my child.'"

With these words Deane turned, went back to the desolate-looking hotel, and after silently replenishing the stove, sat down to wait.

CHAPTER XIX.

FROM where he sat, he could just see Hester's rounded cheek, partly shaded by her dishevelled hair. An intense longing came over him to go to the couch, bend down and press his lips to it once by way of farewell—for it was all over, he felt, between them now.

He had conceived an overpowering passion for this gentle girl, who had been everything that was perfect in his eyes; and he had found her weak, coquettish—an ordinary type of frivolous woman, eager for admiration and ready to accept the attentions of this middle-aged man who was always at her heels. It was a miserable disillusionizing, and he sighed as he gazed at the couch. He told himself mockingly that men were fools, and he but little better than the rest.

Then he turned his eyes upon Anderson, wrapped in his blanket, near the stove; and a hot feeling of rage flushed up into his temples, while his fingers clenched till the nails were pressed into his palms.

That they had been overtaken by the storm was plain; but he could not believe but that Anderson had planned to leave the Colonel and hurry Hester on there. She could not have been a consenting

party, he told himself. She was too gentle and true to forsake her father in such a time of peril. It was all that scoundrel's work; and she, poor girl, had been half delirious with fear, shame, and exhaustion at being found in so compromising a position.

Deane's love for her was stronger than ever, though he was telling himself that all was over now. He had no right to reproach her. She had chosen between them, and preferred this man—ignorant, poor girl, of the fact that he himself would, in his manly chivalry, have died sooner than have compromised her in the slightest degree.

Once more telling himself that he would play the part of guardian till the Colonel returned, he sat up again and glanced at where the lawyer was apparently fast asleep. Then, religiously avoiding the part of the room where Hester lay, he gazed out through the window at the dazzling slope of snow, now ablaze with the gold of the morning sun. The sky was of the most intense blue; not a breath of air was stirring, and the silence was profound.

"There must be a search party up here soon," he thought; and then he began wondering about the Colonel. The cold had been intense, and unless the entrance were covered by the drifting snow it was possible that he might have succumbed. If Frant and the guide returned with that news, what a terrible awakening it would be for her who lay there sleeping so profoundly.

"Poor girl!" he thought. "Better have listened

to me—better have kept to my engagement of yesterday.”

His eyes were fixed upon the half-seen face again and again, and the longing to press his lips to the wild dishevelled hair came stronger and stronger, till he found himself planning excuses for going across the room. She was evidently very ill the previous night, and nothing had been done; for help was impossible. But surely it was his duty now to go to her side—to touch her brow to see if she was feverish—to speak to her and ask if he could be of any service. It struck him, too, that he ought on his first awaking to have gone off and tried to find medical aid.

But so sure as this idea came round, he drew a heavy breath and glanced at where Anderson lay, and felt that he could not leave her then.

The intense silence continued, and thoughts came now as to their position. Help was not likely to come from the south, for no one would attempt to cross the pass after such a fall. Besides, it was known that the hotel was not yet opened. Only the people below, where they were staying, could send aid, and the pass might be so blocked that it would very likely be days before help could reach them; so that, unless by chance there was food in the place, starvation stared them in the face.

“No,” he said to himself directly after; “Frant and Valter will find a way out somehow over the mountain. You shall live and be happy in your choice.”

As he spoke, the desire to see that Hester was

not suffering, and touch her hand lovingly for the last time, became uncontrollable. He rose from his seat in perfect ignorance of the fact that he was being watched. For Anderson had started into wakefulness at a slight sound, and then had half covered his eyes with his arm, so that every gesture made by Deane had been seen.

Anderson did not move as the young man crossed the room, stepping carefully over the bare boards, which creaked beneath his heavy mountaineering boots, till he paused by the couch and gazed down sadly but passionately in the sleeping face. He could see now that she was flushed, but a slight dew was glistening upon her white forehead. And as he gazed down at her, the feeling of bitterness passed away, and he knew that in spite of all that had passed he was her slave. The desire was strong upon him still to raise one of her hands and press it to his lips, but to him then such an act would have been desecration of his idol—the taking advantage of her helplessness. As she rested there in her youth and trust, there was a halo of sanctity about her which made him draw back softly and walk to the window, where he stood gazing out for some minutes trying to calm the beating at his temples.

A curious feeling of rage had suddenly taken possession of him as he thought of what might have been. He had condemned the woman he loved unheard, and without the right; for he had never spoken. He had won no confession or promise from her. His acts, he knew, had been

those of some green and simple boy in his reverence for her whom he had worshipped. But for this man, who lay sleeping there, how different all might have been; and in the mad passion which had come upon him he dared not look at his recumbent form, lest he should be tempted to some folly.

The cool air by the window calmed him at length, as he stood gazing out at the wondrous wintry scene; but he saw nothing but Hester's face—her eyes seeming to look appealingly and full of reproach, as if to ask him why he had condemned her almost upon his companion's words.

"They say it is a madness," he muttered; "and I must battle with it and try to see things as a sane man should."

He closed his eyes and stood there in dreamy thought, seeing Hester's face still, and leaned his burning forehead against the icy glass, till there was a faint sigh from the couch which made his pulses bound again. Turning softly, he went back, to stand bending over her, and to see that she had turned her head slightly, so that the morning light shone full upon it; but she was still heavily asleep.

Bending lower, and eagerly scanning her face as he sought to read her state—whether she would awake fevered and strange as on the previous night—he stretched forth his hand to lay it tenderly upon her brow, when there was a sharp rustling sound behind him.

Deane turned quickly just as Anderson sprang to his feet, and the two men stood face to face.

CHAPTER XX.

"THE strongest wins!" was the thought that flashed through Deane's mind. His nerves thrilled, and an intense feeling of satisfaction ran through him as he measured his adversary with his eyes and thought of how easily he could crush him down.

There was something, too, in Anderson's gaze which suggested that they two were enemies to the death.

But Deane's rage gave way instantly to something approaching confusion, so utterly disarmed was he by his rival's next look and the accompanying words.

"Good heavens!" Anderson cried; "you startled me, Mr. Deane. I have been asleep, and for the moment I could not understand where I was. I—I—am I awake now? Of course," he continued hurriedly; "I remember now. But Miss Denton?"

Deane held up his hand.

"Asleep!" whispered Anderson, giving a shudder. "Oh, how cold I am! But stop," he continued excitedly; "she was ill last night; and where are the others?"

"Gone to bring up the Colonel," said Deane, feeling puzzled and confused. "Miss Denton seems to be sleeping calmly though."

Anderson took a step or two toward her, and after a quick glance turned back and signed to Deane to follow him to the window.

"She does not look ill," he whispered: "it must have been from fear and exhaustion. I had a horrible struggle to get her here. I did not think it possible that such a storm could have come on so late in the year."

"It is always winter in the mountains," replied Deane.

"Yes, of course; I had forgotten," continued Anderson, with a shiver. "Have you—oh, all right. I am not a brandy drinker, but it is life to one at a time like this. Here, take a nip."

"Thanks, no."

"Ah well, I must," said Anderson. "Fancy my sleeping through that horrible storm. Utterly done up, I suppose. But, look here; we ought to go and seek for Colonel Denton. Let's go at once. Miss Denton will perhaps not wake for hours."

"Come, then," said Deane quietly; and they went out into the hall, then stepped out of the open window into the snow.

"Ugh!" ejaculated Anderson, "what a place! And at this time of the year! But I oughtn't to complain. It saved our lives last night, for I was pretty well at my last gasp when I reached here."

Deane made no reply, but struggled on through the snow, which was terribly deep. Farther on their task became more toilsome, and it was only by following the track left by Frant and Valter, whose experience had led them to take the easiest

way, that they were able to get along at all; so that it was a full hour before they came in sight of the last refuge. A cheery shout from high up came ringing and echoing along the rocky walls.

“What’s that?” cried Anderson. “It does not sound like trouble.”

“The guide,” replied Deane, pointing. “He has been up the side of the pass.”

They met close to the entrance to the refuge, from which the snow had been torn away and trampled down. Here Frant had shown himself as soon as Valter’s shout was heard.

“How is he?” cried Deane and Anderson almost together—the former in a voice full of anxiety, as he thought of the question being asked again up at the hospice.

“Better. We were going to make a start as soon as Valter came back. Well, can we get down the pass?”

“No! There is only one way, and that is over the mountains by the *col* of the Schneeberg.”

“And the lady can’t do that,” said Deane, shortly. “I don’t know that any lady could climb that. Ah, here is Colonel Denton. I hope——”

“Where is my child?” cried the Colonel. “Why have you left her?”

“She is quite safe, sir; we left her sleeping.”

“Alone, up there in the mountains?” cried the Colonel, angrily; and Anderson, who had pressed forward to speak, remained silent, preferring that Deane should bear the brunt of the old man’s anger.

"We were anxious about you, sir, and she could come to no harm," pleaded Deane.

"Anxious about me—an old worn-out soldier! Bah! absurd! You have deserted your colors, man; and you, Mr. Anderson, why was she taken from here?"

"Don't blame me, Colonel Denton," said Anderson, deprecatingly. "I took her away for two reasons—to obtain help, and because I did not think her life would be safe in this place."

The Colonel glanced at him sharply, but the words had disarmed him.

"Well," he said, sternly, "she is safe. Now, Mr. Frant, what does the guide say?"

"Impossible to get down the pass yet. We had better get up to the hospice, and see what can be done."

"See what can be done, man! I'll tell you what to do. Set to work and knock up a coffin for me. I shall never recover last night's work. Perished, sir, perished. Here, get on back," he cried, as he stumbled through the deep snow. "That poor girl will be in agony till she knows the worst."

"I believe we shall find her still sleeping," said Anderson.

"And pray why do you believe that?" cried the Colonel, irritably. "Do you take my daughter for a marmot, sir, or some other creature accustomed to hibernate. Look here, Mr. Deane—oh, great heavens!—rheumatism! I shall be racked. Mr. Deane?"

"I am listening, sir."

"Humph—didn't seem to be. I woke up again and again in the night—hot and fevered in spite of the snow—dreaming and confused. I seemed to be in the retreat from Moscow, and before I could convince myself that I was safe from an attack of the Cossacks—I say before I could convince myself that all was the result of a disordered brain, I dropped off to sleep, and was dreaming the same thing again. Ah!"

He slipped, and in trying to recover his footing loosened a great drift of snow overhanging the torrent, down to which he was fast gliding when Deane caught his hand and dragged him up to the track they had made that morning.

"Thanks," he said, coolly, glancing back at the fierce torrent, which was dashing on, carrying heavy stones, and sweeping masses of ice and snow from where they had fallen during the night. "I'm a bit stiff this morning. By the way, some one covered me with a macintosh last night. You, Mr. Frant?"

"No. You must thank Mr. Deane for that."

"Humph! Thank you, Mr. Deane. I believe that saved my life. Wonderful resister of the cold; but I would rather have had a blanket."

"I am sorry I did not come provided," said Deane, smiling.

"Ah; no one anticipated this. By Jove! what terrible walking; but make haste, gentlemen, make haste. We are forgetting that some one has been left entirely alone up yonder. No possibility

of any one getting there from the other side, guide?" added the Colonel in German.

The guide shook his head; and now, evidently more at rest, the Colonel trudged on bravely; but the contraction of his brow and his compressed lips showed from time to time that he was in no little pain.

For the most part the track made through the snow followed the regular path, but every here and there, in some sheltered spot where a ridge of the rock projected, the snow lay so deeply that a deviation had been made; and this proved to be such rough climbing that Anderson on one occasion, as he saw the Colonel totter, offered his arm.

But the civility was resented.

"Thank you, Mr. Anderson," said the Colonel sarcastically; "but I was thinking of helping you. Here, guide, give me a hand."

Anderson smiled; but it was not a pleasant smile; and he gave way to Valter.

"Ah, that's better," cried the Colonel. "Lucky fellow! I'd give something to be as young and strong as you are."

Anderson followed close behind them, and Frant stopped to fill and light his pipe, giving Deane a meaning look.

"Breakfast," he said. "Why don't you join'in?"

Deane shook his head, and those in front passed round one of the rocky buttresses that jutted from the side of the path.

"I say, old man," continued Frant in a low

voice; "what is your real opinion of friend 'Stopheles?'"

"I detest him!" said Deane, with energy.

"Same here," said Frant, puffing at his pipe. "No opinion of him at all. See what an ugly look he gave the old man."

"I saw him smile."

"Yes; come along. What does the cockolorum say in Shakespeare about smile and smile and smile and still be a villain? Old man won't have a very nice son-in-law."

Deane started as if he had been stung, and gave his companion an angry look.

"Can't help it, old man. You may as well look the thing fairly in the face. It's a rough ridge full of loose stones you've got to climb, so you'd better tackle it like a man, not go on blind to the danger, and some time or other find yourself going headlong down into the valley of despair. I say, poetical, that—for me. Result of a morning pipe on an empty inside. Come, be a man."

"You mean well, Alick," said Deane, slowly; "but it is not kindness to lay rough hands on a hurt."

"Let's lay a tender one on it then, old chap," said Frant, holding out his big muscular hand, which was quietly taken; and then they passed round the rocky buttress to see that the Colonel and the others were well on ahead.

As they drew nearer to the hospice, both the young men wondered that they had succeeded in

reaching it the night before. Setting aside the perils of the snow-laden wind, and the risk where the path ran close along by the edge of a precipice, with the wind tearing down in its tremendous strength, they constantly came upon places where the snow had gathered hundreds of feet above them, clinging on the shelves and slopes of the pass till too heavy, and then thundering down in minor avalanches, sweeping everything before them.

“Little short of a miracle how we all escaped,” said Frant, coolly; “and you may as well keep an eye upward, old fellow, for there’ll be plenty of snowfalls along here for days to come. I don’t want to be covered and then washed clear down below. Look out!” he yelled.

As he spoke a quantity of snow dropped with a thud far above on to a ledge and then came down, gathering in strength just where there was a rift in the wall of the pass. Valter heard the warning thud at the same moment, and dragged the Colonel close in against the rocky wall, Anderson instinctively following suit.

“Ah,” said Frant as they went on, “that sort of thing will be going on for days under this hot sun, and as long as no one is touched, so much the better.”

The open space where the hospice stood was reached soon after, and Deane had hard work to refrain from hurrying on first and entering the place.

Valter was the first to climb in at the window

by which they had left, and then lean out to help the Colonel.

"Confound it!" muttered the latter, querulously; "and me so stiff. Can't you open the door?"

"Locked up, herr," said the guide quietly. "Your hand."

Anderson stepped close up and followed actively enough, as soon as the Colonel had passed through the opening; and Frant drew back for his friend to go next. They crossed the stony floor and entered the dining-room, hat in hand, just as the Colonel was speaking.

"Gone upstairs, perhaps," he said. "Not here, Mr. Deane," he continued, passing the two young men, and going back into the hall to shout at the foot of the stairs. "Hester, Hester, my dear, where are you?"

There was a dull echoing sound in the blank house, and then he called again.

"No one here, you say?" he continued, as the rest followed into the hall, looking curiously from one to the other.

"No, herr," said Valter, speaking in German, but perfectly comprehending the Colonel's words; "and every room is locked up except these two down here."

"Very strange," cried the Colonel, uneasily, as he hurried back to where the stove still glowed. The blankets which had been used lay tossed here and there. "You say you left her here."

"Yes," cried Deane and Anderson together, "asleep on that couch."

"Search the house," cried the Colonel, as if he were giving an order to the men of his regiment.

This was soon done; for on ascending to the top floors, every door was found locked, while below it was as Valter had said—only two rooms were open.

"She must have gone out," cried Deane.

"Madness," said the Colonel. "She would not have ventured through that snow. Mr. Anderson, how could you leave her alone?"

Anderson made a deprecating gesture, but was silent. Deane spoke.

"We were to blame, sir; but as your daughter was in safety, our first thoughts were for you."

"Bah, man! What am I to a tender girl? Somebody must have been while you were away. Outside, and search for footprints."

"No one could have come, herr, without our seeing him," said Valter, quietly. "I know this pass from a boy. The upper part—the highest point—is closed; no man could have come down."

"But are there wild animals?"

"Not here, herr. A few bears far away in the east."

"Out, and search for fresh footmarks in the snow," cried the Colonel; and Deane hurried out, followed by Valter. The latter uttered a cry at the end of a few moments, and pointed to something they had not noticed as they came back.

For there, plain enough now they were sought, showed the footprints of a woman in the deep snow. The traces were distinct close to the hos-

pice, but were lost directly after in the trampled snow of the track made by the men in going and returning. Here and there they reappeared till the wind-swept path was reached, where they once more disappeared, not a trace being seen in the patches of snow that lay all around.

The Colonel seemed to have forgotten his pain and weariness in his anxiety, and, forcing himself to the front, he hurried on close to the guide, Anderson keeping up behind, while, thanks to his activity, Deane kept abreast of the excited leader, making a new track for himself.

"I ought to have seen the new track, herr," Valter kept on saying in self-reproach. The Colonel was about to turn upon him, but repressed himself on seeing how eagerly the man sprang on, bent half double and noting every footprint.

Twice more these disappeared, either from the rock being bare or through the crumbling down of snow from above; but by patient search they were picked up again and the quest went on.

"My poor child!—my poor child!" groaned the Colonel, who was rapidly growing exhausted.

"Keep a good heart, sir, for heaven's sake," cried Deane, "we shall find her. It's all plain enough."

"Plain enough?" groaned the Colonel.

"Yes. She awoke, fancied herself deserted, and tried to find her way back to the refuge in search of you. We must have passed her."

"Don't speak, man," said the Colonel hoarsely, "I know."

He pointed to the torrent that rushed on faster than they could walk, quite a hundred feet below. "She has slipped and fallen there."

"No," said Deane vehemently. "I have watched every step, and they are still going on. We should have seen the marks in the snow where she slipped."

At that moment the Colonel staggered, and Anderson tried to save him; but Deane was first, caught the old man in his arms, and helped him to a wind-swept rock.

"Quick, Alick! your flask."

Frant already had it in his hand.

"Precious little left," he whispered; but the tiny dram within revived the exhausted man a little, and he drew himself up.

"Forward!" he said, but the guide shook his head.

"I have been looking carefully," he said. "For the last quarter hour there has been no trace."

"Nonsense, man!" cried Anderson. "She must have gone on. You don't half look."

"Will the herr lead?" asked Valter coldly.

"No, sir, go on!" roared Anderson.

"The herr is not my master," replied Valter, turning his back to Anderson and addressing the Colonel. "The snow is only marked by our feet," he said respectfully. "The lady cannot have gone further. Look."

He pointed onward down the pass, where there was stretch after stretch of soft white snow in which, plain and deeply marked, were their own footsteps.

“He’s right enough,” said Frant, gravely; “there isn’t a trace of her. She has not gone so far as this.”

The Colonel glanced at Deane, whose eyes gave confirmation of the words.

“Then you think——” groaned the Colonel.

He did not finish, but pointed down at the torrent.

“No, no!” cried Valter. “Impossible, herr. I should have seen.”

“Ah,” the Colonel added, quickly, “you think something—quick, tell me at once.”

The young men were exchanging glances of such meaning that it was evident the same thought had occurred to all.

“It is a painful thing to say, sir,” began Frant.

“Speak, man,” cried the Colonel; “you cannot torture me so much by telling me the truth as you torture me now.”

“They—we have all noticed,” said Deane, in a voice trembling with emotion, “that the footsteps have not reappeared since we passed that great fall of snow which we saw an hour or so ago.”

“My God!” groaned the Colonel, turning ghastly pale; and he stood gasping for a few moments. “Back!” he cried, wildly; “at once!”

The order was not needed, for Deane had taken the lead. Closely followed by Frant and Valter, he was ploughing his way through the deep snow.

Not a footprint was visible till they had reached the spot where the snow came down so heavily that morning. There were no marks till they

were some twenty yards beyond, when they met the first.

It was plain enough. They continued up to where a ridge rose across the path. Deane stopped and passed his hand across his dripping forehead as he gazed down at the river, and then turned to follow Valter, who was already climbing over the newly-fallen snow.

It seemed madness to go; for high above them drift after drift was wreathed and curved like waves ready to fall at a sound. In fact, here and there it was almost in motion. But there was a chance, and to test it the young men went on for a few yards. Then Deane uttered a joyous cry, sprang forward, and leaped into a hollow, where he had caught a glimpse of a dark dress.

That cry was quite sufficient to loosen one of the impending curves of snow, which dropped with a heavy thud.

“Are you hurt, herr?” cried the guide, struggling out and offering Frant his hand to extricate himself.

“Half stunned. But Mr. Deane—why did he shout?”

“Hist!” whispered Valter, who was creeping closer to the rocky scarp of the huge niche in the pass. “Here—quick—Mr. Frant,” he cried, forgetting caution as he plunged on to where some of the loose snow was in motion; and with his help Deane struggled out, lifting the insensible form of her they sought.

CHAPTER XXI.

No time was lost in bearing Hester up to the hospice, before reaching which shelter she gave signs of returning consciousness. She told them she had been toiling on through the snow to try and find the refuge where the Colonel had been left. She must almost have been in sight of the returning party when she sank down exhausted just before the warning shout was uttered by Frant, sufficient snow remaining before her to hide her from those who passed. Providentially the heap of snow which fell at the shout given by Deane was only light, and sufficient only to cover them till Deane struggled out.

"Ill?" said Hester, wonderingly, about an hour after, as she lay on the couch in the great blank room, with her father seated by her, holding her hand. "No, not ill; but confused and strange. My head aches."

"Lie still and sleep," whispered the old man, tenderly; and she smiled at him trustfully and closed her eyes.

Satisfied at last that she was asleep, the Colonel rose softly and went across to the other room, where the four companions of his imprisonment had gathered round a stove.

"Is she better?" cried Deane, eagerly.

"Yes, and sleeping peacefully," said the Colonel, with a sigh of relief. "There is no fever. All she wants is rest and quiet."

"Thank God!" said Deane, inaudibly.

"And now, gentlemen," continued the Colonel, "let me give a hearty grip of the hand all round. Yes, yes, my lad, and to you, too," he cried to Valter. "God bless you for a brave fellow! I wish I was young again, with a regiment made of stuff like you."

Valter smiled as he returned the Colonel's grasp, prouder than if he had received a valuable present.

"That's more English than a long speech," said the Colonel, merrily, "and means more. There, gentlemen, that was my first business. Now for the second. I am ravenous."

"Oh, that's modest," cried Frant, exhaling a great puff of smoke. "I'm wolfish."

"Well, is there nothing to be done?"

Valter said something in German which the Colonel just grasped.

"Then, in heaven's sake, break in. Never mind the proprietor's objections; I'll pay for them."

"But the cellar, old chap," cried Frant. "Surely they haven't carted the wine back down the valley—pagged it, I mean."

"Oh, no, herr; there's plenty of wine here."

"Then why didn't you say so at once. Here, Colonel Denton, you're in command; order out a burgling squad."

"One moment," he said, smiling, but they saw the tears in his eyes as he spoke, and he went back into the dining-room and returned.

"Quite well," he whispered, "sleeping beautifully. Bah! how weak I am," he cried, blowing his nose loudly. "Want of food. Now then, pioneer, lead on."

Valter looked puzzled, but grasped the old man's meaning directly, and taking his ice-axe he led the way to a door which he said was that of the kitchen.

"The herr will pay for the damage to the hotel?" he asked.

"Of course," cried the Colonel, and the instrument the guide carried was put to a use far different from that for which it had been made; for in Valter's hand it became a wonderfully effective burglarious implement. A few lever-like wrenches sent the door open with a broken lock. Then the window was opened, the shutter thrown back, and the sunlight streamed in. Valter made at once for another door, which fortunately yielded to a touch of his hand. They found it was the larder, where they were greeted by the sight of rows of hooks intended for joints, empty dishes, barrels, and a couple of tubs. But there was neither *schinken*, as the guide termed it, bacon, nor dried sausage. There was not a scrap of flour in either of the barrels—nothing whatever edible. Frant thrust his hand into his pocket, took out his tobacco pouch, opened it, looked inside, and closed it again with a sigh.

“Not a very hopeful sight for hungry people,” said the Colonel. “Is there no tea, sugar, or coffee?”

The guide searched what seemed to be intended for a store-room, but there was not a trace of anything, and he led the way to the door of the cellar, which also yielded to the dexterous use of the ice-axe.

As this door was flung open, showing a set of stone steps, the Colonel turned to Anderson.

“We must not use the wine if we find it. You are physician enough, Mr. Anderson, to know how bad that would be without food.”

“Yes; but a little brandy would be valuable for our flasks.”

“Well,” Frant continued, as the guide descended and lit his way with wax matches, struck and handed to him from time to time by Frant, who uttered dismal groans.

“Empty bottles, empty tubs, empty everything—company included,” he cried. “Here, let’s go up and have a smoke. Got plenty of cigars, Colonel?”

“Oh yes, enough,” said the old man testily, as they went back into the room they had warmed. “We can’t stay in this miserable place and starve. Come, guide, surely there is a way over the mountains.”

“Every way is blocked with snow, herr,” replied the guide; “but if any of the gentlemen will come I will try.”

“But how are we to get my daughter over.”

The guide shrugged his shoulders.

"It would be impossible, herr. We must stay here till a way is cut through the snow or the thaw comes."

"Oh, not so long," said Frant. "I say, Adam, old fellow, we shall have to do the shipwrecked mariner business and cast lots, unless Mr. Anderson will volunteer."

"Then the place is quite empty," said the Colonel in dismay.

"Yes, sir," cried Frant, laughing, "except furniture."

"We will see what we can do, sir," said Deane. "Frant, you will come with us?"

"You may depend upon it I am not going to sit down and starve," replied Frant; and Deane turned to the guide with an inquiring look.

"While there is this snow hanging loose on the mountains, herr," said Valter quietly, "it is like madness to go; but we have our rope, and we cannot stop here without food. I am ready."

"Which way shall we try?"

"Who can say, herr? We must go and try till we can find a way down."

As he spoke, there was a dull distant roar which increased till it was like thunder. Finally there was a deafening crash followed by a deep reverberation.

"Great heavens!—what is that?" cried the Colonel.

"Snow which falls so late as this, herr, cannot stay. It is all on the move in the high slopes. A handful sends great fields falling."

"The man is right," cried the Colonel, eagerly peering from the window; "it is like madness to stir under the treacherous slopes. You cannot go."

"It is a case of must, sir," replied Deane, smiling.

"Indeed, yes," said Anderson, who had for some time been silent. "We have warmth and shelter; but we must have food."

"*Qui dort dine*," said Frant carelessly. "Seems to me that it's a fine chance for an experiment in hibernation. Let's go to roost till they come from below to root us out."

"For goodness' sake, Alick——"

Deane did not finish his speech, for the Colonel turned upon them angrily.

"Look here, my good sir," he cried; "I have passed over half my life in India, and have returned shattered in health. A man can't have bad health without its affecting his disposition, and I have—I own it—a devil of a temper sometimes."

"Oh, it was only a joke, sir," said Frant, apologetically.

"But it's not a time for joking, sir."

"And in extremely bad taste," added Anderson.

"Will you have the goodness to let me finish what I was saying, sir?" cried the Colonel, hotly.

"I beg pardon."

"When I am unwell I cannot restrain my irritability," continued the Colonel, "and I am stiff, rheumatic, and feverish now, in addition to being

famished. I warn you, Mr. Frant, that another remark like that will—will— There, there, I will not be angry at such a time. Look here, gentlemen, we must have an attempt made to obtain food. Where is there the best chance—the nearest place?”

“Nothing nearer or more accessible than the hotel, sir, and your own home,” cried Deane.

“Then, in heaven’s name, come on, gentlemen.”

“No,” said Deane, quietly. “Your place is here, with Miss Denton.

“But I will not remain inactive.”

“You will be doing us more good, sir, than by coming with us.”

“And I will go with them, Colonel Denton.”

It required an effort, but it was a case of emergency, and Deane spoke out.

“No, sir. Have the goodness to stay with Colonel Denton. You are something of an invalid, and the venture requires all the strength and activity of young men.”

Anderson bit his lip, and he bit it harder as the Colonel took Deane’s hand.

“God bless you, my lad!” he said, warmly. “I’m proud of my young fellow-countryman. You are quite right; and I hate settling down to be an old man. There’s all the spirit, even if the muscles are wanting. Can I help you?”

“Yes, sir—by watching over your daughter,” replied Deane. “We are going, and it is what you soldiers would call a forlorn hope. If we can get

over the mountains, we shall not be long before we return with help and food. If we do not get over, you will see us back here before long."

"But you will get over, my lad, I feel sure."

"I wish I did, sir. If we do not return within two days——"

"What?"

"You must, with Mr. Anderson's help, make an effort to get down the pass, guarding yourselves against the danger of the falling snow."

"But where will you be then?"

"Heaven knows, sir."

"Is the danger so great?"

Deane shrugged his shoulders.

"The danger is as great to sit here in inaction and starve."

"Oh, but I cannot let you venture."

"Surely Mr. Deane is exaggerating," said Anderson, blandly.

"I hope I am, sir."

"The herr has spoken the truth," said Valter, gravely. "We Swiss would not stir at a time like this unless there was some one in danger."

"But ought I to let you go on such a perilous errand?" said the Colonel.

"You would not keep back your soldiers if it was a call of duty, sir," said Deane, smiling; and Anderson felt a pang of jealous rage run through him as he saw how warm a feeling was springing up between his rival and the Colonel.

But he calmed down as he thought of his position—alone with the Dentons, and with the favor-

able opportunities for advancing one or the other of the objects he had in view.

"Then you will go," said the Colonel.

"Yes, sir; we must go. We have gone through plenty of perils for pleasure's sake. We must go through some now for duty."

"Are we in danger?" said a quick, eager voice; and all stared to see Hester at the door.

"Ah, my child!" cried the Colonel. "Better?"

"Yes, the feeling of confusion has gone off now. It was as if I had been taking a sleeping draught. I don't quite understand where we are."

"Oh, only in the hospice, Miss Denton," said Anderson, eagerly.

The Colonel gave him a sharp look.

"We are shut in, my darling, by the snow. The pass is blocked."

"But you talked about danger," said Hester, and she looked quickly at Deane, colored, and turned her eyes upon her father.

"Well, snow is a little dangerous sometimes, as you know; but our friends here are going to try to find help."

"Yes," said Deane, quietly; "and the time is passing. Are you both ready?"

For answer Valter slung his coil of rope over his shoulder, picked up his ice-axe, and strode to the door.

"Ready? yes!" said Frant, cheerily. "I'll order dinner at the hotel, Colonel Denton. Miss Denton, *au revoir*. Mr. Anderson, there's plenty of

wood in the left hand cellar. The post of stoker is one of honor at a time like this."

Anderson nodded and tried to smile. Deane took up his hat and turned toward the door, not daring to look at Hester.

"Don't leave us like that, Mr. Deane," said the Colonel, warmly, as he extended his hand. "Thank you, and *au revoir*. Hester, my dear, wish him good speed."

"I do," said Hester, quietly, as she raised her hand, which was eagerly grasped and earnestly pressed, the contact sending a thrill through both which made them forget the danger by which they were surrounded.

Then Deane passed out of the place, and the Colonel stood holding his child's hand, watching the three dark figures growing smaller as they traversed the snow.

"Crying, my dear?" said the Colonel, suddenly.

"Yes. I feel as if you had sent them to their death," said Hester, in a voice so full of warmth and sympathy that Anderson felt as if fortune was fighting against him.

"Sent him to his death," he said to himself, unconsciously quoting Hester's words; and as he bent lower over the glowing opening of the stove, the light shone full in his face, and his eyes gave forth a lurid glare.

For he was thinking of his opportunities, and of how for days past he had neglected the principal mission upon which he had come. In all probability, he would be alone with the Colonel that

night, and in spite of hunger the old man would sleep from exhaustion. Would he sleep heavily enough to allow of the precious letters being purloined?

Anderson smiled, for fate might be kind to him in another way—with Hester. Women were weak, he told himself, and he could remind her of their previous night's adventure.

"He will not get back here again to-night," the lawyer said, softly. "Perhaps she is right: the old man has sent him to his death."

"Did you speak, Mr. Anderson?" said the Colonel.

Anderson started and looked round, to see that Hester was gazing at him in a half-frightened way, while as he returned her gaze he seemed to hold her eyes, and a feeling of exultation made the blood flush to his temples.

"I don't think so," he said, merrily. "Perhaps I did think aloud, for my mind was full of ideas respecting a cosy room at my club in St. James' Square, and snug little tables spread for dinner."

As he was speaking the Colonel thrust his hand into his breast, and Anderson involuntarily did the same—the one grasping his cigar case, the other his brandy flask, but not on account of their ordinary contents.

"Yes," said the Colonel, peevishly. "I wish we were there now."

"I don't," said Anderson, to himself. "I'd suffer ten times the hunger for this night's chance. Yes, the old man is sure to sleep."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE day passed slowly.

Anderson was all smiles and good humor, striving in every way to make the sojourn more bearable. His was the task of mending the fire and getting together things from the other room to make that in which they stayed less bare. He was constantly starting topics for conversation, and nothing could have been more courteous and gentlemanly than his bearing toward Hester—to her trouble and to the Colonel's annoyance.

The latter sat by the fire impatient enough, fighting hard to contain himself; for he was, as it were, all on edge. Every now and then, when he felt as if he must explode, he got up and went to the window to look out. Whenever he went to look out, Hester rose and followed him, to gaze out too.

"Nature. Alarmed and coy," said Anderson to himself. "Well, I like her the better for it. She cannot really care for that man."

"I haven't been so hungry since I was up in the hills," ejaculated the Colonel, "when the supply wagon went over the precipice. It was during the Akeanar expedition."

"Where you were hurt, papa?"

"Now, my dear Hester, you know I was hurt there. I told you a hundred times."

"Yes, papa," she said weakly. She looked so piteously in his face that he passed his arm round her, and they stood gazing out at the snow-clad mountains.

"Hungry, pet?" he said at last; and Anderson, who was about to venture another remark, closed his lips just in time to prevent their words clashing.

"A little, dear; but not so very bad. I am thinking about you."

"Oh, never mind me. I'm an old soldier, and used to starving; but I do wish we had a cup of tea or a glass of wine."

"Will you take a little brandy?" said Anderson.

"No, sir, thank you," replied the Colonel, coldly. "Spirits taken fasting are poison to me."

"Yes, of course. I beg pardon. It was the only thing I could offer you. Do you think it is of any use to try and search the place again?"

"No, I do not. There is plenty of wood, is there not?"

"Ample for days," said Anderson.

"Because I suppose we shall have to dine with Duke Humphrey to-night, and we must make up our minds to watch and doze for the next twelve hours. Confound the expedition! How could I ever have been such a fool as to come."

"It was unfortunate for Miss Denton that the weather should have turned out so bad."

"Hang his confounded chatter!" muttered the

Colonel. "Hester, my dear, can you bear a little smoking?"

"Oh yes, papa; I should like it."

"Anderson, give me one of your cigars, and take one of mine. Thanks," he continued, after the business of exchange. "Now, if you begin to cough, Hetty, I shall really be sorry, for I must give the wolf a little tobacco, as there's nothing else."

"I think I will not smoke, if you will excuse me," said Anderson, glancing at Hester.

"Then, if you don't I can't," cried the Colonel, irritably. "For goodness' sake, man, light up."

Anderson bowed and began toying with the cigar, as the Colonel bit off the end of his and sat frowning, heedless of the fact that his daughter had folded a piece of paper and lit it.

"Might I ask," said Anderson, smilingly, extending his hand.

"I beg your pardon," said Hester, offering the lighted paper, which Anderson took. He contrived to clasp her hand at the same time, and gave her a burning look as she hastily withdrew her fingers.

"You really are sure that you will not mind?" he said.

"Of course she will not, sir," cried the Colonel. "She knows we need it. Hah!" he ejaculated, as he began to feel the soothing influence of the aromatic leaf, "we must make the best of it to make our imprisonment bearable. I'm begin-

ning to regret that we did not accompany the forlorn hope."

"It would have been impossible for Miss Denton."

"Well, I suppose so," said the Colonel, rising to replenish the stove, but Anderson started up and was before him.

"Your own suggestion," he said laughingly: "mutual help."

The day wore on, and Hester began to reproach herself for her fears. Nothing could have been better than Anderson's manner toward her. It was always gentlemanly and considerate, and he devoted himself as long as daylight lasted to scheming little things to make the neighborhood of the stove more comfortable.

"Yes," said the Colonel, grimly, as he ceased his lionlike tramp up and down their prison. "Yes; all very nice, Mr. Anderson. You've made a drawing-room of the place; but I wish you could have turned it into a kitchen."

"I wish so, too," replied Anderson. "I should have had no scruple about being cook."

"Confound it!" cried the Colonel half an hour later, as he took the cup from his flask; "only one more dram. Hetty, my dear, I don't like asking you to sip brandy, but under the circumstances—as medicine—what do you say?"

"No," she replied, with a smile.

"Hah!" sighed the Colonel; "they say woman is weak. The weakness lies our way, I'm afraid. You have some brandy, Mr. Anderson?"

“Oh, yes; half a flask full.”

“Then I shall drink mine, for I am utterly exhausted.”

He tossed off the last drops in his flask, and replaced it before going to the window again, where he was joined by Hester, the pair gazing out at the dying light upon the peaks within view, while in the depths of the pass it was almost dark.

As Hester turned with her father to retrace their steps, she shuddered at the aspect of Anderson's countenance, which seemed to stand out of the darkness and glow strangely in the reflection of the stove. His eyes actually glistened as they were fixed upon her.

It was only a momentary impression, and he was talking to them both the next minute, speaking cheerily about the morrow.

“We are going through the worst of the ordeal now, Miss Denton,” he said; “for I believe that before long we shall all drop off to sleep, and not wake again till quite late in the morning, and by that time help will have come.”

“Well, the best thing we can do,” said the Colonel, buttoning up his coat a little tighter, in a way which drew Anderson's attention to the swelling formed by his breast pocket. “Some animals sleep for months without food; we ought to manage for a few hours.”

The evening was fast growing into night, and the silence of the place to Hester appeared appalling. The gentlemen had smoked till they were tired, and the conversation had flagged. She had

again gone over the adventures of the past night, and shuddered as she glanced at Anderson, feeling more and more that to be shut up there with him was to be in his power. Still she fenced with her thoughts, telling herself that they were silly fancies not worthy of consideration.

Her musings were interrupted by their object, who had silently left the room and now returned, making the Colonel start up and betray the fact that he had been dozing.

“What is it?” he cried. “Who’s that?”

“It is only I,” said Anderson, placing a vessel on the mouth of the stove. “I’m going to make some water hot, and I should advise you to follow my example—have a glass of grog.”

“Humph! Yes. Better than nothing. I will.”

Anderson busied himself getting glasses, and where he stood all was black darkness, the vivid glow from the stove cutting across the room in a clearly marked ruddy line.

In the midst of the silence which ensued there suddenly arose the pleasant sound of the kettle singing, and all sat waiting till a jet of steam poured forth into the room.

“Hah!” ejaculated the Colonel; “puts one in mind of your little kettle, Hetty, with the spirit lamp. But there’s no afternoon tea this time, my dear.”

“I shall enjoy it all the more next time, papa,” said Hester, laying her hand upon his arm and watching Anderson.

A minute later he came back to where father

and daughter were seated, with a steaming glass in each hand.

“There, Colonel Denton,” he said; “that’s the best I can do. No sugar, and we are more than ten miles from a lemon. Still it is better than nothing.”

“Very good of you, Mr. Anderson—very good indeed. Thanks. Been worse, sir, if there had been the hot water, sugar and lemon, and no brandy—eh?”

“Far worse. And now, Miss Denton,” continued Anderson, “I have ventured to bring you this.”

“Oh, no, thank you,” she exclaimed.

“Excuse me: it is very weak, and you are suffering. It may be the means of procuring you a refreshing night’s rest. I know it is not a lady’s beverage, but under the circumstances—what do you think, sir?”

“Well, really,” replied the Colonel, “I hardly know what to say. It is very good of you; but I shall leave it to Hester herself. Well, my dear, what do you say?”

“I should prefer not to take it,” said Hester, firmly.

“Then that settles it,” said the Colonel, “thanks to you, Mr. Anderson, all the same. But yourself—have you a glass?”

“Yes; I mixed that,” said Anderson, quietly, as he carried Hester’s glass back into the darkness and took up another. “Your health, Colonel Denton.”

“To our speedy deliverance!” cried the Colonel. “Hah! that is warm and comforting.”

Hester looked at him as he sat sipping the brandy-and-water, and then listened to a few remarks made by Anderson, as he sat back in the darkness beyond the stove, and talked about the peculiarities of the neighborhood.

The darkness outside was intense, and as Anderson at last ceased speaking, a faint cracking sound from the stove seemed the only living thing in the great solitude.

The Colonel was silent, and as, in spite of herself, Hester turned her eyes in the direction where Anderson sat, invisible now in the darkness, a chill of dread came over her, for she felt that he was gazing fixedly at her.

Faint from want of food, mentally disordered still by the feverish attack of the previous night, it was as if the wild dreamy state was coming back; and with a shiver of dread she softly stole her hand to where her father's lay upon the arm of his chair. It rested within the strong fingers which closed over it, and gave it a firm pressure.

A faint sigh of satisfaction escaped her. She felt safe now, and for a few minutes sat gazing at the golden embers with a glow of warmth at her heart. Then, as if drawn there in spite of herself, her eyes turned with frightened gaze toward the place where Anderson was seated; and again the impression was strong upon her that he was looking at her fixedly.

The suffering this caused was the more keen from the fact that she could see nothing beyond that glow of light. All else was intensely black,

and a child-like feeling of dread chilled her as she sat breathing hard, in the fancy that he was about to spring at her.

She pressed her father's hand once more, and there was the same firm return of her grasp, sending its comforting thrill through her. She determined to end the painful silence by starting some topic of conversation. But no idea would come. Her lips seemed sealed, and with growing agony she felt that the sensation of dread was once more creeping over her.

Why did not her father speak? Why did not Mr. Anderson say something? Why did she not herself speak? These questions repeated themselves; but there was no answer; and with her feverish nightmare-like sensation increasing, she once more sought for encouragement by pressing her father's hand. The chill of horror increased so that her faculties were as if frozen, for there was no answering grasp.

The Colonel was fast asleep.

The knowledge that her father was sleeping heavily stunned Hester for the moment. She pressed his hand again and again, but there was no response.

Then thoughts crowded upon her, and she was full of apprehension, amidst which came a peculiar fancy—one which grew and grew as she clung to the large firm hand which seemed to be her only stay.

The idea was this: that her father had gone off to sleep like that on the previous night, and had

left her, so to speak, to the protection of their companion. She had then attributed it entirely to his exhaustion; but now he had not been panting and struggling through the deep and blinding snow.

She pressed the Colonel's hand again, but there was no return. His slumber was profound, and once more her eyes were turned to the darkness beyond the stove, as she strained her sense of hearing in the hope that their travelling companion had also fallen asleep.

If she could realize this, she felt that she could wait patiently for the return of day, but there was not a breath. She could only come to one conclusion: Anderson was seated there, screened by the gloom, watching her and gloating over the fear he knew that he inspired.

In her feverish state it was terrible. She knew well enough that he had conceived a passion for her—that in his way he loved her—and it was horrible. She had never before achieved to the knowledge of what a man's power might be. Gradually growing more excited by her fancy, she trembled in anticipation as she felt that she was there alone with this man; that her father was in a profound sleep from which she would not be able to awake him; and that Anderson would choose this time to declare his insane love.

Almost as she had reached this pitch of agony, which chained her like the paralyzing touch of an unhealthy dream, there was a faint sound, as if her silent companion had stirred.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HESTER'S heart seemed to stand still, and she this time checked the intense desire to look in Anderson's direction, but gazed fixedly at the glowing embers. All was still again but the deep breathing of her father, and she could count the throbbings of her heart.

She pressed the Colonel's hand over and over again; but there was no response. There was a terrible profundity about his slumber, and she felt by instinct that no effort of hers would arouse him.

Once more there was a faint sound, whose effect upon her was to excite a desire to leap up and run shrieking from the room. But she felt powerless to stir, and as the noise was not repeated she drew a deep breath of relief; for a reaction had commenced. The sounds she had heard were doubtless made by their companion; he, too, had no doubt yielded to the influence of the hot spirit, and was sleeping soundly.

A long-drawn breath of relief again, and a restful feeling came over her as she sat there, reproving herself for her cowardice, and thinking what slaves weak people are to their imaginations. "What was there to fear?" she asked herself. Nothing. Her dread ought to be for Adam Deane and his companion, who had so bravely

gone for help. Forcing the current of her thoughts into another direction, a feeling of amusement stole through her as she dwelt on the possibility of her young aunt marrying again. It seemed possible, for there could be no doubt about her thinking a good deal about the stalwart little mountaineer—Mr. Deane's companion.

Mr. Deane's companion!

That brought her thoughts back into the line they would have followed before. This time they mastered her, and after a faint struggle she yielded, flushing slightly the while at finding how pleasant it was to dwell upon Adam Deane and his pursuits—how interesting that fancy of his was, and what a satisfaction it would be if he really did discover those ancient gold workings.

She flushed a little more deeply as she felt how much it interested her, and that she was wishing he might succeed. For Mr. Deane was so quiet and manly, and was always so respectful to her. How ready he was, too, when her father was irritable, to pass it over without resentment.

Then came thoughts of his behavior when the avalanche fell, and lastly there was his brave effort to save them on the previous night. For aught she knew to the contrary, he was at that moment toiling up the pass and battling with the snow in a brave effort to bring help. A sweet sense of pleasure began to glow at her heart, as she felt that there was one great reason for all this—a reason that he would some day boldly tell—when he would say: "Hester, I love you."

What should she say?

“Hester, I love you!”

She started as if she had been stung, for there kneeling on her left, and now clasping both her hands in his, was Anderson. And as she looked down at him, horrified, it was to see a strange light in his eyes as the fire struck them sidewise, and giving them a weird aspect, heightened by the appearance of his face, half in the light, half in the black darkness of the shade.

For the moment, as she crouched back in her chair, staring at him, she wondered whether she had heard those words, or they were her imagination.

She was not long left in doubt, for he continued, in a hoarse whisper:—

“Don’t shrink from me, dear. I love you, indeed—indeed. Listen to me!”

“Mr. Anderson! Papa, papa!”

“Hush!” he said, quietly; “he is sleeping. You will not wake him.”

The chill that had paralyzed her before came with renewed strength at this, for Hester felt that the words were true. Slightly recovering herself, she dragged one hand away, and caught at her father’s arm, shaking it sharply.

“I tell you that he will not wake. Hester, listen to me. Forgive me if I speak to you suddenly in this unprepared—no, it is not unprepared,” he continued, almost fiercely. “You know—you have felt—that I loved you these months past. My eyes told you my deep, my eternal admiration

for you, when we first used to meet by the sea, and you felt how intense, how true my love was for you when I tracked you and followed you to this lone valley."

"Mr. Anderson, is this a time to speak to me?"

"Yes—the time given by fate."

"Father! father!" she cried, growing alarmed now.

"Why do you try to wake him?" he whispered, hoarsely. "He would not refuse me; but it is not only his consent—I want yours. I want to feel that you will be mine—that you will love me. There, you see I, a strong man, am on my knees to you—pleading—begging."

"Mr. Anderson!"

"Listen. You say, is this a time? Yes, and you know it. Fate has thrown us together, as she did last night, when I held you in my arms, and won you from the death that was striving to tear you away. You do not recall that?"

"I know," she said, in a startled, hesitating way, as she tried to recollect the scene of the past night, "that you took me with you to get assistance."

"Yes, and we were covered by the snow. I carried you, Hester dearest—in these arms—to safety—here. When, a dozen times over, my strength was failing, when the storm was bewildering me, and you were insensible to its horrors, I would not fail, for I had you to save—your precious life to win—and I fought on and on, love giving me strength, till at last I bore you to this place."

"You carried me here—here?" she faltered.

"Yes: you do not remember? I bore you here, and won you back to life; for I love you, dearest."

Horrified by his words and manner, she tried to drag her hands away, but he held them fast.

"You think I tell you of all this boastingly," he whispered, "but it is not that. It is to tell you—to make you understand all I feel; for I know I am not young nor handsome—not one of the bright-faced boys who win women's hearts and then, thoughtless, careless, cast them away. I am not smooth-tongued and romantic, for mine has been a hard life, Hester—a battle with my kind. I never thought to kneel to a woman like this and plead for pity, for I despised women till I saw you in all your sweet innocence and beauty. Ah! you are turning to me at last. Hester, I saved your life; tell me that life is mine."

"Mr. Anderson, this is madness."

"Love is madness," he whispered; "but a madness which leads to joy. Hester—love—we are alone."

"We are not alone," she cried, desperately. "Father."

"He might as well not be here," whispered Anderson. "You see he does not heed you. But you do hear me. Hester, I tell you it is fate. You must listen to me now. You will be my wife?"

"No, no," she cried: "it is impossible."

"The impossible made possible by fate, who has these two nights overthrown us together alone. Come, let me plead to you tenderly. I would I

had the words to tell you how long and how dearly I have loved you; but they will not come."

"Mr. Anderson, this is cowardly—unmanly," she cried, growing strong now as she felt how self-dependent she really was in the presence of the strange stupor in which her father lay.

"You call it so," he said, gently; "but it is my love that speaks."

"You insult me by persevering when I tell you it is impossible," she cried.

"Why?" he said, sharply. "Because you are engaged?"

"No, no," she cried, wildly.

"Then it is not impossible. Even if you had been engaged you would have been mine."

"Mr. Anderson!"

"Yes; you call my offer insulting. Have you no tender word—no gentle look to give me?"

"I tell you, sir, that all this is a cruel insult—an outrage. If my father heard you—as he shall hear—you would bitterly repent."

"No," he said, softly. "There can be no repentance—only a feeling of joy in the recollection that I have told the woman I worship how I love her."

"I tell you once more, sir, this is a cruel outrage. I cannot—I will not—give you any other reply. No! no! I could not—I never would."

"Not recompense the man who saved your life by giving that life to him?"

"Is it the act of a gentleman to bargain for what he has done, sir?" she cried, rising and dragging

her hands away. "The poorest peasant here would have done what you did."

"Perhaps," he said; "but he would not have risked his life. You will be my wife, Hester?"

She turned from him with so bitter a look of disgust that the blood rushed to his temples and retreated, leaving him cadaverous and pale.

"You do not mean this," he whispered. "I have taken you by surprise."

"Yes," she said, firmly. "I thought Mr. Anderson was my father's friend, and would respect and save his child from the pain of a scene like this."

"Your father's friend—your friend—your lover, Hester. A man who will stand at nothing to win you to be his wife."

Hester seized her father's hand, and bent down over him.

"Father, father!" she cried; "why do you not speak?"

Anderson smiled.

"You do not heed what I say," he continued. "I want to win you by gentle words, Hester; but you force me by your cruel, bitter disdain to speak. What am I to say to you?—tell you I will wait years if you order me to. I am rich; your every wish shall be gratified. I will be your most patient slave; give in to every caprice. You shall occupy a position in society that shall make others envious. Ah! you are relenting. Hester, my own!"

She shrank from him with a repetition of the

look of disgust which stung him to the quick, and with an angry gesture he stood with heaving breast, biting his lips, and trying hard to master the sensation of rage which carried him away.

When at last he spoke, it was in a husky whisper, which told of his emotion, and made Hester pass one arm about her father's neck and cling to him in dread.

"Frightened?" said Anderson. "Don't be alarmed. You accused me of acts not worthy of a gentleman; but I love and respect the beautiful woman who is to be my wife!"

"Your wife!"

"Yes; my wife. It is fate, I tell you. I told you, too, that I would stop at nothing to win you. If the open honest tenders of the gentleman are of no avail, I must try other means; only I warn you—you force me to it. Do you not see your position, Hester?"

She gave him a quick glance.

"I say, do you not see your position? You are a lady—stop, I will not speak to you like this. I appeal to you once more; be merciful to me, Hester, I love you."

She turned away.

"Be merciful to yourself, then."

She was still silent.

"Mind; you must not blame me in the future. No; you will not. You will be too happy as my wife, and forgive anything, Hester. Do you not realize your position—as a lady accustomed to move in good society?"

She shivered slightly, but even now she did not realize the import of his words.

“You have driven me to it,” he said, desperately. “Can you not see that you must be my wife.”

She clung more closely to the sanctuary she had taken, but made no other sign.

“That, even supposing it possible that your affections led you in another direction—say toward our mutual friend, Deane——”

“Mr. Anderson!” she cried indignantly.

“Well, then, any other gentleman you might meet—and he were disposed to ask your hand in marriage, as I have done.”

He spoke more and more slowly, making his words, as it were, cut home, while she stood attentive, half wondering at what he might dare to say.

“You could not accept him. I should not allow you to accept him. I should be driven, Hester, by my intense love, to say that man must never clasp to his breast the woman I dearly love.” He waited for her to speak, but the silence was profound, and he went on again slowly:

“For my own sake—to save my life from the pistol or poison, for I could not live without you—I should, in self-defence, have words wrung from me that would end his pretensions on the instant.”

She turned upon him, her eyes full of wonder, and then began trembling as if some dim perception of his meaning was dawning upon her mind.

“You would have forced me to it, and your beautiful eyes are now asking me the question—What should I say? Well, ask me in words.”

He paused.

“You will not? Then, once more, dearest, do we tell your father when he wakes in the morning that we ask his blessing on our love? No reply? Those beautiful eyes still questioning—still asking how I should win you from one—from a thousand would-be lovers? Well, I will tell you—hard as it is—but lovingly. Fate has given you to me already, dearest. I felt it; but I would not enforce my power till I had pleaded humbly for the love you cannot withhold.”

He paused again, and passed his tongue over his parched lips—hesitating even then before he dealt his cowardly blow. But passion conquered, and in the belief that he would bring her to his knees he went on.

“Fate has given you into my hands. Hester—love—wife—have you forgotten the events of the past two days?”

“No, sir,” she said, coldly.

“You have, or you would not speak like that. Hester, have you not thought of how your future rests with me?”

Again her eyes looked wildly and wonderingly into his.

“Last night—to-night—alone, here with me, in the mountains? You do not see? Why, a word from me would drive the most ardent lover from your feet! Hester, dearest, once more I tell you fate has given you into my hands, and you are mine and mine alone!”

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CURIOUS sensation of rage and contempt for himself came over Lawrence Anderson as soon as he had uttered the words. Something within him—perhaps the much-talked-of still small voice of conscience—whispered that he was acting and playing the part of a villain, and it only wanted the bitterly resentful look flashed from Hester's eyes to half madden him.

For if ever eyes darted a speaking look that said "Coward!" Hester Denton's were those eyes before she turned from him in disgust, standing behind her father's chair with her arm about his neck.

Could Anderson have felt that he had been successful, and that he had completely cowed her by his threats, he would have thought little of his words, triumphant as he would have been in the feeling that he had achieved one-half of his mission. But the contempt and defiance in the look of one who seemed to have suddenly changed from a timid girl to a firm woman, stung him to the heart while it increased his admiration.

He, too, had risen, and stood silent and motionless, looking from her to the glowing stove and back, while the silence in the half-dark room grew more painful as the moments fled.

A dozen times over he was on the point of speaking; but no words would come. He had sent his barbed and poisoned shaft straight at his intended victim, and he had seen it strike and fall blunted from the armor of her woman's innocence and strength. What was to be his next step?

He moistened his parched lips again and again, and began to pace the room to and fro, while Hester furtively watched him, strong in her defiance, but trembling as she saw him pass from the black darkness of the end across the broad patch of light and disappear.

Her greatest dread was lest he should come back behind her; but he confined himself to one path in front of the stove. As she listened to his steps she pressed the Colonel's shoulder, and when Anderson's back was turned she passed her hand caressingly over her father's cheek.

Still there was no responsive movement. He slept on deeply, the regular inspiration slightly raising her arm as she rested with it across his breast.

Half an hour of agony such as she had never before felt passed—a brief space which felt to her like an age; and then Anderson stopped suddenly before her, his voice husky and changed.

"Hester," he said; "Hester! can one so beautiful—so dear to me—be hard and cruel like this? There; I retract all I said. It was base, unmanly, villanous. I confess it. But have some pity on me; I could not restrain myself. A man such as I loves only once, and when his affection is set, it

bears all before it like some furious torrent. I tell you that for your love I could stay at nothing, yet when humbly, appealingly, I speak to you, every word is treated with cold contempt."

He waited, but she remained silent, and he went on.

"I will not believe that you are at heart so cruel. It is your girlish shrinking from accepting the man who worships you. For heaven's sake—for pity's sake—say one word to me; give me something to feed on—a gleam of hope. You cannot realize what a love like mine is. Speak to me or you will drive me mad."

He paused again.

"Do you not hear me? I ask for forgiveness for my words. Hester, dearest, I could not injure you, even in thought. What I said was wrung from me by your cruel coldness. There, dearest, you will listen to me now."

He took a step toward her to seize her hand, but she shrank from him with a cry of dread; and he turned away with a gesture of rage, and resumed his hurried tramp up and down the room.

"Very well," he said at last, as he stopped suddenly before her. "You force me to speak. One of us two must be slave. I have prayed to you to let me be, but you turn from me with contempt. I shall beg no more. I can wait, for I am the stronger. It is your turn to plead now—when you like. You have not quite grasped the situation; but you can think it out, and then you

will see that your future is in my hands—that you must come to me. When you do, I shall be merciful as you have not been to me, and——”

Hester hardly heard his last words in the agony of a thought that had attacked her. She checked Anderson's utterances now by a wild cry, as she frantically began to tear at her father's throat.

“What is it?” cried Anderson, excitedly.

“He is dying—he is dying!” cried Hester. “Father! Dear father! don't leave me now.”

“Hush, you are mistaken,” whispered Anderson hoarsely. Thrusting away Hester's hands, he rapidly unfastened the Colonel's kerchief and collar, and laid his hand upon his brow and then at his throat.

For the sleeper had suddenly begun to utter hoarse catching sounds and to struggle feebly, while he made ineffective motions with the fingers as if to tear away something that was suffocating him.

“Help! what can I do?” cried Hester, excitedly; and she leaned over and gazed in the now open and dilated eyes.

“Don't—don't be alarmed,” cried Anderson, huskily. “A slight fit of some kind. There, I'll carry him to the couch. Yes, you can help me. He will be better lying down.”

As he spoke, he lifted the old man from the chair, and half dragged him to the sofa which had been the daughter's resting-place the night before. The reclining position appeared to afford some relief to the gasping man, who in the inter-

vals of the paroxysms which attacked him began now to mutter incoherently.

“Is—is he dying?” whispered Hester, with a look of awe.

“In heaven’s name, no! He—he can’t be,” stammered Anderson. “It is a slight fit. He had no business to go to sleep in that position. There, you see, he is better now.”

“No, no,” cried Hester, wringing her hands; “he is worse—he is dying.”

She flung herself upon her knees, and threw her arms about her father’s insensible form, but made no resistance as Anderson drew her away, saying in a trembling voice:

“Don’t do that. You are injuring him. Give him air, let him breathe easily. I don’t think—I can’t think—there is much the matter.”

“Heaven help me!” murmured Hester. “What shall I do?”

Anderson also was excited, and watched every change and movement that took place as the Colonel tossed his head from side to side, muttering the while. After a time he became silent, and seemed to drop into a heavy sleep once more; but it only lasted a few minutes. Then he grew more restless than ever, and, in spite of her repugnance, Hester looked wildly at her companion for help.

“Try not to be alarmed,” he said, with his voice trembling, and Hester saw that as he busied himself about her father his hands shook as with palsy. “He will go off soundly to sleep again, I hope, soon.”

“And if he does not?”

She could not continue the train of thought; it was too bewildering, too crushing in its horror. At last she knelt there by the couch holding a hand, which kept on twitching convulsively, but no coherent answer came to anything she said.

For quite a couple of hours this went on. Anderson divided his time between pacing the room and watching by the Colonel's side, pausing now and then to wipe the sweat which gathered on his own brow, while more than once Hester heard him mutter excitedly to himself.

Anderson was weighing over the position in which he was placed, and thinking of the Colonel's age, his undoubted weakness from long residence abroad, and the fact that for so many hours he had been absolutely without food. As these thoughts crossed his mind, the lawyer trembled in spite of his strong nerves.

At last, as he was bending over the couch, he passed his hand inside the Colonel's breast. Hester gazed up at him wildly.

He did not speak directly, for his hand was closely in contact with something which touched the back of it, and when he did give utterance to words his voice was changed.

“Beating more strongly,” he said. “The fit has passed.”

“You—you are not deceiving me?” whispered Hester.

“Have some faith in me,” he replied with peculiar emphasis. “I have told you the truth.

Now go and sit by the stove. You are shivering with cold."

"No, no; I will not leave him."

"Do as I bid you," he said sternly. "Replenish the fire. He must not suffer from a chill."

Hester rose obediently, bent down and kissed her father, and went to the stove, glancing over her shoulder once, to see that Anderson's back was to her, and that he was arranging one of the blankets over the sleeping man.

Then, as she softly began to place some small fir logs in the stove, Anderson glanced back sharply, drew the blanket well over the Colonel's shoulders, and finally withdrew his hand with the cigar case and pocket book, which he had extracted from the sleeper's breast.

The former was quickly returned. With his heart throbbing with excitement, Anderson slipped the pocket book into his own breast.

"There," he said, as he crossed to where Hester knelt by the stove; "go and satisfy yourself. He is sleeping calmly now."

"You are sure, Mr. Anderson?"

"Yes, Hester. No, don't flinch. I give you my word that I will not speak to you again as I have. The next words will come from you."

She drew herself up.

"You think they will not—now. But we shall see. One word more—are you going to tell your father what has passed to-night?"

"I have no secrets from my father, sir," she said, simply.

“That is not true,” he said sharply, and with blunt emphasis. “Ah, I am not blind. But you will not tell him what has passed. Do you know what he has been suffering from to-night? I’ll tell you. An affection of the heart. This must have weakened him, and any fresh excitement might be dangerous. The Colonel is choleric enough without anything to spur him on. I should think twice, Madam, before I spoke.”

She shivered slightly at his words, and he seemed to fix her eyes as he gazed at her.

“There,” he said; “I shall leave you to yourself to think. Call me if he seems uneasy again. I will rid you of my presence, and light the stove in the other room. You need not be alarmed. I keep my word.”

He took a box of wax matches from his pocket, caught up one of the blankets and two of the glasses from the table, leaving the one that had been filled for Hester untouched. As he reached the door he turned, and gazed back at her for a few moments where she stood trembling, and then passed out of her sight, leaving her to sink sobbing by her father’s side.

CHAPTER XXV.

“ONE failure—one success,” muttered Anderson, as he hastily ignited some of the combustible chips lying ready, and soon had a good blaze in the other stove, before which he knelt. After taking a little brandy from his flask, he drew out a tiny stoppered phial and held it up to the light, with his thumb nail pressed to the glass on a level with the top of the fluid within.

Twice over he moved his nail to different heights on the side of the bottle, as if calculating or measuring.

“Just about the same quantity as last night,” he said to himself. “Weak, I suppose, from want of food. The greater effect.”

He replaced the phial, and crouched down by the fire, gazing at the glow and warming his chilled hands.

“Suppose he had died,” he said; “suppose he had died. Alone with me, no one else to look to. Bah! I had forgotten the aunt.”

He glanced round the dark room, rose and made sure that he had closed the door, then returned and placed a chair before the open stove door, threw in more wood to make a brighter blaze, and with a grim smile of satisfaction he took out the Colonel's pocket-book.

“Strange work for me, my lord,” he said with a laugh. “Lawrence Anderson, the celebrated criminal lawyer, picking pockets. Now then, let me see.”

He opened the thick book and carefully examined pocket after pocket, to find in the two first, crisp, clean, Bank of England notes to the amount of a hundred and fifty pounds, in addition to a few Swiss and French hundred franc bills.

“Old man is pretty warm,” he said, as he replaced the notes. “Now then. Humph! stamps. Ah—here we are,” he said, as he found an envelope in the next pocket, containing carefully folded papers. “I shall not have wasted the whole night.”

He took out the folded papers with trembling fingers, opened them, held them to the light, and replaced them with an imprecation.

“Confound his prescriptions! He’ll drug himself to death some day.”

There were two more pockets to examine, and he took out and read from the first what proved to be, according to its heading, “The best recipe for genuine Indian curry.”

“Ah!” he ejaculated, as he replaced this with a grim smile. “Of course they would be in the innermost pocket. At last.”

There they were: two letters in nearly new envelopes, but on taking out the contents he saw the characters, written on foreign paper, were in quite a childish hand.

He laughed.

“Indian princesses don’t go to young ladies’ seminaries, it seems,” he said. “Now, then, beauteous brown one, who threatens our noble statesman, let us see.”

He leaned more closely to the stove and read: “My own dear papa.” Anderson started. “Pet name, I suppose,” he muttered; but he turned to the last side and read: “Your loving daughter, Hester.”

“Damnation!”

He turned to the other letter, which also bore the same signature, but it was written, as the date showed, a month earlier, and he sat scowling, with the two treasured missives in his hand, probably the first written by his child from England to the officer thousands of miles away.

Then a change came over the man. He turned them over, for they possessed a peculiar fascination for him, which tempted him, in spite of his disappointment, to read them and hold them to his lips before he replaced them. Then he carefully felt over the sides of the book to make sure that nothing was in the lining.

“Disappointing—disappointing,” he muttered, dreamily. “I made so sure that they were here.”

He hastily thrust the book into his breast and went across the hall to the other room.

Hester started up from where she was kneeling to look at him in a frightened way, which he ignored, and said gently:

“How is he?”

“Sleeping, I think,” she replied. He went up

to the couch, felt the Colonel's brow, and then took his hand.

"Yes, sleeping quite peacefully. There is nothing to mind. He will wake in the morning quite well and refreshed."

Hester gazed at him fixedly, and he had hard work to avoid blanching before her searching eyes.

"Why do you say that?" she exclaimed.

"Well—from old experience and knowledge of my kind. Men do not live to forty without being either physicians or fools, as the proverb says. You may trust me. Cruel as you are toward me, I would not delude you with false hopes. Your father sometimes thinks himself worse than he really is; but all the same he is delicate, and this storm has somehow given him a nasty shock."

Hester wanted to thank him, but she dared not, lest even the slightest encouragement should make him renew his protestations; and they two stood gazing fixedly at each other, Hester knowing all the time that he was reading her thoughts.

"The room is growing chilly!" he said, at last. "Pray don't let the fire go down. He has slipped, too, a little. I will place him in a more comfortable position."

Hester went off toward the fire, wondering that Anderson had not offered to replenish the stove himself. She threw on two or three blocks before returning to where her companion was bending over the Colonel, with the patient's Russian leather cigar-case in his hand.

"This ought to be in his pocket, ought it not?" said Anderson. "Slipped out, I suppose. Will you put it back?"

She took the case.

"By the way, I dare say he would give me a cigar if he were awake. May I take one?"

Hester offered the case, which Anderson opened, took a cigar, and closed and handed back. Then Hester slipped it into her father's breast, beside his pocket-book, which was in its place.

"There," said Anderson, "you need not be under any apprehension. If there were any danger, I would not leave you. The stove will burn for some hours, so wrap something round you, and go to sleep. You would rather I left you?"

There was no reply.

"I understand," continued Anderson, bitterly. "But I am patient. I shall wait, because I know that I must win. Good-night. To-morrow I dare say help will come. If not, the next day, or the next. If not, then it will be too late. I don't know that I shall mind, except for your sake—you are so young and beautiful. For myself, it would be a joy to lie down and die at your feet. Once more, good-night."

He held out his hand, and in spite of herself Hester raised hers, for it to be taken and held passionately to Anderson's lips before he loosed it and walked sharply out of the room.

Hester went back to her vigil, drawing back her chair so that the full glow from the stove might shine upon her father where he lay, breathing

rather heavily, but in a slumber that was peaceful and calm.

Then through the rest of that weary night the girl sat watching and listening to every sound. At one moment she was buoyed up with hope, for there were sounds without which made her hurry to the window, feeling sure that Deane and the others had returned; but as she stood with her face pressed close to the panes, seeing nothing save the glittering stars, the sound was repeated, and she knew that instead of footsteps it was the falling of fragments of frozen snow from the roof.

Back by the couch, finding consolation in holding her father's hand, she became tortured by the fancy that Anderson had stolen outside and was at the panes watching every movement; and this belief grew so strong at last that she was only able to disabuse her mind by rising and going up to the window again and again.

Would the morning never come! It seemed an age since the night had fallen. She looked out to see the stars bright as ever, and listened to a peculiar sighing wind that swept round the house. Then back in her seat, faint and nervous with all she had gone through, she waited again, starting at the crackling of the embers, and wondering what the coming day would bring.

Then she began wondering how long people could exist without food, and shuddered at the idea of seeing her father perish before her eyes.

This thought was succeeded by one which seemed to pervade her being—the presence of

Anderson, and the feeling that though she had mastered him so far, with her father ill, she would be at his mercy and perhaps compelled to make some promise.

For the prisoner was becoming weak in thought as she was in body. The pangs of hunger were growing more hard to bear, and she dared not go to sleep, even had she wished.

At last the desire to close her eyes, if it were only for a few minutes, grew so strong that she was compelled to leave her seat and begin pacing the room; but only to feel over and over again that she was almost asleep as she walked. At last, after quite an hour's weary struggle, she felt that she must give way. Going to the couch, she drew the Colonel's arm about her neck, and sinking down on the floor, her eyes closed; but she started directly into wakefulness, for there was a sound in the hall, and convinced that Anderson was returning, she once more began to pace the long room. As she reached the window her heart bounded, for the tops of the mountains showed faintly in the coming light, and she knew that in less than an hour they would be glowing in the morning sunshine. It would be broad daylight then in the valley, and she told herself that fear would pass away with the darkness. The door opened softly, and Anderson came slowly into the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“GOOD-MORNING,” he said quietly; but there was a curiously disturbed look on his face, and he went straight to where the Colonel lay.

“Has he been awake?”

“No; he has not stirred.”

Anderson bent over the Colonel again, and as Hester watched him she noticed that his hands seemed to be busy about her father’s waist.

“Better let him have his rest out. You have been asleep, of course?”

Hester shook her head.

“Why not? Still full of mistrust?”

She made no reply, and he came to her side.

“Waiting to speak more fully?” he said, taking her hand to hold it in spite of an attempt for its withdrawal. “Well, I am ready to hear you. There will be no help to-day; perhaps not to-morrow. Don’t you think, under the circumstances, we ought to be more than friends?”

A slight movement on the Colonel’s part made Hester run to his side, glad of the reprieve. She caught his hand tightly between hers, determined not to leave him again.

Anderson had followed her, and after a sharp look at the sleeping man:

“Hester,” he whispered, “I have sat thinking

over what I said to you in the night—of what you said to me. Come, you understand me better now; you will not be so cruel. Confound!" he ejaculated, for at that moment there came a faint distant sound, an unmistakable *jodel*, which made Hester run to the window and throw it open, tear out her handkerchief and wave it excitedly; for there, a half mile away, in single file, she could see a party of men coming along from the direction of the last refuge.

Her signal was seen, and another melodious shout rang out on the clear morning air as one of the party detached himself from the rest and came on at a slow laborious trot through the thick snow.

Hester's heart began to bound. There was no more cause for dread, and the color began to mount to her cheeks again as she recognized the figure in advance. It was Adam Deane safely returning, and of those with him three were carrying loads upon their backs.

"Then the adventure is over for the present," said a voice behind her. She started round to see that Anderson was looking at her with a cynical smile upon his countenance. "There, it is only the commonplace finish. Well, Hester, I may thank Fate for what she has done. She has changed what might have proved to be a tedious and doubtful courtship into a quick and short certainty."

She looked at him indignantly.

"Too late for that," he said. "They will be here in a very few minutes now, so one word while

we are alone. Take what line of action you please before these people for the present. I agree with you that it would be embarrassing for us to seem to be engaged. But we are."

Valter's *jodel* rang out again cheerily, and ran echoing along the rocks of the great hollow.

Hester tried to speak—to utter the hot indignant thoughts in her heart; but no words would come, and she was still struggling to articulate when Deane came ploughing through the snow up to the window.

"All well?" he cried.

"Yes, yes!" said Hester, stretching out her hands to him; and as they were eagerly seized she felt a sense of joy and safety. "Welcome back."

Deane's heart throbbed tumultuously, and his voice shook a little as he climbed in at the window to see Anderson a short distance behind, looking ghastly in the reflected light.

"Ah, Mr. Anderson," he cried, "how are you? They'll be here directly with provisions. We tried hard to get back last night, but we could not get over the snow in the darkness, and had to take refuge in the first hut. But where's the Colonel—not ill?"

"He has had rather a bad attack," said Hester. Anderson cleared his throat and seemed to speak as if by an effort; but there was a malicious ring in his voice as he said quietly:—

"Yes; he has been very ill. Miss Denton and I sat up with him all night."

Deane changed color a little, and turned quickly again to Hester, who met his eyes with a look that was almost imploring.

"He is better now," she said hastily; and she too changed color under the young man's searching gaze.

"Morning," came from the window, and Frant climbed in. "Here we are, loaded. Now, Valter, my lad, hand in the commissariat. Got a fire. Hurrah! Talk to you presently, when you are all brought back to life. Not got the door open then?"

He said no more, but signed to Valter to come in. One of the hotel people, who had accompanied them, entered too, and in an incredibly short space of time a capital breakfast was spread, the men who had volunteered their services being quite at home in the old hospice, and making no scruple about hunting out and utilizing the necessaries stored away in the cupboards.

This done, they adjourned to the other room to prepare their own breakfast, while after a look at the Colonel, Frant turned to Hester.

"What do you think?" he said. "Shall we wake him?"

Hester hesitated, but the problem was solved by a sigh from the couch; and as Hester ran to his side, the Colonel sat up, stared sharply round, and then rose quickly.

"Well done!" he cried, with his head quite clear. "You should have called me when you came. Glad to see you back, gentlemen. You've

worked well. I thank you. This is a pleasant surprise."

"Are you better, sir?" said Frant.

"Better? No; how can I be till I've had some food. Come, my dear, you are famished. Sit down. Now, Mr. Anderson, no ceremony. We starved ones can't wait. Ready, gentlemen."

They took their places at the table, where, as Hester dispensed the steaming coffee, she glanced uneasily at her father, feeling that he had not the slightest recollection of his illness during the night. In spite of herself, she glanced at Anderson, who met her gaze with a look that made her flush with anger—the more deeply that she knew Deane was taking notice of all that passed.

Little was said for the next few minutes, during which time the breakfast was partaken of with avidity by all but Hester and Deane.

"Come, my dear," cried the Colonel, "you must eat. You need not be afraid. In an hour you will be quite recovered. I've gone through this sort of thing before—but in heat, not in the cold. I must have slept soundly last night. How did you get on, Mr. Anderson?"

"I?" said that gentleman, giving Deane a meaningful look. "Oh, pretty well. A day's fasting does not act on me as a sleeping draught."

Deane tried hard not to look at Hester, but his eyes would turn in her direction. He found that she was just glancing at him, her face looking agitated; and as their eyes met a vivid flush rose to her brow, while Deane felt a sickening sensation of despair.

"Ah," said the Colonel, "you are not an old campaigner, Hester, my child; but you have borne up bravely. A little more coffee, my dear. I hope, Mr. Deane, that the brave fellows who came with you are looking after themselves."

"Oh yes, sir," cried Frant, who noted his friend's countenance; "they are feasting away. Splendid air this for the appetite. But we could none of us eat last night."

"Why?" said the Colonel.

"Well," said Frant, laughing, as he kept up the conversation to draw attention from Deane, "in the first place we had been cutting our way over snow and ice till we were so exhausted that we could hardly stand. In the second place, we were cold, miserable, and fireless, as well as disappointed by our failure."

"Poor fellows!" said the Colonel, attacking some ham. "And in the third place?"

"Oh, never mind that, sir."

"But I do mind, sir," said the Colonel, authoritatively.

"Well, sir," said Frant, gazing hard at Hester; "two of us were Englishmen, and knowing that an English lady and two of our compatriots were only a short distance away, half starved and anxiously watching for the help that might not come for days, made my friend set such an example that I only had appetite for a pipe. Another cup of coffee, please, Miss Denton. I'll make up for it now."

The Colonel drew a long breath, rose from his

seat, went round to where Deane was seated, and laid one hand upon his shoulder, the other on Frant's.

"I can't make speeches this morning, my lads," he said, huskily. "I only say thank you. God bless you both; I never felt more proud of being an Englishman. Hah!" he ejaculated, as he turned back to his seat in the midst of a painful silence. "Hester, my dear, I'm going to have a terrible fit of some kind after this. But I'll wait till we get back to the *châlet*."

"Ah, do, sir," cried Frant.

"I add my thanks," said Anderson, quietly. "Mr. Deane—Mr. Frant, I hope you will look upon me as your friend for life."

"Oh, come, I say," cried Frant. "Don't. You are spoiling a fine young, healthy, honest appetite. Yes, Miss Denton—thank you. I beg your pardon; but you people make too much fuss about it. I worship mountain climbing, and this has been a pleasure to me—combination of pleasure and utility. Now then, what about going back?"

"To be sure, yes," said the Colonel. "How soon shall we start?"

"That depends, sir, on Miss Denton. We have ropes and a short ladder up at the last refuge, but there are some awkward little bits to climb and descend, for we have to quite leave the pass and go up the side of the gorge. I thought perhaps it would be better to stay here a few days while a way is cut."

"Stay here?" said the Colonel, "Hester, my

child, are you brave enough to try the climbing?"

"Yes, certainly," she cried, eagerly.

"But the risk?" said Anderson.

Frant glanced at Deane, and saw that there was a peculiar twitching about his eyes.

"I think, with the help the guides would give me, papa," said Hester, quietly, "that I could manage to go where you did."

"Of course," said the Colonel. "Then, gentlemen, as soon as you please, we will start."

"In about an hour then," said Frant. "Oh, by the way, Miss Denton, there is a note from your aunt. I beg pardon; I forgot. Come, Deane, old man. Now for a quiet pipe with the guides, and to make our plans."

He led the way to where the men were finishing their meal, then strode out through the deep snow with Deane, ostensibly to examine the latest fall of snow.

"Well?" he said, as soon as they were out of ear shot. "Have you come to your senses, now?"

"I was not aware that I had been mad," replied Deane, angrily.

"Lunatics never are, old chap. Come, Adam, old man, let's get back to the old ways as soon as we can. I wouldn't speak, but I can't bear to see you so down."

"There is no need to speak."

"Yes there is," said Frant, warmly. "Sooner or later I dare say you and I must give up climbing and gold hunting, and strike our colors to the

fair; but I'm not going to haul mine down to a widow who throws her arms round my neck and kisses me just because I'm coming through the snow to help her niece. 'Brave gallant man!' Bosh! I look it!"

"The poor woman was frantic with grief, and terribly agitated."

"Yes, and her face was horribly wet. Then as regards you."

"Mind what you are saying."

"Eh? Hot enough to melt a way back for us to the hotel. But I don't care: I will speak. I want you to take to some dear sweet girl."

"Alick."

"All right; I'm loaded and must fire. Miss Denton is all that; but after what has passed, man? And then—oh, it's as plain as a pikestaff; there's a regular understanding between her and that Anderson."

"You're frightfully unjust to say so, Frant," cried Deane, fiercely.

"Perhaps: but I say what I feel."

"I'd sooner die than believe it," cried Deane, pallid now with the jealous feeling of agony at his breast.

"Mind you don't, old chap," muttered Frant. "I don't half like that Anderson. He's too smooth to be safe."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"BUT couldn't I climb it, Mr. Frant?"

"I suppose it is possible. Valter went up it like a rabbit; but I for one would not stand still and see you do it."

"No, no; you must not try," said Deane eagerly.

"But I should be swinging at the end of the rope," said Hester, as she gazed up at the wall of rock, high up on a shelf of which Valter and another of the men were standing.

They had been toiling amongst the loose snow for two hours, and had now reached a spot where it was imperative that they should strike up out of the gorge, pass along the mountain side for some distance, and then descend again.

"Well," said Frant; "suppose you were swinging at the end of the rope. You would not be the first young lady who has enjoyed a swing."

"But suppose the men let go?"

"I'll kick them both over the precipice, and hold tight myself."

"But you will be here."

"No; I'm going up first, and I shall help haul you."

"But suppose the rope breaks."

"It would take ten young ladies of your weight

to break it. Make a loop," he continued, turning to Deane; "but tie her in as well."

"Will you tie me in, Mr. Frant?" she said hastily. "Perhaps Mr. Deane would go up first instead."

"Right," cried Frant. "Adam was the first man. On you go, Deane—*Vive les coquettes!*" he muttered to himself. Deane seized the rope Valter was holding a hundred feet above their heads, and scrambled up, while Frant secured the loose end round Hester.

"Not so bad as I thought," he said to himself, as he watched and saw that she was trembling violently as she followed Deane's movements. At the most risky part she closed her eyes and caught at Frant's arm.

"Make you giddy?" he asked.

She nodded.

"And you wanted to try and climb! Now, then, who knows best?"

"You, I suppose," she said, looking him frankly in the face, as she glanced up and gave a sigh of relief.

"Won't do, madam," said Frant to himself; "I'm many degrees over proof. But you are nice." Then aloud: "Ahoy there! ready?"

"Yes," came from above, just as the Colonel and Anderson walked up with the other men.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Anderson; "you are surely not going to——"

"Haul Miss Denton up there, sir? Yes, we are; and you after—unless you prefer the climb. Quite safe, Colonel."

The old man looked up and down.

"Is there no other way, Mr. Frant?"

"No sir, or we should have taken it. You are not afraid, Miss Denton?"

"No," she said, firmly.

"Have you taken every precaution, Mr. Frant," said the Colonel; and just then Anderson stepped to Hester's side.

"The risk is too great," he whispered.

"I am quite ready, Mr. Frant," she cried, hurriedly.

"Haul away," shouted Frant. "Stand aside, please, Mr. Anderson. There, I'll steady you, Miss Denton. You must not mind turning round, but don't struggle, or you might strike against the rock."

Quickly and steadily as she sat, bound in the bight of the rope, she was drawn up, Frant guiding her by a second rope and shouting a word or two of encouragement.

"Well done!" he cried. "You'll soon be up." Then to himself, "Hang her! that wasn't a coquettish look, but as nice and innocent as could be. Now, if she goes right up to the top without squealing or fainting, I'll begin to believe in her. —Well done!" he cried again. "Steady!" Then once more to himself, "Wouldn't let Adam touch her—that was it; and yet trusted him all the same."

A cheer rose from the great shelf where Hester was safely landed, set free from the rope, and stood ready to wave her handkerchief to her father.

"Now, sir, will you go next?"

"As you like, Mr. Frant. You and your friend are in command. I'm afraid I could not climb that."

"I shouldn't let you try, sir," cried Frant, as he caught the bight of the lowered rope. "Like to be lashed in?"

"Oh, no," cried the Colonel, passing the loop over his head, and seating himself.

"Ready, sir?"

"Ready. Haul away."

He was rapidly hauled up by the three strong men above, and the rope lowered again.

"Now, Mr. Anderson, your turn," cried Frant. "Like to be tied?"

"No," replied the lawyer quietly. He took his place, the signal was given, the rope tightened, and as the hauling proceeded Frant noticed that Deane was right at the edge, taking the lead.

"Fine chance for a man to make an end of his rival," thought Frant. "Only to let him go, and he'd do no more courting. Wonder whether Master Anderson thinks that. Bound to say he's a bit uncomfortable. No; it's all right. Adam isn't Cain, and Anderson isn't Abel. Not a bit like him; but he has plenty of pluck."

He stooped and picked up his ice-axe, then began to climb.

"Hi, there! Wait for a rope," shouted Deane.

"Can't," was the reply; and as Valter and the other guide had gone before him, he steadily picked his way up, followed by the last man, to

reach the shelf and find that Hester had been watching him all the time, and was looking quite pale as he reached her side.

As they continued their journey Deane offered his hand twice in difficult places—Anderson having all his work to keep his own footing; but Hester declined, and looked appealingly at Frant, who responded by joining her, whispering, laughingly, to his friend as he passed:

“I was all wrong. Not the lawyer: I’m the happy man.”

Deane looked in no wise disturbed as he gave way and looked on.

“Glad you’ve so much judgment, Miss Denton,” said Frant. “I’m the safest man here.”

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Frant,” she cried, giving him her hand without a trace of embarrassment. “Yes, I can get along easily now. I should not like to slip and hurt myself.”

“No one does.”

“But I meant that it would trouble papa so. Put my foot there? Oh, what a depth!” she said, in an awe-stricken whisper. “Why, it must be quite a hundred feet down to the bottom.”

“Yes,” he said, “only multiplied by eight.”

“Mr. Frant!”

“Every foot of it. Distances, heights, and depths are very deceptive out here, where everything is grand. But, I say, you’re a very brave little woman. There are not many who would have taken that hauling up so coolly.”

She laughed.

"How deceptive appearances are, Mr. Frant. I'm the most terrible of cowards."

"Can't be. You were as firm as a rock. I touched your hand and it was cold and dry."

"That was because I knew it must be done, and I would have gone through anything to save papa anxiety—and avoid another night like last," she added to herself.

"All proof that I'm right. You knew how risky it was, and you ventured. You mastered your feelings. Well, that's bravery."

"Oh, nonsense!" she said, merrily. "But, Mr. Frant, how could you be so foolish as to risk coming up that terrible place without the rope?"

"Because I was afraid," he said, dryly.

"Afraid?"

"Yes, of getting out of practice as a mountaineer, and that the guide would think I was funky. So, you see, I'm the greater coward of the two."

"I'm afraid I don't follow you," said Hester, with a perplexed look in her eyes; "but I don't think you are right. If you had touched my hands when you had reached the top you would have found them damp enough then, and I was in dread all the time lest you should slip."

"She is a coquette," thought Frant.

"Are there many more dangerous places to climb?"

"No; we have got over the worst of it. That was the bit which puzzled us last night—that and the ascent to it. We tried a different way, and

it was impossible in the dark. I thought once poor old Deane had gone over."

Hester gave so violent a start that she nearly slipped on the shelving rock they were passing.

"Take care!" cried Frant, grasping her arm so roughly that he must have given pain; but she made no sign.

"How was that?" she said.

"He would keep on trying to get to you; but it was quite impossible in the dark; and at last he slipped and was going down headlong; but Valter, who was roped to him, threw himself down and checked him."

Hester drew a long catching breath, and as Frant caught sight of her averted face he saw that it was very pale.

"She isn't a coquette," he said to himself. "She's a dear sweet little thing, and I don't wonder at old Adam being touched. No, it is all girlish frankness, because she likes me as a rough straightforward fellow. If I began to fool and compliment she would shrink into her shell like one of the big snails."

"Oh! have we to go down there?" cried Hester, as she saw one of the guides pause for a moment, and then begin to descend a very steep slope.

"Yes, and then be lowered down a bit like the side of a house. After that, we shall have a quiet slope down into the valley; and, as it says in *Jack Robinson*: 'The perils and the danger of the voyage are past;' but I hope we shall be better friends for our adventure."

“I hope so, indeed,” said Hester, looking him full in the eyes with so pleased an expression that, as Frant was helping her down, he called himself “a beast” twice over, and ended by telling himself that if anybody ever dared to call his companion a coquette in his presence he would break his neck—a hyperbolical expression due, perhaps, to the bigness of everything around.

The bottom of the slope was reached, a long climb achieved, and then the “house side” rocks were descended by means of the rope. The party now breathed more freely, for all that remained was a couple of hours’ steady descent of the pass over bare stony ground, smoothed by glacial action.

But half of that distance had not been passed before they came in sight of a party of about thirty men, some of whom were bearing poles while others carried shovels, ice-axes and staves.

As the two parties came in sight there was a tremendous cheer from the new comers, who broke into a trot, while the cheer was heartily responded to by the successful rescuers.

Five minutes after the English adventurers were surrounded by quite a little crowd of excited people, all eager to shake hands and congratulate, while the poles and chairs they bore were adjusted, and Hester, the Colonel and Anderson were borne back in triumph, the shouts as they neared the little hotel announcing their coming, which was greeted by the firing of a cannon.

As they came closer there was the fluttering of

a handkerchief, and the little crowd parted to allow Aunt Ecclesia to run up to the chair in which Hester was seated. More than one big Swiss walked about wiping his eyes as they saw the passionate embraces of aunt and niece.

“My darling! I never thought to see you again.”

The next moment she had her arms round the Colonel's neck.

“Oh, John, John,” she sobbed; “it has been so hard to bear.”

“But we're back safe, my dear,” cried the Colonel, affectionately, moved by his sister-in-law's emotion.

“And Mr. Anderson,” cried Aunt Ecclesia, shaking hands eagerly. “And Mr. Deane—you brave, good fellow!” she cried. “I knew you would save them if they were to be saved.”

“Don't forget Valter,” whispered the Colonel, merrily, though there was a tear in his eye.

“Ah, tease me, dear,” she replied. “I'm only too glad to hear your voice again. But Mr. Frant—where is Mr. Frant? Ah! there he is.”

The gentleman in question had been hanging back, and was just whispering to Hester:

“I say, do try and keep your aunt from being quite so demonstrative.”

But he was too late. Aunt Ecclesia had seized his hand and kissed it twice before it was withdrawn. To save further manifestations he offered his arm.

“Let me see you up to the *chalet*,” he said; and

then in a whisper, "I say—don't—don't my good little woman—with all these people here."

Aunt Ecclesia uttered a sigh and seemed to recollect herself. She withdrew her hand from his arm and placed it in Deane's, making him answer her questions as they walked up to the *chalet*, the crowd following and cheering lustily from simple gladness of heart.

Anderson shook hands with the two young men. "Heaven bless you both," he said, huskily; "and I am thankful, for I have gained two of the best of friends."

"Didn't know it," said Frant to himself. "He doesn't, either," he continued, as he saw his friend's troubled frown.

"All right, Adam, old man, I'll join you directly."

It was quite a quarter of an hour before he did join Deane, who had been in conference with the landlord, while a tremendous amount of cheering had been going on.

"Why, Aleck, lad, what have you been doing?"

"Only making the beggars drink our health."

"But I have been telling the landlord to prepare a supper for all the men."

"Good boy!" cried Frant, quietly; "and I'll be another dozen of champagne."

"Champagne? Another."

"Well, it was only Swiss."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“WELL, Hetty, my dear—Ah, look there! See it? Quite a big one.”

“Yes papa, and another, and another.”

“Ah! and look at that,” said the Colonel again, as they stood on a little wooden bridge which spanned the river just where it made a sudden plunge of some two hundred and fifty feet into the chasm below.

They had been leaning against the rail for some time, this being a favorite spot with the Colonel—one reached without much trouble; and here he was never weary of watching the falling water, and chatting with his child.

“More stones falling to-day than ever,” he said, taking out his cigar case. “There is twice as much water, too.”

“Yes; all that snow must be melting,” said Hester, rather absently.

“Hullo!—not well?”

“Oh, yes,” she said, with her eyes looking particularly bright and tender.

“Humph! You seemed so dreary and dull I was going to propose leaving the *chalet* and getting over into Italy.”

“Oh, papa!”

“Don’t want to go?”

"Oh, no! We are so happy here."

"Happy? Queer taste, Hetty. Always being smothered in avalanches, or starved to death when we are not breaking our necks."

"We must not run any more risks."

"Don't want to go, then?"

"Oh no, papa," said Hester, flushing. "Aunt would be so disappointed if we left."

The Colonel chuckled.

"Oh, but I should go on. Can't stand the risk of that *mésalliance*."

"Papa!"

"You may say papa!" cried the Colonel, laughing, as he trifled with his cigar-case. "She's touched by that good-looking young guide Valter, I'm sure."

"Papa! for shame!"

"Hah!"

The Colonel just saved the cigar-case from falling into the fall.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "I wouldn't have lost that on any account," and he hastily opened it, selected a cigar, and replaced the case in his breast.

"It would have been a pity. But, papa, don't tease Aunt Ecclesia about that. You know you are wrong, and twice over she has come to me in tears."

"Poor, dear, sensitive little darling! Mayn't I tease her again about her not being with us at the hospice?"

"Oh, I don't mind that," said Hester, merrily.

“Because she is so nice and plump and rosy, and if we had been driven to extremities—eh?”

“Oh, papa, what nonsense!”

“Humph! then you would like to stay on here?”

“Oh, yes,” she said, coloring slightly, but not so faintly that he did not detect it.

“Then it is to be, Hetty, eh?”

“I—I don’t understand you, papa,” she cried, looking startled.

“Yes, you do,” he said, assuming his stern military way, and making her look pale. “He has been hesitating and hanging about me for the past fortnight, ever since we were shut up in Fort Starvation. Last night he spoke out.”

Hester looked at him sharply, and took hold of the rail that guarded them from the torrent.

“Hullo! Not going to leap over the fall to avoid matrimony, are you?”

“Papa!”

“He spoke very fairly; said the usual stuff about loving you, and that sort of thing, and that the adventure up yonder quite settled him to propose.”

Hester’s eyes looked wild doubt, and her countenance was alternately white and flushed as the Colonel went on.

“Not the sort of man I should have selected if I had been choosing; but he is well off, and may make a good husband. I don’t want to lose you, Hetty, but I suppose it must come some day. Well, what am I to say to Mr. Anderson?”

The look of doubt passed away on the instant,

and there was something of her father in her countenance as, drawing herself up, she said sternly, "Tell Mr. Anderson it is impossible."

"Eh? Well done, Hetty! That's decisive. I like a woman to know her mind. I'm glad of it, my dear. I like Mr. Anderson very well as a friend, but as a son-in-law—well, that's quite another pair of shoes. Then, emphatically no?"

"Emphatically no, papa. I do not like Mr. Anderson, and I never did."

"Come, there are no half measures about that, Hetty," said the Colonel, as he laid his arm on the rail and smoked, and gazed into the chasm where the stones were falling fast.

"I have often felt as if Mr. Anderson had some *arrière pensée* in attaching himself to us as he has done."

"Eh?—what?" cried the Colonel, starting. "Pish! prejudice. You were the *arrière pensée*, pet, and a deuced nice one, too."

"I don't know, papa. You have made me think like this, with your suspicions about people watching you."

"Humph!"

"You thought that Mr.—that those other gentlemen had followed you."

"Well, I did. How do I know now that they did not?"

"You know that they had been here a long time when we came, papa."

"Humph! Well, that is rather against my theory," he said, laughing. "There, I am a very

obstinate, suspicious, old fellow, Hetty, and I was wrong. So are you. Mr. Anderson came as an invalid; you've hooked him, and now——"

"You are going to set him free, papa," said Hester, putting her arm through his. "No—no—no. It is impossible."

"Well, well, don't be so tragic about it, my dear; and I tell you I'm very glad. Then you don't want to stay here because of him?"

"I want to stay here, papa, because if we go anywhere else Mr. Anderson may follow us, while if we stay here he will, no doubt, on hearing what you have to say, go."

"Upon my word, Hetty, I had no idea you could be such a little tartar," cried the Colonel, merrily. "Only the other day you were a pretty, little, mild, meek, bread-and-butter young lady, all accomplishments. Now, all at once, I find you have jumped into a formidable, decisive woman. I suppose you will now begin to drill me."

"Papa! this is too serious a matter to jest about. I don't like Mr. Anderson."

"Said so before."

"He is a dangerous man, I am sure."

"Prejudice, pet."

"He has been showing me for some time past what his wishes are."

"And you never spoke to me."

"I thought that if he saw my feelings he would have the good taste to draw back; but since he has spoken to you, I am compelled to be plain."

“And you are, my dear—very; and I like you the better for it. Then it shall not be Mr. Anderson, eh?—nor any one else?”

“Here is aunt coming,” said Hester, quickly, as the gleam of a white dress was seen through the trees of the descending path; and directly after she saw and waved her sunshade to them.

“Shall I tell auntie?” said the Colonel.

“No, papa, not yet. It is a thing I can’t bear to dwell upon.”

“And she would talk you to death, eh? Well, Ecclesia, come to look for a guide?”

“I have come to look for you and Hester,” said the little lady. “Hetty, my darling, are you disposed for a walk?”

“Yes, aunt dear. Papa, I’ll leave you now.”

“All right, my dear. Don’t go far. Which way is it to be, and I’ll perhaps come and meet you?”

“Up the valley,” whispered Aunt Ecclesia, coloring a little. “The gentlemen are not that way.”

“Up the valley, papa,” said Hester, and the old man stood with his back against the rails watching them through the smoke he kept emitting.

“Bless her,” he muttered; “I don’t want to lose her, but I wonder I have kept her so long. They all come buzzing about like flies around a candle. Well,” he added, after a pause, “when I was a young man I should have buzzed too.”

“No; emphatically no, eh! Glad of it. Don’t like him,” he repeated. “Thinks he has some

arrière pensée. Strange thing I never thought of that."

"Humph!" he continued, "is she right? The cleverest among us passes by the greater danger through having eyes only for the less. Have I been a fool for making friends with this man?"

"Pooh!—rubbish! Can't be. He is too genuine. There goes his attraction for me. Poor fellow! Well, he's too greatly a man of the world to suffer much, and I dare say he'll go now. But could he? Is it likely? Bah!—impossible. I've grown so suspicious that I see danger everywhere. My lord would not have sent a man like that to run me down. Anyhow, I'll be on my guard. Here come the two detectives and Ecclesia's *bête noire*. How she snubbed the poor fellow the other day just because I was present. Astonishing thing how a bit of banter bites a sensitive woman."

"Morning, gentlemen," he cried, as Deane and Frant came within hearing, with Valter close behind, wearing his rope like a baldric across his breast. They had evidently come from the ice fields.

"Morning, Colonel," came back cheerily from Frant, and Deane took off his hat.

"Rather like that little chap," said the Colonel. "Fancied once or twice that he was taken with Hetty, but he is just as civil to Ecclesia. Brave little fellow. So is the other. Well," he shouted, "loaded with gold?"

Deane shook his head and laughed.

"Ah!" he said, as he came on to the bridge, "laugh away, sir, but I will find it yet."

"Are you so very eager to get rich?"

"Not a bit. I suppose that if I did find it I should commence some other craze directly after."

"Yes. All a madness, Mr. Deane."

"No, no, Colonel. Pray, don't grumble at him. He never would climb like an ordinary Christian."

"You mean climb for the sake of seeing how soon a peak can be mounted?"

"That's it. Now, since he has been trying to find Aladdin's cave, he'll climb anywhere—head as cool as a bit of ice. You should have seen him this morning."

"I don't want to see him break his neck," said the Colonel, testily, as he took out his cigar case.

"Now, if I were gold-hunting," said the Colonel, pointing down into the huge cauldron below, "that's the sort of place I should try to look for it, if the water could be turned away."

"And you would find nothing but dust," said Deane, quietly; "anything that goes down there must be ground to powder."

"Don't lean too heavily on that rail, young man," said the Colonel, shortly. "I don't think it is very safe."

Deane laughed, and changed over to the other side. A party of smart-looking men came along, and crossed the bridge, saluting the gentlemen with a friendly word or two in an Italian *patois*.

"Who are these?" said the Colonel.

"What we should call navvies at home, sir."

"Humph! not much like ours. What are they doing here?"

"They have been at work on one of the railways, so they say at the hotel; and their excavating being finished, they are making for their own side of the mountains. A party passed the hotel yesterday."

"Humph!" growled the Colonel, "spoiling the country. What do we want with railways in a lovely land like this? Where is the Swiss Ruskin to get up a protest?"

"All the tourists' doing."

"Yes. Take a cigar," said the Colonel, offering his case.

"Thanks, no; I'll keep to my pipe."

"Of course," said the Colonel. "What ruffians you young Englishmen make of yourselves when you come abroad. Here, Mr. Deane, put away that nasty black pipe and have one," he continued.

"That other fellow's past hope."

Deane thrust the pipe in his pocket, and took a cigar.

"Take another, Mr. Deane," said the Colonel. "Here—no. I'll refill it to-morrow. Take the case."

"The case, sir," said Deane, looking at the handsome contrivance of Russia leather and gold, with an escutcheon on the side.

"Yes, my lad; take it and keep it as a remembrance of a very rusty old blade—myself!"

"Really, Colonel Denton, you are very good," said Deane, warmly; "but I could not think of it. Besides, your crest is on the side."

"The more reason why you should keep it. There, don't bear resentment against a crotchety old soldier, who says much more than he means. Take the case. I have not said much, but I feel horribly in your debt, sir, and in my rough fashion I'm very grateful. No—not another word. Light your cigar, and I'll get back to the *chalet*. Had a very long walk?"

Deane did not reply, but Frant plunged into the breach. They walked on together to the spot where the pathway forked, the Colonel going off to the right, the two young men following Valter's steps toward the hotel.

For some minutes neither spoke, Frant watching his friend's moody face as he strode on, striving to chase away the doubts which still clung to him, in spite of the manifest pleasure Hester had daily shown when they met—doubts which kept reviving at the frequent encounters when Anderson was present.

As they reached the hotel, Valter was waiting to take their ice axes. Deane pitched his carelessly to the guide, and then passed on.

"Not coming in?" said Frant.

"No, old fellow; not yet. I'll go on and finish this cigar."

"Then I'll come too," said Frant, and they went on for half a mile without a word, Frant, whose countenance looked sad and troubled, glancing sidewise from time to time.

Their way twice led through little passes, where thickly packed fir trees rose among the rocks. The

second time a wild-looking face was seen for a moment peering after them, but was withdrawn at once.

"The gov'nor seems disposed to be very civil, Adam, old fellow," said Frant at last.

"Yes; I ought not to have taken the case."

"I don't see why not. Hullo! Oh, I see—an assignation."

"On my soul, no, Aleck. I had not the least idea," said Deane, stopping short as he caught sight of Hester and her aunt a quarter of a mile in front going slowly up the valley.

"Needn't swear, old fellow," said Frant, sadly.

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Go back," said Deane.

"Bah!"

"What! go forward to expose myself to the wiles of a coquette?" said Deane, bitterly.

"Who says she is a coquette?" cried Frant, flushing.

"You have, a dozen times."

"Then knock me down for a liar and a cad."

"What?" cried Deane, with a curious laugh.

"Is Saul also among the prophets?"

"Yes, and going to give you the straight tip, old man," cried Frant, warmly. "If ever there was a sweet, true, innocent girl on earth, Hester Denton is that girl; and any man—self included—who says she is not——"

"Aleck!" cried Deane, in astonishment.

"Yes, you may well look surprised, old man. I was a fool and a prejudiced ass. Why, if I were

you, do you think I would let that confounded lawyer fellow go hanging after her as he does. She doesn't like it, I'm sure. The old man is taking to you, as you see. The course is open to you. Ah, Adam, old chap, you're a lucky fellow, and I wish I was in your shoes."

"Don't—don't talk like that!" cried Deane. "You don't know what it is to feel as I do: one day full of bright hope, the next full of despair. You set me doubting just at the time when I was ready to fire up with mad jealousy. Everything has been against me. That man, with his cursed patronizing manner, has led me to believe that he was as good as engaged to her. How could I help doubting and being in misery?"

"Quite right; but now's your time. Hang it all—go to her like a man—speak out like a man."

"What? Without a word to her father?"

"Oh, hang etiquette at a time like this! If she does care for you as she ought, and you care for her, why, the Colonel—Oh, hang it, he's a father as well as a soldier; and, rough one as he is, he worships that girl."

"Go and speak to her," said Deane, dreamily repeating his former words, "before a second party?"

"Oh! I'll take care of that."

"Aleck!" cried Deane, catching him by the arm; "it seems too much to hope."

"For her?" said Frant, dryly.

"Man, man—don't jest at a time like this."

"Why not? Am I to look miserable because

my best friend is going to win the girl who loves him?

“If I only dared to feel sure.”

“Coward!”

“Yes, coward. So much of my life’s happiness depends upon her reply.”

“Then, why torture yourself, old chap?” said Frant, with a ring of sadness in his words. “Hang it, man, the peak is before you, all glowing in the sunshine of happiness—the virgin height and pure and immaculate waiting for you to scale. Afraid?”

“No, not afraid; but I approach it with awe,” said Deane. Without another word they walked on sharply, but did not overtake the couple in front, for they encountered them—Hester having proposed that they should turn back.

“Now, forlorn hope, do your duty,” said Frant to himself, and, after a cheery greeting to both, he shook hands warmly with Aunt Ecclesia and led her on toward the hotel.

Hester made a gesture full of alarm.

“Aunt—Aunt Ecclesia,” she said, nervously.

“Don’t—don’t stop her,” said Deane, hastily; and she turned her frightened eyes upon him as if imploring him not to speak. But as she gazed at him a change came over her, and her answer to his extended hands was the placing of her own within them; and they did not try to escape from the warm clasp in which they were held.

A minute later Hester’s hand was resting on Deane’s arm, and they were walking slowly back

together, in perfect silence; for to both it seemed as if there were nothing to be said.

Save for a look from time to time—a look that was met for an instant before Hester's eyes fell, and she trembled in her new found happiness—they might have been two of the most ordinary people walking slowly down the mule path toward the patch of pine forest through which Frant and Aunt Ecclesia were passing—the latter with her heart beating wildly with hope, and then with fear.

They passed on, for it was not their day. Frant talked, but it was to some extent in the spirit, as he told himself, of Marcus Curtius leaping into the gulf; and the gulf was more pleasant than he had hoped.

Then they passed out of the wood, with its mossy rocks and fallen trunks, all suggesting rest and sweet converse, and Aunt Ecclesia's heart sank a little till she recalled that there was another patch of pine further on.

As they passed out of the wood at one end, Hester and Deane entered by the other. The silence was only broken by the murmuring hum of the torrent, which rose and fell like the deep diapason of some huge organ; for neither bird nor insect could be heard, and as they two passed on it was as if no one else was living in the great and glorious world—as if they were alone in the fulness of their love.

Here, as if completely under a spell, they two stopped, in the very darkest shade of the wood, where a mossy rock rose just above the dense mass

of tender-leaved vaccinium, and at a gentle pressure of the hand Hester looked up at the man whom she felt must be her lord. Without a word, moved by his will, she sank upon the stone, while he, whom she had looked up to as lord, was now at her feet, kneeling in adoration of the treasure given into his hands.

“Hester!” he whispered, passionately; “I have no words to speak. My love—my love!”

Adam and Eve in paradise: as innocent and as full of joy. But the devil was there—close at hand—parting the pine boughs—as timidly Eve suffered herself to be drawn lower and lower toward Adam’s breast.

But serpents are out of place in the higher Alps, and the Devil was in human shape—with a countenance that would have startled Adam Deane had he been looking that way.

CHAPTER XXIX.

“I REALLY cannot bear it, Hester. Your papa is too bad.”

“Oh, aunt, dear, you ought to be used to a little teasing now.”

“I am, my dear—to a little teasing; but it is not a little. It is so shocking, too. Persisting that he saw me squeeze that guide’s hand!”

“But, aunt, dear, it is all nonsense. Papa is not blind.”

“Now, Hester, if you begin, that will end it. I am not a pauper.”

“No, you are my dearest aunt.”

“Now, don’t kiss me, my dear, with banter on your lips. If you begin too, I shall set up an establishment of my own.”

“Of course you will, aunt, dear,” said Hester, merrily. “When is it to be?”

“Hester! As if such a thing was ever possible!”

“Papa thinks it is; for he asked me last night whether Mr. Frant would come and speak to him first, as he occupies the position of father.”

“Father!—nonsense!—brother. I will not have the matter discussed. Mr. Frant would never insult me by asking such a thing. I declare, Hester, that for the past four weeks you have been quite changed—laughing and singing about the

place; and only the other day you were morbid and shrinking, pretending to be afraid of Mr. Anderson. I don't know what's come to you."

"Yes you do, auntie, dear," cried Hester, flinging her arms about her and kissing her, to hide her flushed face.

"Ah, well, I suppose I do! But you are terribly stupid over it, and I'm quite astounded to see your father taking it all like a lamb. Only the other day, he was all amiability to Mr. Anderson; now he is barely civil at times. I suppose he is relenting, though, or he would not have asked him to dinner to-night. I wish he would not, for I really do not like the man. Oh, here are the gentlemen. There, go and tell your father they are coming."

"Why, aunt, you know he and Mr. Anderson have gone down the valley together."

"Oh, dear, yes! What a head I have, to be sure. Then we shall be obliged to see them alone. By the way, Hetty, did your father say whether he had found his letters?"

"No, aunt. The dispatch-box seemed to have been opened by a false key, and a whole packet has gone."

"I don't believe it. He is so forgetful and stubborn. Depend upon it he never brought the letters out here at all."

"He may not, Aunt," said Hester, carelessly, as she went to the window.

"It was only one of his excuses to make a disturbance. But Hetty, my dear. Really! you

shouldn't! What will Mr. Deane think of you, if you are so bold. You ought to be more retiring now than ever."

Hester turned from the window, looking amused at her aunt's words, but with a sweet aspect of joy, rest and content in her eyes. For the time of doubts and fears was gone, and Anderson had seemed to accept his fate, treating her always now with quiet friendly deference.

In fact, one evening he as good as asked her forgiveness, confessing that it was all a mistake on his part, and congratulating her. Hester, in the full tide of her happiness, blind now to everything but her love, safe in the protection of Adam Deane's strong arm, was ready to pardon.

Deane and Hester, in their new found joy, looked at the whole world through the rosier of rose-colored glasses. Every day seemed happier than the last, and the lovely valley, with its mighty snow-covered peaks and frowning crags, with the soft green Alps, bright with the greenest of green and gayest of flowers, was a paradise full of joy.

So the days had been gliding on in a dreamy peace. Even a rainy time had seemed beautiful, and when Deane returned to his hotel at night, it was always with the feeling that the Colonel was growing good temperedly tolerant of his presence at the *chalet* for Hester's sake.

At the hotel the intercourse with Anderson was beginning to grow warmer. The latter's behavior was now never effusive, but was rather friendly

and gentlemanly. He joined Deane and Frant whenever they seemed disposed to accept his presence, but at other times kept aloof; so that in a short time Deane found himself led into making advances to the lawyer that a month earlier he would have deemed impossible.

The plump maid answered Deane's summons, and after ushering in the two visitors, hurried to the back of the house to receive her own, in the person of Valter.

"Ah, Miss Denton," cried Frant; "the Colonel in?" and before she could answer—"I want him to prescribe for Deane."

"Are you unwell?" cried Hester, hastily turning to Adam.

"I? No. Some nonsense of his."

"Oh, no; serious business, I can assure you; and as the Colonel's so clever with powder and draught, I thought he would set him right."

"But Mr. Deane says he is not ill, Mr. Frant," cried Aunt Ecclesia.

"Mad people always say they are perfectly sane, madam. I, who am a looker-on, say that he is decidedly ill. Does nothing but mope and moon, and hang about the hotel. Miss Denton, you will not believe what I am going to tell you."

"Am I so sceptical?"

"You will be. Actually he has not mentioned his myth for a week, and there is every prospect of the jolly old Romans' gold mine resting in peace."

"Don't take any notice of him," said Deane, who looked a trifle uncomfortable.

“Do, Miss Denton. No gold-hunting; no climbing. Now, once more, Adam, old man, will you come and do Piz Luce to-day?”

“No, thanks. I’ve a presentiment that I should fall.”

“Bosh! It’s a perfectly easy climb. You might drive a cow nearly to the top.”

“Is there really no danger?” asked Hester.

“Not a scrap, I assure you.”

“Why not go?” said Hester, smiling.

“Because I want to have another look at the gorge, for one thing; and for another I do not feel in climbing trim—to be dragged up to the top of a mountain to see nothing but clouds, and then come down again.”

“But you will have made the ascent. Is that nothing?”

“Next to nothing,” said Deane, merrily. “I don’t want to walk—or climb—to the top of a mountain just to say that I have been there.”

“There’s gratitude!” cried Frant. “Did I ever murmur about climbing up or diving down into all sorts of places in search of your imaginary gold mine?”

“Never. You were always the best of companions.”

“And you are getting to be the worst. I throw you over. Miss Denton, it is all your doing. You have the proud satisfaction of knowing that you have made a bad mountaineer much worse.”

“I am very sorry,” said Hester, smiling at the spoiled climber.

"If it were not impolite, I'd say I don't believe you. Well, ta, ta, all. I shall be off."

"You will be back to dinner, Mr. Frant?"

"Trust me," said the young man, laughing.

"Which point is it you are going to climb, Mr. Frant?" said Aunt Ecclesia.

"That one," said Frant, pointing.

"Oh! But it looks very dangerous."

"Madam," said Frant, didactically, "you should never trust to appearances."

"But you really ought to be careful. Suppose you were to slip and fall."

"And be late for dinner," said Frant.

"It is nothing to laugh at, sir. Think of your friends at home. Suppose they had the news of your meeting with an accident."

"Mrs. Lindley," cried Frant, merrily, "it will not do. Your *rôle* is that of the dove, and you are trying to utter the forebodings of a raven."

"Mr. Frant!"

"I beg pardon. I was getting poetical, and lost my way."

"I hope, you will not lose your way in coming down the mountain."

"I'll try not; and for the sake of my friends at home I will be very careful. There, I must be off. Ladies, if you are looking that way in four hours' time, I hope you will see me hoist my flag—I mean my pocket-handkerchief—on my ice-axe handle. For the present, good-by."

He left, Aunt Ecclesia joining Hester and

Deane at the door as they watched the two young men disappear among the pines.

"Really, Mr. Deane," said Aunt Ecclesia, "I think you are very wise in giving up this terrible climbing."

"But I don't deserve your praise, Mrs. Lindley."

"Oh, don't call me by that dreadfully formal name, Mr. Deane," pleaded the little lady. "I mean—that is—ah, Hester, my dear, I ought really to go and speak about the dinner."

Flushed and confused, and looking like a young girl in her hesitation, she hurried out of the room.

For a few moments no word was said. Then Hester looked up consciously.

"It is very cruel of me," she said, "to expose you to so much banter and annoyance?"

"You know I do not mind," he said, tenderly.

"But it is because I spoke to you about the danger of these ascents. I wish I were not such a coward."

"And I wish you may never change."

They had been seated by the window about half an hour when Deane rose.

"There," he said, "I ought to go now."

"I have robbed you of your companion."

"No," said Deane, taking her hand to hold it to his lips; "I always have a companion with me now. I shall go over into the next valley for a walk."

At that moment Aunt Ecclesia entered the room ready to go out.

"Not ready, Hester?" she said. "Oh, you!"

"Ready for what, auntie?"

"Our walk. I told you I should be ready in quarter of an hour."

Hester glanced merrily at Deane.

"I'm afraid I did not hear you, aunt, dear," she said. "There, I will not be a minute."

"Then good-by," said Deane, holding out his hand; "except you will come part of the way with me."

Hester glanced at her aunt.

"I will not take you into any dangerous places," said Deane.

"Really, Mr. Deane, any one would think I was a terrible coward. I'm sure I can climb better than Hester."

"Then you will both come?" he cried, eagerly.

"Are you going to search for the old gold mine?"

"Yes," said Deane, looking wistfully at Hester.

"We will come part of the way," cried Aunt Ecclesia.

Ten minutes later they were going slowly up the zig-zag path by the side of the valley down which the avalanche had thundered. The sun was shining brightly in the deliciously clear atmosphere, the faint tinkle of the bells of a herd of goats came from far overhead, while the snowy peaks near at hand were dazzling from their brilliancy, and the lower slopes more in the distance were of a delicious blue.

Neither Deane nor Hester spoke much. They were oppressed, almost sad, as if the beauty of the

scene was too much to bear. But as they rose higher into the more bracing air, the saddened feeling gave place to a sensation of calm and placid joy, whose effect was to make them join hands and walk on slowly together, to stop from time to time and gaze at the mountain slopes and valleys. The silence was profound, and as they stood gazing at the glint of water far away, where a fall of the river flashed into light, Deane said, slowly:

“And they say this is a miserable world—a vale of tears. Hester, I never knew how beautiful it was—how really happy one could be—till now.”

For answer, as they stood together in the great solitude, high now above human habitation, and half leaning against a mossy rock from whose crevices appeared the rosettes of the little *sedum*, and about which the ruddy mountain rhododendrum blossomed, Hester suffered herself to be drawn nearer to her companion, and, with her head resting against his shoulder, they gazed dreamy-eyed and happy at all below.

Aunt Ecclesia was forgotten—as she had forgotten them; for the little woman, with her cup full of pleasure, like a child, was seated a hundred yards away, hidden by the rocks, watching the dazzling snowy point three miles away upon which in due time a signal was to be shown.

Deane and Hetty were still resting, hand holding hand, when a quick reproachful voice, borne close to them by footsteps unheard in the moss, exclaimed,

“Hetty, my dear—I’m not blaming you—but

you shouldn't up here—where every one can see you. Mr. Deane——”

“But we are alone,” said the latter, smiling. “Only you to see, and—there, it shows you how we love and trust you.”

“Yes, that's a very pretty speech, Mr. Deane,” said Aunt Ecclesia, pettishly; “but nowadays one never can be quite alone. And can't you see papa going along that path toward the *chalet*, along with Mr. Anderson, and you know he always carries a glass.”

She pointed with her sunshade. Deane shaded his eyes and gazed down. He could make out the Colonel's white pith helmet, and caught sight of a flash from something shiny carried by a dark figure at his side—either the binocular or its patent leather case.

“There,” continued Aunt Ecclesia; “you are not out of sight, and I know Mr. Anderson never goes a dozen yards without using his glass.”

“It was very thoughtless of me, aunt, dear,” said Hester, simply, and with her cheeks glowing; but there was a look of innocence in her eyes which made the little lady kiss her warmly.

“Never mind, dear; I don't see that there was anything to be ashamed of; and it was all Mr. Deane's fault,” she added, merrily.

“Granted,” he said. “Mine be the blame.”

“Hetty, my dear, I can't see them.”

“I can, aunt, dear, quite plainly. There, at the edge of those firs.”

“I didn't mean them, child, but the others,”

cried Aunt Ecclesia, pettishly; "Mr. Frant and Valter."

"Oh, I had forgotten them," said Deane, glancing at Aunt Ecclesia, who turned away at his gaze. "Almost too soon yet, I think."

"You think!" cried Aunt Ecclesia. "Whatever idea have you of the time? There, Hester, dear, we must go back now."

"Yes; we ought to return, aunt," and the speaker held out her hand to Deane.

"My dismissal," he said, raising the hand to his lips.

"Now, Mr. Deane—after what I said. Really! That dreadful man is sure to be using his glass just at this very moment."

"Only till dinner-time," said Hester, merrily. "Be careful, and don't run into danger. If you find the gold mine, I bespeak a bracelet. Can you see them, aunt?"

"Yes; and Mr. Anderson is using his glass. I saw it flash."

"But I meant Mr. Frant," said Hester, mischievously. Waving her hand to Deane, she turned to go, but stopped short as he plunged down the slope leading to the deep gorge where he fancied he had discovered traces of the old workings.

As he descended, he leaped from time to time, boy-like, on one of the huge blocks of limestone, to turn and wave his ice-axe, while Hester ran to keep Deane in view, taking out her handkerchief to wave to him from time to time till he finally disappeared.

Aunt Ecclesia stood watching her, with her forehead puckered up, comparing in her musings her own fate with that of her niece.

"I never seem to have been happy like that," she said; "never seem to have been a girl and loved. Yes, wave your handkerchief to him. You can see him, and he loves you. I can't see my—him," she continued, with a wistful gaze at the white peak Frant was to ascend; "and even if I could see him, I don't know that he cares. No, it's all very weak and stupid and childish of me. He's young, and brave, and strong, while I'm only a poor old widow."

She sighed bitterly, and the sadness which overspread her face made it look very sweet and lovable, in spite of her self-depreciation. The term old widow, by the way, was singularly *mal apropos*, for she was about a year younger than Frant.

"All this is a silly fancy," she continued. "He could not care for me, and has only, in his thoughtless way, been making fun of me. He shall see now that I am not so weak and foolish as to take any more notice. Yes!—only a foolish fancy; and now I am going to be very wise."

"Thinking, aunt, dear?"

"Oh, Hetty, you made me jump. Yes, I was thinking, dear."

"What about?"

"The dinner, and how to make it nice. There is so little change. No fruit, no fish up here."

"Don't trouble about it. You know what papa

said: The Swiss bread, cheese, and wine, was a feast for a god."

"Yes, my dear, but your papa is not a heathen god. I'm not led away by his fine speeches about bread and cheese and wine. You keep him without his *entrées* and delicacies for a week, and see what a temper he would be in."

They continued their way down thoughtfully, and scarcely a word was said till they were close to the end of the slope that they had passed in coming up. Aunt Ecclesia stopped short, close to a clump of pines.

Here she drew a long breath, and looked sharply round.

"Did you hear anything?" said Hester. "Oh! look, aunt, look!"

She pointed away across the valley to where, at the summit of the peak Aunt Ecclesia had watched, there appeared a dot on the snow. Directly after there was a suggestion of something moving over the dot for a minute or so.

"Mr. Frant has climbed the Piz, aunt!" cried Hester, joyfully.

"Yes, my dear," said Aunt Ecclesia, sadly, "and not the first person who has climbed high up toward what seemed in the distance like Heaven, and then had to crawl down."

"Why, auntie, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, my dear—nothing. Come along."

At the end of a hundred yards or so Hester turned quickly upon her aunt.

“What made you stop and exclaim up there by that wood?”

“I? Oh, I remember now; I fancied your papa must have been up there.”

“What, after a long walk this morning? Oh, no.”

“I fancied I smelt one of his cigars—the curious odor those have which he brought from England.”

“Fancy, auntie. Come along. What a long time papa will think us!”

Hester had hardly uttered those words when she stopped short, for a rough-looking, black-bearded man rose suddenly from the turf beside the track, and three others at the same time sprang to their feet.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE people of the Alpine districts are of such a class that fear of molestation is an idea that presumably never enters the heads of the thousands of ladies who tramp through the Swiss mountain valleys, often enough quite unattended; and, to the honor of the nation it can be said, an appeal at any hut would be responded to by protection, and, if need were, defenders.

The thought, then, of anything wrong never occurred to Hester or her aunt. They rightly judged the men to be navvies from the Italian slope, returning from work on the line just being completed. The ladies were preparing to return the salute they expected, and pass on, but the way was barred by a couple of the men, while two others, after a glance behind them, closed up the way of retreat.

“Don’t be alarmed, Hetty,” whispered Aunt Ecclesia; “they have been drinking.”

But the men were sober enough to make clear their object directly, and showed that, though brigandage might for the most be a thing of the past, relics of the old custom still lingered.

Uttering something in a barbarous Italian *patois*, the most truculent-looking of the gang pointed to

Hester's gold watch and chain. As she shrank from him, he caught her arm, seized the watch, and snapped the chain, transferring both to his pocket; while, in spite of her angry struggles and expostulations, Aunt Ecclesia suffered in a similar way, another of the men snatching her brooch as well.

"Hester, call for help!" she cried, loudly; but the man who held her placed his face close to her, and gave her so menacing a look that she was for the moment silent, while angry demands were made now for their purses.

"Give them the money, aunt, pray," cried Hester, who was very white, but otherwise showed no sign of fear. Then, with a cry, Aunt Ecclesia started forward and flung her left arm about Hester, striking at the man who held her across the face with her sunshade; for, not content with robbery, the man was proceeding to insult. He had thrown his arms round her, uttering the one word "Belissima!" and was trying to kiss her when Aunt Ecclesia's blow brought the fierce southern blood flushing to his temples. With an angry roar he turned to seize her.

One of his companions threw his arm across the fellow's breast, saying something quickly, and nodding in the direction of the valley. But for a moment the ruffian resisted, thrusting his hand into his breast and drawing forth a knife.

But the flash of temper was only momentary. The words of warning had their effect, and the little party started off at a run by the way the

ladies had descended, passed in amongst the trees, and disappeared.

“Oh, Hetty, Hetty, my child! Quick; let us run!”

“No, aunt,” panted Hester. “The danger is past now.”

“Don’t—don’t faint, darling, pray,” sobbed Aunt Ecclesia, as Hester reeled to a tree and supported herself by its trunk.

“No, no, aunt dear; I’m not going to; but my heart beats so, and I feel giddy. I’m better now. Oh, who could have expected that!”

“No one, I’m sure. That beautiful watch, too, that poor Lindley gave me. Come along, quick, and your father shall send the police after them!”

“You forget, aunt,” said Hester, smiling sadly, “that there are no police nearer than Altbad. There, there; it is only our watches. Let’s get on home.”

It was her turn now to comfort Aunt Ecclesia, who was nearer fainting than her niece. But she, too, soon recovered, and they made the best of their way back to the *chalet*, where the Colonel could hardly credit their story. As soon as it was brought home to his understanding, then slightly confused from his being awakened from a sleep after his morning walk, he seized his stick, hurried down to the hotel, and ten minutes later men were going in two directions—to give notice to the police, and to spread the alarm on toward the frontier, so that the miscreants might be stopped

as they sought to go through one or the other pass into Italy.

The landlord was as furious as the Colonel.

“Oh!” he cried, in German, “if the brave, noble English gentlemen and Valter were only here! The dogs—the wretches. Bad men who have been here to work, and Heaven be praised, going back. A disgrace to our Commune, herr. But wait; they shall suffer in prison for it.”

Nothing more could be done. The Colonel was for starting alone in pursuit, but was detained almost by force; and, feeling at last that he was too weak and helpless to follow these men among the mountains, he returned slowly to the *chalet* where, some hours later, he was joined by Anderson and Frant. The former had met the latter on his way back alone from his climb, and after a few words of commiseration they announced their intention of going in pursuit.

“No,” said the Colonel, who had now calmed down; “it is not our duty. Information has been given, and your landlord, for the credit of the place, will leave no stone unturned to have the scoundrels punished. It will be a lesson, though, about letting my ladies go out unattended.”

“But, Colonel,” began Frant, warmly; “I must do something.”

“He is quite right,” said Anderson; “we must do something.”

“Yes,” said the Colonel, “and you shall. The ladies have been startled, but they have got over it; and as to the watches and chains, I’m not

going to have my dinner spoiled for them. There, gentlemen, back to your hotel. In an hour I shall expect you to dinner with our friend Deane."

Here Frant took out his handkerchief and began to dab his cheek, which was scarred down one side by a cut, while the handkerchief he used was marked a great deal by blood.

"Why, what's the matter?" cried the Colonel.

"Oh, nothing; bit of a scratch. I slipped and fell on the ice."

"Not roped?—where was the guide?"

"He had gone on. I rather broke down to-day, and was obliged to let him finish, as I had promised the ladies they should see a signal made."

"Better have stopped with them, sir," said the Colonel.

"Yes," said Frant, shortly.

"Then you went up toward the glacier?" said Anderson, quickly.

"I? Oh, yes. I thought I might as well be doing something as wait," said Frant.

"I thought you came from that direction," said Anderson, "but these valleys twist and double so that one gets puzzled. Hallo! Oh, the guide at last."

For Valter, looking hot and excited, had learned the news on his return to the hotel, and came up directly to offer his services.

"You got to the top, Valter?"

"Yes, Herr; but the news—the *schöne fräulein*?"

"People have gone after the scoundrels," said the Colonel. "I thank you, though, all the same.

There, gentlemen! At seven promptly, dinner. Bring Deane, and not a word about the adventure to-night."

"Very good, sir. But where is Deane? I have not heard the rights of it. I came here directly. I left him with the ladies."

"Up the mountains somewhere, mining, I suppose."

They were in the veranda now. Just then Frant clapped his hand to his cheek, for he had felt something warm trickling down. Taking out his handkerchief, he held it to his face, and Valter uttered an exclamation.

"Well," said Frant, angrily, "what is it?"

"The mark on your face, Herr!" said Valter, in a husky voice, as he pointed; "the handkerchief—the blood!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Now, don't be silly, Ecclesia," cried the Colonel. "You have lost your watch and chain; I've told you I'll give you new ones; and yet you are going on in this hysterical way. Look at Hester."

"It is not the stupid watch, John," cried Aunt Ecclesia. "Gretchen has just told me: he slipped and fell and has hurt himself."

"Nonsense!" cried the Colonel with a merry look at Hester. "It was not Valter, but Frant."

"Oh, John, how can you tease me at a time like this? Of course, I know it is Frant. And no doctor near."

"Pish! The doctor he wants is a good meal. There he comes, with a yard of sticking plaster across his face. Looks a beauty, upon my word."

Aunt Ecclesia hurried to the door as Frant and Anderson came up the path.

"Oh, Mr. Frant, are you very much hurt?" she cried.

"No, no—nothing at all. Bit of a cut, and a bruise or two."

"But, but—you, you should be careful," cried Aunt Ecclesia, hysterically. "You look so dreadfully pale."

"Eh?" said Frant, sharply. "Pale?" and he looked inquiringly at Hester.

"Yes; you do look pale, Mr. Frant," she said, "I hope you are not hurt."

"Scarcely a bit," he said, giving her an eager grateful look. "I suppose I was a little shaken."

"Wants his dinner," said the Colonel. "A glass of wine will set him right."

"Will you have one now?" said Aunt Ecclesia.

"Indeed, no," he said, gratefully. Then, in a low tone, "Don't fidget about me pray; they are noticing it."

Aunt Ecclesia blushed, and turned to Hetty, fighting hard to be composed.

"Where's Deane?" cried the Colonel, after a reference to his watch; and he looked at Anderson.

"Mr. Deane?" he replied, and he turned to Frant with an inquiring look.

"I don't know," said Frant. "I left him with these ladies."

"Mr. Deane went over the mountains toward the gorge, away to the right of Piz Luce," Hester said, quietly.

"Then he has met Lucy and has stopped to dinner," said the Colonel, with a laugh. "Well, it's past time. I'm not going to break my regular hours for a parcel of wild-goose hunters. Let's have dinner, Ecclesia."

"Will you not wait a little longer, papa?"

"No, my dear. Deane has a watch and knows my regular habits; he ought to have been here."

"But it will be so rude, John," cried Aunt Ecclesia.

"Yes, of Mr. Deane. I wouldn't have waited even for Mr. Anderson here. I've no patience with him. A man has no right to be late on parade. Besides, Frant is fainting for that glass of wine."

"Indeed, I am not," he cried.

"Mr. Anderson, will you take in Miss Denton. Mr. Frant, my sister. I'll take myself in, and Deane must have his dinner cold."

The meal passed off very unsatisfactorily, for, in spite of her efforts to be calm, Hester grew more and more anxious as the time went on, and Aunt Ecclesia, whose good resolution on the mountain side had melted away, was more than ever disposed to be hysterical. The events of the past two hours had completely thrown her off her balance, and her efforts to carry out calmly the duties of hostess were miserably weak.

The Colonel was evidently angry at Deane's non-appearance. This, coming on the top of the insult to his sister and child, interfered a good deal with the enjoyment of his dinner; and though he kept passing the wine, it did not animate him, but appeared to have a lowering effect.

Anderson, on the contrary, seemed in excellent spirits. After his first glass of champagne, he became thoroughly animated and full of anecdote, proving himself to be a brilliant dinner table conversationalist, and an adept at filling up awkward gaps. To Hester he was the beau ideal of gentlemanly consideration, chatting to her pleasantly and evidently trying to lead her away from her

troubled thoughts, so that she began to feel grateful to him.

She uttered a sigh of relief as Aunt Ecclesia gave the customary signal, and they rose to go into the other little room.

"There," cried the Colonel; "let us see what a cigar will do. Come, Frant, fill your glass and pass the claret to Mr. Anderson. Hang that fellow Deane," he continued, as he reached down a cigar box and passed it to his guests, "I believe as soon as he gets mooning about up in the mountains he forgets everything. Well, Anderson, what did you do after I came for my nap?"

"Went in for a ramble, and tried all the stones and tree trunks I could for a comfortable seat, till I ran against Mr. Frant. Then we came back together, and as soon as we heard the news at the hotel we came on here."

"Ah, to be sure, yes. Your cigar's out, Frant—try another. That one does not draw well."

"Oh, thanks," cried Frant hastily, for he had been sitting back paying no heed to what was going on.

"That one draw, Frant? Ha! Here he is!"

There was a step outside, and both Anderson and Frant started and exchanged glances.

"Shall I punish him, and make him go without his dinner; or be merciful and let him have his cold scraps?"

"I think I should err on the side of mercy," said Anderson, smiling. "We have all dined well."

“Yes, I will. He has punished himself. Well, Deane——”

The Colonel stopped short, for it was Gretchen who opened the door.

“Is that Mr. Deane?”

“No, Herr; Valter.”

“Eh?” cried Frant, excitedly. “What does he want?”

“Send him here,” cried the Colonel; “and let’s give him a glass of wine.”

Directly after the guide came to the door.

“Well, Valter, my lad?” said the Colonel.

“The Herr?” he said; “the Herr Deane?”

“Not come back yet,” said Frant. “Or have you brought a message?”

“No; no message. He is not here?”

“Is not this strange, Mr. Frant?” said the Colonel, for it now struck him that his child would soon begin to grow uneasy.

“Yes; he ought to have been back by now. He must have stopped hunting too long in that old gorge.”

“I dare say he will be back soon,” observed Anderson, quietly. “Of course, he knows every step of the way?”

“Yes; the Herr knows all the way,” said Valter; “but he should have been back.”

“Well, have a glass of wine, my lad, and go and meet him. Tell him we are expecting him here.”

The guide put aside the wine with an impatient sigh.

“Who saw him go?” he said.

“My daughter.”

“Yes, Miss Denton said she saw him walk toward the deep gorge, Valter,” said Frant, rising. “Had we not better go and look for him?”

“I don’t know, Herr. I am not sure. He ought not to have gone alone; and yet he knew the way so well. But there is another thing that troubles me. I cannot tell, but has he gone after those men?”

The Colonel gave the table a bang with his hand, and made the glasses leap.

“Of course,” he cried, with his face lighting up, so satisfying was the thought in every way. “He heard of the scoundrels—perhaps saw what took place—and went in pursuit.”

Frant uttered a sigh of relief, and Anderson smiled.

“What do you say?” cried the Colonel.

“It seems more than probable,” said Anderson. “Of course, he is young and chivalrous, and if he heard of the assault he would pursue them at once.”

“And a deal more manly a thing than sitting down to a good dinner,” said the Colonel, warmly. “No reflection on you, gentlemen, for I insisted upon the search being left to the proper hands. But I hope the poor fellow will not come up with them alone.”

“If the Herr Colonel thinks so, then,” said Valter, “I will go in search of Herr Deane.”

“Yes; and if you will excuse me, sir, I’ll go with him,” said Frant.

The Colonel hesitated a moment or two, then nodded in his short military way.

"Yes," he said; "perhaps it will be better. Where shall you make for?"

"Over the mountains to Denarlier, sir," said Valter.

"But that is many miles away."

"Five hours, sir; but we may meet Herr Deane at any time."

"I am sorry to let you go, Mr. Frant; but it is a duty to your friend. I would offer to accompany you but I should only be a hindrance."

"There is no need, sir," cried Frant. "No, no, Mr. Anderson, you need not come."

"I certainly am not going to let you start alone, Mr. Frant," said Anderson warmly. "Let's be off at once before the daylight has faded."

"You will excuse us to the ladies, sir," said Frant.

"There will be no need; they will be most grateful."

Anderson bowed, and they passed out at once by the French window, and were half way down the path, with the Colonel watching them, when the door was thrown open hastily, and the two ladies hurried in.

"Surely, John," cried Aunt Ecclesia, "you have not quarrelled with Mr. Frant?"

"Absurd! as if I ever quarrelled with any one."

"But they are gone."

"Mr. Deane has not yet come back."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Hester, excitedly.

"Now, now, now: don't be a goose, child," cried the Colonel, testily. "What's the matter? Do you think he has fallen off a mountain? He has not come back, and we have come to the conclusion that he has gone in pursuit of those modern Fra Diavoli, and I hope he will catch them and break their necks."

"Gone? After them?"

"Yes; and the proper thing to do, isn't it?"

"Is there no danger?"

"Tchah, danger! He has right on his side. Wasn't it the best and bravest thing to do?"

Hester could only answer "Yes."

"A set of cowardly Italian roughs. Why, if even old I had been there they dared not have looked at you. I never thought so much of Deane before. Now I think he's a deuced manly young fellow—gone after those four scoundrels like that! Shows he has got his heart in the right place. Thoroughly plucky. I suppose I shall begin to like him after all."

Hester said nothing, but her arm stole round her father's neck, and her head lay on his breast, while Aunt Ecclesia stood with the tears in her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“WELL, papa?”

It was breakfast time the next morning. The Colonel had risen early and walked down to the hotel.

“No news yet, my dear; they haven’t come back.”

Hester sighed, but tried to look cheerful; and soon after, when alone with Aunt Ecclesia, she assumed a light-hearted manner that she did not feel on seeing that lady’s saddened face.

“Why, aunt dear,” she said, “what is the matter?”

“Oh, nothing, my dear, only one cannot help feeling anxious about the gentlemen.”

There were one or two little matters to break the monotony of waiting for news. One was the arrival of a police official from the nearest town to take a list of the stolen jewelry, the amount in the purses, and a description of the men.

This individual impressed strongly upon the Colonel the great concern that was felt respecting the robbery and assault upon an English family, and assured him that nothing should be left undone to insure the punishment of the offenders.

“Bother!” the Colonel exclaimed as soon as they were alone. “I’d a great deal rather go down to

the hotel to ask for news of our friends. By the way, Hester, my dear," he said, as Aunt Ecclesia left the room, "Anderson is behaving very well. You and I, my dear, are cursed with suspicious temperaments. He is a gentleman."

Hester colored, and was about to speak out fully regarding all that had passed between her and her father's friend, but Aunt Ecclesia came back, and the desire to speak died out.

"Don't you think you might go to the hotel again, and ask for news, dear?" asked the little lady.

"Yes, I might go now," said the Colonel; and he went, to return directly with the information that the first party who had gone in pursuit of the excavators had returned without overtaking them, but the police onward were in pursuit.

"And I begin to hope that they will not catch them, my dears," grumbled the Colonel, "for I don't want to appear against them, and to have you two dragged up as accusers. There, I'm going to have my morning cigar. I shall not be far away."

"Hetty," said Aunt Ecclesia rather huskily, and there was a rosy bloom in her cheeks, "do you think it would be undignified if we walked up the mountain track in the direction the gentlemen took last evening?"

"Yes, aunt, dear. I am as eager to learn news of them as you are; but I think we ought to stay."

"Oh, Hetty!" cried Aunt Ecclesia, bursting into tears, "don't look at me like that."

“Auntie!”

“But you did, dear, and it gives me horrible pain. I ought to be checking you and playing propriety.”

“Aunt, dear,” said Hester, passing her arm round her companion’s waist, “you are so very little older than I am, that I think you might take me more into your confidence.”

“No, no; I cannot, my dear. And—and there is nothing at all.”

“But don’t you feel that I must know better?”

“Oh, no, Hetty, my dear. You must not know better. It is all a foolish fancy—on your part. But, of course, I cannot help feeling uncomfortable about the gentlemen your father has made his friends, especially on your account.”

“Yes, aunt, on my account,” said Hester, with a sigh, and they both took their work and seated themselves where they could see the mountain track along which those who returned from the search must pass.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE tediously long day had nearly come to an end, when there was a shout raised at the hotel, followed directly after by the report of cannon, and the occupants of the *chalet* hurried out to see, higher up on the steep slope, the figures of the returning party.

“Here—my glass, Hetty,” cried the Colonel; and she darted in to return with the binocular.

“Is—is he there, papa?” she panted eagerly.

“Frant—the guide helping Anderson, who seems footsore. Perhaps Deane is on in front, among the trees,” said the Colonel, with the glass to his eyes.

Hester’s brow contracted, and she drew back into the house. She felt that Deane was not there. And so it proved. The party had been right across to the town in the valley beyond the group of mountains, and both in going and returning examined the various gorges and slopes—every spot, in fact, where by accident a wayfarer could have fallen; but the only news they bore was that the party of excavators had been seen twice—the last time going in the direction of one of the rarely used passes which led from the Valais into Italy.

“Then where can Deane be?” cried the Colonel; and his words reached Hester, who was standing

in the little dining-room, hidden from sight by the side of the open window.

“I don’t know what to say,” replied Frant.

“Valter thinks he must have gone into one of the ravines they have not yet explored,” said Anderson.

“Then, in Heaven’s name, get men together, and let’s have every place well searched,” cried the Colonel.

“Yes, sir, we were coming back to the hotel to get some refreshment and help. It is nearly full moon to-night,” said Frant.

“I’ll join you,” cried the Colonel. “The poor fellow must be found.”

The party moved off, Anderson limping so that it was evident that he could do no more.

“If I were only young and strong again, Ecclesia,” cried the Colonel, as they entered the house. “But that poor fellow must be found. Ah, Hetty, my darling, you there?”

She stood gazing at him piteously for a moment or two, and then, after a struggle she cried passionately:—

“Yes, father, he must be found—or I shall die!”

“Is it so bad as that, Hetty?” he said gently, as he held her to him and softly smoothed her hair. “Come, come, we don’t know that there’s anything wrong; and if there is perhaps it’s only a sprained ankle. These mountaineering fellows do not mind a night or two in the fresh air.”

“It’s very good of you to talk like that, father,” she said, trying hard to be calm; “but as he went

down the mountain side toward that deep black place, I seemed to be bidding him good-by forever."

"Imagination, pet," said the old man, tenderly. "That's trying to foretell things after a fashion, so I shall turn prophet and tell you that before long he will be back safe and sound, and we shall all be laughing at the fright he gave you!"

Two days passed, during which the mountains were searched, Frant and Valter being out constantly with quite a band of guides, who came, many of them, from a distance to help in the hunt.

Anderson was footsore, and suffered in addition from a sprain; but he went heart and soul into the business, beginning by promising fifty pounds to the man who should find Deane. The Colonel offered a similar sum.

Frant only came up once to the *chalet*—to be met at the door by Hester, who caught his hands, asking him imploringly for the news he could not give. He turned from her with a strange guilty look, and soon after went away and came no more, but spent every hour he could snatch from sleep leading and directing the men. On the fourth day after Deane's disappearance, when the police search for the excavators was at an end, the men having apparently got over the mountains and back to their own place, it was determined to make a fresh start, the Colonel accompanying the party. They gathered under the leadership of Frant and Valter just at the spot pointed out by Hester and

Aunt Ecclesia as that where they had seen Deane disappear.

“It seems only like a recapitulation,” said the Colonel, as they stood debating their next step; “but it is evident we have missed some point, so let us see. This gentleman has disappeared, and of the reasons open to us we have first—accident. He may have slipped into some chasm, or perhaps only into some little crevice, and we may have passed him again and again. Next, he may have known of the assault committed by those men, overtaken them, been overcome, and is lying dead somewhere with stones piled over him. There seems to be no other explanation of his disappearance.”

“No,” said Frant, sadly; and Valter gave him a curious look.

“I differ from you,” said Anderson, who had climbed so far by the help of his old enemy—the mule. “It seems to me,” said Anderson, “that there are two other explanations.”

“In Heaven’s name what?” cried the Colonel.

“First, sir,” replied Anderson, “there is the possibility of the poor fellow having excited some one’s enmity, or say jealousy, and in a quarrel having been thrust into one of the *crevasses*.”

“But that is a similar explanation to the other,” cried the Colonel, who turned from Anderson directly after, attracted by the ghastly pallor on Frant’s face. “We said he might have been thrust down by those Italians. But jealousy!—pooh!”

“Perhaps you are right, sir.”

"I'm sure I am. We have to deal with men—not devils. Well, what is your other theory?"

"A very untenable one, I'm afraid; but it is possible that Mr. Deane had reasons for disappearing."

"What?" cried the Colonel with a blank look.

"Of course, it is mere supposition," continued Anderson; "but at any rate, we must be now on a wrong track."

"Reasons for disappearing—reasons for disappearing!" cried the Colonel, his suspicious nature became roused, and he recalled his last interview with Deane. "Oh, no," he said, mastering his unworthy thoughts, "impossible!"

"Yes," said Anderson, "it must be impossible, for what reason could Mr. Deane have for disappearing of his own accord? Of course; it is absurd."

"Let us begin by going straight for the glacier," said the Colonel in a tone of authority.

Frant started and looked at him blankly.

"But Miss Denton saw him going in quite another direction," he said.

"I know that, sir; but he could have returned that way, and fallen into one of the *crevasses*."

"Impossible!" said Frant, warmly. "He knew his way too well, and was too good a mountaineer."

"We all make slips, Mr. Frant," said Anderson.

"Yes, of course, but——"

"The Herr Colonel is right," said Valter firmly.

"We have never half searched there."

“Because it was foolish to do so,” said Frant.
“What are you thinking of?”

“My duty,” said Valter, taking off his hat and stepping forward. “Sir, I have served you for months, and I loved you as a brother. I have taken your pay, but I have worked for you in all brotherhood, and you know that I have risked and would again risk my life to save yours.”

“Yes, Valter, I believe it,” said Frant.

“But the time has come when I must speak out. I am an ignorant man, but I am not blind. I speak though it tears me to the heart to have to believe such things—to speak against a man I have loved; but I must speak now, if only for the sake of the dear lady breaking her heart there down below in the *chalet*.”

“You—you know something,” cried the Colonel. “What is it, man?”

“God forgive me, if I am wrong,” said Valter piously; “and you, too, forgive me, Mr. Frant.”

“Speak out if you know anything,” said Frant, who was very haggard now.

“I must, sir. I know that you dearly love that sweet young lady.”

“What!” cried Frant, furiously; and he took a step forward, but the Colonel raised his hand.

“Let him say all he has to say.”

“Yes; he cannot deny it. I have seen it a hundred times. He loved her as much as my other dear master, Mr. Deane.”

“The man is mad!” said Frant, wildly.

“No, sir, I am a man and have seen everything.”

But why should you not love her? I loved her—we all did.”

“Yes, yes!” came in a murmured chorus.

“But as we would love one of God’s good angels, and there is not a man in these valleys who would not be ready to give his life for the sweet English lady who these months past has been as sunshine in our land.”

There was another murmur of approval.

“Go on, man; what does this mean?” said the Colonel hoarsely, and evidently deeply moved.

“I say, then, the herr loved the English maiden, and the devil tempted him in his bitter jealousy to keep a smiling brotherly face toward Mr. Deane, while at the first opportunity he was ready to strike and remove his rival from his path.”

“This is utter madness,” cried Frant, excitedly.

“It is the truth, sir,” said Valter, sadly. “Have you not always kept us back from searching the big *crevasses*?”

“Yes,” cried Frant. “The idea was too horrible, and it was impossible he could be there. Valter, this is a cruel charge from you.”

“Yes,” said the guide, “cruel and bitter. I loved you, sir; but I loved that good, brave, tender-hearted gentleman too.”

“Yes, a terrible charge,” said the Colonel, while Anderson rested his hand on one of the guide’s shoulders. “But all this, my man, is supposition. What you say is news to me. Mr. Frant, it is not fair to you to ask if it is true.”

“Yes; a part is true,” said Frant, with his face

flushing and his eyes lighting up. "I confess that I did dearly love Miss Denton from the first day I saw her; but I soon knew that she loved my friend, and that he was as warmly devoted to her; so I held my peace—I hid it all in my breast. But as to this man's charge, that I have raised my hand against one who has always been a brother to me, it is as false as it is ridiculous. He believes it, but the man's half mad in his devotion to poor Adam Deane."

"Then, sir, how came that cut upon face?" said Valter sadly—"the blood upon your handkerchief?"

"I told you—I fell, and the blood was my own," said Frant, contemptuously.

"Then why, sir, did you hang back that day and send me up Piz Luce alone?"

Frant's jaw dropped, and a deadly silence seemed to come over the group.

"Oh, this is absurd," he said aloud. "I was tired and disappointed. My friend had refused to come, and I promised the ladies they should see the signal. So I sent Valter up alone, and waited about thinking. Yes, of course, I met Mr. Anderson here as I came back. You remember, sir?"

"Yes," said Anderson, hesitating; "I remember meeting Mr. Frant, and he told me his guide was up the peaks."

"Where did you meet Mr. Frant?" said the Colonel sternly.

"He was just coming down the gorge from the glacier."

There was another and more terrible silence, Frant, as suspicious circumstances one after another began to hem him in, gazing wildly from face to face, each growing cold and stern, eyes that had always looked frankly in his being averted.

“Oh!” he cried at last, “this is horrible! You all suspect me. Valter, my lad, what have you said?”

The guide laid his hand upon his breast for a moment, and then his lips parted.

“That which it was my duty to say, Herr. Thinking what I did—knowing what I did—I could hold my peace no longer. God forgive me if I am wrong—forgive you, sir, if it is true!”

Frant seemed to grow calm as he looked defiantly round at those who seemed to be shrinking from him.

“It is not true!” he roared. “In Heaven’s name come and see.”

He led the way down the precipitous slope, followed by the whole party. The Colonel seemed to have forgotten his years; the excitement helped Anderson; while the stern-looking guides hung round Valter, some with their baldric-like coils of rope across their broad chests, others carrying short ladders, such as are used for crossing *crevasses* or some yawning *berg schrund*.

It was a toilsome climb and descent, repeated many times, before they reached the gorge, and began to tramp along by the foaming torrent of icy muddy water which came thundering out of the ice grotto at the glacier foot.

On reaching this Frant stood peering into the cavern, with its turquoise and amethystine blue walls, then, beginning to climb up the side, he made the ice ring as he struck it with his axe. He clammers up among the crags and terraces which threatened to fall and crush the party, never once looking back, but letting them struggle after him—ever on and on, higher and higher, up the solid cascade which now filled the gorge, till the rock at the side had to be mounted, the snow completely barring the way. Up this nearly perpendicular rock face Frant went like a goat, closely followed by Valter, who paused at the top to unroll and lower his rope, by whose help the other guides came, and, using their own ropes, the Colonel and Anderson were hauled up to the top.

By this time Frant had descended again to the glacier, and going now slowly, he stopped at *crevasse* after *crevasse*, blue and yawning, leaping some, going round the end of others, and after a hasty glance down, passing on with contemptuous indifference.

He paused at last at the edge of one far larger, and seated himself on a block of stone which had journeyed down from miles above them. As the party straggled up to where he was, Frant turned to Valter.

“Help me,” he said; and he seized the stone.

The guide guessed his intent, and bending down the two turned the stone over and over till it fell down the yawning blue crack, to strike one side,

then the other, and send up crashing hollow reverberating echoes which slowly died away, Anderson turning pale as he glanced down the chasm of ice.

"Well," said Frant, mockingly; "is that a likely place for a man to murder his friend? Shall some of us take a lantern and rope and go down?"

There was no answer, and he laughed bitterly.

"Come on," he cried; and he led again, in and out of the labyrinth of cracks, higher and higher, till the sound of waters falling came rumbling and reverberating to their ears.

All followed him, for to a man they realized that it would be impossible to search the hundreds of *crevasses*, and that only by accident could they, if Valter's supposition was right, hit upon the one which contained the body. But by a kind of instinct they seemed to know where Frant was leading them, and no one was surprised to see him halt at last by the great rift called by the guides the *Moulin*, where the torrent turned almost at right angles on to the ice, over which it flowed in a self-worn bed to where it poured into the *crevasse*, in one vast cascade, to tunnel its way beneath and issue from the ice grotto miles below.

"There," cried Frant; "that is the spot where a man would murder his friend—where the track crosses. Now, then, ropes. Who goes down? What, no volunteers? Rope and lantern, then. I'll go down."

He had hardly uttered the words when a deafening peal of thunder followed a vivid flash of light-

ning, and, as the storm gathered, there was only one course open—retreat, if they wished to avoid what would evidently be a terrible tempest.

“Impossible to search to-day, sir,” cried Valter, and the whole party returned drenched to the hotel, the Colonel going on home with his head in a whirl.

Valter’s words had not impressed him so much as Anderson’s. He could not rid himself of a thought which had come upon him with a renewal of his old suspicions. After telling sister and child that there was no news as yet—for he dared not speak of the terrible charge—he lit a cigar, and shut himself in alone, to try and think the matter out. The idea grew more and more fixed, till at last he started up suddenly and struck the table with his fist.

“The scoundrel!” he cried. “My first suspicions were right. An emissary of that black-guard lord.”

“Who is, papa?” said a voice at his back, for Hester had entered unheard, leaving the door ajar.

“Adam Deane.”

“And why, pray?” she said, coldly.

“I placed in his hands my case containing those letters. I was afraid of being robbed, and I thought he was not likely to be suspected of holding them.”

“Your case, papa?” said Hester, coldly.

“Yes; my cigar case. There is a secret pocket in the side. I gave it to Adam Deane the day he

disappeared. The scoundrel! He knew; and he has escaped with it to London—to his employer, Lord——”

“Absurd!” cried Hester.

“Mr. Anderson, you there!” cried Aunt Ecclesia, wildly, as she rushed up to the door and drew it open, showing Anderson, pale and strange, standing as it were framed, where he must have heard every word.

“Speak!” continued Aunt Ecclesia. “Mr. Frant—Gretchen—this horrid news! Hush, John. Tell me it is not true. Mr. Frant arrested for Adam Deane’s murder! Mr. Anderson, is it so?”

His lips parted twice before he could speak; then with a commiserating look at Hester he said:—

“Yes, madam, just now, at the hotel. It is true.”

Aunt Ecclesia uttered a wild shriek, and Hester stood with her hands clasped to her brows as if she had been stunned.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE news was true enough, as the Colonel found on reaching the hotel, after leaving his people completely stunned by the strokes which had fallen so rapidly one upon the other.

Valter's words had not been without effect. The information had been carried to the police, who did not scruple to make a seizure at once.

The Colonel had pleaded and then stormed and appealed to Mr. Anderson for his help. It was all a piece of mad folly, he was sure. He had not a doubt in his own mind where Deane was—safe back in England, of course.

But while he was protesting to people who received his words upon their impenetrable official armor, a man higher in authority arrived from the principal town.

He heard the Colonel politely and referred him to the nearest English consul; but instead of placing any faith in what had been said, he ordered that men should be ready at daylight to thoroughly search the crevasse.

"News, my darling?" said the Colonel on returning. "None as yet; but Hester, I fear that I am right. My suspicions were aroused when I first met those two, and I can stake my life upon it that Deane has escaped with the Princess' letters."

"Papa, dear," cried Hester, looking at him wildly; "you make me mad with this suspicion."

"Hetty!"

"I must speak, father," she cried. "You have dwelt so on the fear of people following you that it has become a mania. Could you not see in every act, and feel in every word, that Adam Deane was a gentleman and the soul of honor? See how he risked his life for us."

"Only to achieve his end. He and his companion are adventurers."

"It is not true!" cried Aunt Ecclesia. "Mr. Frant could not have done what they say."

The Colonel was silent.

"Why don't you speak, father, and set poor aunt at rest. Tell her that Mr. Frant could not have done this thing."

The Colonel recalled all he had heard—remembered Frant's declaration of his love—and with complications seeming to grow more entangled, he uttered a low sigh.

But he was not allowed to rest.

"Tell her, papa," cried Hester. "She is suffering cruelly. It is as absurd that poor Mr. Frant should raise his hand against his friend as it is to brand Adam as a common thief."

The Colonel groaned.

"Then I will tell her," cried Hester. "Aunt, dear, Mr. Frant is the dearest, truest friend that ever lived, and papa has let himself be led away by these foolish charges till he does not know what to believe himself."

The Colonel looked at his child piteously—quite unnerved.

“I’m—I’m afraid you are right, Hetty,” he said, with all his dictatorial fierceness gone. “Don’t be hard on me, my dear. I can only judge by what I know.”

“And what do you know beside the silly tattle of these people?”

“That Deane has gone with my case containing the letters. It was a foolish thing to give them to him; but I thought they would be safe in his hands.”

“And how could Mr. Deane know that there were two letters concealed in the lining of the case?”

“Ah, that has puzzled me.”

“Father,” cried Hester, passionately, “can you not see how childish all this is? I have reminded you before that Adam Deane was here first, and could not have known of our coming. If you think an enemy has done this, you must look elsewhere.”

“Ah! Then you have suspicions?”

“Yes—no,” she cried, wildly. “I dare not think.”

“But you think still that Deane has been killed?”

“I will not think that; but I am sure some terrible accident has befallen him, or he would have been here.”

The Colonel pressed his hand to his feverish head, and looked pityingly at his child, who now knelt down at his feet.

“Father, dear,” she said, “I am trying to be strong, and to act like a brave, true woman; but it is so hard—so hard!”

“My darling! I know,” he said, embracing her.

“I dread to say what I think—I shrink from telling you my horrible suspicions.”

“Better tell me, dear,” said the old man, gazing at her vacantly. “What is it you do think?”

“That Adam has been killed.”

“Yes, dear,” he said, feebly, “been killed——”

“By the man who dared to love me, and who under the cloak of false friendship has followed him till he could strike some cowardly blow.”

The Colonel looked at his child nervously.

“You don’t believe me, father.”

“Yes—yes I do,” he cried, hastily. “I think—I feel now that you must be right. It is what they are saying. Poor fellow—yes, he loved you too. And you thought this?”

“About Mr. Frant? Oh! father—dear father—why will you be so blind? Mr. Anderson has insulted me again and again with his declarations of love.”

“What!” cried the Colonel, springing to his feet, as he felt that there was something tangible at last.

“I—I dared not tell you before. It was cowardly, but I was afraid, and—Oh, father, I was too happy to think of anything else but him who loved me, and it all seemed to be over. But now I am sure—it was he who struck the blow and——”

“Oh! dear lady, dear lady, come to her—pray come!”

“Gretchen,” cried Hester, springing to her feet, as the girl entered the room.

“Madame is half mad, and is dressing herself to go down to the hotel!”

CHAPTER XXXV.

COLONEL DENTON joined the party who started for the glacier. The chief of the police, who had been reinforced by two more men in the night, left one in charge of the prisoner, who later on was to be conveyed to the chief city of the Commune. The guides, headed by Valter, were in force, and Anderson was up and ready to form one of the band, which later on was to assemble at the brink of the crevasse.

Troubled in mind by his child's words, the Colonel shrank from encountering Anderson, though everything as they went on began to strengthen him in his belief that Hester's were wild utterances—as wild as he felt his own had been. But he was spared all trouble on Anderson's account, for the latter, looking pale and intent, bowed to him without speaking, and attached himself to the leading party of the guides.

At last the glacier was reached, the toilsome climb up its slippery surface had been ended, and in almost complete silence the searchers gathered at the side of the great crevasse, some little distance from where the torrent poured in. The chief of the Commune police now spoke out.

“It is a waste of time, and folly,” he said, peer-

ing down. "What ground have you for thinking the English Herr is down here?"

"None that he is here," said Valter; "but he may be down one of the crevasses."

"Well, then, if a man fell, or was thrown down there, is it possible to get him out?"

Valter gazed down and then shook his head.

"I think not," he said. "It seems impossible. But light a lantern and join some ropes. I will go down and see."

"What for?"

"He might have lodged on some shelf of ice, and the English Herr ought to rest in holy ground."

"Amen," was murmured softly.

"Double the ropes and join them well," said the official. "Light a lantern, one of you. They shall not say we have not done our duty. Go down and try."

There were a few busy minutes of preparation, and the chief of the police said sharply,

"Light another lantern, and lower it first."

The preparations were made, and all bent forward and gazed intently as the light was lowered fifty—a hundred—two hundred feet, shining feebly on glistening walls of pure ice, and making what seemed to be a heavy fall of rain glisten and sparkle.

All at once the light went out.

The lantern was hastily drawn up. It was seen that rope and lantern were dripping with water.

"You see," said the official; "the crevasse nar-

rows, and the falling water is dashed from the side. It is madness to go down. Will you try?"

"Yes," said Valter, firmly. "I cannot give up without a trial. He was my good master, and we shared many dangers. He would have gone down for me. Ready?"

"Ready."

A thrill of horror ran through the Colonel, and he stepped to where the guide stood, silently holding out his hand.

The man's face lit up as he eagerly grasped it. He then drew back, made a sign to the others, and, seating himself on the edge of the vast cleft, he grasped the rope with one hand, his ice axe with the other to steady his descent, and with the light suspended from his belt he was lowered steadily down.

Every neck was craned as half-a-dozen pairs of strong arms steadily lowered down the rope till Valter was seen to go from light into twilight and then into bluish darkness.

The candle burned clearly, and they caught glimpses of the guide's face as he swung to and fro, thrusting himself from the sides to avoid the edges of the jagged crack.

Not a word was spoken; even men held their breath and strained their sense of hearing for the descending man's order as to raising or lowering.

Suddenly the light became indistinct, then disappeared, altogether fully two hundred feet below.

"Well?" shouted the chief of the police; "shall we haul up?"

There was no reply, no sign of the rope being agitated.

"Quick; draw up," cried the officer, sharply; and Valter was rapidly hauled to the surface, the lamp out, and his head and arms hanging inert by his side, while the water streamed from him as if he had been lowered into a well.

The rope was taken from about his chest, and brandy held to his lips, but for some minutes he made no sign. By degrees he opened his eyes, closed them as if the bright sunlight gave him pain, and then reopened them to gaze wildly round.

"How is it with you, my lad?" said the Colonel, kindly, as he bent over him.

"The water," he said, faintly; "the water stunned and strangled me."

"Yes," said the chief; "that has proved it. Coil up your ropes, men. It is an impossibility."

"But surely you will not give up like that?" said Anderson, excitedly.

"Yes, sir; I will not risk any other man's life," said the official.

"It is a duty," cried Anderson excitedly. "The body must be found. A hundred napoleons to the man who brings him up."

"Then Monsieur feels sure that he is down there?"

"Yes; absolutely sure," cried Anderson. "He must be found. A hundred napoleons, I say."

There was no reply.

"Two hundred," cried Anderson excitedly.

Still no reply.

“Three hundred napoleons—four hundred—five hundred,” cried Anderson, as Valter rose to his feet once more and shuddered.

“What!” cried Anderson, “are you all cowards?”

“No, Herr,” said the young guide quietly; “we would any of us go down for love of the poor young lady yonder and of him who is dead, if it were possible. But there is a horrible whirl of water down there; and what are five hundred napoleons to a man who is drawn up dead! Some of them have wives, but their wives would rather have their men.”

“Right, Valter, my lad,” said the chief of the police. “It is not to be done.”

“Not to be done?” cried Anderson. “Then when will the body be found?”

“Fifty years hence, when the ice here has ground its way down into the valley, and his bones are cast forth,” said Valter—“unless he has already been swept out of the ice grotto at the glacier foot.”

“Then we may find him there.”

“No, Herr,” said Valter; “if he has been swept through the icy tunnel, he has gone down the river and over the falls, and from there into the lake.”

“Then the lake shall be dragged,” cried Anderson. “Money shall not stand in the way of recovering his remains.”

The chief of the police shrugged his shoulders and turned to the Colonel.

“Impossible, Monsieur,” he said. “The lake is a thousand feet deep where the river rushes in.”

Ten minutes later the party began to descend the river of ice, pausing at crevasse after crevasse, but in a hopeless way; for all felt that nothing could be done, and Anderson’s eyes, as they met the Colonel’s, were full of despair.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“It’s a curious thing,” said Adam Deane, to himself, as he leaped down from the rock upon which he had stood to wave his ice-axe to Hester; “but only a few weeks ago I was in full pursuit of what Aleck calls my myth. There seemed to be only one thing in the world then worth pursuit. Now I am going in search of the old gold workings—just to fill up time, and to get away into the solitude of these mountains to dream and think of her—to try and keep down all this wild joy which nearly drives me mad.

“God bless her!” he cried aloud, with quite a joyous shout. “God bless the whole world! God bless everybody and everything in it! Oh! what a happy lunatic I feel! Listen, you great, hoary, silver-crowned mountains, and you dark, gloomy chasms, with your rocks and caves. She loves me, she loves me, and you all look beautiful, as if my darling had turned everything into a paradise.

“There!” he cried, after leaping and bounding down the steep slope in all the vigor of his early manhood. “I must do something to let off the steam, for I am in love—in love, and—oh! thank God, thank God for all this new-found joy! My love is amply returned.”

“Hah!” he ejaculated, after a time, as he drew

a long breath and began to ascend the other side of the deep gorge, "this is the sort of thing to do one good. It will make me more sensible, instead of being drunk with delight, and ready to shout and sing like a child over a holiday. If I did not come out like this sometimes I should be babbling to everybody I met about how happy I have grown.

"Steep bit this," he panted. "So much the better. Done me good to have gone up Piz Luce with Aleck and Valter; but I couldn't stand them now. I should be saying or doing something weak, and Aleck would laugh at me. Poor old chap! Too bad to pitch him over as I have; but wait a bit, his time will come, if it has not already. Hang me if I don't believe it's getting serious with Mrs. Lindley. Well, why shouldn't it? She's a very sweet little woman, whom any man might love. I love her for my darling's sake. I wish them joy.

"There," he cried, as he reached the top, panting and hot. "Yes, I wish them joy. Now, let's see, which way shall I go to-day? I must not go too far, because of being back to dinner. Wonder whether I shall sit by my darling's side. Can't be very far off. I am not far off, for I feel as if she is with me now—a part of my very being.

"Ha, ha!" he cried, with his face flushed with exercise, and his joyous sensations in the fine crisp air where he stood. "How solitary! Not a soul—not a sound—not so much as a goat-bell.

Alone, alone, alone, where one can cry aloud and shout for joy.

“Wonder how old Aleck is getting on. I ought to see him from somewhere up here,” and he shaded his eyes from the sunshine and gazed long at the conical mountain away south, with its peak completely clothed in dazzling white snow. “No, not a sign of him, nor Valter neither. What a muff they are beginning to think me. Now, then, which way shall I go? Odd if I should really find a trace of the old mines to-day, and be able to take back a specimen or two of gold. Make the Colonel stare, for he looks upon me as a madman over that craze. Which valley shall I explore?”

He climbed upon a mass of stone and looked along the different valleys and depressions which opened out before him, seeming to be like so many gigantic watercourses running up toward the different peaks.

“Bah!” he cried. “What nonsense! Why hunt any more? I came out here to seek for the old gold mine, and I have found it—the oldest, truest, purest source of golden happiness to man. Love—her love. As for the metal, pah! the thought is degrading. I want no myth when I have found the reality, that I shall clasp once more in my arms to-night.”

He began to descend into the next depression of the pathless waste, thinking, thinking always.

“What could she see in me?” he said, gently. “I’m not good enough for her. What could she see in me?”

He stopped musing and took out his pipe, but thrust it back.

“No; let’s have one of the old man’s cigars.

“He’s taking to me,” he continued, as he drew out the handsome Russia case with its engraved crest on the side. “Yes, he’s taking to me. Eccentric, but a thorough gentleman; and he feels that I love her whom he loves most on earth. Good cigars, too,” he said, opening the case and selecting one. “Pretty thick this. So much the better. Keep the weeds from getting bruised.”

He replaced the case in his breast, bit off the end of his cigar, lit up in the shelter of a rock, and went on, smoking.

“By George,” he cried, “what a cigar. Delicious!”

He wandered, now slowly, now bounding down some smooth slope in the exuberance of his joy. Then came a climb, and a rest on some block of stone, or a pause, during which he threw himself down in the bright sunshine upon some bed of Sedums, where quite a couch was formed of the tiny rosettes. All around was still, and not even a bird was visible but once, when a lammergeyer, with wide-spread wings, floated near, looking at him curiously, and then circling round as if watching him.

“Not dead yet, old fellow,” shouted Deane. “Eh, don’t understand English? What is it, then? *Nicht todt*. Still puzzled? *Pas encore mort*. Oh, I see; you’ve come over the mountains from the sunny side. *Non morto*.”

“What a fine fellow, and what eyes! Wonder whether he would have a pick at a body if one was lying here dead—fallen, say, during some climb.

“Ugh! What have I to do with such horrible thoughts? I want to live on and on for my darling’s sake. What’s o’clock?”

He looked at his watch, and came to the conclusion that he had ample time to cross a ridge before him, make his way down into a chasm which he had taken to be one of the spots worked by the old Romans, and climb from there on to the side of the mountain and over the other ridge which cut him off from the glacier. Down this he made up his mind to journey by the far side, then cross and descend to the ice cave, and follow the stream to where it joined the river in the Schnee-thal, and so descend back to the hotel.

“Plenty of time,” he said, “and a really good honest tramp will do me good. I’ve been fooling so far, and dreaming like a sickly sentimental love-lorn boy. Hurrah, I’m glad of it; for if ever man was in honest manly love that fellow is Adam Deane.”

He started off now at a good swinging pace. There was no track of any description, and the place was well littered with fallen rocks; but he leaped and dropped and crept between, and went up and down in full enjoyment of the difficulties he encountered. Twice over he recalled Frant and his climb, and stopped at good points of vantage to examine the snowy peak; but there

was still no trace of any one mounting, and coming to the conclusion that Frant had attacked the mountain from the other side, he went on. At last he stood high up among the shattered rocks, gazing down into the great gorge which formed the bed of the glacier, quite four miles above the spot where the stream poured into the crevasse.

Here for a time he became so interested in the scene of wild grandeur below him, with its terraces and descents of ice looking like some tremendous cataract suddenly congealed, that the memory of Hester faded from his mind. He was high enough up now for the snow to be lying all around like sheets of hail stones.

He had never been so high up the glacier before. He was now near where it mingled with past winters' snows, which curved up in white and gold to the summits high on his right. So grand was the dazzling spectacle in its purity, hardly showing traces of stony moraine, that he stopped for long shading his eyes from the glare, and watching the strange jagged shapes of the broken ice.

At last, silent and wondering at Nature's majesty here in these icy solitudes, he walked along the stony slope of the gorge till he came upon a narrow rift filled with snow and running down to the glacier. Taking his place on this, and supported by his ice axe held behind him, he bent his figure back and gave himself up to the pleasure of the rapid motion of a glissade, and, with the hard snow hissing and rushing down with

him, he descended swiftly, to stop at length in a bed of dazzling snow on the surface of the glacier.

The difficulties of his task now began, for the surface of the frozen river was only to be passed by careful management. But Deane's was the training of years, and he began to slowly descend, picking his way carefully. For he was alone.

"I must bring her up here," he said, as he stopped in one of the wildest and grandest spots along the snowy fall. "Such scenes as these only come to the lot of those who climb. If we came from below, started early, and took plenty of time, it would not be too laborious, and I could help her."

He went on downward, his eyes wandering constantly over the icy chaos, and as he descended every beautiful pinnacle and turret was associated in his mind with Hester, and he fancied he heard her ecstatic praise of the glorious scene.

"Poor Aleck!" he said, as he came to a more open spot, where the ice formed a fairly level slope, across which zig-zagged a great crevasse. "Poor Aleck! I hope matters will go smoothly and well for him."

He stopped, gazing to right and left. The crevice extended right across the glacier, and to get round meant a walk of quite a quarter of a mile.

"Not too wide to jump," he said, for the gap was only about five feet across. Drawing himself up, he made a spring forward, cleared the rift, and came down lightly on the ice on the other side, where he slipped for some distance, and it was

only by the exercise of the greatest dexterity that he saved himself from a nasty fall.

“This will not do,” he said laughingly, as he stuck the spike at the end of his ice axe into the mass beneath his feet, and began to wipe his heated brow. “Not my own property now; so I must take care.” Then resuming the steep descent, he kept on winding in and out among the many obstacles till at the end of a couple of hours the deep humming roar of the fall told him of his nearness to the great crevasse, which he reached at last, heated and weary, by the slope farthest from the hotel. Here he sat down to rest and watch the falling water as it came down the side, wearing the ice away, and widening the gap day by day.

Consulting his watch, Deane found he had plenty of time to spare, so took out his pipe and lay back to gaze at the beautiful scene through the soft mist which rose from the burning tobacco.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THERE was ice below and before him, ice in huge masses to right and left, while high up peak after peak displayed its fields. But where he lay, bathed in sunshine, there was a warm glow; and as he basked there, dreamily seeing Hester, and pondering on all that had passed, the beautiful vision of dazzling white, veined with softened blue, died away—and the next moment as it seemed to him he was battling with some terrible indescribable peril—some danger which had grasped him by the throat and forced him back! For an indefinite time he seemed to be struggling against this force, but vainly; for he was mastered, and he was growing weaker and weaker, with an agony of despair ever increasing, till with one tremendous effort he forced it back, opened his eyes—to see Anderson not a yard away, gazing down at him mockingly, with hands resting upon an alpenstock.

“Do you always sleep as uneasily as that, friend Deane?” he said with a laugh.

“Sleep! Was I asleep?” stammered the young man.

“Evidently, and gasping and sighing as if you were suffering from a maddening attack of indigestion.”

"Couldn't be that," said Deane, smiling, "for I have not touched my sandwiches."

"Going to sleep with a pipe in your mouth, perhaps. Bad tobacco."

"Perhaps so. But how came you here?"

"I? Oh, I have been strolling about with the Colonel till he went in to have his nap. Having nothing else to do, I came to see if I could run against you or Mr. Frant. That led me down and up till I reached the glacier on the other side. I had just seated myself, thinking what a lovely, wild, solitary place it was, when I caught sight of what seemed to be a dead goat lying on the rocks on the other side, which dead goat resolved itself through my glass into a human being with English legs. 'Frant or Deane,' I said, and I came across the ice and found Deane. Ready to go back?"

"Yes," said Deane, who could not shake off the unpleasant sensation left by his dream. "I'm ready; have a cigar?"

"Thanks, yes."

"Wish he had said no," thought Deane, and brought out his present.

"Hullo!" said Anderson, banteringly; "succeeded to the Colonel's property already?"

"Nonsense, man; a little gift."

"Ah!" said Anderson, with a sigh, as he gave Deane a sinister look, wondering the while how much Hester had said to him. "Lucky youth! What a time of sunshine you have before you."

"Let's use the sunshine, then, to get back," said

Deane, handing a light, and then applying it to his half-empty pipe. "It will be precious cold here before long, and it's a good way to the hotel."

"Bless me, then, for coming all this way and waking you," said Anderson, puffing away at his cigar and sweeping the slopes of the mountains with his eyes. "Why, if I had not arrived so opportunely you would not have been at the *chalet* to dinner, and in the morning you would have been found frozen stiff."

"Not I," said Deane, picking up his ice-axe. "Ready?"

"Yes, quite," said Anderson, whose eyes were still wandering. Seeing that his companion noted his abstraction, he continued: "Wonderful, wonderful! Here, in this hot country, and an hour or two's climb takes us into what must be exactly like the Arctic region."

"Yes," said Deane, quietly; "but one gets so accustomed to it that one hardly notices the snow line. Shall I lead? I know the cuts better."

"By all means, please. One might easily go astray on this great river of ice."

"Yes," said Deane, and he strode on in front with his ice-axe over his shoulder, while Anderson followed, striking the iron point into the ice at every other step to steady himself.

They were about two-thirds of the way across, with the great crevasse on their right, and the scrappy conversation that had been carried on ceased, consequent upon the low thunderous roar which came up from the hideous chasm.

“I—I would not go too near,” said Anderson, huskily.

“Oh, I’m all right,” replied Deane. “My head will stand anything now. Like to have a look down? I’ll hold your hand.”

“Thanks—no,” said Anderson, and he followed Deane closely as the latter walked along within a few feet of the edge.

The fall was still about fifty feet away, when suddenly there was a grating sound; Deane felt Anderson’s alpenstock pass between his ankles and wrench them, so that he was tripped up and thrown heavily on the ice, while instantly Anderson exclaimed, “I beg your pardon,” and he felt a violent thrust.

It was almost instantaneous. The thrust sent Deane over the edge, the ice offering no stay; but with the instinct of a mountaineer, and in desperate effort to save himself, he made a blow with his ice-axe as he glided over toward the gulf. The stroke was not enough to stop him. The sharp point only scraped over the ice, failing to take hold; but it checked his progress like a drag, and anchored him by holding on at the extreme edge, Deane clinging desperately to the handle as he swung to and fro.

It had not occurred to him that this was other than a terrible accident, and as he looked up and saw Anderson’s face white as ashes, his alpenstock planted at the edge, gazing down at him, he said hoarsely:

“For God’s sake, man, keep your nerve, or I’m

gone. Back. Lie down on your face as far as you can from here, stretch out your hands, and hold the axe head tightly down while I try and climb up."

Anderson did not move, but stood as if frozen, his eyelids wide, so that rings of white showed round the pupils of his eyes.

"Don't—don't be a coward!" cried Deane, hastily. "Lie down, I tell you, and hold the axe head. I can hang some time, but the ice may give way. Do you hear me? Anderson! For——"

He ceased his appeal, for now he read the truth in the devilish face, fixed, cruel and triumphant. He knew now that it was no accident, but the determined act of one who sought to remove him from his path. And they were alone there—absolutely alone.

A cry for help was, he knew, vain; and after seeking for a few moments to find a foothold, he tried, as a man does who is accustomed to perilous adventures among the mountain peaks, to be calm. He knew that he could hang like that for some minutes, his muscles being like iron; and he said, as he gazed fixedly in the other's face:

"Mr. Anderson—help me."

There was not the slightest change in the face above him, and now he spoke in an appealing tone.

"Mr. Anderson, for God's sake, save me! It is murder to let me go."

Still no reply; nothing but that devilish face glaring down at him, the alpenstock clutched

tightly against his cheek as he slowly took a little ivory-handled revolver from his breast.

Deane's lips parted. His nerve was going, and the horror of such a death just then half maddened him. His agony was about to find vent in a wild cry; but once more he mastered himself. He knew his peril, but he had been in peril before, when calm matter-of-fact coolness had saved his life, as it should save it here.

"He cannot mean it," he thought. "The man is paralyzed with horror. Hold fast, good axe," he muttered; and, throwing all his manhood's strength into the muscles of his arms, he began slowly and steadily to pass one hand above the other.

Twice, and then he ceased, for he swung about frightfully, and his wildly-staring eyes could see that the axe-head had worked so much nearer the edge that he dared try no more.

"Anderson!" he gasped, in a low, husky voice, "for pity's sake—as you hope for mercy—help!"

There was a loud, hoarse sound like a deep sigh, and hope sprang up in Deane's breast as he saw Anderson slowly return the pistol to his breast, grasp the alpenstock again, and gaze down in his face. The man would save him; and Hester—he should live to see her again.

"Ah!"

The first wild cry of fear and horror that had escaped him, as he saw Anderson move slightly. There was a jarring sensation down his wrists and away to his breast.

He was paralyzed now, and the horrible roar of the reverberating torrent below for the first time struck upon his ears like the cry of some monster eager for its prey.

Again that strange jar, which flew through every nerve, following a slight motion of the devilish face, which stared triumphantly down.

He would have uttered another appeal for mercy, but the words would not come now; and he waited with his eyes growing filmy, through what felt like an age of torture, for the next jarring sensation.

“God help her! Hester—my own!” he sighed, as the last crumbling thrill came. The glistening steel axe-head trembled for a moment on the edge, the ice splintered away, and Adam Deane plunged down into the horrible void!

Anderson had deliberately kicked the axe from its frail anchorage, and now rose erect, and once more bent over to listen to the dull, heavy reverberating roar.

“Gone!” he said, softly; and turning away he walked across the ice, looking searchingly to right and left, in dread of some hidden witness. He saw none, and in due time came upon Frant, about a mile below, just where the glacier ended.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BRIBERY and corruption had been at work; but, to the credit of the guard be it said, they would not have been sufficient. He felt sympathy for the two weeping women who came imploringly for an interview, and as soon as he had exacted from them their word of honor that they would not aid the prisoner to escape, they were ushered into the room where Aleck Frant was walking up and down like a caged lion.

“Miss Denton! Mrs. Lindley!” he exclaimed, as Hester threw up her veil and came forward, while Aunt Ecclesia caught at the back of a chair and stood supporting herself by it, sobbing almost hysterically, “How good of you—I did not expect this.”

Hester laid her hands in his, the tears streaming down her pale cheek as she fixed her eyes upon him, while a flush of joyous excitement and hope lit up the young man's face.

“Knowing what I do,” she faltered, “I could not stay away.” Then, with her voice growing firmer, “He was my dear husband—the husband he will ever be in my heart—and I could not let the man he trusted—the companion I know he looked upon as a brother—rest longer without

knowing that I do not believe this cruel charge. Aleck Frant, you could not have done this."

The light died out of Frant's eyes, and with it the wild hope for the future, as he raised Hester's hands softly and reverently to his lips.

"God bless you for this, Hester," he said huskily, and in a voice hardly above a whisper, "He knows I am innocent." Then, after a pause, as they stood together in the middle of the room, "It was like you to come."

A piteous sob broke upon the stillness then, and a smile full of sadness came upon Frant's face, as he looked once more into Hester's eyes.

"Yes," he said with a sigh; "I am innocent enough, as they will find some day." Letting Hester's hands drop slowly, one by one, he turned to where Aunt Ecclesia stood, with her head bent down, blinded by her tears, and struggling with the deep emotion that half suffocated her.

As Frant turned to her, something seemed to whisper to him the words: "Take the good the gods provide you."

Aunt Ecclesia's sobs came softly, and he could see that her face was working behind her veil.

"Mrs. Lindley—Ecclesia," he said softly, as he held out his hands.

"Aleck!" she cried wildly. The next moment her arms were about his neck, and she was sobbing hysterically as she hid her face in his breast.

"It is not true," she said, as she nestled closer to him. "You couldn't—you are too true and noble, and good. I can't help it—I am only a

weak foolish woman. Let the world think what it likes. I do love you, Aleck, and if they kill you they shall kill me too."

"No, no, no," he said, as he held her throbbing and trembling closer and closer to him. "They shan't kill you, my brave, true, little woman; nor they shan't kill me. We'll have the truth out somehow. You've given me the spirit to work, as well as taught me that I have something to live for. Come, come, come, no more crying, dear."

She looked up at him with her eyes flashing with delight, and kissed him softly on the cheek.

"No," she said, extricating herself from his embrace, and taking his arm with both her hands clasped about it. "I'll be very firm now; but you will not think me shameless and strange?"

"I?" he said tenderly, and then with a pitying look he held out his hand to Hester, who took it, and then kissed both in turn with a very loving and sisterly kiss.

"Now," she said, quietly, as she drew a long catching breath, "tell me what ought to be done, Mr. Frant, to set you free."

"Nothing at present," he said. "I suppose I shall very soon be taken away from here."

"To prison?" cried Aunt Ecclesia, wildly.

"Well; what of that? Come, be brave. It will only be the first step toward my freedom. There must be an examination, and we shall see how they frame the charge. With the consul's help, I shall get a proper advocate, and I have no doubts about the future. We do not know that Adam

Deane is dead. It looks bad, I know. So it does about me, when even poor old Valter suspects me, and, in his great liking for Adam, turned upon me as he did."

"And I hate him for it!" cried Aunt Ecclesia.

"No, no, little woman," said Frant, gently. "He is a good fellow, and he did not turn upon me till things looked black."

"They did not—they never looked black."

"Yes," said Frant, smiling at her, "they did. It was so contrary to my custom to put the guide off with an excuse, and send him alone to make that ascent, that when he came back to find me scratched and bleeding from a fall——"

"But you did fall?"

"Fall? I believe I did. I was blundering along, thinking; and though it was quite low down, where a school-girl might go in safety, I never had a narrower escape in my life."

"Oh!" ejaculated Aunt Ecclesia.

"But I got off with a few cuts, and of course I bled a little. My appearance, and poor Deane's absence, did look suspicious. But there. Cheer up both of you; I tell you Adam is not dead."

Hester turned to him wildly, and in spite of what had passed a pang shot through him as he realized the intensity of her love for his friend. "Don't raise false hopes," she faltered.

"They are not false hopes," he said, firmly. "I cannot—I will not believe poor old Adam is dead. It sounds mad," he continued; "but we have been so much together, such brothers for

years, that if he had passed away I feel as if I should have had some sign—that I should have felt that he was dead. No, I will not believe it till I see him lying dead before me.”

At that moment the fastening of the door rattled, was shaken again, there was a loud cough, and the key was slowly turned. Then the door seemed to stick, and at last was slowly pressed open.

“Yes,” cried Frant, “what is it?”

The official entered quite apologetically to announce that the interview must end.

“No, not yet—another half-hour,” cried Frant, taking a napoleon from his pocket.

But the man shook his head and refused the gift.

“The ladies must now go,” he said; then turned his back upon them and stood close up to the door, with gentlemanly consideration for the painful parting that he knew was at hand.

“There,” said Frant, cheerily; “time’s up, ladies. Let’s keep a bold face on the trouble. Good-by, dear sister. You have done more than you can imagine by coming here. Good-by, Ecclesia, dearest,” he said, cheerfully, as he took her in his arms. “Be my firm, brave, little wife; and if I send for you because I want your help, you will come?”

“To the world’s end, Aleck,” she said, looking proudly into his eyes and offering her lips as he bent toward her.

The next moment the ladies were descending the hotel stairs, and walked hastily with their veils drawn toward the *chalet*.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A SENSATION of falling through space; a sudden plunge into water which thundered in his ears; blows, the feeling of being beaten and ground against stones; a horrible sense of suffocation; a sudden check which half stunned him. Then, as his senses returned, Deane found himself suffering agonies, in intense darkness, clinging to a mass of stone, while some terrible creature which kept up an incessant roar appeared to be tearing and dragging at him to pull him down from where he clung.

How long this lasted he did not know. It might have been hours, it might have been minutes. But presently he sufficiently recovered from the terrible shock to realize that he was clinging to a mass of stone, with a rushing stream of water up to his waist exercising a constant drag upon him, and ready at any moment to sweep him under.

He was too much stunned and confused at the moment to comprehend more, and it was instinctively that he clung tightly with one hand while feeling about in the darkness with the other till he could get a fresh hold. Then he brought his feet into play on the smoothly worn rock beneath

the water, tried to draw himself higher, slipped, and was nearly borne away.

Another effort, after he had rested, panting and frozen with horror for some time; and another, and another; all of which exhausted him so that he was ready to let go. But a last effort, the most feeble of all, was happily so successful that only the lower part of his legs were exposed to the rush of the water. After a rest, he contrived to get himself clear, half sitting, half lying on the smooth rocks.

This was followed by a dull confused period, during which everything passed away and he knew nothing. Regaining his senses, the horror of his position nearly drove them back, and it was only by a tremendous effort that he was able to try and make out what it all meant.

There was the hollow booming roar, the rush of a torrent, a feeling of intense cold, and a darkness that seemed as if it touched him, pressing so heavily on his brain that he could not think.

Again his senses left him, and once more, after an interval that might have been minutes or hour, he struggled back into consciousness, but still from that darkness there would come no answer to the simple question, Why?

He was cold, and his clothes were drenched; but he had not the energy to try and wring out any of the water. He could only lie on those smooth wet stones, and drowsily try to think, till the effort grew so wearisome that his head sank heavily down upon his left arm, his brow touching

the rock about which that arm was bent; and this time he dropped into a state of unconsciousness that gradually became sleep.

When he awoke the power of thought had returned, and he lay wondering for a few moments what that deafening, reverberating thunder could be—why he was nearly paralyzed, and so stiff and cold that he could not stir. He could not feel that he possessed arm or leg, they were so utterly benumbed. And always that terrific roar, and the darkness so intense that for the moment he felt that his eyes must be closed. He opened them—closed them again, opened them once more, and it was always so black that he uttered a wild cry, which sounded muffled and strange, and seemed to be swept away. Could he be blind?

That terrible thought acted as a spur to his brain. Like a flash it all came back, and he saw himself clinging to his ice-axe, with the head just anchored on the edge of the crevasse, gazing up wildly into the devilish face of Anderson as the head of the ice-axe was deliberately kicked away.

So agonizing was the reality that for the moment he found himself praying for insensibility. But the power to think coherently came instead; the horror grew more dull, and, like a man inured to peril and accustomed to find himself in situations which called for all his energy, he began to calculate his chances of escape.

It was all plain enough now. He had been plunged into the depths of the awful crevasse, and was lying there with his limbs broken, for still he

could feel no sensation in hand or foot. But by degrees there was suggestion of returning animation as he moved a little, and for the first time something like hope began to dawn upon him. He not only found that he could move one arm, but that he could keep his position without slipping into the rushing water which thundered just below.

Arrived at this point, it was only a matter of time before he realized that, though stiff with bruises, there were no bones broken, and that he must have been plunged into the water, which had thrown him against the stone to which he had instinctively clung.

He had drawn himself up now, stiff and suffering with the cold, to sit with his chin resting upon his knees, which he clasped with his stiffened arms, carried away once more by the agony of his thoughts. Hester—she would think him dead. That man had tried to murder him, and it was for her sake—to clear a rival from his path.

For a time these thoughts were utterly prostrating. Then they seemed to send an electric glow of rage through him. His blood coursed wildly through his veins, his brain grew more active, and again he began to think of the possibility of escape.

“When was it that all this happened?” he asked himself, as he passed his hand over his garments.

The answer came to his touch. It must have been many hours before, since he had some faint memory of the water dripping from him, and now

the natural heat of his body had made everything partly dry.

“Preserved so far,” he cried at length, frantically. “God give me my reason, and I will face him yet.”

And now he set himself resolutely to work to understand his position. He felt about him, and there was the slippery, well-ground stone on either side and a few feet above him. The rocks sloped so that in his movements he was extended face downward, and suddenly it occurred to him that a projection was pressing awkwardly into his chest.

The next moment he uttered a cry of joy, and thrust his hand into the breast of his Norfolk jacket—to drag out his flask, which proved to be three-parts full. A draught of the French brandy it contained sent a thrill of energy through his veins. His hands busied themselves about the other pockets. In his right breast was the Colonel’s cigar-case, three-parts full; in other pockets were his tobacco-pouch and pipe, a little case of sandwiches; and at his waist was something he dared not for the moment take from its tiny pocket. It seemed too much to hope that this last adjunct to a mountaineer’s equipment should be intact.

He sat for a few moments now as he turned himself, and the sturdy Englishman came out. Taking pipe and pouch from his pocket, he deliberately filled the former, replaced the india-rubber pouch, and then, in spite of himself, his cold hand trembled as he thrust his fingers into the tiny

waist pocket and drew out a little silver box, opened it, shook out a wax match into his hand, and wondered.

The box was warm—would the matches be dry? If dry—would they have been spoiled by the wet? It was some minutes before, after closing the box, he dared strike the match on the roughened surface he had touched with one finger to make out its exact whereabouts. Then, with his teeth set so hard that they threatened to cut through the bone mouthpiece of his pipe, he struck the match and there was a faint line of light.

Another sharp scratch and his heart sank—the water must have got to them.

Once more a quick drawing of the little rounded end over the file-like part of the box, and there was a burst of light! The tiny taper he held on high was burning with a clear flame, long enough for him to see what he had already mentally grasped—that he was seated on a tiny island of rock in the middle of a rushing stream, facing a black tunnel which arched over the waters before him. He was on an island only a few feet across, with the water on either side rushing furiously, while the arch above him was of ice.

He sat there thinking, with his elbows on his knees, and the warm glow of the tobacco lighting up his hands at every draw as he held them round the bowl. Thinking, thinking, and seeing clearly now that he was below the glacier, seated on the bed rock in the tunnel, safe for the moment, until the glacier stream should increase and bear him

away. A prisoner without a prospect of escape, unless he could force his way back into the crevice and cling there until help came. Unless, on the other hand, he could wade or swim down to the grotto at the glacier foot—perhaps miles below. Taking his pipe from his lips, Deane uttered the word “Impossible!” and told himself that there was only one way of escape open to him to life; and that was through the gates of death to life eternal, where there would be no more mental agony and pain.

CHAPTER XL.

THERE was quite a little crowd outside the hotel door. Every dweller in the Schnee-thal had been attracted there—to see, perhaps for the last time, the familiar face of the sturdy young Englishman who was to be taken away under police escort to the great prison, there to be examined, and then await his trial for the murder of his companion, the stranger who had such mad ideas about the existence of an old gold mine.

They were both well known, for there was hardly a peasant at whose door they had not stopped for a draught of water, a bowl of milk, or some bread and cheese, when out with Valter, the guide—who was now standing with a group of men who followed his avocation.

There were quite a dozen guides present from the neighboring valleys, each with a tuft of flowers in his felt hat; for in its way the day was a kind of holiday. The women were attired in their best, with flat straw hats and flowers, black velvet bodices, and snowy-white linen, decked with silver chains.

There was a buzz of excitement as a gentleman on horseback was seen coming up the mule path, a guide leading the steed, which was stopped at

the hotel door. A whisper ran round that it was the English consul from Berne.

Shortly after he had entered, Anderson came out. There was a dead silence as he passed through the little crowd and made his way to the *chalet*, pausing for a moment to gaze down the path which led to the bridge over the falls.

Half-way there, to his surprise he met the Colonel, with Hester and Aunt Ecclesia, both closely veiled. A change came over him as he caught sight of Hester, and he drew in his breath with a strange sound; but recovering himself, he went on.

“Going for a walk?” he said, quietly.

“Walk, sir?—no,” cried the Colonel, with asperity. “They would come, both of them.”

“Would come?”

“Yes, sir. That young man is to be taken away this morning.”

“Is this wise, Miss Denton?” said Anderson, gravely.

Hester’s eyes flashed through her veil, but she did not speak; for her aunt was clinging to her arm and whispered to her to go on.

“Wise?” cried the Colonel; “whoever said it was?”

Anderson shrugged his shoulders.

“And for goodness sake, sir,” cried the Colonel, who was thoroughly on edge with mental pain, “don’t act like a confounded Frenchman. If ever there was a time when we ought to be truly English, for the sake of our countryman, it is now.”

“Indeed, Colonel Denton, it is my wish.”

“Then, why in the devil’s name, sir, do you sneak off from the hotel and leave that poor fellow in the lurch? There, girls—come along, or I shall be saying something rude.”

Anderson darted a look at Hester, but she turned away her head. He drew back for them to pass, and turned and followed them. Gretchen also, in her best, and looking flushed and excited, came hastily out of the *chalet* to go to the hotel.

As soon as the little party was seen approaching, there was a murmur of expectancy, the people drawing back, and their attention being diverted from the horses which were led out from the side of the building. As the ladies drew near, two of the brightest looking of the maidens pressed forward and offered them bunches of freshly-gathered Alpine flowers, which were accepted. Amidst murmurs of sympathy, they were going forward when the men all took off their hats and saluted the stern-looking Colonel, whose lips quivered a little as he acknowledged the salute.

The next little incident was caused by Valter’s approach. He shrank back as the Colonel waved him away, and stood gazing after the party as they went up to the hotel till Gretchen went up to him and took his arm.

Then a burst of conversation rose on the soft morning air, and the place looked as if all were gathered for some merry-making. Never had the valley looked more beautiful, with its bright brown *chalets*—the patches of meadow dotted with

flowers, the gray rocks and clumps of tall dark green firs, tasselled with young growth of a brighter green; while high above all, far beyond the rocks where the goats climbed and sent down showers of sound from their bells, rose dazzling fields and points of purest ice and snow.

The visitor's guilt was discussed, and popular favor was so evidently on his side that when, a few minutes later, one of the police came to the door, held up his hand for silence, and ordered the man who had the horses to bring them forward, there was a low angry murmur. This was checked on the instant as the Colonel came out, supporting Aunt Ecclesia, and followed by Anderson and Hester, who at every attention shrank from him with an instinctive feeling of horror.

The murmur died away as the Colonel stood with the heart-broken women by the door. A policeman came out, directly followed by another walking beside Frant, to whom no other indignity was offered, and a couple more followed behind.

The chief of police made a sign, the stirrup was held ready, and Frant mounted—prisoner enough, for one of the police now held the horse's head. The others prepared to mount for the long ride down the mule-track to the town.

But as Frant settled himself in the saddle and turned to hold out his hands to his friends, there was a tremendous shout raised, in which the women joined, waving their handkerchiefs wildly.

"Not guilty there, Colonel!" said Frant, with forced gayety.

"No, no, my lad," cried the old man, taking Frant's hand; "and not guilty here!"

"Good-by, Ecclesia!" continued Frant, in a low voice. "Come, for my sake be brave, or I shall break down too; and I want them to see that I am an Englishman."

She grasped his hand and tried to speak, but sank back in the Colonel's arms, Hester turning to aid her. Valter came up on the other side, hat in hand, and sank upon one knee as he laid his hand upon Frant's off stirrup.

"Say you forgive me, sir," he cried, piteously.

Frant frowned as he looked in the guide's frank, handsome face; then his own cleared.

"Yes," he said, "I forgive you; for I believe you would have done as much for me."

"I would, sir—God knows I would, for I loved you both."

"Give me a little of the love still, my lad," said Frant, softly; "for I never raised my hand against my friend."

He turned now to where Hester was, just leaving her aunt's side, the police making way for her respectfully. Raising her veil, she came toward the horse, Anderson following her, as if to hear what she would say.

"I will not say good-by," she whispered, as she placed her hands in Frant's, and looked up in his face. "Aleck—brother—for Heaven knows—I believe you—in——"

She had raised her eyes at the word "Heaven," and directly after her utterance was broken, and

she gave forth a wild shriek as she stood with her hands extended, gazing wildly toward the steep slope above the hotel.

At that moment a shout was raised; and then there was a suppressed cry of horror, as a wild-looking, half-naked figure, whose remaining clothes clung to him in rags, came staggering down the mountain path. His face was bleeding, his hands and arms were torn, and there was a wild and ghastly look in his eyes—which were, like his cheeks, sunken as if he had passed through some terrible ordeal.

“Ah!” shouted Frant, as he flung himself from the horse; and he would have rushed to meet the figure but strong hands were immediately upon his wrists.

But Valter was free, and with a shout of delight he rushed to meet—Deane! Another guide followed, and together they supported the much-sought man to the front. Hester had just fainted, when a wave of strength seemed to flow through Deane.

“Aleck!” he cried. “Quick!—arrest that man!”

He pointed beyond the crowd to where a figure was seen hurrying down the path, rapidly disappearing amidst the pines.

But almost as his words were uttered, Valter dashed in pursuit, and the crowd parted right and left as Deane, throbbing with fictitious strength, followed in pursuit of his enemy.

For a few moments no one stirred. Then a thrill ran through the crowd, and the men rushed

down the road to find that pursuers and pursued had left the main track and had turned off to the right, where the narrow path led down a steep zig-zag to the bridge across the falls.

“He’s making for the mountains,” cried one of the guides. “Valter will soon have him there.”

Suddenly came the sharp, clear crack of a revolver, and those who followed saw Anderson standing in the middle of the bridge, with the smoke rising above his head. Valter, who had seized him, was staggering onward blindly, bent of head, with arms extended toward the other side, where he dropped upon his knees as Deane reached the bridge and rushed at the man in the centre.

In another moment Deane would have had him by the throat; but there was a flash and a puff of smoke, twice repeated, and the half-paralyzed descending group saw Deane fall heavily against the rail, while Anderson turned to make for the mountain path on the other side.

But he had not reckoned upon the guide. Valter had risen from his knees on the farther rocks, and staggered back to the bridge, to try once more to seize his would-be murderer.

It was almost momentary—that battle of a strong, wiry man with two whom he had disabled by shots. Those who were descending saw Deane rise again to make another attempt at capture, just as, drawing himself back to give impulse to the blow, Anderson struck out savagely at Valter, and they closed. There was a brief struggle, and

both went down—Valter to lie immovable, with his head over the upper side, Anderson to fall with a crash against the stout railings, one of which gave way. The next instant he was over the side, clinging to the edge, shrieking wildly for help, as he hung suspended over the horrible chasm.

His cry was not in vain.

Deane struggled forward, as he lay upon his breast, and caught Anderson's wrists in a clasp of iron just as the cramped fingers were giving way.

"Help! help!" cried Deane hoarsely. He was being slowly drawn from the plank bridge as he gazed wildly into the distorted face of the man he sought to save!

"Hold on a moment," shouted the first guide who reached them; and he checked Deane's onward progress to destruction by flinging himself across his body, and clasping the boards on either side. "Now," he shouted, "one of you reach down and get hold of his wrists," and as he shouted his order the man who followed tried to obey. He reached down to the full stretch of his arms, being fascinated the while by the terrible countenance below.

"Now, quick!—can you reach? Got him?"

"Ah!"

That cry was uttered in despair, for Anderson's wrists were just beyond the guide's reach. He could not strain over to the extent that Deane was drawn, and the blood that trickled from a bullet-wound in the young man's arm had made one

wrist slip from his fast-failing hold. Anderson swung round, hanging by one arm. He made a desperate clutch to reach the bridge.

It was his last effort. Deane's grasp was vain; his enemy's wrist was jerked from his failing fingers, and the two guides saw the unfortunate man disappear in the foam of the falling waters. He was gone!

"Back, and run down the valley!" cried the Colonel, who had now reached the scene. "You will find him as he is swept along."

"The English Herr does not understand our falls," said the first guide, rising and looking down, white-faced, and as if fascinated, into the terrible gulf. "No man who goes down there is ever found again. Now, lads, help these two to the hotel. Both shot. Will it kill them?" he asked in a whisper of the Colonel, who was down upon his knees eagerly examining the wounds.

"No," he said; "a man does not die of a bullet through the arm, nor yet from one which passes round outside the ribs."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE Colonel was right; but matters were worse than he thought. He had Adam Deane carried up to the *chalet*, instead of to the hotel. The effect of the bullet wound, supervening upon the shock and sufferings he had passed through, utterly prostrated the young man, and he lay for long hovering on the brink of death.

But it is almost impossible for a young man to die when an angel is continually by his pillow bidding him stay—as Hester Denton did, making no scruple, now that he was weak and helpless, of telling him of her love and of how had he died she would have died too.

Deane suffered severely, but he seemed in no hurry to get well. Valter had been for a long climb with Frant, only carrying his arm in a sling, weeks before Deane had grown strong enough to take what the Colonel called an honest walk.

“I look upon you, Adam Deane,” he said one day, when he was smoking a cigar by the sick man’s bedside, “as one of the most contemptible humbugs under the sun.”

“You are hard upon me, sir.”

“Not half so hard as you deserve, sir. You begin by saving our lives; then you steal my child’s

heart, like the miserable thief that you are; then you go and get yourself thrown down a crevasse, and have your best friend arrested for your murder; and lastly, when you turn up alive, you try to get yourself killed! And because, out of weak sympathy, I have you brought up here to be nursed, do you try to get well? Not a bit of it. You do all you can to get off into the other world. I don't believe you want to get better."

"You are quite right, sir," said Deane, frankly. "I do not."

"I knew it."

"I have been too happy as I am."

"God bless you, my boy!" cried the Colonel, warmly pressing his hand; "but you must get well. I suppose you'll be wanting to get married one of these days. But you never told me about your adventures in that crevasse!"

"There is little to tell. I was carried by the torrent to a mass of rock in the great ice tunnel, to lie there for what seemed to be weeks. To get back against the stream was impossible; to go down with it was possible enough; but for days I dared not attempt it. While a drop of brandy or the smallest scrap of tobacco or cigar remained, I could not stir! Think of what it meant: trying to move along in the black darkness, expecting each moment to be carried off one's feet and whirled into some lower water-course where air would fail me, and where I might be wedged into some cleft and drowned. I dared not try. It would have been bad enough if I had been sure

that the tunnel extended straight to the ice grotto; but it was almost madness to hope that it would be direct. Even now I do not know what falls and cavities may have been in its course."

"But you waded down it?"

"I waded a little way down in the black darkness, after I had grown so weak that I knew to stay was to die. Then I was swept from my feet by the terrible torrent; and the rest is like a dream. I found myself, cut, bruised and nearly suffocated, being swept along in the broad sunshine, to struggle down to you as you know."

"And have you told Hester all this?"

"No; she has never pressed me to speak. I must tell her some day, though of course she knows nearly all."

"Yes. You talked enough in your delirium to give us a pretty good idea of how it all happened. Well, I'm glad the wretch did not live to be hanged. But there, let's talk about something else. Humph! cigar's out. I say, young man; I told you I should ask you for that cigar-case back. Give it to me and you shall have another."

Deane pointed out where Hester had placed the case. The Colonel took it, drew out a penknife, and slit the water-stained leather to draw out a couple of blurred letters.

"There," he said, as Deane lay back wondering; "those were Master Anderson's aim as well as Hester. He couldn't have thought that, in pushing you down that crevasse, he was destroying letters for which he was to receive a thousand pounds."

"But are you sure of all this?" said Deane, after the Colonel had made him acquainted with the facts of the case.

"Sure? Yes. There is no suspicion this time. The authorities requested me, as an Englishman who had known him, to take a list of Anderson's possessions, to examine his papers, and to help them report to his friends. One letter was from Lord Desborough, telling him that if these letters were not obtained within a month he should draw back from his bargain and offer the reward to some one else."

"Then is it true?"

"Yes, as true as that I have communicated with his lordship, and told him how fate played into my hands—how I have read his letter and how his wretched tool behaved out here. In my last letter I called upon him to communicate with the sweet lady whose cause, for her father's sake, I espoused. Yesterday I heard from her, asking for her letters back, and by the same post I received a newspaper containing a paragraph which announces the approaching marriage between Lord Desborough and my Indian Princess. Ah, here's my other princess. Well, Hetty, this fellow's better."

"Papa!"

"Yes, my dear; it's all sham now, and I'm going to turn him adrift."

"You're not, dear," cried Hester, flinging her arms about his neck.

"Ah, you'll see. Hullo, who's this?"

"Aunt, dear; she has been for a walk."

"With that mountain maniac, of course," cried the Colonel, rising and going to the window, while Hester laid her hand upon her invalid's brow, to have it removed directly to his lips.

"Hullo, murderer!" cried the Colonel.

"Morning, sir. Ready for a climb?"

"No, I'm not. Here you, Ecclesia—you must go back to England."

"John! How can you?"

"Yes. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, going gadding about with that boy. You are old enough to know better."

"Really, John, I— Come in, Mr. Frant, it is really dis——"

They did not hear the rest, for Aunt Ecclsia hurried indoors, and the Colonel came away from the window chuckling.

"Poor Ecclesia! How she does hate to be teased."

"And how you love to tease her, papa!"

"Well, yes, I do, my dear; but I suppose I am not to have the chance much longer. I say, I did not tell you, Deane, that I saw that chief of police yesterday. He was full of apologies to Frant about the arrest, and I must say he behaved very well after the truth came out. I mean about the legal business, and the setting of him free."

"Aleck told me he did," replied Deane.

"Humph! Well, I want a fresh cigar," said the Colonel, looking from one to the other, half-

pleased, half-regretfully. "I shall go down yonder and send Valter up to valet you. You must get up."

"Ready, sir. I——" began Deane; and Hester darted a reproachful glance at her father.

"Now, no nonsense; the day's lovely. I shall tell the fellows to bring a *chaise-à-porteurs* up to the door in half an hour, and you shall go out in the fresh air. It will do you no end of good. I declare it has made me feel quite young."

"Yes, papa, you are wonderfully better."

"But I shall be bad again when you take flight, puss. There, I know I'll be in the fashion. You people are going to be married. Hang me, if I don't have a wife too."

Hester laughed, for she knew him by heart; and when early in the next spring there was a double marriage at the English church at Berne, and the old Colonel gave away daughter and step-sister, he did not keep his word; neither did any one hang him. He hung himself, and frequently, upon his daughter's neck.

It was about six months after that wedding that Aleck Frant came, with his girlish-looking wife, to stay with the Deanes. After dinner, in the course of their chat over a cigar, Frant said to his host:

"Had a letter last week from Valter, to thank me for my congratulations on his marriage. Hopes to see us both again for a good climb."

"Hah!" ejaculated Deane. "Poor old Valter! He was a good fellow, Aleck."

"*Is* a good fellow—*is*. What do you say to another trip to hunt for the myth?"

"For what?"

"The gold mine."

"There is no need—I found it. 'Adam's myth' proved to be a great and solemn truth."

"I don't quite——" began Frant.

"I found the gold mine, my dear boy—the oldest, purest there is: the love of a true woman—gold that is without alloy."

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