

out the bright light of the day. Her loosened hair framed the round face of a pleasant girl of the Vosges, whose only beauty was her youth, the soft color in her cheeks, and the gentle light of her brown eyes, which was always the same. She knew that she was loved. She was accustomed to the affection that had been hers for as long as she could remember. Among many suitors for her hand, she had chosen the gamekeeper of a rich iron merchant at Strasbourg, one of the rare, pure-blooded Alsations, authorised by the administration for the guardianship of private properties situated on the border line and infested with the tramps and poachers of the north of the empire.

It required much courage for the young woman to accept the long winter spent on the summit of the mountain, high above the pines and the beech trees, and with no neighbors, but the clouds, the snow, and the wind. More than one peasant's daughter in her place would have regretted the valley, and been at times ill-tempered. But she had never complained of anything. And this had given her a singular authority over her husband.

Against this habit the latter, however, hesitated to obey her wish. Seated at the foot of the bed in a low chair, he looked at his wife, and now through the window out across the clearing, white and drifted with snow, to where the dark line of the pine trees distinguished the heavens from the earth. Supple and broad-shouldered, his skin deeply tanned and his blue eyes deeply set in his head, there was no look of youth about the gamekeeper's face save in its strong endurance.

'If we were not so poor,' he said, 'I would have a little sled.'

'What for?'

'To carry the little one in, Rosalie; how do you think I can carry him? I do not know how, as you do, to hold him in one arm, and besides the snow is so deep now that—'

'Such a big man to be worried for so little!' laughed the wife. 'Put him in your game-basket, Louis Schmidt, it is plenty deep; he will sleep there as soundly as if he were in his cradle, and the cold will never touch him. If he wakes up and cries, give him the bottle of milk which I will put in the bottom of the basket.'

The guard consented, and took down the heavy bag of deerskin hanging on the wall and which he used to carry the provisions of bread and dried vegetables from the valley to the cabin on the mountain top.

A quarter of an hour later he closed the door of the lonely house and took the first step in the clearing. The snow was soft and fine, and covered the whole landscape, even to the other mountains across the Rhine, which Louis could faintly distinguish in the distance.

He tested the trail with his ironshod staff; on his right shoulder was strapped the bulky, warm bag which was sometimes moved with a motion all its own.

Pushing his way through the border of pines, the mountaineer had first to get over a declivity of sharp brittle, treacherous stones, where the path wound like a fine-toothed saw. The guard knew the multiple dangers of this passage, where the night wind had piled and drifted the snow. But he started resolutely, thinking only of the return, when it would be still more difficult. He had not gone thirty steps when both feet flew from under him. He uttered an appealing cry which echoed heavily against the snow-covered rocks. Instinctively he reached up and drew the game-basket down upon his breast, and, folding both arms across it, he felt himself suddenly plunged into an icy, moving darkness, precipitated with it, heaved up and stifled with it, helpless to fight it away, while his ears filled with the uproar and hurt him cruelly, as if he had been the clapper of an engulfed bell and was continuing to toll throughout its course into the deep abyss.

His clearness of mind and his quick wit were marvellous in these duels with death. Not only did he understand the peril and analyse it in its three elements of cold, darkness, and furious speed, but he further saw with all the details of the low, warm room, the image of Rosalie, lying pale in bed and waiting for the return of her son from his Baptism; he could see all the

houses of the village in the valley; the faces of his mother and father, the companions of his boyhood, and even a red cock which he had once longed to possess, and whose clarion cry he could hear in the midst of his anguish. Then, suddenly, he was out in the blessed air again, bruised and aching, his legs torn in ten places by the sharp stones. Happily, the leather bag, which he had protected with his arms, was safe and its treasure also; only the bottle of milk had escaped from its moorings and went rolling down the mountain side, followed by a cloud of snow.

'Well,' little one, that was not so bad for a beginning,' said the father. 'Don't cry; it was only a white blanket that fell on our back.'

He picked himself up, painfully, and started through the beech forest, carrying the baby, who had not even awakened. Progress was slow work, however, and more than two hours passed before he could distinguish through the mist the old man Traquet's farm. It was the first farm between the mountain and the valley, close on the border line, and therefore hospitable to smugglers.

Weariness, cold, and desire to dry his garments by the heat of the stove decided Schmidt to enter, regardless of whom he might meet. He climbed the three steps, made of three logs of wood, and knocked at the door.

The hostess who opened was a strong, tender-hearted Alsatian woman, and, much to Schmidt's astonishment, she stood cautiously in the doorway and demanded in a whisper:

'What do you want, Louis? And how did you get into such a condition? Speak very low.'

The guard explained why he had come down from the mountain, and what had occurred on the way.

Then she said quickly, half serious and half jesting:

'Just think! Gottfried Barth has been here for nearly two hours. He is more than two-thirds drunk, and I cannot get him away. There is nothing he would like better than to be the godfather of your son! Just the same you had better come in, if you really can't go any further.'

She stood aside, and Schmidt could see in the corner of the wide hall a man clothed in the gray and green uniform of the German foresters. Without speaking, he made a sign to the woman that he would remain outside, and, drinking a glass of brandy which she brought him, he started once more into the snow.

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When at length he presented himself at the parish house of the village, he was so exhausted that he fainted and lay like a log for two hours.

Coming to himself, the guard-keeper, Louis Schmidt, had a second astonishment. From the little group of houses with the pointed roofs came the people, Alsations of every age, the poorer hunters as well as the important members of the village, who wore thick coats with silver buttons. They all crossed the street to the church door where the sexton was awaiting with a candle in his hand: near at hand in the warm kitchen where the guard had just sufficient strength to enter and throw himself down, the cure's servant, a withered, ageless woman, dried up like a nut, was proudly holding in her arms the baby boy, who never in his short life had been dressed so richly as then; white robe, white shoes, and a white ruffled bonnet, a whole baptismal outfit loaned by one of the richer families of the village. Relatives and friends had gathered round, and dressed in their Sunday costumes, the girls with black bows in their hair, twice as large as their heads. The good cure grasped the gamekeeper's hand: he was smiling with pleasure, and on his round face was written a childish content at another's surprise.

'Listen,' he cried, 'isn't that fine music?'

The church bells were ringing a joyous peal such as only the rich could have rung for their children, so alive with sound, now soaring high into the heavens, now sinking softly to the earth, so bright and so happy that the swallows, doubtless thinking that Easter had come, began to twitter and call in the chimneys, and along the edges of the roof.