

The stranger took his three little trees in his arms and stuffed into his pockets the boxes of candles and baubles. Then saying "Thank you, and good Christabend, Frau Schaun," he went out into the thick snow.

His big feet made hardly any sound on the muffled pavements any more than if he had been walking on carpet.

"Frau Schaun," thought that lady; "he knows what my name is. What's his, I wonder."

"Hans," she called out, "come out here." Hans, in the stuffy little parlor (more like a counting house, that smelt like warm second-hand clothing) was seasonably employed in compiling Christmas bills, partly by the aid of a well-thumbed scales-book, and partly by sheer force of imagination and bold surmise.

"Why?" queried Mr. Schaun, not eager to quit the cosy airlessness of the parlor for the draughty shop.

"Because I want thee to come and look at a man who," she concluded with alluring hyperbole, "has just bought all the shop."

Thus seduced Schaun lumbered up and joined his wife.

"Where is he?" he demanded with a disappointed glance round the remaining stock, which was much less reduced than he had been led to hope.

"There: look at him. Do we know him? He called me Frau Schaun."

"Customers don't generally call thee Lisa. I don't know him. He's like no one I know except the pump."

Earlier in the week Schaun had swathed the pump in far from "tailor-made" habiliments of straw. Meanwhile the man like the pump was passing up the street. A broad street of houses so low as to make it look broader than it was.

Friedrich Günther risen from his knees, was, as an act of reparation for his previous refusal, setting three candles among the plants in his window. By the time the stranger had reached Günther's house the candles were well alight. "One for each tree," he told himself. She hasn't forgotten her promise," he added with a sharp realization of the many, many times she must have lighted her candle with a quickening sense of its inutility. But perhaps not. He did not know any definite bad news of him had come home.

He drew near the window and peered in—how well he knew that room!

The elder Fritz had drawn back from the window and was standing by the table in the middle of the floor.

"There, I have done what thou didst ask," he muttered, turning to his wife, behind whose back all the bright light of the fire was shining.

"Yes, dear man: I thank thee," she was saying. Then, with sudden start more like terror than joy or hope, she gasped out

"Herr Je'!"

That exclamation, so often used profanely enough came from her lips as something midway between a prayer and a cry of ineffable terrified aspiration. Her eyelids closed—she was afraid to go on looking.

"What is it?" Friedrich demanded, sharply

turning from her to glance whither she had been staring.

Above the plants, a face was almost pressed against the window-panes. Above the face was a snow-piled cap.

"No!" shouted Friedrich. "It cannot be! Dear God, it is and to mock." Maria's eyes opened again: her lips were trembling exceedingly. Her face was ghastly white—almost gray. She fell forward in a heap at her husband's feet: she had never fainted in her life before and it seemed to her and to him like death. But it was the best thing, I daresay, she could have done.

When her consciousness returned it was not her husband only who was leaning over her, with a small cup of potato-brandy in his hand. Fritzchen, the young Fritzchen, was supporting her head, and chafing her forehead, her hands with the brandy. A big puddle of melted snow from his clothing lay all around them both. Three little fir-trees stood round it, as if it had been a little lake in a little forest: little tapers of various colors kept dropping from one of his pockets. "Are they good for swooned persons?" the elder Fritz inquired as one of them plumped down on his wife's nose. It was the only joke he had ever attempted since the second year of his marriage—the attempt proved how over-wrought he must be.

His son was stooping down in a fruitless effort to kiss his mother without shaking snow all over her.

"That is," the lad answered, succeeding.

It gave him a queer feeling when, later on, he read the English priest's letter about his own Christian end.

"Eh," he said, "how I remember that afternoon! I thought I was dying: I was sure of it. I hadn't much consciousness when I saw him come in picking his way across the floor that was covered with us—there were no beds and we lay in our stretchers as they had brought us. All were badly wounded, but only eleven of us in my state. It felt very cold—we hadn't eaten since before the battle: though they had covered us with plenty of blankets. I didn't notice that he was a priest, for he was not wearing the cassock. But presently I heard him reading Latin—over the little fellow lying next me: a boy almost, with a funny face and very black hair. The priest was giving him Extreme Unction: I heard the lad say 'My feet also,' and saw him straining to get his boots off. Then the priest gave him the Blessed Sacrament and I said 'I am a Catholic, too,' and he turned round to me. 'I can't talk German,' he said, in what he evidently thought was German; 'but,' he said, 'I can understand enough to hear your Confession—I think.' So I made my Confession; then he asked if I had any prayer-book—we all had one. And he read the prayers for the dying out of it, and the long words nearly killed him. He gave a sort of gasp when he saw one coming: and tumbled over it, as if he had been tumbling over a chair in the dark. All the same he did his best, and he was like a father in that strange place. He stayed a long time, and when he left me, said he would come

back in the morning—that was after he had given me the Blessed Sacrament and read all the prayers. I said I should be dead before morning. One of his tears fell on my face and I know he was kind, though English. He went away as if he wanted to stop—only he saw I was scarcely conscious. I had had to hold on to myself to do it all. He told me I had better sleep, but I said 'When I do it will be for ever.' I had told him about you, and how my mother would at that hour be lighting the candle in our window for me to see if I came home—it was then I felt his tear on my cheek—I liked it because it was hot, and everything else was so cold. He said God's Mother would pray for mine—her Son had come back to her. Yours, Mutterchen, would never, I knew, come back to her. I suppose I was asleep when he went away: I knew no more till early in the morning. I saw the little dark fellow by his side, dead, with his eyes open, and a sort of laugh on his lips. He was holding my prayer-book—he had told me before that he had lost his. A sergeant was taking down the name and regiment written at the beginning of it, and I tried to explain that was my name and my book: but I could not: the man could not understand me—of course he did not understand German, and I couldn't speak at all clearly or move either of my hands to make a sign. Presently they carried out the little black-headed lad, and I knew where he was going. They carried me away too, but only to another place where there were doctors—I hadn't seen them since before the priest came on the afternoon before. One seemed to think it was no use doing anything more, but the others insisted and they did an operation. I recovered in another place, and felt much better—in less horrible pain, and able to breathe, and they gave me hot soup with brandy in it, I think, and I felt better still. Presently—I don't know how long after, for I was always falling asleep, I recovered again and I was in an ambulance, and it took me (and some others) to a hospital train. We went to England—they (our own people) had said that was England, and that we couldn't go to London because it had been destroyed. I was terribly ill for some time, and had another operation. The doctors were kind and so were the nurses, though some of the nurses looked as if they did not like us—us Germans I mean. One patient in a bed next mine had been a waiter and he could talk a little German—such German! I asked him to write a letter for me, but he said he couldn't do that—German prisoners' letters must go through the Commanding Officer. I don't think he could write a German letter, and my hands were bound up in splints till long after that. At last when I could write I made a letter, and I threw it out of a window in the wash-place. I didn't know what else to do, and just hoped someone would pick it up and post it. Perhaps someone did, but they had regulations like ours about letters, and a letter to Germany would not have much chance of going through—at all events, not for a long time. You may get it still. I was wounded on the 18th of October early in the morning. On the 8th of December a lady came who talked

H. Glover

Reinforced Concrete Walls, Granite and Marble Kerbs. All kinds executed. MONUMENTAL SCULPTOR. 50 KENT TERRACE.

of Cemetery work Telephone 3241.

Wellington