

The Citizen's Watch

By Unknown

I

The day before the Christmas of 1832, my friend Wilfred with his counter-bass slung behind him, and I with my violin under my arm, set out from the Black Forest to Heidelberg. There had been a deep fall of snow, so that looking over the wide expanse of deserted country we could discover no trace of the way along which we should go, no road, no path. The bitter wind whistled around with monotonous perseverance, and Wilfred, with his knapsack upon his meagre shoulders, his long legs wide-stretched, the peak of his hat drawn down over his nose, marched on in front of me humming a merry tune from Ondine. Once he looked round with a strange smile, and said—‘Comrade, play me the Robin waltz. I should like to dance.’

A laugh followed these words, and the brave fellow again continued his way. I trod in his steps, the snow being nearly up to our knees, and as I went on I found myself becoming by degrees very melancholy.

At length the steeples of Heidelberg peeped up in the distance, and we began to hope that we should arrive there before nightfall. As we pressed on we heard the galloping of a horse behind us. It was about five o'clock in the evening, and big flakes of snow were floating down in the gray light. When the horseman came near to us he pulled in his steed, looking at us out of the corner of his eye. For our part we also looked at him.

Picture to yourself a strongly built man with red whiskers and hair, wearing a fine three-cornered hat, in a brown riding-cloak, and a loose fox-skin pelisse, his bands thrust into furred gloves reaching up to his elbows—an alderman or burgomaster with portly stomach, with a fine valise strapped on the croup of his powerful thick-set horse. Truly a character.

‘Hullo, my friends,’ said he, disengaging one of his hands from the mittens which hung to his trunk-hose, ‘you are going to Heidelberg to play, I suppose.’

Wilfred looked at the stranger, and said shortly—

‘What is that to you?’

‘Ah, certainly. I have some good advice to give you.’

‘Good advice!’

‘Yes. If you want it.’

Wilfred took long strides without making any reply, and I, stealing a sidelong glance, thought that the stranger looked just like a great cat, his ears standing up, his eyelids half closed, his moustache bristling, and his air tender and paternal.

‘My dear friend,’ said he to me, frankly, ‘you would do best to return by the way you have come.’

‘Why, sir?’

‘The illustrious Master Pimenti of Novara is about to give a grand Christmas concert at Heidelberg; all the town will be there, you will not take a kreutzer.’

Wilfred, looking round in a bad temper, said—

‘We laugh at your Master Pimenti and all his like. Look at that young man; look at him well. You see he has not yet got a single hair on his chin he has only played in the little cabins in the Black Forest for the *bouengredel* and the charcoal-burners to dance. Well, this little fellow, with

his long fair hair and his big blue eyes, defies all your Italian impostors. His left hand holds in it melodious treasures—treasures of grace and suppleness. His right hand is gifted with the most wonderful command over the fiddlestick, that heaven in its most bounteous mood ever bestowed on man.'

'Ah, au,' said the other. 'Is that so?'

'It is as I tell you,' cried Wilfred, setting off at his full speed, and blowing on his red fingers.

I thought he was only making fun of the stranger, who kept lip with us at a gentle trot.

So we went on for about half a league in silence. All of a sudden the stranger said to us, sharply—'Whatever may be your ability, go back again to the Black Forest. We have enough vagabonds at Heidelberg without your coming to increase the number. I give you good advice, especially under the present circumstances. Take it.'

Wilfred was about to make a sharp reply, but the stranger, putting his horse to the gallop, was already going down the Elector's Avenue. As he rode on, a company of ravens flew over the plain, seeming as if they were accompanying him, and filling the air with their clamour.

We came to Heidelberg at seven o'clock, and we there found on every wall the big placards of Pimenti.

The same evening while visiting the taverns we met many musicians from the Black Forest—old comrades, who invited us to join them. There was old Bruner, the violoncellist; his two sons, Ludwig and Karl, two good second violins; Henry Siebel, the clarinet player; the famous Bertha, with her harp; lastly, Wilfred, with his counter-bass, and myself as first violin.

It was resolved that we should go together, and that after Christmas we should share like brothers. Wilfred had already taken for us two a room on the sixth floor of a little inn called the Pied-de-Mouton, in the middle of the Holdergrasse, for four kreutzers a night. It was in truth nothing more than a garret, but luckily there was an iron stove in it, and so we lighted a fire there in order to dry our clothes.

While we were sitting down enjoying ourselves eating chestnuts and drinking a flask of wine, behold Annette, the servant, in a little red petticoat, hat of black velvet, her cheeks red, her lips rosy as cherries—Annette comes creeping up the stair, knocks at the door, enters, and throws herself into my arms overjoyed.

I had known the dear girl for a long time, for we came from the same village, and I may tell you that her bright eyes and her pretty ways had completely captivated me.

'I have come to talk with you for a minute,' said she, sitting down upon a stool. 'I saw you come an hour ago, and so here I am'

Then she commenced to chatter, asking me news about this person and that, till she had asked after all the village, hardly giving me time to reply to her. At length she stopped and looked at me with her sweet expression. We should have sat there till morning if Mother Gredel Dick had not commenced to call out at the foot of the stairs—

'Annette! Annette! Where are you?'

'I am coming, I am coming,' cried the poor child, jumping up.

She gave me a little tap on the cheek and ran to the door, but before going she stopped.

'Ah,' she cried, coming back again, 'I forgot to tell you. Do you know of it?'

'Of what?'

'Of the death of our pro-rector, Zâhn?'

'Well, what is that to us?'

'Oh, take care, take care, if your papers are not in order. They will be here to-morrow at eight o'clock, to see them. They have been stopping every one, all the world, during the last five days.'

The pro-rector was murdered in the library of St. Christopher's cloister yesterday evening. Last week some one murdered, in a like manner, the old sacristan, Ulmet Elias, of the Rue des Juifs. Some days before, some one killed the old wise woman Christina Haas, and the agate merchant, Sehigmann, of the Rue Durlach. Do look well after yourself, my poor Kaspar,' said she tenderly, 'and see that your papers are all right.'

While she was speaking the voice on the stairs kept on crying—

'Annette, Annette, are you coming? Ah, the baggage! to leave me all alone.'

We could also hear the voices of the drinkers as they called for wine, for beer, for ham, for sausages. It was necessary she should go, and Annette ran away as she had come, and we heard her sweet voice—'Heavens, madam, why do you call so? One would think that the house was on fire!'

Wilfred shut the door, and having sat down again, we looked at one another with some uneasiness.

'That is strange news,' said he. 'Are your papers all right?'

'No doubt they are,' and I handed mine to him.

'Good! Mine are there. I had them looked over before I left. For all that, these murders may be unpleasant for us. I am afraid we shall do no good here, so many families will be in mourning, and, besides, the distraction of the others, the worrying vigilance of the police, the disturbance—'

'Nonsense,' said I. 'You see only the dark side of things.'

We continued to talk of these strange events till it was past midnight. The fire in our little stove lit up every cranny in the roof, the square window with its three cracked panes, the straw mattress spread out near the eaves where the sloping roof met the floor, the black cross beams, and threw a dancing shadow of the little fir table on the worm-eaten floor. From time to time a mouse, attracted by the warmth, would dart like an arrow along the floor. We heard the wind moaning in the high chimneys, and sweeping the powdered snow off the roofs. I thought of Annette. All was silence.

All of a sudden Wilfred, taking off his waistcoat, said—

'It is time we went to sleep. Let us put some wood on the fire and go to bed!'

'Yes. It is the best thing we can do.'

Saying so, I took off my boots, and in a couple of minutes we were on the pallet, the coverlet drawn up to our chins, a piece of wood under our heads for a pillow. Wilfred was quickly asleep. The light from the stove came and went. The wind grew fiercer, and I at length slept, in my turn, like one of the blessed.

Towards two o'clock in the morning I was roused by a strange noise. I thought at first that it must be a cat upon the roof, but, placing my ear against the rafters, I was not long in uncertainty. Some one was passing over the roof. I nudged Wilfred with my elbow to wake him.

'Be quiet,' said he, taking my hand. He had heard the noise as well as I. The fire threw around its last gleams, which flickered on the old walls. I was about to get up, when, with one blow of a stone, the fastening of the little window was broken and the casement was thrown open. A white face, with red whiskers, gleaming eyes, and twitching cheeks, appeared, and looked into the room. Our terror was such that we could not even cry out. The man put one leg and then another through the window, and at last jumped into the loft, so lightly, however, that his footsteps made not a sound.

This man, round-shouldered, short, thick-set, his face distorted like that of a tiger on the spring, was no other than the good-natured fellow who had given us advice on our road to Heidelberg. But how changed he was! In spite of the terrible cold he was in his shirt sleeves, he had on a

plain pair of breeches. His stockings were of wool, and in his shoes were silver buckles. A long knife, stained with blood, glistened in his hand.

Wilfred and I thought we were lost. He did not seem, however, to see us as we lay in the shadow of the garret, although the flame of the fire was rekindled by the cold air which came in at the window. The man sat down on a stool, and shivered in a strange manner. Suddenly his green yellowish eyes rested on me. His nostrils dilated. He looked towards me for a minute. I had not a drop of blood in my veins. Then he turned away towards the fire, coughed huskily, like a cat, not a muscle of his face moving. At length he took out of his trousers pocket a large watch looked at it like one seeking the time, and either not knowing what he was doing or designedly, laid the watch upon the table. Then he rose as if uncertain what to do, looked at the window, appeared to hesitate, and went out at the door, leaving it wide open.

I rose to bolt the door, and I could hear the steps of the man as he went down two flights of stairs. A great curiosity overcame my fear, and when I heard him open a window looking into the yard, I turned to an opening in a little turret on the stairs which looked out on the same side. The yard, from this height, looked like a well. A wall fifteen or sixteen feet high divided it in two. To the right of this wall was the yard of a pork-butcher; on the left was that of the inn, the Pied-de-Mouton. It was covered with damp moss and such vegetation as grows in dark corners. The top of the wall could be reached from the window which the man had opened, and from there the wall ran straight on till it reached the roof of a big solemn-looking building at the back of the Bergstrasse. As the moon shone between big snow-clouds, I saw all this in an instant, and I trembled as my eye fell upon the man on the wall, his head bent down, his long knife in his hand, while the wind sighed mournfully around.

He reached the roof in front, and disappeared in at a window.

I thought I was dreaming. For some moments I stood there, my mouth open, my breast bare, my hair flying, the rime from off the roof falling about my head. At last, recovering myself, I went back to our garret, where I found Wilfred haggard-looking and murmuring a prayer in a low voice. I hastened to put some wood in the stove, and to bolt the door.

‘Well?’ asked my friend, rising.

‘Well,’ said I, ‘we have escaped. If that man did not see us it is because heaven did not will our death.’

‘Yes,’ said he. ‘Yes. It was one of the murderers whom Annette spoke about. Good heavens! What a figure, and what a knife!’

He fell back upon the bed. I drained the wine that remained in the flask, and as the fire burnt up and the heat spread itself through the room, and since the bolt on the door seemed strong enough, I took fresh courage.

But the watch was there, and the man might come back for it. The idea made us cold with fear.

‘What had we better do?’ asked Wilfred. ‘It seems to me that our best way would be to go back as quickly as we can to the Black Forest.’

‘Why?’

‘I do not much care now for double bass. Do as you wish.’

‘But why should we return? What necessity is there for us to leave? We have committed no crime.’

‘Hush, hush,’ said he. ‘That simple word “crime” would suffice to hang us if any one heard us talking. Poor devils like us are made examples of for the benefit of others. People don’t care whether they are guilty or not. It will be enough if they find that watch here.’

‘Listen, Wilfred,’ said I. ‘It will do us no good to lose our heads. I certainly believe that a crime has been committed near at hand this night. Yes, I believe it, it is most probable; but in such a case, what ought an honest man to do? Instead of flying he ought to assist in discovering the guilty; he ought—’

‘And how—how can we assist?’

‘The best way will be to take the watch, give it up to the magistrate, and tell him all that has occurred.’

‘Never—never. I could not dare to touch that watch.’

‘Very well, then, I will go. Let us lie down and see if we can get some sleep.’

‘I cannot sleep.’

‘Well then let us talk. Light your pipe and let us wait for daybreak. I daresay there may be some one up in the inn. If you like, we will go down.’

‘I like to remain here better.’

‘All right.’

And we sat down beside the fire.

As soon as it was light I went to take up the watch that lay upon the table. It was a very handsome one, with two dials, the one showing the hours and the other the minutes. Wilfred seemed in better spirits.

‘Kaspar,’ said he, ‘after considering the matter over, I think it might be better for me to go to the magistrate. You are too young to manage such matters. You would not be able to explain yourself.’

‘As you wish,’ said I.

‘Yes, it might seem strange that a fellow of my age should send a lad on such an errand.’

‘All right. I understand, Wilfred.’

He took the watch, and I could see that his vanity alone urged him on. He would have blushed, no doubt, among his friends at the idea that he was less courageous than myself.

We descended from our garret wrapt in deep thought. As we went along the alley which heads to the Rue Saint Christopher, we heard the clinking of glasses and forks. I recognised the voices of old Brémer and his two sons, Ludwig and Karl.

‘Would it not be well,’ I said to ‘Wilfred, ‘before going out, to have something to drink I’

At the same time I pushed open the door of the inn. All our friends were there, the violins, the hunting-horns hung up upon the walls, the harp in a corner. We were welcomed with joyful cries, and were pressed to place ourselves at the table.

‘Ha,’ said old Brémer, ‘good luck to you, comrades. More wind! more snow! All the inns are full of folk, and every flake that falls is a form in our pockets.’

I saw Annette fresh, beaming, laughing at me with her eyes and lips. The sight did me good. The best cuts of meat were for me, and every time that she came to lay a dish on my right her sweet hand was laid upon my shoulder.

My heart bounded as I thought of the chestnuts we had eaten together. Then the ghastly figure of the murderer passed from time to time before my eyes, and made me tremble. I looked at Wilfred. He was in deep thought. As it struck eight o’clock we were about to part, when the door of the room opened and three tall fellows, with livid faces, with eyes shining like those of rats, with misshapen hats, followed by several others, appeared on the threshold. One of them, with a long nose, formed, as they say, to scent good dishes, a big baton attached to his wrist, approached, and exclaimed—

‘Your papers, gentlemen.’

Every one hastened to comply with this command. Wilfred, however, who stood beside the stove, was seized with an unfortunate fit of trembling, and when the police-officer lifted his eye from the paper in order to take a side glance at him, he discovered him in the act of slipping the watch into his boot. The officer struck his comrade on the thigh, and said to him in a joking tone—

‘Ha, it seems that we trouble this gentleman!’

At these words Wilfred, to the surprise of all, fell fainting. He sank into a chair, white as death, and Madoc, the chief of the police, coolly drew forth the watch, with a harsh laugh. When he had looked at it, however, he became grave, and turning to his followers—

‘Let no one leave,’ he cried, in a terrible voice.

‘We will take all of them. This is the watch of the citizen, Daniel van den Berg. Attention. Bring the handcuffs.’

The word made our blood run cold, and terror seized on us all. As for me, I slipt under a bench near the wall, and as the officers were engaged in securing poor old Brêmer, his sons, Henry, and Wilfred, who sobbed and entreated, I felt a little hand rest on my neck. It was the pretty hand of Annette, and I pressed it to my lips in a farewell kiss. She took hold of me by the ear, and led me gently, gently. At the bottom of the table I saw the flap of the cellar open. I slipt through it, and the flap closed above me.

All this took but a moment, while all around was in an uproar.

In my retreat I heard a great stamping, then all was still. My poor friends had gone. Mother Gredel Dick, left standing alone upon the threshold, was uttering some peacock-like cries, declaring that the Pied-dc-Mouton had lost its good fame.

I leave you to imagine what were my reflections during that day, squatted down behind a cask, cross-legged, my feet under me, thinking that if a dog should come down, or if the innkeeper should take it into her head to come to fill a flask of wine, if a cask should run out and it was necessary to tap another—that any one of these things might ruin me.

All these thoughts and a thousand others passed through my brain. In my mind’s eye I already saw old Brêmer, Wilfred, Karl, Ludwig, and Bertha hanging from a gibbet, surrounded by a crowd of ravens, who glutted themselves on them. My hair stood on end at the picture.

Annette, no less anxious than myself, in her fear took care to close the cellar-flap every time she went in and out, and I heard the old dame say to her—‘Leave that flap alone. Are you foolish, that you bother so much about it?’

So the door remained half-open, and from the deep shadow in which I was I saw fresh revellers gather around the tables. I heard their cries, their disputes, and no end of accounts of the terrible band of criminals.

‘The scoundrels!’ said one. ‘Thank heaven, they are caught. What a pest have they been to Heidelberg! One dared not walk in the streets after six o’clock. Business was interrupted. However, it is all over now. In five days everything will be put in order again.’

‘You see those musicians from the Black Forest,’ cried another, ‘are all a lot of scoundrels. They make their way into houses pretending that they come to play. They look around, examine the locks, the chests, the cupboards, the ins and outs, and some fine morning the master of the house is found in his bed with his throat cut, his wife has been murdered, his children strangled, the whole place ransacked from top to bottom, the barn burnt down or something of that kind. What wretches they are! They ought to be put to death without any mercy, and then we should have some peace.’

‘All the town will go to see them hanged,’ said Mother Gredel. ‘It will be one of the best days in my life.’

‘Do you know, if it had not been for the watch of the citizen Daniel they would never have been discovered. The watch disappeared last night, and this morning Daniel gave notice of its loss to the police. In one hour after, Madoc laid his hand on the whole gang—ha! ha! ha!’ and all the room rang with their laughter, while I trembled with shame, rage, and fear by turns.

At last night came, and only a few drinkers sat at the table. The people of the inn had been up late the night before, and I heard the fat mistress gape and say—

‘Ah, heavens! when shall we be able to go to bed?’

Only one light remained in the room.

‘Go to sleep, mistress,’ said the sweet voice of Annette. ‘I can see very well to all that is wanted until these gentlemen go.’

The toppers took the hint, and all left save one, who remained drowsily before his glass.

The watchman at length came round, looked in, woke the man up, and I heard him go out grumbling and reeling till he came to the door.

‘Now,’ said I to myself, ‘that is the last. Things have gone well. Mother Gredel will go to sleep, and little Annette will come to let me out.’

While this pleasant thought passed through my mind I stretched my cramped limbs, when I heard the old innkeeper say—

‘Annette, shut up, and do not forget to bar the door. I am going into the cellar.’

It seemed that such was her custom, in order to see all was right.

‘The cask is not empty, stammered Annette, ‘there is no necessity for you to go down.’

‘Look after your own business,’ said the old woman, and I saw the light of her candle as she began to descend.

I had only time to place myself again behind the barrel. The woman, bent down under the low roof of the cellar, went about from one cask to another, and I heard her say—

‘Ah, the jade! How she lets the wine drip from the taps! Look! look! I must teach her how to turn a tap better. Did one ever see such a thing! Did one ever see the like!’

Her light threw deep shadows on the damp wall. I drew myself closer and closer.

All of a sudden, when I was imagining that the woman’s visit was ended, I heard her sigh—a sigh so deep, so mournful, that I thought something extraordinary must have happened. I raised my head just the least bit, and what did I see I Dame Gredel Dick, her mouth open, her eyes almost out of her head, looking at the foot of the barrel behind which I lay still as a mouse. She had seen one of my feet under the woodwork on which the barrel rested, and she imagined, no doubt, that she had discovered the very chief of the assassins lying hid there in order to throttle her in the night. I at once resolved what to do. Standing up, I said to her—

‘Madam, in heaven’s name, have pity on me. I am—’

But then, without looking at me, without listening to me, she began to utter her peacock-like cries, cries to stun you, while she began to rush out of the cellar as fast as her extreme stoutness would let her. I was seized with terror, and taking hold of her dress, I threw myself on my knees. That seemed to make matters worse.

‘Help! Murder! Oh, heaven! let me go. Take my money. Oh, oh!’

It was terrible.

‘Madam,’ said I, ‘look at me. I am not what you take me for.’

Bah! she was foolish with fright. She raved, she stammered, she bawled in such a shrill voice that if she had been under the earth all the neighbourhood must have been aroused. In such a

strait, becoming angry, I pulled her back, jumped before her to the door, and shut it in her face with a noise like thunder, fastening the bolt. During the struggle her light had gone out. Dame Gredel remained in the dark, and her voice was now only heard feebly as if far off.

Exhausted, breathless, I looked at Annette, whose trouble equalled mine. We could not speak, and we listened to the cries as they died away. The poor woman had fainted.

‘Oh, Kaspar!’ said Annette then, taking my hands in hers, ‘what shall we do? Save yourself, save yourself. Some one has perhaps heard the noise. Have you killed her?’

‘Killed? Me?’

‘Ah well. Run. I will open the door.’

She drew the bolt, and I ran off down the street without so much as even waiting to thank her. How ungrateful! But I was so afraid. The danger was so near.

The sky was black. It was an abominable night, not a star to be seen, not a ray of light, and the wind, and the snow! I ran on for at least half an hour before I stopped to take breath, and then imagine how surprised I was when, on lifting up my eyes, I saw, just in front of me, the Pied-de-Mouton. In my fright I must have run round the neighbourhood; perhaps I had gone round and round. My legs felt heavy, were covered with mud, and my knees shook.

The inn, which had been deserted an hour before, was now as lively as a bee-hive. Lights gleamed from every window. No doubt the place was full of police-officers. Wretched as I was, worn out with cold and hunger, desperate, not knowing where to hide my head, I took the strangest course of all.

‘Well,’ said I, ‘one can but die after all, and one may as well be hanged as leave one’s bones in the fields on the way to the Black Forest.’ And I went into the inn to give myself up.

Besides the sour-looking fellows, in battered hats, whom I had seen in the morning, and who went and came, ferreted about, and looked everywhere, before a table sat the chief magistrate Zimmer, clothed in black, solemn, with a piercing eye, and by him was his secretary Roth, with his brown periwig, his wise look, and his great eyes big as oyster-shells. No one paid any attention to me, a circumstance which changed my resolution. I sat down in one of the corners of the room, by the great oven, in company with two or three neighbours who had come to see what was going on, and asked in a calm voice for half-a-pint of wine and for something to eat.

Annette was near ruining me.

‘Heavens,’ she cried, ‘is it possible!’

But an exclamation or two amidst such a clatter did not signify. No one noticed it. Having eaten with a good appetite, I listened to the examination of Mother Gredel, who sat in a large chair, her hair all ruffled, and her eyes still wide open with fright.

‘What age did the man appear to be?’ asked the magistrate.

‘About forty or fifty. He was a tremendous man, with black or brown whiskers, I cannot say exactly which. He had a big nose and green eyes.’

‘Was there nothing peculiar about his appearance—any blotches or wounds on his face?’

‘No. I do not remember any. He had a big mallet and pistols.’

‘Very well, and what did he say?’

‘He took hold of me by the throat. Happily I cried out so loudly that I frightened him, and then I defended myself with my nails. Ah! when one is about to be murdered, how one can defend oneself?’

‘Nothing is more natural, madam, nothing more legitimate. Write that down, M. Roth. The coolness of this good woman has been really wonderful.’

So the deposition went on.

After that they examined Annette, who simply said that she had been so frightened that she really did not notice anything.

‘That is enough,’ said the magistrate. ‘If we require further information we will come again to-morrow.’

All went away, and I asked Mother Gredel to let me have a room for the night. She had not the slightest recollection of me—so much had fear distracted her brain.

‘Annette,’ she said, ‘show the gentleman to the little green room on the third floor. For me, I cannot stand on my feet. Oh heaven! What strange things happen in this world!’

Annette, having lit a candle, led me to the room, and when we were alone together she said to me—

‘Ah Kaspar, Kaspar! I should never have believed it of you! I shall never forgive myself for having loved a robber!’

‘What, Annette,’ cried I, sitting down, despairingly, ‘you too! Ah, you have given me the last blow!’

I could have burst into tears, but she saw the wrong she had done me, and, putting her arms around me, said—‘No, no! You do not belong to them. You are too gentle for that, my dear Kaspar. But it is strange—you must have a daring spirit to come here again!’

I explained to her that I was near dying of cold outside, and that that had decided me. We remained some minutes in deep thought, and then she went off for fear Mother Gredel would be after her. When I was alone, having looked out to see that no wall ran near my window, and having examined the bolt on my door, I gave thanks to heaven for having delivered me from so many perils. Then I got into bed, and fell into a deep sleep.

II

The next morning I was up at eight o’clock. The day was dull and misty. When I drew my bed-curtains, I saw that the snow was heaped up upon the window-sill, and that the panes were all frosted. I began to think sorrowfully about my friends. Had they suffered from the cold? How would Bertha and old Brêmer get on? The thought of their trouble grieved me at my heart.

As I was thinking, a strange noise rose outside. It approached the inn, and it was not without some fear that I took my place at a window in order to see what it was.

They were bringing the band of supposed robbers to the inn, in order that they might be confronted with Mother Gredel, who was too unwell, after her terrible fright, to go out. My poor comrades came down the muddy street between two files of police-officers, followed by a crowd of lads, howling and whistling like very savages. I can even now see that picture. Poor Brêmer, handcuffed to his son Ludwig; then Karl and Wilfred together; lastly, Bertha, who came by herself, crying in a pitiable manner—

‘In heaven’s name, gentlemen, in heaven’s name, have pity on a poor innocent player on the harp! Fancy me killing, robbing! Oh, heaven, can it be!’

She wrung her hands. The others were sad, their heads bowed down, their hair hanging over their faces.

All the folk in the place congregated in the alley around the inn. The police put all strangers out of it, and shut the door, and the crowd waited eagerly without, standing in the mud, flattening noses against the window-panes.

The greatest stillness reigned in the house, and having dressed myself I opened the door of my room to listen, and to see if I could not learn how matters were going. I heard voices of men as

they went and came on the lower landings, which assured me that all the passages were guarded. My door opened on the landing just opposite to the window through which the murderer had fled. I had not before noticed it, but as I stood there, all of a sudden, I perceived that the window was open, that there was no snow upon the sill, and when I came near I saw new traces upon the wall. I shivered when I saw them. The man had been there again! Did he come every night! The cat, the polecat, the ferret, all preying animals, have their one path on which they prey. What a discovery! A mysterious light seemed to illumine my soul.

‘Ah,’ I cried, ‘if I had but a chance to point out the real murderer, my comrades would be saved.’

With my eyes I followed the tracks, which stretched out so clearly to the wall of the neighbouring house.

At that moment I heard some one putting questions. They had opened the door in order to get fresh air. I listened.

‘Do you acknowledge having taken part in the murder of the sacristan Ulmet Elias, on the twentieth of this month?’

Then followed some indistinct words.

‘Close the door, Madoc,’ said the magistrate; ‘close the door, madam is unwell.’

I heard no more.

As I leant my head upon the banister, a great conflict took place within me.

‘I am able to save my friends,’ said I. ‘God has pointed out to me the way to render them hack to their families. If I fail to do my duty I shall be their murderer,—my peace, my honour, will be for ever lost. I shall always look upon myself as the most cowardly, the vilest of mankind!’

For a long time, however, I hesitated, but all of a sudden I resolved. Going down the stairs, I went into the kitchen.

‘Have you ever seen that watch?’ asked the magistrate of Mother Gredel. ‘Remember yourself, madam.’

Without waiting for her to reply, I advanced into the room, and in a firm voice, said—

‘That watch, M. Magistrate, I myself have seen in the very hands of the murderer. I identify it. As to the man himself, I can deliver him to you, if you will listen to me.’

There was complete silence around. The police-officers looked at one another astounded. My poor comrades seemed to take courage.

‘Who are you, sir?’ asked the magistrate.

‘I am the friend of these unfortunate prisoners, and I am not ashamed to say it, for all of them, M. Magistrate, all of them, are honest folk, not one of whom is capable of committing such a crime as is laid to their charge.’

Again there was silence. Bertha began to weep. The magistrate appeared to collect himself. Then looking fixedly at me, he said—

‘Where do you say we can find the murderer?’

‘Here, here, M. Magistrate, in this very house. In order to convince you of the truth of what I say, I only beg a minute’s private conversation.’

‘Very well,’ he said, rising.

He made a sign to Madoc, the chief of the police, to follow us, and for the rest to stay behind. We went out.

I rapidly ascended the stairs and they followed me closely. On the third landing I stopped before the window and showed them the tracks of the man in the snow.

‘Those are the assassin’s traces,’ I said. ‘He comes along there each night. He went along there at two o’clock yesterday morning. He returned last night, and without doubt he will come again to-night.’

The magistrate and Madoc looked at the marks for some minutes without uttering a word.

‘And what grounds have von for saying that those are the traces of the murderer?’ asked the magistrate incredulously.

I told them all about the apparition of the man in our garret, I showed them the window from which I had seen him as he fled in the moonlight, which Wilfred had not witnessed as he had remained in bed, and I confessed to them that it was fear alone which had restrained me from telling them all this on the previous night.

‘It is strange,’ muttered the magistrate. ‘This modifies the position of the prisoners very much. But how do you account for the murderer being hidden in the cellar of the inn?’

‘That man was myself.’

And I told him all that had passed on the preceding day, from the time my comrades were arrested to the moment of my flight.

‘That is enough,’ he said.

Turning towards the chief of the police—

‘I confess, Madoc,’ said he, ‘the declarations of these musicians never appeared to me to be conclusive, they were far from satisfying me that they were guilty. Then their papers, at least those of some of them, would establish an alibi such as it would be very difficult to overcome. In the meantime, young man, notwithstanding the apparent truth of your statement, you must remain in our custody until the truth is established. Do not let him out of your sight, Madoc, and take such measures as you think fit.’

The magistrate descended the stairs very thoughtfully, and folded up his papers, without asking another question.

‘Conduct the accused back to their prison,’ said he, and throwing a contemptuous glance on the fat old innkeeper, he went away, followed by his secretary.

Madoc alone remained with two officers.

‘Madam,’ said Madoc, ‘you must be silent respecting all that has occurred. For the rest, let this young fellow have the room he had yesterday.’

Madoc’s look, and the tone in which he spoke, did not admit of reply. Mother Gredel declared she would do whatever he required, so long as he preserved her from the robbers.

‘Do not trouble yourself about robbers,’ said Madoc. ‘We shall remain here all day and all night to keep you safe. Look after your affairs without fear, and to begin with, let us have something to eat. Young man, may I have the pleasure of your company to dinner?’

My position did not admit of my declining his offer, so I accepted the invitation.

We seated ourselves before a ham and a flask of Rhine wine. Some people came in as usual, and tried to obtain information from Mother Gredel and Annette, but they took good care not to speak in our presence, and were very reserved, a matter in them which was very meritorious.

We spent the afternoon in smoking our pipes and in drinking. No one paid us any attention.

The chief of the police, in spite of his extremely upright figure, his piercing eye, his pale lips, and his great eagle nose, was not a bad fellow when he had had something to drink. He told us some tales with much happiness and fluency. He wanted to kiss Annette in the passage. At every joke of his his followers burst out in loud laughter, but as for myself, I was sad and silent.

‘Well, young man,’ said he to me, laughing, ‘cannot you forget the death of your worthy grandmother? What the deuce! We are all mortal. Empty your glass and drive off these miserable thoughts.’

The others joined in, and time passed on amidst a cloud of tobacco smoke, the clinking of glasses, and the tinkling of pewter pots.

At nine o’clock, however, when the watchman had been round, a sudden change came over the scene. Madoc rose and said—

‘Ah, then, let us see to our little business; close the door and put the shutters to. Be brisk. As for you, madam and mademoiselle, you had better go to bed.’

These three men, so abominably shabby, looked more like robbers themselves than the preservers of peace and justice. They drew out of their pockets iron bar, at the end of which was a leaden ball, and Madoc, tapping on the pocket of his riding-coat, assured himself that his pistol was there. The next minute he drew it out to put a cap under the hammer.

All this they did with the greatest calmness, and then the chief ordered me to lead them to my garret.

We went up. When we arrived there we found that Annette had taken the trouble to light a fire there. Madoc, muttering curses between his teeth, hastened to throw water over it and extinguish it. Then pointing to the pallet, he said—

‘If you have the heart, you may sleep!’

He sat down with his men at the end of the room near to the wall, and one of them blew out the light.

And I lay there praying to heaven to send the murderer to us.

After a minute or two the silence was so profound that no one could have imagined that there were three men in the room, watching, listening to the slightest noise, like hunters on the track of some timorous beast. I could not sleep, for a thousand horrible thoughts occurred to me. I listened to the clock striking one, two. Nothing happened; no one came.

At three o’clock one of the police-officers moved, and then I thought my man must have come, but all became quiet again. Then I began to think that Madoc must regard me as an impostor; to think how put out he would be, and how he would revenge himself on me the next day; how, wishing to assist my comrades, I had myself run into the toils.

When three o’clock had struck, the time seemed to me to go very quickly. I should have liked the night to have been much longer; time might afford me a loophole of escape.

As I was thinking thus for the hundredth time all of a sudden, without the least noise, the window opened, and two eyes shone in at the aperture. All was still in the garret.

‘The others have gone to sleep,’ I thought.

The face stopped there for a moment. Did he suspect something? How my heart beat! The blood ran fast through my veins, but my brow, nevertheless, was cold with fear. I could not breathe.

The face remained there for some seconds, and then he seemed suddenly to make up his mind, and glided into the garret as quietly as of old.

A terrible cry, sharp, ringing, broke the stillness.

‘Seize him!’

All the house seemed to ring with the noise of cries, of stamping feet, of husky exclamations, making me shiver with dread. The man shouted, the others panted with their struggle. Then I heard a crash which made the floor creak, the grinding of teeth, the clinking of handcuffs.

‘Light,’ cried Madoc.

When the light was in, throwing around a blue glare, I could dimly see the police-officers bent over a man in his shirt sleeves. One held him by the throat, the other knelt on his breast. Madoc held his handcuffed hands with a grip which seemed to crush the very bones. The man seemed insensible, save that one of his feet from time to time lifted itself and fell upon the floor again with a convulsive motion. His eyes were almost out of his head, and the froth was on his lips. Hardly had I lighted the candle when the police-officers exclaimed, astonished—

‘The citizen!’

All three rose, and I saw them look at one another pale with fright.

The man’s eye turned itself to Madoc. He seemed about to speak. In a little while I heard him murmur—

‘What a dream! Oh heaven! what a dream!’ Then he drew a long breath, and remained quite still.

I drew near to look on him. It was certainly he, the man who had given us good advice as we were on our way to Heidelberg. Did he know that we should be his ruin; had he some terrible presentiment? He remained perfectly still. The blood trickled from his side over the white floor, and Madoc, recovering himself, bent down beside him and tore his shirt aside from his breast. Then we saw that he had stabbed himself to the heart.

‘Ah,’ said Madoc, with a sour smile, ‘the citizen has cheated the gibbet. He did not let the opportunity slip. You others, stop here while I go and fetch the magistrate.’

He put on his hat, which had fallen off in the struggle, and went out without saying another word.

I remained in the room with the man and the two officers.

At eight o’clock the next day all Heidelberg was acquainted with the wonderful news. It was a strange event in its history. Who would have suspected Daniel van den Berg, the chief woollen-draper, a man of wealth and position, had these tastes for blood?

The affair was discussed in a thousand different styles. Some said that the rich citizen must have been a somnambulist and irresponsible for his actions—others that he murdered from a mere love of it, for he could not intend to gain anything by his crimes. Perhaps he was both a somnambulist and an assassin also. It is an incontestable fact that the moral being, the will, the soul, whatever you like to name it, does not dominate the somnambulist, but the animal nature, abandoned to itself in such a state, follows naturally the impulse of its instincts whether they be peaceful or sanguinary, and the appearance of Daniel van den Berg, his flat head bulging out behind the ears, his long bristling moustaches, his yellow eyes, all seemed to say that he belonged to the cat tribe—a terrible race, killing for the sake of killing.

However that might be, my comrades were freed. For five days Annette was famous as a model of devotedness. The son of the burgomaster, Trungott, the plague of his family, even came and asked her to marry him. As for me, I hastened to get back again to the Black Forest, where since that time I have filled the position of leader of the orchestra in the tavern of the Sabre-Vert, on the Tubingian road. If you should happen to pass that way, and if my story has interested you, look in and see me. We will have a bottle or two together, and I will tell you a story which will make your hair stand on end.