

E.WERNER

DANIRA

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Danira

I

The storm had lasted all night. Not until early dawn did the gale lessen and the towering billows of the sea begin to subside.

The steamer, which had undergone a tolerably severe conflict with wind and waves, was just running into the sheltering harbor, at whose end appeared her destined port, a picturesquely situated town, dominated by a strong citadel on a rocky height.

In the bow stood a young officer in the uniform of the Austrian Imperial Chasseurs, who, spy-glass in hand, was scanning the scene. The light fatigue cap covering his thick, fair hair, shaded a face that harmonized perfectly with his manly bearing. Every feature was grave, firm, resolute, and the clear light-brown eyes, with their quiet, searching gaze, suited the countenance. Yet one might have desired a little more life and animation; the grave, passionless repose of a face so youthful produced an almost chilling impression. A heavy step was heard on the cabin stairs, and directly after a young soldier, who wore the same uniform, approached. The steamer still rocked so much that he had some difficulty in crossing the deck to his officer, who now closed the glass and turned toward him.

"Well, George, what are the men doing?" he asked. "How are things going down below?"

"It's awful, lieutenant," was the reply. "They are still so sea-sick that they can neither hear nor see. You and I are the only ones who have kept up."

"I suppose you are very proud that we two are the only ones who have proved ourselves good sailors?" said the officer, with a flitting smile.

"I should think so," answered George. "When a man has seen nothing but mountains all his life, it's no small matter to toss about on this confounded glittering blue sea, as we have done for three days and nights. This Cattaro is surely almost at the end of the world."

He spoke in the purest Tyrolese dialect, and now stationed himself close behind the officer with a familiarity that implied some closer relation than the tie between a subaltern and his commander.

George was a handsome, sturdy fellow, with curly black hair and a fresh, sun-burnt face, in which a pair of black eyes sparkled boldly and merrily. At present, however, they were scanning with evident curiosity the goal of the journey which the steamer was now approaching.

The open sea had already disappeared, and nearer and darker towered the gigantic peaks which had been visible in the distance since early dawn. They seemed to rise from the water in every direction and bar the ship's way, but a narrow passage between the cliffs opened like a huge gloomy gate, and the whole extent of the harbor appeared before the vessel as she steered in.

The foaming, surging waves had been left outside, and the water lay almost motionless, encircled by the chain of mountains surrounding it.

The sun was already struggling with the dispersing storm-clouds; ever and anon golden shafts darted through them and danced upon the waves, and broad, shimmering rays of light gleamed through the mist, but the fog still rested in dense masses over the city, and the citadel was scarcely visible in the shadow of the clouds gathered around it.

"A magnificent view!" said the young officer in a low tone, more to himself than to his companion, but the latter assumed a very contemptuous air.

"Pshaw, they're not like our Tyrolese mountains! No forests, no streams, not a human habitation up there! This is surely the beginning of the wilderness, and if we once get in there we'll never come out alive."

He sighed so heavily that the lieutenant frowned and glanced angrily at him.

"What does this mean, George? Are you losing heart? You were no peace-maker at home. Wherever there was a brawl, George Moosbach was sure to be in it."

"Yes, that he was!" George assented with great satisfaction. "But it was only sport! Still, if we were going to fight honest Christians I should have no objection to doing it in earnest. We should at least be among our own people, and if a man were killed he would have Christian burial, but fighting these savages is no joke. I've been told that they cut off the noses of their enemies—if they have them, of course—and both ears to boot, and that's certainly a very disagreeable custom."

"Nonsense! You and your comrades have imposed upon each other by all sorts of stories, and now swear to them as is your custom."

"But Baroness von Steinach was terribly frightened when the marching orders came. She sent for me to come to the castle and made me promise never to leave your side, Herr Gerald—beg pardon, Herr Lieutenant, I meant to say."

"Oh! use the old name, we are not on duty now," replied Gerald; "respect for your lieutenant doesn't agree with the memories of our boyhood, when we were playfellows. So my mother sent for you? Yes, she is always anxious about the life of her only son, and can never accustom herself to the thought that danger is part of the soldier's trade. But there is the port in sight! Go to your comrades, they have probably nearly recovered, the water is smooth here."

"Yes, Herr Lieutenant!" replied George, drawing himself up with a military salute and marching off, while Gerald von Steinach again raised his spy-glass.

Meantime the steamer had been sighted from the shore, and its appearance caused an eager stir near the harbor. True, ships bringing troops to this distant frontier of the empire were now daily arriving; still it was an event, and a motley crowd in which, however, uniforms predominated, thronged the landing-place to greet the new arrivals.

Not far from the shore was a fine residence overlooking the bay. It was the home of the commander of the garrison, and at the window stood a young lady, gazing intently through the gradually dispersing fog at the approaching ship.

The graceful figure framed by the window looked like a picture against the dark background of the room, a picture in which everything was bright and sunny, the rosy, laughing face, the fair curling locks, the blue eyes radiant with mirth.

There was a great deal of arrogance and self-will in the charming little face, and the extremely elegant attire which, in this out-of-the-way place, displayed the very latest fashion prevailing in the capital, showed that vanity was not a total stranger to the young lady. Yet there was something bewitching in the little elfin figure that leaned so gracefully out of the window, and now turned with every sign of impatience.

"The steamer hardly moves to-day," she said, angrily. "It has been in sight for more than half an hour. It ought to have reached the landing-place long ago, and is still floating on the waves yonder. Danira, for heaven's sake, put down that book! I can't bear to see you reading so indifferently, while I am almost dying with curiosity."

The person addressed laid the book aside and glanced hastily out of the window. She was probably about the same age—neither of the girls could have been more than seventeen—but it would have been hard to find a greater contrast than the pair presented.

There was something foreign in Danira's appearance which did not seem to suit either her fashionable dress or her surroundings. Her face was dark as if burned by a scorching sun, and yet pale, for the cheeks showed scarcely a tinge of color. The luxuriant braids, blue-black in hue, seemed to yield reluctantly to the constraint of being fastened on the head; they looked as though they must fall by their own weight and float unconfined.

Her long dark lashes were usually lowered, but when raised, revealed a pair of large dark eyes, full of dewy radiance. Their expression was cold and careless, yet their depths concealed a light ardent and glowing as the rays of the Southern sun, which had evidently kissed them.

The girl's voice too had a peculiar tone, deep yet musical, and the German words, though spoken with perfect fluency, had a slight trace of the foreign air which characterized her whole appearance.

"The steamer will be here in fifteen minutes," she said. "It is coming at the usual time. Are you so impatient to see your betrothed bridegroom, Edith?"

Edith tossed her little head. "Well, what if I am! We have become almost strangers to each other. I was a child when we left home, and Gerald only came from the military school to bid us good-bye. He was a handsome fellow then—I remember him perfectly—but a little priggish, rather stupid, and possessed of a horrible talent for lecturing. But I'll cure him of that most thoroughly."

"Do you intend to 'cure' your future husband before you have ever seen him?" asked Danira, with a tinge of sarcasm. "Perhaps he isn't so yielding as your father."

Edith laughed. "Oh! Papa is sometimes stern enough to other people—yet I do as I please with him, and it will be the same with Gerald. Do you like his picture?"

She took a large photograph from the writing-table and held it toward Danira, who, with a hasty glance at it, answered in a curt, positive tone, "No."

Edith's blue eyes opened wide in amazement.

"What, you don't like this picture? This face with its handsome, regular features—"

"And eyes as cold as ice! That man has never loved, his glance says so."

"Well, he must learn then! That shall be my task. Of course I shall see little enough at first of this lieutenant, who has been sent campaigning and courting at the same time. He must go and fight your countrymen for weeks up in the mountains before he can pay proper attention to me. I hope it won't be long ere the bands of insurgents are scattered and destroyed. I shall tell Gerald that he must hasten the victory and his return on pain of my displeasure."

There was only saucy mirth in the words, nothing more, but Danira seemed to find a different meaning. Her eyes flashed, and in a voice that sounded almost cutting, she replied:

"Better tell him to take care that he does not lose up yonder all hope of return and marriage—forever!"

Edith gazed at her a few seconds, perplexed and startled, then indignantly exclaimed:

"I believe you are quite capable of wishing it. Is it possible that you still care for those savages, who have not troubled themselves about you since your childhood? Papa is perfectly right when he says you have no affection, no gratitude, in spite of all he has done for you."

A half bitter, half grieved expression hovered around Danira's lips as she heard these reproaches. "Gratitude!" she repeated, in a low tone. "You do not know how hard a duty gratitude is, when it is required."

Spite of the sharp tone there was something in the words which disarmed Edith's anger. Stealing to her companion's side, she laid her hand on her arm.

"And I?" she asked in a voice of mingled reproach and entreaty, "am I nothing to you?"

Danira looked down at the rosy blooming face, and her tone involuntarily softened.

"You are much to me, Edith. But—we do not understand each other and never shall."

"Because you are inaccessible and self-contained as a book with seven seals. I have always been a friend, a sister to you. You would never be the same to me."

The reproach must have struck home, for Danira's head drooped as if she were conscious of guilt.

"You are right," she said in a troubled tone, "it is all my fault. But you do not, cannot know—"

"What is it I don't know?" asked Edith, curiously. Danira made no reply, but passed her hand lightly over the curly head resting on her shoulder and gazed into the blue eyes, now glittering with tears. Perhaps the young girl's feelings were deeper, more earnest than she had believed.

Just at that moment they heard the signal announcing that the steamer had reached the landing. Edith started, her tears vanished as quickly as they had come, anger and reproaches were alike

forgotten and the young girl rushed to the window with the eagerness and curiosity of a child that has been promised a new toy and cannot wait for the moment of seeing it.

The scornful expression again hovered around Danira's lips. She pushed aside, with a gesture of repugnance, the photograph which still stood on the table, and, taking up her book again, turned her back to the window.

Yet the young fiancée's impatience was very excusable, for her remembrance of her betrothed husband dated from her earliest childhood. Her father, Colonel Arlow, before being transferred to the distant Dalmatian fortress, had been stationed with his regiment in the capital of Southern Tyrol, only a few hours ride from Castle Steinach, and the matrimonial plan had been arranged at that time. Gerald's father, on his death-bed, had told his son of this darling wish, and Edith had been educated expressly for him. While the young officer was preparing for his military career, his betrothed bride, who had lost her mother when very young, had grown up in the house of a father who spoiled and idolized her. Distance had hitherto prevented a meeting between the young couple, but at the outbreak of the insurrection Gerald's regiment was unexpectedly ordered to Cattaro, and thus chance ordained that his first campaign should also be a courtship.

Meantime the disembarkation had already begun, but amid the confusion of arrivals and greetings it was scarcely possible to distinguish individuals. At last, a group of officers separated from the throng and walked toward the city, and but half an hour elapsed ere the commandant entered the room with his guest.

Colonel Arlow, a fine-looking, soldierly man in the prime of life, led the young officer to his daughter, saying, in a jesting tone:

"Herr Gerald von Steinach, lieutenant in the Imperial Chasseurs, desires an introduction to you, my child. See whether you can recognize in this young warrior the features of your former playfellow. Of course, Gerald, you will not remember the child of those days; she has altered considerably in the course of the years."

The last words and the look that rested on his daughter expressed joyous paternal pride, a pride certainly justifiable. Edith was wonderfully charming at that moment.

Gerald approached her with perfect ease, and, holding out his hand, said cordially:

"How are you, Edith?" The words from his lips, with their native accent, sounded as familiar as if he had taken leave of his little *fiancée* only the day before.

Edith looked up at the tall figure, met the eyes resting gravely but kindly upon her, and suddenly lost her composure entirely. A burning blush crimsoned her face, the words of greeting died upon her lips, and she stood silent and confused, perfectly unconscious how bewitching she looked in her embarrassment.

Gerald gallantly kissed the little hand that rested in his own, but only held it a moment ere he relaxed it.

He had evidently received a pleasant impression of his young *fiancée*, but his nature was apparently incapable of deep or passionate emotion.

He now saw for the first time that another lady was standing at the back of the room, and turned with a gesture of inquiry to the colonel.

"My adopted daughter, Danira," said the latter carelessly. He seemed to consider any further introduction unnecessary, and there was even a tone of negligence in his voice.

The young officer bowed, casting a somewhat puzzled glance at the girl's sullen face. Danira returned the salute without raising her eyes.

Gerald brought messages and letters from his mother, and these afforded subjects for a conversation which soon became extremely animated, and in a few moments dispelled the last remnants of constraint still existing between the young pair.

Edith had conquered her momentary embarrassment, and now resumed the familiar tone of her childhood. She fairly sparkled with gayety and jest, as was her nature, but all her vivacity failed to

infect Gerald. He was courteous, gallant, even cordial, and readily answered all her questions about his journey, his home and his mother, but he did so with the grave, quiet composure that seemed an inseparable part of his character.

At last the conversation turned upon the approaching campaign. The colonel did not consider the insurrection so trivial a matter as many of the officers. He spoke of it earnestly, even anxiously, and, for the first time, Gerald appeared really interested. He was evidently a thorough soldier, and Edith noticed with a surprise equal to her displeasure that the campaign lay far nearer to her lover's heart than the courtship of his bride. With all her charms she had failed to rouse one spark of feeling from the unvarying calmness of his manner, but now, while talking of mountain passes, fortifications, attacks and similar uninteresting things, his eyes brightened and his face began to flush with eagerness.

The young lady was accustomed to be the principal object of attention, and felt offended to have a man absorbed in such subjects while in her presence. Her lips pouted more and more angrily, and the lines on her smooth brow indicated an extremely wrathful mood. Unluckily Gerald did not even notice it, he was plunging deeper and deeper into military matters with the commandant.

Once, however, he faltered in the midst of a sentence. He had addressed a question to the colonel, and pointing to the mountains, turned toward the window, when he suddenly saw Danira, of whom no one had taken any further notice. She was standing, half concealed by the curtain, apparently uninterested, yet her face betrayed feverish suspense, breathless attention, she was fairly reading the words from the speaker's lips.

For a moment her gaze met the young officer's. It was the first time he had seen her eyes, but a menacing, mysterious look flashed from their depths. He could not understand its meaning, for it was only a moment—then the lashes drooped and the girl's features regained their usual rigid, icy immobility.

The colonel answered the question with great minuteness, and the discussion between the two gentlemen became more and more animated. Edith listened a few moments longer but, as the pair did not seem disposed to leave their mountain passes and fortifications, her patience became exhausted. Rising with the freedom and rudeness of a child she said, in a tone intended to be sarcastic, but which sounded extremely angry:

"Come, Danira, we will leave the gentlemen to their conversation on military affairs. We are only interrupting these interesting discussions."

With these words she unceremoniously seized her adopted sister's arm and drew her into the adjoining room. Gerald looked after her in great astonishment; he evidently had no suspicion of the crime he had committed. The colonel laughed.

"Ah! yes, we had forgotten the presence of the ladies! They take the liberty of showing us how greatly our war stories bore them, and after all they are right. You have lost Ethel's favor, Gerald, and must seek forgiveness."

Gerald seemed in no haste to do so, he answered with perfect composure:

"I am sorry, but I really supposed Edith might be expected to take some interest in a campaign where I am to win my spurs."

"Perhaps she is afraid it will make you forget her," said the colonel with a shade of reproof. "It really almost seemed so. My little Edith is spoiled in that respect. Perhaps I have indulged her too much, we are always weak toward an only child. I am glad that you are so devoted to your profession, but young girls desire first of all to see a lover in a betrothed husband. The military hero occupies a secondary place. Note that, my boy, and govern yourself accordingly in future."

Gerald smiled. "You are right, perhaps, I am too thorough a soldier, but ought Edith to reproach me for it? She is a soldier's daughter, a soldier's promised bride, and is living here amid all the excitement and preparations for the campaign. Her companion seemed far more interested in it."

"Danira? Possibly. I have not noticed."

"Who is this Danira? There is something peculiar, foreign in her appearance. She cannot be a German. Every feature betrays Slavonic origin."

"Yes, that blood does not belie itself," said Arlow indignantly. "You are perfectly right, the girl belongs to the race that is giving us so much trouble, and you have before your eyes a type of the whole people. When Danira came to my house she was a child, who could have received no very deep impressions of her home. She has had the same education as Edith, has been reared like a daughter of the family, has lived exclusively in our circle, yet the fierce, defiant Slav nature has remained unchanged. Neither kindness nor harshness can influence it."

"But how came this adopted daughter into your house? Did you receive her voluntarily?"

"Yes and no, as you choose to regard it. When I was ordered to my present post, the insurrection, which was then supposed to be finally suppressed and is now again glimmering like a spark under ashes, had just been put down. Yet there were still daily skirmishes in the mountains. During one of these, a leader of the insurgents fell into our hands severely wounded, and was brought here as a prisoner. After a few days his wife appeared with her two children, and asked permission to see and nurse him, which was granted. The man succumbed to his wounds; the wife, who had caught a dangerous fever prevailing at that time in our hospital, soon followed him to the grave, and the children, Danira and her brother, were orphaned."

Gerald listened with increasing interest; the young Slav girl would probably have been indifferent to him, but her origin aroused his sympathy and he listened attentively to the story of the commandant, who now continued:

"My officers and I agreed that it was both a humane duty and a point of honor to adopt the orphans, and we knew, also, that persons in high places would be pleased to have the children of one of the most dreaded insurgent chiefs under our charge and training. Conciliation was then the watchword. I took the little ones into my own house, but after a few weeks the boy vanished."

"Had he fled?"

"We thought so at first, but it soon appeared that he had been carried off by his countrymen. Danira escaped the same fate only because she was sleeping in the room with Edith. Besides, women are little valued by this people. To leave their chiefs son in our hands seemed to them a disgrace, but they did not care about the girl."

"So she remained in your house?"

"Yes, by my dead wife's express desire. I at first opposed it, and the result proves that I was right. Every care and kindness was lavished on this girl, who even now, after so many years, is still as alien, I might almost say as hostile to us, as on the first day of her arrival. If I did not know that my Edith's bright, sunny temperament instinctively repels such influences, I should be anxious about this companionship and should have put an end to it long ago."

"Such mysterious natures are unsympathetic to me also," replied Gerald hastily, with an expression that almost betrayed repugnance. "There is something uncanny in her appearance. I met her eyes a moment a short time ago, and it seemed as if I were gazing into a dark, tempestuous night. Edith, on the contrary, seems like a bright spring day, though with somewhat April weather."

The colonel laughed heartily at the comparison.

"Have you discovered that already? Yes, she is as capricious as an April day. Rain and sunshine in the same moment. But I can give you the consolation that the sunshine predominates, only you must understand how to call it forth. Now go to her, that your first meeting may not end in discord. You will come to an understanding better if you are alone."

He waved his hand kindly to his future son-in-law and left the room.

Gerald did not seem to have thought of a reconciliation, but he could not disregard this hint; and, besides, the father was right, this first hour of their intercourse ought not to end in discord. The young man, therefore, went to the adjoining room, where the girls probably still remained. His coming had doubtless been expected, for at his entrance something fluttered away like a frightened

bird, and he saw Edith's light summer dress vanish behind the door of the adjacent apartment. But the concealment did not seem to be very seriously meant—besides the dress a little foot was visible, betraying the listener's presence.

Gerald turned to Danira, who had not left her seat.

"I wished to have a few minutes' conversation with Edith. I expected to find her here."

"Edith has a headache, and will not make her appearance again until dinner time; she does not wish to be disturbed now."

While Danira carelessly delivered the message she stepped back a little, as if expecting that the young officer would not heed the command but enter in spite of it. He could not help seeing his *fiancée* in her hiding place, or fail to understand that she was merely making it a little difficult for him to obtain forgiveness. Gerald really did cast a glance in that direction, but instantly drew himself up and with a military salute, and said:

"Then please give my regards to her." And he left the room without even glancing back.

He had scarcely gone when Edith appeared from behind the door. She looked more astonished than indignant, and evidently could not understand the rebuff she had received.

"He is really going!" she angrily exclaimed. "Yet he must have seen that I was in the room, that I expected him—he probably did not wish to find me."

Danira shrugged her shoulders. "I'm afraid it won't be so easy for you to 'cure' this man. He has just showed you that he does not allow himself to be trifled with."

Edith stamped her little foot on the ground like a naughty child.

"I told you he had a horrible leaven of the schoolmaster, but his very defiance pleased me. He really looked like a hero when he drew himself up in that soldierly way and stalked off with his spurs clanking."

She saucily tried to imitate Gerald's gait and bearing, but Danira did not even smile. Her tone was cold and grave as she replied:

"Beware of that obstinacy; it will give you trouble."

II

Nearly three weeks had passed since the arrival of the regiment. The larger part of it had already gone to the scene of the insurrection, but Gerald's division still remained in Cattaro, thereby subjecting his patience to a severe trial. He and his men had been ordered to the citadel overlooking the city, now used only for keeping prisoners. The service was therefore very easy, and the young officer could spend several hours daily with his fiancée, which was regularly done.

It was very early in the morning. A dense fog rested on the bay and mountains, and there was less bustle than usual in the port.

Among the sailors and laborers already on the spot appeared the figure of George Moosbach, walking up and down in full uniform, but evidently much bored.

He had tried to enter into conversation with one of the sailors, but the latter understood nothing but Slavonic, and pantomime was not sufficient to enable them to comprehend each other, so the attempt ceased. George was strolling discontentedly on, muttering something about ignorant people who did not even understand Tyrolese German, when a voice behind him said:

"Surely that's George from the Moosbach Farm."

The young soldier started and turned. Before him stood a priest in the dress of the Franciscan Order, a tall figure with grave, deeply-lined features which, however, expressed no sternness; the eyes, on the contrary, had an unmistakable look of kindness and benevolence, and the same traits were noticeable in his voice as he now added:

"How are you, George, here in this foreign land?"

George had been on the point of jumping for joy in a most disrespectful way, but instead of doing so he stooped and reverently kissed the priest's hand.

"His Reverence, Father Leonhard! I didn't think you would come here to the world's end too. I supposed you were at home in beautiful Tyrol among Christians!"

"Well, I don't seem to have fallen among Pagans, for the first person I have met in Cattaro proves to be one of my own parish," replied the priest, smiling. "I arrived yesterday and was sent to take the place of Father Antonius, who cannot bear the climate. I shall accompany the regiment instead."

The young soldier's face fairly beamed with delight.

"You are going with us, your reverence? God be praised! Then we shall have one blessing in the wilderness—Krivoscia, they call the place! It's such a barbarous name that an honest Tyrolese tongue can't pronounce it. There is nothing except stones, robbers and goats, one can scarcely get anything to eat and still less to drink"—George sighed heavily—"and when a man lies down to sleep at night he may happen to wake with his head split open."

"Those are certainly unpleasant circumstances! But I hear that the regiment left Cattaro long ago. Why are you still in this city?"

"We have stayed here, the lieutenant, I, myself, and fifty men. We are up in yonder old walls—the citadel, they call it—guarding a few of the rascals we've been lucky enough to catch. Herr Gerald, of course, is furious about it, but that does him no good."

"Gerald von Steinach?" asked the priest. "I don't believe he finds it so hard to bear the delay, since Colonel Arlow commands this garrison."

"I believe he would far rather be up among the savages," said George, laconically.

"Why? Isn't his future wife in the city?"

"Yes. And he's a betrothed husband, too, that's certain, but—I don't like the business."

Father Leonhard looked surprised. "What is it you don't like? Herr von Steinach's future wife?"

"The young lady!" cried George enthusiastically. "With all due respect, she's a splendid girl! She looks like the sunshine itself, and she can laugh and play pranks like an elf. I'm high in her favor,

and am constantly obliged to tell her about our Tyrol, where she was born. No, I like her very much, your reverence."

"Then what did you mean by your remark?"

The young soldier, much embarrassed, thrust his hand through his curly black hair.

"I don't know—Herr Gerald always kisses her hand and brings her flowers, and rides and drives with her—but I should treat my sweetheart differently."

"I believe so," said the priest, with a furtive smile. "But in Baron von Steinach's circle people conduct courtships in another fashion from the wooing at the Moosbach Farm."

"Very true. I know that the manners of the nobility are entirely different from ours, but when a man is in love it's all the same whether he's a count or a peasant, and Herr Gerald isn't in love a bit. In short—there's a hitch in the affair, and some reverend priest must interfere and set it to rights again."

He looked at Father Leonhard with such honest, beseeching eyes, that it was evident he firmly believed that a priest could set to rights anything he undertook. But Father Leonhard replied:

"No, George, the young couple must arrange such things themselves; there can be no interference. They will learn to know and love each other better. Gerald von Steinach is a man of excellent character."

"Yes, unluckily, rather too excellent!" George exclaimed. "I believe he never committed a folly in his life, and people must do foolish things, your reverence, otherwise men wouldn't be men; it can't be helped."

"You have certainly given sufficient proof of that. Your father and mother are anxious about how their reckless and somewhat quarrelsome son may fare in a foreign land. I promised to have an eye on you, but I think you have kept the promise you made me when you left. Where did you get that bump on your forehead?"

George hastily raised his hand to his head and drew down his cap so that the suspicious spot was covered.

"It isn't worth mentioning. It was only in sport, that we might not get entirely out of practice. Besides Bartel began; he gave me one blow, but only one, and I dealt him six in return. He won't come near me again very soon."

"George, you are incorrigible!" said the priest, gravely, but this time the sinner was to escape the punishment he deserved. Just at that moment Gerald appeared on his way from the citadel, and, with much surprise and pleasure, greeted Father Leonhard, of whose arrival he had also been ignorant.

Again messages and questions about home were exchanged, and when Father Leonhard said that he was going to call on the commandant, the young officer offered to accompany him. But he turned back to ask the question:

"Are the mules ordered, George?"

"Yes, Herr Lieutenant, they'll be at the colonel's house in half an hour."

"Very well, I think the ladies will be ready by that time. Let me know when the animals are there."

He walked on, conversing with the priest, and George followed, greatly delighted that a reverend ecclesiastic was going with the regiment into the "wilderness," as he persisted in calling Krivoscia.

Spite of the early hour the inmates of the colonel's household were awake and ready for the excursion, which had been planned the day before, except Edith, who, at the last moment, had taken a dislike to the expedition. She thought the weather too uncertain, the road too long, the ride too fatiguing—she wanted to stay at home, and her father, instead of opposing this capriciousness by a word of authority, was trying remonstrances.

"Why, child, do listen to reason," he said. "What will Gerald think if you stay at home? How can he help believing that his society has no attraction for you?"

"Perhaps it has as much as mine for him," was the defiant retort. "Well, then, we shall be quits."

"You had a little dispute yesterday. I saw it by your faces when I entered the room, and now the poor fellow is to suffer for it. Take care, Edith, don't strain the cord too tight, he is not over-yielding."

"Papa, you love me, don't you?" The young girl's voice had an unusually bitter tone. "You would even sacrifice a favorite plan for my sake, you would never force me into a marriage which—"

"For heaven's sake, what does this mean?" cried the colonel, now really alarmed. "What has occurred between you?"

Instead of answering, Edith began to weep so bitterly that her father became seriously troubled.

"But, my child, what is your objection to Gerald? Is he not an attentive, gallant lover? Doesn't he gratify all your wishes? I don't understand you."

"Oh! yes, he's attentive and gallant, and—so icy, that I sometimes feel as if a cold wind was blowing upon me. Danira was right when, looking at his picture, she told me that he could not love and would never learn. I have never yet heard one warm, tender word from his lips, but, on the contrary, he plays the tutor on every occasion, and, if I don't submit patiently, shrugs his shoulders and smiles compassionately, as we smile at a child—I'll bear it no longer."

The colonel took the excited girl's hand and drew her toward him.

"Edith, you know how much Gerald's mother and I desire this marriage, but you also know that I will never force you into it. Be frank, does no voice in your heart plead for your old playfellow?"

A traitorous blush crimsoned Edith's face and, nestling in her father's arms, she laid her head on his breast.

"He doesn't love me!" she sobbed. "He thinks of nothing but the campaign. He is impatient to get away, fairly longs to go, the sooner the better; he doesn't care in the least that I am to remain behind."

"You are mistaken," replied Colonel Arlow gravely, but with perfect sincerity. "Gerald might be a little less of a soldier and more of a lover, I admit, but you ought not to doubt his affection. Passionate impetuosity is not one of his traits of character, but the better I know his character, the more security it affords for your future happiness. Have you ever really tried to win him? I do not think so."

Edith raised her head—she was evidently very willing to be persuaded—and asked in a low tone:

"You mean, papa?"

"I mean that Gerald has hitherto known much more of your caprices than of your attractions. Can not my little Edith succeed in striking a spark from the flint if she tries the other method? She always knows how to get her own way. Now go, my child, and dress for the ride; meantime I'll have a word to say to the lieutenant; he has no suspicion of your interpretation of his military zeal."

This time the young lady found it advisable to obey the request. A smile was already breaking through her tears, for Gerald's voice was heard in the ante-room.

"There he is," she whispered. "Don't tell him I've been crying, papa," and without waiting for a reply she glided out of the room.

The colonel smilingly shook his head; his mind was now relieved concerning his daughter's aversion to her proposed bridegroom, but he could find no opportunity to "say his word" to the latter, for Gerald entered with Father Leonhard, whom he introduced to the commandant.

The fog was beginning to scatter when the little party of riders left the city. They passed the fortification walls and the citadel frowning on its cliff, and entered the open country. The object of the day's excursion was a visit to a fort situated on a steep mountain several hours' journey away, whose commanding position afforded a wide and magnificent view. They intended to avail themselves of the opportunity to pay the commanding officer a short call, for the order excluding strangers, of course, did not apply to Colonel Arlow's prospective son-in-law. The colonel himself was detained in the city by his military duties, so Gerald accompanied the two ladies.

The mountain road, used principally for military purposes, and therefore extremely well kept, began just outside of the city. At first trees and bushes appeared on both sides, but soon everything green vanished, and the road led upward in countless windings through desolate, rocky heights.

The dense, heavy curtain of clouds, which at dawn had concealed the whole landscape, began to grow thinner and thinner till it became a transparent veil, and finally melted away in blue vapor. The bay and its shores sank lower and lower, and the mountains seemed higher and more rugged, the nearer the party approached them. Edith's moods that day perfectly justified the term "April weather." The shower of the morning was followed by bright sunshine. No one would have supposed that the sparkling, laughing eyes had shed tears an hour before. The dainty figure in the dark-blue riding habit sat the mule lightly and gracefully, and looked as fresh and sunny as the day struggling victoriously through the mists.

Edith had either taken her father's admonition to heart or actually determined to strike fire from the flint, for she was so bewitchingly engaging that even Gerald's cool composure was not proof against it. He must indeed have been stone to remain unmoved by such a sparkling flow of jests and witticisms. The smile that so well suited his grave features, yet so rarely visited them, became more and more frequent, and, contrary to his usual custom, he allowed himself to be completely enthralled by the gay spirits of his *fiancée*.

While the young couple rode forward on the best terms with each other, Danira followed more slowly. As if by accident, she kept her mule a few steps behind, and the distance between her and the two others imperceptibly increased. The rear of the little cavalcade was closed by George, who trotted comfortably along, thinking how foolish his lieutenant was to long to be in the midst of the campaign, where they would be obliged to march in the dust and heat, instead of riding at their ease on mules.

They had gone about half way when they met a solitary horseman. He wore the picturesque dress of the mountain tribes of the country, a costume admirably suited to the vigorous frame and dark complexion of a man already past his youth. His rich garments and the small but spirited mountain horse, with its shining brown coat and gay trappings, showed that he was a rich and distinguished person in his tribe, and moreover he was attended by a servant or subaltern, who also wore the costume of the country, but was on foot.

The two men had come down a steep path which met the mountain road at this point, and in a narrow curve of the latter encountered Gerald and Edith. The stranger stopped his horse to let them pass, and made a haughty, dignified bow, though his eyes rested with a hostile gaze on the young officer. Gerald returned it with a military salute, and Edith, pleased with the stately mountaineer, bent her head courteously.

They were some distance in advance when Danira passed the spot. The stranger still sat motionless on his horse, but the young girl's mule suddenly stumbled, then reared and made a spring toward the cliffs. It was a perilous moment, but the horseman seized the animal's bridle with a firm grasp. While doing so he murmured a few words in the Slavonic tongue. Danira answered in the same language, probably an expression of thanks for the service rendered. The animals remained side by side a short time, while the stranger continued talking—not until George came up did he release the bridle with a brief farewell, and Danira then rode on.

Gerald and Edith had turned and watched the scene. There was no occasion for anxiety, as the rider kept a firm seat in the saddle, yet they waited.

"See, Danira has found a cavalier on the high-road!" said Edith, laughing. "Her countrymen are not usually ready to pay polite attentions to ladies; this seems to be an exceptional case."

"It is unusual, too, for a quiet, steady mule to stumble on a smooth road," replied Gerald, without averting his eyes from the group. "I don't understand how it could have occurred. The animal must have been irritated."

"Here you are! What has happened?" Edith called to her foster sister, who had remained perfectly undisturbed by the little incident, and now answered quietly:

"I don't know; something must have frightened the beast."

"Did you know that man, Fräulein Danira?" asked Gerald.

"No; I was merely thanking him for his assistance."

The answered sound positive and repellant, as though she wished to prevent any more questions. The young officer remained silent, but cast a keen glance at the spot where the stranger was just disappearing around a curve in the road. Edith, however, asked with curiosity:

"Did you know him, Gerald?"

"Certainly. It was Joan Obrevic, the chief of one of the principal mountain tribes, who, though he has not yet openly declared war against us, is only waiting for the signal to join the insurrection. He has been in Cattaro several days, ostensibly to make negotiations, and, unfortunately, has not been sent off without ceremony."

"Unfortunately?" Danira repeated. "You seem to regret it, Baron von Steinach."

"Certainly, for I believe the whole affair is merely a pretext to gain time or conceal efforts in another direction. Joan Obrevic has reason to remain passive for the present—his son is a prisoner in our hands. This son was one of the first to resist the attempt to force him into the military service, and unceremoniously shot the officer who commanded the detachment. This was the beginning of the bloody scenes which have since been so frequently repeated, but we at last succeeded in securing the assassin."

"The assassin—because he defended his liberty?"

"Because he treacherously shot the officer who stood quietly talking with him, expecting no attack—in civilized nations that is called assassination, Fräulein!"

Question and answer were equally sharp in tone, but Edith, who had been listening impatiently, now interposed.

"Dear me, do stop these political and military discussions! I'll make George my cavalier; he will at least try to entertain me, and not bore me with accounts of the insurrection."

The threat was probably not seriously meant, but Gerald seemed to understand it so, for he answered coldly:

"If you prefer George's company to mine I must of course submit."

Again that shrug of the shoulders and compassionate smile, which always enraged her. They did not fail to produce their effect to-day. She hastily drew bridle, turned, and called loudly:

"George, come here! We'll ride on before."

With these words she turned into a steep path that saved a long bend of the mountain road.

George did not wait to be asked twice. He quickly put his mule into a trot and overtook her the next instant.

A very familiar relation had already been formed between him and the young lady. Edith liked the somewhat rough but comical and zealous fellow, saw in him her lover's former play-fellow rather than his subaltern, and had instantly granted his entreaty that she would address him with the "Du" used in his native Tyrol. George, on his side, was not a little proud of this confidential position, and felt an even more enthusiastic admiration for his lieutenant's *fiancée* than for the lieutenant himself.

They rode up the mountain for about ten minutes, then reached the main road again, and were now far ahead of the others. Edith stopped her mule, and George did the same.

"I suppose we are to wait here for the lieutenant?" he asked.

The young lady cast a glance backward. Her anger had already vanished, but she wanted to punish Gerald for his lack of gallantry by compelling him to ride with Danira.

She knew that he had a positive aversion to her foster sister and that the feeling was mutual, for he and Danira avoided each other whenever they could. So Edith found much amusement in the idea of the vexation of both, if they were condemned to a longer *tête-à-tête*.

"No, George," she said. "As we are in advance, we'll get to the fort first—that is, if you'll go with me."

"I, Fräulein—to Krivoscia, if you order me!" exclaimed George, whose tongue always seemed to have an attack of cramp whenever he uttered the ominous word.

"Well, we won't go quite so far to-day, but I know how to appreciate this proof of your devotion. In your eyes, Krivoscia is the incarnation of everything horrible. So much the better. You won't run the risk of carrying home one of the Krivoscian girls and making her the future mistress of the Moosbach Farm."

The young Tyrolese, in his horror, dropped the mule's bridle and crossed himself.

"St. George forbid! I should first have to lose my senses and my head to boot. I believe my father would leave the whole farm to the monastery if I should bring home such a savage, and he would do right."

"Your father of course expects you to bring him one of the Tyrolese girls for a daughter-in-law?"

"No one else would ever suit!" replied George solemnly, "No other girls can compare with those in the Tyrol. They are better than all the rest in the world put together."

"I'm quite of your opinion, especially as I'm a Tyrolese lass myself, and who knows—if I were not already betrothed, I might have a chance of being mistress of the Moosbach Farm."

"Yes, that might do!" said George, honestly. "I should have no objection, I'd take you on the spot, Fräulein—but it can't be."

Edith burst into a merry laugh. "No, it certainly can't be, but your offer is very flattering to me, and I will consider it seriously. Now let us ride on, the animals have rested long enough." She urged her mule forward and George followed. He respectfully remained a few paces behind the young lady, but could not help feeling a little regret that "it couldn't be."

Meantime Gerald and Danira pursued their way alone. The latter, it is true, had paused a moment and asked: "Shall not we follow?"

"I think not," replied Gerald, so coolly that it was evident he did not feel at all inclined to submit to his *fiancée's* whim. "The path is steep and stony. I at least prefer to ride along the comfortable road."

"And give Edith a lesson," Danira added in a low tone.

"Edith must learn to take more interest in my profession; that is essential in a soldier's wife."

"Certainly. I only fear that, with this mode of teaching, you will accomplish nothing."

"Why not? Edith is still half a child, and children must be taught. Yet, if you desire to give me any advice on this point, I shall be grateful." There was unconcealed mockery in this appeal for counsel to the girl of seventeen, but the cold, sullen glance that answered the scoff showed that it had failed to reach its mark. The young Slav was no longer a child; the dark shadow on her brow betrayed how far she had already advanced into womanhood.

"Edith can be influenced in only one way," she replied. "Then she can be swayed completely—but the appeal must be made to her heart."

"And you think I have not understood that?"

"You have apparently not desired to do so. The tutor will gain nothing from this spoiled child—the lover everything."

Gerald bit his lips; he felt the justice of this reproach, but he also felt a touch of Edith's irritability when she was reprov'd. Now it was his turn, and he could not even find a fitting answer.

As they approached the summit of the mountain the road began to ascend in steeper curves. Danira rode close to the edge; though her mule had just shown its untrustworthiness, she seemed perfectly fearless. Gerald could not help noticing how steadily the animal now trod upon the loose stones, and how firmly the slender hand held the bridle; she evidently had perfect control of the beast, so the incident appeared all the more incomprehensible.

They had just reached a broader, rocky projection, when Danira suddenly drew rein and bent down to her saddle.

"Has anything happened?" asked Gerald, whose attention was attracted.

"Nothing of any importance. Something about the saddle must have been disarranged by the mule's sudden jump. I did not notice it until now."

The young officer instantly stopped and dismounted, but his companion swung herself out of the saddle so quickly that she was already standing on the ground when he approached. He saw that she wished to avoid his assistance, and therefore, without a word, instantly turned to the animal. The damage was trifling; the saddle-girth had loosened. Gerald tightened it again, and then straightening himself, said:

"I think we will let the mules rest a little. They have had a sharp climb, and the fort is still some distance off."

He knotted the bridles loosely together, and then stepped out upon the point, where Danira was already standing, gazing into the distance.

The landscape they beheld was both magnificent and peculiar, a picture whose wide frame contained the most abrupt contrasts. Desolate rocky wastes, and green, smiling shores, white hamlets glimmering in the brightest sunshine, and gloomy ravines where scarcely a ray of light penetrated, the luxuriance of the south and the rude solitude of the north, but all lay as if transfigured in the clear, golden radiance of the morning.

Yonder appeared the city, with its harbor and citadel, picturesquely located on the coast, and beyond the rocks, bare dark-gray stone, towering higher and higher, growing more and more desolate, till they at last ended in jagged, riven peaks. Far below gleamed the bay in its strange, curving outlines, which sometimes seemed to seek and meet each other, then to recede far asunder. The surface of the water flashed under the rays of the sun like a glittering metal mirror, and the same tide lay black and motionless in the shadow of the lofty cliffs, which actually rose out of it, and whose steep sides were washed by the waves.

But the eye roved over rocks and waters to the open sea. Yonder on the horizon it gleamed, mist-veiled, sun-illuminated, the blue expanse seeming to stretch into infinite distance, for at the point where sea and sky met it blended with the deep azure hue of the heavens, arching above the earth in all the radiant, glittering splendor of the south.

Gerald's gaze rested fixedly on this magnificent view, whose varied charms enthralled him. At last he turned to his companion, but she did not notice it. Her eyes, looking dreamily into the distance, were now fixed on the mountain peaks of her home, looming dimly through the mists. The girl herself stood like a dark enigma amid the surroundings into which fate had cast her. The cold, expressionless face, and the fire lurking in the depths of her dark eyes, the delicate, youthful features, and the stern aspect that robbed them of all youth, were as contradictory as the country of her birth.

Perhaps this very contrast attracted the young officer. This girl was certainly a different creature from the blonde Edith, with her rosy, laughing face, around which the blue veil fluttered so coquettishly. Danira's black habit was wholly devoid of ornament, and the little black hat, which did not half cover the heavy braids was equally simple. The slender yet vigorous figure, it is true, showed perfect symmetry of outline, and the regular features seemed chiselled in marble, but the sunshine flooding the girlish form appeared to be repelled; she had something of shadow in her nature which only became more conspicuous in a bright light.

Danira must have felt the searching glance resting upon her, for she suddenly turned, and pointing to the distant landscape, said:

"There is a symbol of our country! I think it can bear comparison even with your home."

"Certainly, and it has an added charm—the superb background of the sea. The country is beautiful, if only it did not contain so many enigmas."

"Why, you are just on the verge of solving them all. There is not a ravine, not a rock-bound province which has not been penetrated by your troops; the people know how to tell them."

"At least we shall know our friends from our foes, and I think we have a right to ask that question."

The words sounded so significant that Danira's attention was attracted. She cast a quick, inquiring glance at the young officer's face, and replied curtly and coldly:

"Ask, then."

"Suppose I should be obliged to commence here with the query: 'Where did you make Joan Obrevic's acquaintance?'"

"I have already told you that he is a stranger to me."

"Yes, you said so, but I don't believe it."

Danira drew herself up proudly. "Baron von Steinach, I must beg you not to extend your educational efforts to me; I am not Edith."

"But you are the commandant's adopted daughter and enjoy the rights of a child in his household. I must remind you of the fact, since you seem to have forgotten it."

The young girl turned pale and was in the act of making a hasty reply, but, as though warned by some sudden recollection, controlled herself. Yet a contemptuous expression hovered around her lips as she replied:

"At least, until now, the commandant's house has been free from—spies."

Gerald started as if he had received a blow, his face flushed crimson and his hand involuntarily grasped the hilt of his sword. No one would have supposed that his clear eyes could blaze with so fierce a fire as at that moment, and his voice, usually so calm, sounded hollow and half stifled.

"That word came from a woman's lips. Had a man dared to so insult me, I should have had but one answer for him."

Probably Danira had not expected her thoughtless words to produce such an effect, but she was evidently more surprised than alarmed by the sudden outbreak. So this man must be irritated, stung to the quick, ere sparks would flash from the flint. She almost felt a secret satisfaction in having accomplished this, but now also realized the full force of the offence. Her eyes dropped, and she answered in a low tone:

"I was insulted first—I have no weapon of defence except my tongue."

Gerald had already recovered his composure. He seemed to repent the ebullition of rage and resumed his usual quiet manner, though with a shade of icy reserve.

"I fear I shall be obliged to give you back the evil name. Listen to me quietly, Fräulein," he added, as she made an angry gesture. "The subject must be mentioned between us. I prefer to apply first to you and, as we are alone here, it can be done at once."

The words sounded somewhat mysterious, but Danira seemed to understand them, for she requested no explanation. Yet her eyes no longer avoided the gaze of her foe, but met it firmly and fearlessly; she was ready for battle.

"A week ago I was obliged to take to the commandant in person a report that admitted no delay," Gerald continued. "Leaving the citadel at a very early hour in the morning, I went to the city alone on foot. I suppose you know the little house, occupied by Slavonic fishermen, which stands somewhat off the road; I need not describe it to you. Day had not quite dawned when I reached the spot. Just at that moment the door opened and two persons came out. A man—not Joan Obrevic, but a slender youth, who, like him, wore the costume of the country—and a lady whom, in spite of the gray dusk, I distinctly recognized. How she had succeeded in passing through the city gates, which at night open only to the watchword, I do not know, nor how she returned again. The pair took a very familiar leave of each other, then one walked in the direction of the city, the other went toward the mountains, and in a few minutes both vanished in the fog. But no one had passed through the gates that night, I was the first person for whom they were opened."

He paused as if for an answer; but none came. The girl remained silent and did not even attempt to defend herself. The young officer had probably expected something of the sort. His face darkened still more and there was an accent of scorn in his voice as he continued:

"Of coarse I have no right to meddle with love affairs, but I have every reason to suppose that the relation is here abused to forward very different plans. A few days after this incident, Joan Obrevic appeared in the city. He, too, frequents that house, and probably also receives reports there from persons most closely associated with the commandant. His younger comrade doubtless merely opened the path he is now following. I, at least, do not believe in the farce of negotiations which he alleges as the motive for his stay."

Again a pause ensued. Danira still persisted in her silence, though evidently most deeply wounded by the speaker's glance and tone. Her face seemed to grow actually livid in its pallor, and her bosom heaved with her gasping breath, but her lips were firmly closed as if to force back any words.

"So you refuse me any explanation," Gerald began again. "Then of course I see my fears confirmed. You can understand that I cannot take delicacy into account where our safety is at stake. I shall inform the colonel that he is being betrayed by a member of his own household, and at the same time beg him if possible to keep the matter from Edith. I should not like to have my young *fiancée* learn at what an hour and place her adopted sister receives a stranger who—"

He did not finish the sentence, for Danira interrupted him. Now she at last found words, but they sounded like the outcry of a tortured prisoner who can no longer endure the rack.

"No more! Spare your insults. You are speaking of—my brother."

She hurled the word at him so passionately, yet with such convincing truth that doubt was impossible. Nor did Gerald doubt, but he seemed fairly stunned by the unexpected disclosure, and almost mechanically repeated:

"Your brother?"

"Stephan Hersovac—yes! I saw and talked with him that night; with him and no one else."

Gerald involuntarily uttered a sigh of relief. He did not know himself why a load suddenly seemed to fall from his breast. The worst fact, the treachery still existed; but he had a vague feeling that he could forgive even this sooner than the other, which had aroused his contempt.

"Then, of course, I beg your pardon," he said. "I could not possibly suspect that a brother and sister would surround their meetings with such secrecy."

"Is it my fault that my brother dares not venture to approach me openly?" asked Danira sullenly. "He was implicated in the affair which delivered young Obrevic into your hands; the same fate threatens him if he shows himself here."

"Yet he ventures into the immediate vicinity of the city. Was that really done only to see a sister who has become so much a stranger to him, for whom he has never inquired, about whom he has never troubled himself?"

Gerald's tone was very different from before, but he had retained the same earnestness, and the look which strove to read the young girl's features was so grave and searching that she shrank from it.

"Baron von Steinach," she said, in a hurried, anxious tone, "I have betrayed my secret to you against my will; you understood how to drive me to extremities, but you will take no unfair advantage of a confession wrung from me in a moment of excitement. You will say nothing?"

"First convince me that I can keep silence without violating my duty. We stand on the brink of a volcano; hatred and hostility everywhere confront us; we must be watchful. I have done you injustice once, Fräulein, and should not like to do so a second time, but—can you answer to the man to whom you owe so much for what was agreed upon that night between you and your brother?"

"To whom I owe the slavery of my whole youth? I suppose you are speaking of Colonel Arlow?"

The words sounded so cutting that the young officer frowned angrily, and his voice regained its former harsh tone as he replied:

"Though Colonel Arlow feels your coldness to him and Edith, he probably never suspected the existence of such an idea in the mind of his adopted daughter, nor has he deserved such a return for his kindness in giving a shelter to two deserted orphans."

The reproach only seemed to irritate Danira still more. A threatening light flashed in her eyes.

"And who made us orphans? Who killed our father? He was dragged here mortally wounded, to die in prison; my mother caught her death in the fever-laden air of the hospital, and the children were to be reared and educated by those who had robbed them of their parents. We were not consulted when we were torn from our people, our home; we were disposed of like soulless brutes. My brother was spared this fate; he was carried back to our native mountains. I remained among strangers, as a stranger, whose presence was tolerated beside the beloved and idolized child of the household. They robbed me of everything—country, parents, friends and gave me in return the wretched alms of an education which only made me miserable, for it never filled the deep gulf that separated me from them in every thought and feeling, never let me forget that I am of a different race. I remained in chains, because I was forced to do so, yet I felt them when still a child, hated them from the moment I first waked to the consciousness of their existence. Now my own kindred summon me, I cannot, will not wear the fetters longer. I throw them at your feet. I will be free at last."

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