LUDWIG TIECK

THE WHITE EGBERT

HIGH up in the Hartz Mountains there lived in a castle a knight who was known by the name of the White Egbert. He was about forty years old, rather below the middle height; and he obtained his name from the quantity of short, smooth, white hair which covered his pale haggard cheeks. He lived a peaceable retired life, never involved in feuds with his neighbours; indeed, he was seldom seen beyond the walls of his small castle. His wife loved quiet as much as he; they were passionately attached to each other; and their only cause of sorrow was that Heaven had not blessed their union with children.

It was seldom that a guest was seen at the castle; and if ever such an event did happen, it never was allowed to interfere with their ordinary way of going on. No advance was made upon the frugality—almost meanness—with which the establishment was conducted; the only difference being that at such times Egbert assumed an air of lightness and gaiety, whereas when alone he was observed to be reserved and melancholy.

His most frequent visitor was Philip Walters; a man to whom Egbert had attached himself, because he observed in him, on the whole, a general resemblance to himself in his ways of thinking. This person was a native of France, and spent the greater part of his time there; but he was often for more than six months together in the mountains in the neighbourhood of Egbert's castle, looking for grasses and minerals, of which he was a collector. He had a small property of his own, and was independent of every one. Egbert often accompanied him on these expeditions, and every year a closer attachment formed itself between them.

There are hours in every man's life in which, if he has a secret from his friend, he becomes suddenly in labour with it, and what before he may have taken the greatest pains to conceal, he now feels an irresistible impulse to throw out of himself—to lay bare the whole burden of his heart, that it may form a new link to bind his friend to him. Friendship ebbs and flows, and is subject to singular influences. There are moments of violent repulsion; there are others when every barrier is dissolved, and spirits flow together and mingle into one.

On a dark cloudy evening, one day late in autumn, Egbert was sitting with his friend and his wife Bertha round the fire in the castle-hall. The flame flung a bright ruddy glow along the walls, and played and flickered in the deep oak roof. The night looked in gloomily through the windows, and the trees outside shook with the wet and the cold. Walters complained of the distance he had to go to his house, and Egbert pressed

him to stay and spend half the night talking over the fire, and then accept a room in the castle till next morning. Walters agreed to do so; wine and supper were brought in; fresh logs of wood were thrown upon the fire; and the friends' conversation became more and more easy and confidential.

When the things were taken away, and the servants had retired, Egbert took Walters' hand, and said, "My dear friend, you must let my wife Bertha tell you the history of her younger days; it is a very strange one, and well worth your hearing."

"With the greatest pleasure," said Walters; and they again drew their chairs round the fire-place.

It was toward midnight; dark masses of cloud were sweeping across the sky, and the moon looking fitfully out between. "Do not think I am forcing myself on you," Bertha said. "My husband tells me you are so noble-hearted a person, it is a shame to conceal any thing from you. Singular as it may sound, the story I am about to tell you is true.

"I was born in a village in the plains. My father was a poor herdsman. Our housekeeping was none of the best, and my parents often did not know where they were to get a mouthful of bread. What was to me most distressing of all was, that they often quarrelled because they were poor, and each brought the bitterest complaints against the other for being the cause of it. Of me, they and every one else said I was a stupid, silly little creature; that I could not do the commonest thing properly; and, indeed, I was a good-for-nothing helpless child. Whatever I took up, I was sure to let fall and break. I could neither sew, nor spin, nor knit, nor could I learn. I could not help in managing the house; all I knew was that we were poor and miserable. I used often to sit in a corner and think how I would help my parents if I was all of a sudden to get rich; how I would shower gold and silver on them, and what fun it would be to see how surprised they would look; and I used to fancy all sorts of spirits sweeping round me, and shewing me treasures buried under ground; or giving me little pebbles, which suddenly turned to precious stones. In short, the strangest notions got hold of me; and when I had to get up and help at any thing in the house, I was all the stupider about it, because my brain was running upon these sort of ideas.

"My father was often very angry with me for being such an idle, useless burden upon him. He sometimes spoke to me very harshly, and it was seldom that I ever got a kind word from him. So it went on till I was about eight years old; and now matters got serious—I must learn to do something. My father thought it was wilfulness and obstinacy in me, and all I wanted was to spend my time in amusement. Enough: one day, after a number of threats which all proved fruitless, he gave me a dreadful beating, and declared I should have the same every day till I had learned to turn myself to some purpose or other.

"All that night I lay on my bed crying; I felt so wretched and miserable that I wished to

die. I was afraid of the daylight, because I did not know what to begin about. I wished and wished for every possible accomplishment, and I could not conceive why I was stupider than other children that I knew. I was almost in despair. When morning began to break, I got up; and hardly knowing what I did, I opened the door of our little cottage. I ran out into the open fields, and presently into a wood close by, which was so thick that daylight could hardly find its way into it. I ran on and on without ever looking behind me. I did not feel the least tired; all I was afraid of was that my father would catch me, and beat me again worse than before for running away.

"When I had got to the other side of the wood, the sun was by this time high in the air, and I saw a dark heavy mass beyond me, covered with a thick mist. Presently I had to scramble up some hills, and then to follow a winding rocky path; and now I felt sure I must have found my way into the neighbouring mountains, and I began to be afraid; living as I did down in the plains, I had never seen them before; and the name of mountains, when I heard people speaking of them, had a somewhat fearful and ominous sound about it. Still, I could not find courage to return; worse fears drove me forward; I often started and looked round as the wind moaned among the fir-trees, or a distant woodman's axe echoed among the hills; and at last when some of the coalmen and miners met me, and I heard them speaking a language I did not understand, I was almost frightened out of my senses. Soon, however, I got used to them, and begged my way on through a number of villages. People gave me enough to eat and drink, and I had always an answer ready for any questions that might be asked me. I had gone on this way for four days, when I fell into a narrow footpath; I followed it, and it led further and further away from the main road, through a wholly different sort of country, where the aspect of the mountains was entirely altered, and became wilder and stranger,—among rocks and cliff's tumbled rudely one upon another, and looking as if the first gust of wind would bring them all crashing down. I did not know whether I should go on or not. It was the middle of summer, so that hitherto I had spent the night either in the woods or in some one or other of the shepherds' huts; but here I saw no signs whatever of any thing like a human habitation, nor in so wild a spot could I hope to find any. The cliffs grew steeper and more precipitous; often I had to pass along the edge of abysses that made me giddy even to look at; at last the very path came to an abrupt conclusion. Now I gave myself up for lost; I cried and screamed, and all the answer was the echoing of my voice along the rocky valley; darkness came on, and I looked for a bank of moss to lie down upon. I could not sleep, for all night long I heard strange wild noises round me, which sometimes sounded like the howling of wild beasts; at others, like the screaming of the mountain-birds, or the moaning of the wind among the rocks and cliffs. I prayed to God to protect me; and towards morning I fell asleep.

"Day had broken when I awoke. There was a steep hill immediately before me, which I climbed up, in the hope of finding some way out of the wilderness; when I had got at the top, however, all around me, as far as my eye could reach, every thing was buried in fog; in the dull grey light I could find nothing but rock, rock, rock, not a tree, not a

blade of grass, not a shrub to be seen, only here and there a branch of heather projecting, with a sad lonely look, from a cleft or chasm in the mountain's side. I cannot tell you how I craved for the sight of a human being, if it was only to be afraid of him. I was hungry and exhausted, and I flung myself down, and determined to lie there and die. In a little while, however, the desire of life got the better of this feeling; I raised myself up and walked on, crying and sobbing all that day through. At last I hardly knew what or where I was; I was so tired that I had almost lost all consciousness; I scarcely wished to live, and yet I was afraid to die.

"Towards evening I approached a part where the country resumed a softer and milder look; and my heart began to beat again, and the desire of life tingled in all my veins. I fancied I caught the sound of a mill-wheel in the distance; I redoubled my speed; and oh! how light and happy I felt when at last I found myself at the end of the rocks and mountains, and saw once more the woods, and meadows, and soft swelling pleasant hills, spread smiling out before me! It seemed as if I had broke at once from hell into Paradise, and I cared no more for being alone and helpless. Instead of the mill I hoped to find, I came upon a waterfall, which a good deal diminished my exultation. I was stooping down, however, to drink some water out of my hands, when on a sudden I fancied I heard some one cough at a short distance from me. Never had I a more agreeable surprise than at that moment. I went towards the place the sound seemed to come from, and on turning the corner of a wood, I saw an old woman sitting down, apparently resting herself. She was dressed all in black, a black cap covering her head and half her face; in her hand she had a crooked stick.

"I went up to her, and asked her to help me. She bade me sit down at her side, and gave me some bread and a little wine. While I was eating she chanted a sort of hymn in a harsh, rough voice; and as soon as I had done, she rose and told me to follow her. Strange and odd as the old woman's voice and appearance was, I was delighted at this invitation; she limped away before me, helping herself along with her stick; and I followed, at first hardly able to keep from laughing at the strange faces she made at every step. We soon left the mountains behind us; we walked on over soft grassy meadows, and then along a forest glade; as we came out again into the open country the sun was just setting, and the splendour of that evening, and the feeling it produced in me, I never shall forget. The sky was steeped in gold and crimson; the trees stood with their tops flushed in the evening glow; a gleam of enchanting beauty lay upon the fields; every leaf was hushed and still; and the pure heaven looked down as if the sky-curtain was withdrawn, and Paradise lay open to our eyes; the brook bubbled along the valley; and from time to time, as a soft air swept over the forest, the rustling leaves appeared to gasp for joy. Visions of the world, and all its strange and wondrous incidents, rose up before my chilled soul. I forgot myself and my conductress, and eyes and heart were lost in ecstacy in gazing on those golden clouds.

"We went up a gentle hill which was planted with chestnut-trees; from the top of which we saw down into a green valley, in the middle of which, surrounded by a clump of

chestnuts, lay a little cottage. Presently a burst of merry barking greeted us, and a bright beautiful little dog came bounding and jumping up against the old woman, and frisking round us with every sign of the greatest satisfaction. Then he turned to me, and, after looking me all over, seemed tolerably satisfied, and ran back again to his mistress. As we descended the hill, I heard a strange kind of song, which seemed to come from the cottage, and to be sung by a bird:

'In my forest-bower

I sing all day,

Hour after hour,

To eternity.

Oh, happy am I

In my forest-bower!'

These few words were repeated over and over again: the nearest description I can give of the sound is, that it was like the effect of a bugle and a cornet answering each other at a great distance over water.

"My curiosity was at the greatest possible stretch of excitement; and without waiting for the old woman's permission, I ran into the cottage. The twilight was beginning to fall; and, by the sinking light, I found a neat, well-arranged little room, a few cups and glasses on a sideboard, and some singular-looking boxes on a table. In a very beautiful cage in the window hung a bird; and it was indeed from it that the song came which I had heard. The old woman was coughing and panting, hardly able to recover her breath. She took scarcely any notice of me—did not even seem to know I was present—but patted her little dog, and then turned and talked to the bird, which only answered with singing the same song. All this time I stood watching her movements; and it almost frightened me to see how eternally her face kept working and twitching; her head, too, shook as if age had loosened its hold on her shoulders; and altogether she looked so odd and strange, that, do what I would, I could not make out what her features were like.

"When she had got her breath again, she lit a candle, threw a cloth over a little table, and put out some supper. At last she turned round to me, and told me to take one of the twisted-cane chairs, and sit down. I did so, and seated myself exactly opposite to her, with the light between us. Then she folded her lanky withered fingers together, and said a long prayer, making all the time such strange contortions with her face, that again it was all I could do to help bursting out laughing. But I was afraid of making her angry, and checked myself. After supper, she said another long grace, and

then shewed me a bed in a little narrow chamber adjoining, she herself sleeping in the room in which we supped. I was tired and half stupified, and so soon fell asleep. I awoke several times, however, in the night, and heard the old woman coughing and talking to her dog, and the bird now and then—which seemed to be in a dream—bringing out single words and lines of its song. The chestnuts rustled outside the window; far away a nightingale was singing; and all these sounds together made so odd a mixture, that I could hardly persuade myself I was awake, and that I had not fallen into another still stranger dream.

"In the morning the old woman woke me up, and presently set me to work. I had to spin, and I soon learnt how to do it; and besides this, I had to take care of the dog and the bird. I very quickly got into the way of managing the household matters, and of knowing the uses of the different articles. One can get used to any condition, and I was no exception: I soon ceased to think there was any thing odd about the old woman, that the cottage was remarkably situated, and that one never saw any other human being there, or that the bird was so very extraordinary a creature. I was delighted with its beauty; all its feathers glittered with every conceivable colour, the brightest sky-blue alternating with deep scarlet over its head and body; and when it sang, it swelled itself out so proudly, that the colours shewed more brilliantly than ever.

"The old woman often went out in the morning, and did not return till evening, when I used to go out with the little dog to meet her; and she would call me her child, her little daughter. In one's childhood one soon takes to people, and I became exceedingly attached to her. In the evenings she would teach me to read, and I was quick and ready in learning; and this afterwards, when I was much alone, became a source of infinite amusement to me; for she had a number of old manuscript books in the cottage, full of fairy-tales, and all sorts of queer old stories.

"There is something very odd about my recollections of the way I went on then. Not a human creature ever came near us; our home family-circle certainly was not an extensive one; and the dog and the bird make the same impression on me now that the recollection of long and well-known old friends produces; yet, often and often as I must have repeated it, do what I will, I cannot call back again the singular name of the little dog.

"So things went on for some four years or more; and I must have been about twelve years old, when the old woman took me at last deeper into her confidence, and revealed to me a secret. Every day the bird laid an egg; and in each egg was a pearl, or some other precious stone. I had often observed before that she had some mysterious doings with the cage; but I had never troubled myself much about it. Now, however, she gave me a charge while she was absent to take these eggs, and put them by carefully in the odd-looking boxes. Leaving me sufficient food in her absence, she would now be away sometimes weeks and months at a time; and my wheel went round, and the little dog barked, and the bird sang, and all was so still in the country

round, that while I was there I do not remember a single storm. No foot of man ever strayed there; no wild beast ever came near our dwelling; I worked on there day after day, and I was happy. Oh, fortunate indeed would men be, if they could but go on through life in such peace and quiet to their graves!

"From the little that I read, I made myself a set of notions of what the world was, and what men were; and very queer ones they were; for they were all taken from myself and the society in which I lived. If we talked of gay, bright, happy people, I could only fancy them like the little dog; beautiful stately ladies must look like the bird, and ancient dames like my old woman. My stories contained something about love, and I made myself the heroine of many wonderful adventures: I pictured for myself the most beautiful knight the world had ever seen; I adorned him with every grace and every perfection; and though, after all my trouble, I could not tell exactly what he was like, I could feel the most passionate despair if he did not return my affection; and I had all sorts of eloquent speeches to make—which I would often repeat aloud—to win his love. You smile! Ah, well, we are none of us young now!

"I was much the happiest when I was by myself; for then I was absolute mistress in the cottage. The dog was very fond of me, and did all that I wished; the bird replied with his song to all my questions; my wheel went round merrily; and I never for a moment felt a wish for any change. When the old woman came back from her long expeditions, she would praise me for being so good and attentive. Her household, she said, was much better attended to since I had been there; she was pleased with my growth, and the general healthiness of my appearance; in short, she spoke to me and treated me exactly as if I had been her daughter. 'You are going on well indeed, my child,' she said one day, with a roughish coarse voice: 'if you continue in this way, you will never come to any mischief. But, you may depend upon it, it never fails, if once one gets out of the right road, but sooner or later we shall be punished for it.' I took little notice of this at the time she said it; for in all I did and said I was a lively, thoughtless child; but by and by, in the night, her words recurred to me, and I could not conceive what she meant. I thought them all over and over again. I had often read about riches and wealth, and so on; and at last it occurred to me that those pearls and precious stones must be of great value. This soon became more plain to me; but what could she have meant by the right road? I could not make any thing of it, do what I would.

"I was now fourteen years old; and it is unfortunate for people that generally they only get their understanding to lose their innocence by the light of it. I now came clearly enough to comprehend that it would be easy for me, while the old woman was away, to take the bird and the jewels, and go with them into the world that I had read about; and then very likely I might find my beautiful knight, who still continued in my thoughts.

"At first this idea was no more than any other, just flashing across my mind and then gone again; but when I sat by myself at my wheel, in spite of myself it kept coming

back to me, till at last it completely took possession of my mind; and I already saw myself dressed with the greatest magnificence, with knights and princes standing round me; and so I would let myself dream on, and then when I started up and found myself in a little narrow room, I felt vexed and disappointed. For the rest, so that I did what I was told, the old woman did not trouble herself about what was passing in my mind.

"One day she went away again, telling me that this time she would be absent longer than usual; I was to see that every thing was kept right, and do what I could to prevent the time hanging heavy on my hands. I took leave of her with some distress, as I felt a misgiving that I should never see her again; I stood watching her a long time as she hobbled away, almost without knowing myself why I was so unhappy. It seemed as if my purpose was already before my mind, and yet I was not actually conscious of it.

"Never did I take so much care of the dog and the bird as now; they seemed closer to my heart than they had been before. The old woman had been gone some days, when one morning I got up with the fixed purpose to leave the cottage with the bird, and go and look for what was called the world. Still I felt unhappy and miserable. I wished to stay where I was, and yet this thought had got too strong a hold on me; there was a singular struggle going on in my soul, as if two opposite spirits were fighting in me. One moment came the sweetness of that sequestered spot before me, looking so beautiful; and then the next, the ravishing idea of a new world, and all the wonderful things in it. I hardly knew what to make of myself. The little dog kept jumping up upon me incessantly. The sunshine lay spread out brilliantly over the green fields, and the chestnut-leaves glistened as it fell on them. Suddenly I felt a strong impulse seize me; I caught the little dog and tied it up in the cottage, and then took the cage and the bird under my arm. The dog whined and struggled at this unusual treatment; he looked up at me with imploring eyes, but I could not venture to take him with me. One of the boxes of precious stones I took and made fast to my girdle, the rest I left in their places. The bird stretched and strained with his head in an odd wild way as I went out with him through the door; the dog sprung at his chain to follow me; but he was bound fast, and he was obliged to stay. I avoided the road that led to the mountains, and went down the valley the opposite way. The little dog kept whining and barking incessantly, and I felt for him in my heart; the bird made one or two attempts to sing, but it seemed he did not like being carried, and would not go on.

"For a long time I heard the barking of the dog, getting weaker and fainter, however, as I got further away; at last it ceased altogether. I cried, and had almost turned about and gone back again, but the craving for something new urged me forward. I was soon over the hill, and I walked on through wood and meadow till towards evening, when I found myself near a village. I felt rather frightened at first in going into an inn among strange people; but they shewed me into a chamber with a bed, and I slept there very comfortably, only that I dreamed of the old woman, who seemed to threaten me.

"My journey had very little variety; but the further I went, the more I was haunted by the recollection of the old woman and the little dog. The poor little thing, I thought, would be sure to die of hunger, without me to help it; and at every turn in the forest I expected to see the figure of the old woman coming to meet me. Sighing and weeping, I travelled on: whenever I stopped to rest myself, and set the cage down upon the ground, the bird would sing his strange song, and then bitter feelings of regret would come upon me for the dear old cottage. So forgetful is our nature, I thought my first journey had not been half so miserable as that, and I craved to be again once more as I was then.

"I had parted with some of the jewels, and at last, after a long round of walking, one day I came to a village. I felt a strange emotion on entering it; I was overcome by something, and could not tell why. Very soon, however, I recollected myself, and found I was in the village where I was born. How surprised I was! a thousand reminiscences came pouring back upon me, and the tears ran down my cheeks. It was very much altered. New houses had sprung up; others, which were new when I went away, were crumbling to the ground; I found traces of burning also; and every thing looked much smaller and more confined than I had fancied. I was infinitely delighted, however, at the thought of seeing my father and mother again after so long an absence. I found the little cottage; the well-known doorway; the handle of the door was exactly as it used to be; it seemed like yesterday that I had had it in my hand. My heart beat and throbbed; I opened the door hastily; but all the faces in the room were strange to me; they stared at me as I entered. I asked for old Martin the shepherd; but they told me he and his wife had been dead for three years past. I drew back as quickly as I could, and went crying out of the village.

"I had been thinking how delightful it would be to surprise them with all my riches; the strangest accident had realised the dreams of my childhood—I could make them happy—and now all was vain. They could not share with me; and what all my life long had been the dearest object of my hope was lost to me for ever.

"I went to a pleasant-looking town, where I rented a small house with a garden, and took a servant to live with me. I did not find the world quite the wonderful place I expected; but I soon learnt to think less and less of the old woman and the cottage I had lived in with her; and so altogether I lived on pleasantly enough.

"For a long time the bird had left off singing, so that I was not a little frightened when one night he began again with a different song.

'My forest-bower,

Thou'rt far from me;

Oh, hour by hour

I grieve for thee:

Ah, when shall I see

My forest-bower?'

I could not sleep all night. The whole thing came back again into my thoughts, and I felt more clearly than ever that I had done what I ought not. When I got up, the bird's head was turned towards me; he kept watching me with a strange expression, and seemed to be reproaching me. Now he never stopped singing; and his song came louder and deeper I thought than it had ever been before. The more I looked at him, the more uncomfortable he made me. At last I opened the cage, thrust in my hand and caught him by the neck. I pressed my fingers violently together; he looked imploringly in my face; I let him go; but he was already dead: I buried him in the garden.

"After this I was haunted by a fear of my servant; my conscience told me what I had done, and I was afraid that some day or other she would be robbing, or perhaps murdering me. Shortly, however, I became acquainted with a young knight, who pleased me exceedingly. I gave him my hand; and here, Herr Walters, is my story ended."

"Ah, you should have seen her then," Egbert broke in hastily; "her youthful freshness and beauty; and what an indescribable charm she had received from her retired education! She came before me as a kind of miraculous being, and I set no bounds to my affection for her. I was poor myself; indeed I had nothing; but through her love I was placed in the position in which you find me. We withdrew hither, and neither of us has ever, for a single moment, regretted our union."

"But see, with our talking and chatting," interrupted Bertha, "it is already past midnight; we had better go to bed."

She rose to retire to her chamber; as they parted Walters kissed her hand, and wished her good night. "Thanks, noble lady," he said, "for your story. I think I can see you with your strange bird, and feeding the little Strohmian."

Walters, too, retired to sleep; but Egbert continued restlessly pacing up and down the hall. "What fools we men are!" he said to himself. "Was it not I that prevailed on my wife to tell her story? and now I am sorry it should have been told! Will he not make use of it for some evil purpose? Will he not blab, and let our secret out to others? Is he not very likely (it is just what a man would naturally do) to feel some accursed hankering after one's jewels, and lay some plan or other to get hold of them?"

It struck him Walters had not taken leave of him with, as much heartiness as he

naturally would have done after being admitted into such a piece of confidence. When once a man has admitted a feeling of suspicion into his breast, every trifle becomes a confirmation of it. Then for a moment he would feel ashamed of so ungenerous a distrust of his noble-hearted friend; and yet he could not fling it off; all night long these feelings kept swaying to and fro through his breast. He slept but little.

The next morning Bertha was unwell, and could not appear at breakfast. Walters did not seem much to distress himself about it, and of the knight also he took leave with apparent unconcern. Egbert could not well make it out; he went to his wife's room, she was in a violent fever; she said she supposed telling her story the preceding night must have over-excited her.

After that evening Walters came seldom to his friend's castle; and when he did he never stayed, but went away again almost immediately with a few unmeaning words. Egbert was excessively distressed at this behaviour: he never said any thing about it, either to his wife or to Walters; but they must both have seen that there was something which made him uneasy. Bertha's illness too was another subject of distress to him. The physician became alarmed; the colour faded from her cheeks, and her eyes grew of an unnatural brightness. One morning she called her husband to her bedside, and sent the servants out of the room.

"My dear husband," she began, seriously, "I have something to tell you, which, however unmeaning and trifling it may seem to you, has been the cause of all my illness, and has almost driven me out of my senses. You know that whenever I have spoken of the events of my childhood, in spite of all the trouble I have taken, I have never been able to think of the name of the little dog that was so long with me. The other evening as Walters took leave of me, he said, suddenly, 'I fancy I see you feeding the little Strohmian.' Can it be accident that he hit upon the name? or does he know the dog, and said what he did on purpose? In what mysterious way is this man bound up with my destiny? At times I try to persuade myself that it is all fancy; but no, it is certainly true, too true. I cannot tell you how it has terrified me to be so helped out with my recollection by a perfect stranger: what do you say, Egbert?"

Egbert regarded his suffering wife with the deepest emotion. For some time he could not speak, but stood lost in his own reflections. At last he muttered a few words of consolation, and left her. He retired to a remote apartment, and paced up and down in indescribable uneasiness. Walters had for many years been his only companion; and now was this man the only one in the world whose existence was a pain and grief to him. Could this one being be removed out of his path, all, he thought, would then be well with him. To dissipate his unpleasant reflections, he took his cross-bow and went out into the mountains to hunt.

It was a rough stormy winter's day; the snow lay deep upon the hill-side, and the heavy branches of the pine-trees bent under their burden. He scrambled rapidly on; the

sweat stood upon his brow; but he could not light on any game, and that increased his ill-humour. Suddenly he saw a figure moving at some distance from him: it was Walters, who was gathering moss from the trunks of the trees. Hardly knowing what he did, he levelled his cross-bow at him; Walters looked round, and raised his hand with a menacing gesture; but the bolt was sped to its mark, and he fell to the earth.

Egbert now felt relieved from a heavy burden. Yet a feeling of terror drove him hastily back to his castle. He had a long way to go; for he had wandered far away into the forests. When he reached it, Bertha was already dead: on her deathbed she had spoken incessantly of Walters and the old woman.

Egbert now lived for a long time entirely alone. He had always been dark and gloomy enough; for his wife's strange history troubled him, and he was continually afraid some terrible misfortune would befall them. His own conscience made him uneasy also. His friend's murder was for ever before his eyes, and his life was an eternal self-upbraiding.

As some relief to his feelings, he went from time to time to the next great town, where he could find society and forget himself in feasting and dissipation. He longed to find a friend to fill up the dreary chasm in his soul; and then again when he thought of Walters, he shrunk in terror from it, as he felt convinced that any friend must only be a source of new misery to him. So many years he had lived with Bertha in their sweet seclusion, Walters' friendship had so long been his greatest delight; and now both were suddenly snatched away from him. There were many moments when it all seemed to him like a strange, wild romance, and that he only dreamt that he was alive.

A young knight, Hugo, attached himself to the silent, gloomy Egbert, and seemed to be inspired with a real deep affection for him. Egbert was very much surprised, and came forward to meet this new offer of friendship the more readily because it was so entirely unexpected. The two were now continually together. The stranger shewed Egbert every possible attention. Neither ever rode out without the other; in short, wherever they were, they appeared inseparable.

Yet it was only for a very brief interval that Egbert allowed himself to feel happy; for he was too sure that Hugo only loved him because he did not know his history. His friend was in an error respecting him; and he felt the same impulse as he had done before to unbosom himself to him, that he might be assured whether he was indeed his friend or not. Then, again, caution kept him back, and the fear of becoming an object of abhorrence to Hugo; there were times when he was so terribly oppressed with a sense of his unworthiness that he could not believe any one who was not an utter stranger to him could entertain the slightest regard for him. For all that, however, he could not contain himself; and one day as they were walking by themselves, he told his whole history, and then asked whether he could still love a murderer. Hugo was touched, and tried to comfort him; and Egbert returned with a lighter heart to the

town.

Yet it seemed to be his curse that a feeling of suspicion must arise even in the hour of confidence; for hardly were they returned to their room, and the glare of the candle was thrown upon his friend's face, than he found something there which displeased him. He fancied he could trace a malicious laugh. It struck him too that Hugo did not seem so ready to talk to him as usual, and that his attention was almost entirely given to the other persons present. There was an old knight in the party who had never been a friend of Egbert, and used to ask unpleasant questions about his wife, and where he got his money from.... To this person Hugo attached himself, and the two held a long mysterious conversation together, while their looks were from time to time directed towards himself. Here he saw all his suspicions at once confirmed. He believed he was betrayed, and his fierce and gloomy temper now got complete mastery over him. As he stood with his eyes fixed on them as they talked, suddenly he saw Walters' face, his air, his gesture—the whole figure so familiar to him. He looked again; and now he was convinced that it was no one but Walters that was speaking with the old knight.... In unutterable terror, almost beside himself, he rushed out of the room, and that night left the city, and returned as fast as possible to his castle.

He wandered restlessly from chamber to chamber; not a thought could he find to soothe him; sleep fled from his eyes, and from one terrible imagination he could only fall into another yet more terrible. He thought he must be mad, and that what he had seen was but a crazed dream; but Walters' features had been too vivid, and all was again a riddle. He resolved to leave the castle, and set out upon his travels, to bring his mind again into order: every thought of friendship, every wish for society, he had now given up for ever.

He set out without having made up his mind which way he would go; indeed he thought little of the country through which he passed. One day he had been riding for some time at a rapid pace among the mountains, when he found himself suddenly involved in a labyrinth of rocks, from which he could not discover any way of escape. At last he fell in with an old countryman, who shewed him a path leading past a waterfall. He offered the old man some money as a reward, but he declined to accept it.

"What is the matter with me?" said Egbert to himself; "I could have fancied this was Walters again." He looked round, and Walters it certainly was. Egbert spurred his horse on at its utmost speed; he flew away over rocks and through woods and meadows, until at length it sunk exhausted under him to the earth. He did not pause to think of this, but continued to hurry on on foot.

In a kind of half-dream, he climbed a little hill; he fancied he heard the lively barking of a dog somewhere near him. Tall chestnuts rustled in the wind, and he caught the strange wild strains of a song:

"In my forest-home

Again sing I,

Where pain hath no life;

No envy and strife.

Oh, am I not happy

In my forest home?"

Egbert was completely stupified, his senses reeled; all seemed a dark painful riddle to him. He could not tell whether he was dreaming now, or whether he had not dreamt of a Bertha as his wife. The common and the wonderful were so strangely mingled together; the world round him was enchanted.... His thoughts and recollections swam confusedly before his mind.

A crooked hump-backed old woman came panting up the hill with a crutch.

"Are you come to bring me my bird? my pearls? my dog?" she screamed to him; "see how wickedness is its own punisher! I was your friend Walters—I was Hugo."

"God in heaven," muttered Egbert to himself, "to what dreadful place have I wandered? Where am I?"

"And Bertha was your sister."

Egbert fell to the ground.

"What made her run away from me in that way? the time of trial was almost over, and thus all had ended well. She was the daughter of a knight; he sent her to the herdsman to be brought up. She was your father's daughter."

"Oh, why, why have I ever had this dreadful foreboding?" cried Egbert.

"Because when you were young you once heard your father speak of it. He could not let her stay with him, for he was afraid of his wife; she was the child of an earlier marriage."

Egbert's heartstrings burst; he lay gasping out his life upon the ground; faintly and more faintly he heard the old woman speak, the dog bark, and the bird chant on his unwearying song.