

others as they fed noisily at the table, moving here and there behind the men with wooden or pewter dishes of food, now and then laughing at the jests that passed or joining in the talk. A huge fire blazed and crackled and roared in the great open fireplace, before which were stretched two fierce, shaggy, wolfish-looking hounds. Outside, the rain beat upon the roof or ran trickling from the eaves, and every now and then a chill draught of wind would breathe through the open windows of the great black dining-hall and set the fire roaring.

Along the dull-gray wall of stone hung pieces of armor, and swords and lances, and great branching antlers of the stag. Overhead arched the rude, heavy, oaken beams, blackened with age and smoke, and underfoot was a chill pavement of stone.

Upon Baron Conrad's shoulder leaned the pale, slender, yellow-haired Baroness, the only one in all the world with whom the fierce lord

of Drachenhausen softened to gentleness, the only one upon whom his savage brows looked kindly, and to whom his harsh voice softened with love.

The Baroness was talking to her husband in a low voice, as he looked down into her pale face, with its gentle blue eyes.

"And wilt thou not, then," said she, "do that one thing for me?"

"Nay," he growled, in his deep voice, "I cannot promise thee never more to attack the towns-people in the valley over yonder. How else could I live an' I did not take from the fat town hogs to fill our own larder?"

"Nay," said the Baroness, "thou couldst live as some others do, for all do not rob the burgher folk as thou dost. Alas! mishap will come upon thee some day, and if thou shouldst be slain, what then would come of me?"

"Prut," said the Baron, "thy foolish fears" But he laid his rough, hairy hand softly upon the

Baroness' head and stroked her yellow hair.

"For my sake, Conrad," whispered the Baroness.

A pause followed. The Baron sat looking thoughtfully down into the Baroness' face. A moment more, and he might have promised what she besought; a moment more, and he might have been saved all the bitter trouble that was to follow. But it was not to be.

Suddenly a harsh sound broke the quietness of all into a confusion of noises. Dong! Dong!—it was the great alarm-bell from Melchior's Tower.

The Baron started at the sound. He sat for a moment or two with his hand clinched upon the arm of his seat as though about to rise, then he sunk back into his chair again.

All the others had risen tumultuously from the table, and now stood looking at him, awaiting his orders.

"For my sake, Conrad," said the Baroness

again.

Dong! Dong! rang the alarm-bell. The Baron sat with his eyes bent upon the floor, scowling blackly.

The Baroness took his hand in both of hers. "For my sake," she pleaded, and the tears filled her blue eyes as she looked up at him, "do not go this time."

From the courtyard without came the sound of horses' hoofs clashing against the stone pavement, and those in the hall stood watching and wondering at this strange delay of the Lord Baron. Just then the door opened and one came pushing past the rest; it was the one-eyed Hans. He came straight to where the Baron sat, and, leaning over, whispered something into his master's ear.

"For my sake," implored the Baroness again; but the scale was turned. The Baron pushed back his chair heavily and rose to his feet. "Forward!" he roared, in a voice of thunder, and

a great shout went up in answer as he strode clanking down the hall and out of the open door.

The Baroness covered her face with her hands and wept.

"Never mind, little bird," said old Ursela, the nurse, soothingly; "he will come back to thee again as he has come back to thee before."

But the poor young Baroness continued weeping with her face buried in her hands, because he had not done that thing she had asked.

A white young face framed in yellow hair looked out into the courtyard from a window above; but if Baron Conrad of Drachenhausen saw it from beneath the bars of his shining helmet, he made no sign.

"Forward," he cried again.

Down thundered the drawbridge, and away they rode with clashing hoofs and ringing armor through the gray shroud of drilling rain.