

He was returning a day before he was expected and the unpleasant prospect of a cold room stared him in the face. Finally he reached the house. Entering the hall he was greeted by a most unusual sound coming from his landlady's apartments. He opened the door hastily, only to stop short with astonishment. In the middle of the floor was crouched the good old woman, moving about as well as her obesity would permit, on hands and knees; on her back was a loudly shouting little fellow about six, while by her side were two other children giving commands to their erstwhile steed at the top of their voices.

"Heaven help me if here isn't the gentleman," she cried, springing up, "and just when I had the children. To think that you'd find me like this. But children make of one whatever they will. The lady—" but Stöger checked her.

"Is my room warm?"

"My, no! I didn't expect you before to-morrow. But I'll have it ready in a minute."

"By that time I'll have caught my death of cold."

"Not if you stay here until the room is thoroughly warmed," and with that she pushed an old leathern arm chair up to the fire.

"And probably I shall tend the children while you are gone."

"Dear me, no. The children won't bother you. Here!" (to the children). "seat yourselves and keep quiet until I come back!" And before Stöger could either acquiesce or object to her arrangement she was out of the room. His arm painfully warned him not to go to his cold room, consequently nothing remained but to make the best of a necessary evil.

The comfortable warmth of the fire softened his mood, and pushing the chair back he began to pace the floor. Suddenly he stopped before the children, shyly huddled in a corner.

"Who are you?" he asked in his brusque manner, of the little girl nearest him.

"I'm mother's dark-brown little girl."

"Mother's dark-brown little girl," amusedly repeated Stöger, glancing at the dark hair and eyes of the pretty little brunette. "You certainly are dark enough."

"And who are you?" turning to the smallest of the two boys, who answered somewhat confusedly:

"Mother's stupid little fat boy," which so strikingly charac-