

“O, mama, mama, wake up! O, you goodest, dearest mama; just open your eyes and look at us again. Mama, O mama, dear, lovely mama, don't be dead!”

With trembling hands Stöger pushed the children away. “You must keep quiet if mama is to awake,” and at his command little Johnnie took the other children to a corner of the room, where, closely huddled together, they cried softly.

Stöger bent over the lifeless figure in order to raise her, but he trembled so violently that he had to give up. He knelt, and supporting her head with both hands looked at the pale, delicate face before him. It was framed in a mass of raven hair. The black eyebrows contrasted sharply with the high, white forehead. The eyes spoke of impending trouble and of a long and arduous struggle. With uncertain hand he stroked the hair back from the forehead. What was it that suddenly griped at his heart till it quivered? Was it the expression of pain in the face before him which affected him so greatly and which disturbed his soul that had so long lain in sleep? Or was it the pictures of the past which passed through his mind and which seemed to envelop in a mist the face before him? Anxiously and questioningly he looked into it.

The door was thrown open and Rosa entered. “Does she live, does she live?” she cried, throwing herself beside her and covering both hands with kisses. Then as suddenly she sprang up again to make way for the doctor and for the landlady who had hastened to the scene.

“She must be undressed and put to bed,” ordered the doctor. “She must have absolute quiet when she recovers,” he added, as he noticed the children.

“The children; oh, what shall we do with the children!” asked Rosa.

“If they could stay alone they might go to my room,” suggested the housewife.

“The least disturbance may result fatally,” said the doctor, imperiously.

“The children,” began Stöger, somewhat hesitatingly, “may use my room.”

At this suggestion the children clung fearfully to Rosa, who was somewhat astonished, but she did not hesitate a moment and the children were soon ensconced in Stöger's apartments.