

"Who is there?"

Two of the robbers escaped. The dumb man remained behind with his dead brother on his back.

Now what happened at the trial? Every one knew the mute had been able to speak. How could anyone doubt but that the dumb man was shamming? They beat him till he was crazy to try and make his speech come back, but in vain. Since then the lads had lost all desire to attack the place.

While all this was passing through my mind I arrived at the inn. A number of carts were waiting in the yard of the inn. Some were carrying timber down the valley; others, maize up the hill.

It was a raw autumn evening. The drivers were warming themselves round the fire. It was the light from the latter that had been visible so far away. An ostler took my horse in charge to give him some oats in the stable. I entered the tap-room where a good many men were drinking, while two sleepy gipsies, one with a lute and one with a zither, were playing monotonously in a corner. I was hungry and cold. The damp had pierced through me.

"Where's your mistress?" I asked the boy behind the bar.

"By the kitchen fire."

"It ought to be warmer there," I said, and passed through the vestibule, out of the tap-room into the kitchen.

It was very clean in the kitchen, and the smell was not like that in the tap-room, of fur and boots and damp shoes; there was a smell of new-made bread. Madame Manjoala was looking after the oven.

"Well met, Mistress Marghioala."

"Welcome, Mr. Fanica."

"Is there a chance of getting anything to eat?"

"Up to midnight even, for respectable people like yourself."

Mistress Marghioala quickly gave orders to one of the servants to lay a table in the next room, and then, going up to the hearth, said:

"Look, choose for yourself."

Mistress Marghioala was beautiful, well-built and fascinating, that I knew; but never since I had known her--and I had known her for a long time, for I had passed Manjoala's Inn many a time when my dead father was alive, as the road to the town led by it--had she appeared to me more attractive. I was young, smart and daring, much more daring than smart. I came up on her left side as she was bending over the hearth, and took her by the waist! with my hand I took hold of her right arm, which was as hard as iron, and the devil tempted me to give it a pinch.

"Have you got nothing to do?" said the woman, looking at me askance.

But I, to cover my blunder, said:

"What marvellous eyes you have, Mistress Marghioala!"

"Don't try and flatter me; you had better tell me what to give you."

"Give me--give me--give me yourself."

"Really----"

"Indeed, you have marvellous eyes, Mistress Marghioala!" sighing.