

They began to eat, quickly and hungrily, tearing the meat with their fingers, not speaking a word. Toli picked up the shoulder-bone of the lamb, and drew near the fire, to scrutinize it, for some omen for the future.

"What's the matter?" Tega asked.

"Nothing--only it seems to me--that there is blood everywhere, that blood pursues. Look, and you, too, Panu."

"There is," murmured Panu, "a little blood, one can see a spot, two red patches."

The hours passed. The dogs started off towards the woods. From their bark there might be dangerous men on the move. Toli listened a moment, took his gun, and said quickly to Tega:

"Have you any weapon about you?"

"I have--a pistol."

"Take it out, and go in there, and do not move. But you, Panu, get more over there--not near the fire, move into the shadow."

He had scarcely finished speaking before the brigands were upon them. They came stealthily through the bushes, avoiding the moonlight, but the shepherd saw them, and without waiting fired a chance shot.

"Don't shoot, don't shoot!" cried the robbers.

A great noise arose--the flock scattered, the barking of the dogs became gradually more and more excited; there was another report, and yet another. Toli's gun gave a dull sound and was followed by several cries:

"You will kill us all like this, all----"

"Down with your arms, lay down your arms!" cried Toli.

"Look, man, we are putting them down; only don't shoot."

"Drop them!"

Toli's voice thundered. His voice alone was enough to make one tremble.

The brigands threw down their arms, and advanced. There were three of them. One was quite a young man, about thirty-five years of age, with a worn face, and very pale. Blood was flowing from one foot and clotting on to his white gaiters as it flowed. Toli went up to him and said:

"I have wounded you--have I wounded you?"

The brigand did not reply. Toli crossed his arms and shaking his head asked:

"Was it me you meant to rob? Was it me you meant to attack? Do you know who I am?"

They looked into each other's eyes, they stared at each other--deep into each other's eyes they gazed. Each one was thinking: "where have I seen him before?" for they had surely known each other somewhere. Vague memories of their past life, of bygone years began to stir, and gradually, recollection dawned.

"Gardana," said the brigand, "is it you?"

Mitu Tega was startled. He shivered as though iced water were being poured down his back. Who had uttered that name? Where was Gardana? He was thunder-struck by what followed: Toli and the robbers shook hands, embraced each other and conversed with each other.