

the story, whither he had wandered with the sheep, he fell in love with the beautiful Virghea. Mad with love, when the family made the winter-move, he followed her to the mountains; he came with a comrade and wandered about till he settled his sheep-fold here, in these parts.

"Ah! where had the fame of this Virghea of Gramuste not reached! All the beauties of nature seemed to have bestowed some gift upon her: the blue of heaven--the colour of her eyes; the shadow of the woods--the mystery of their liquid depths; the setting sun--the gold of her soft hair; the springs--the tone of her silvery laugh. Attracted by such charms every youth fell at the feet of Virghea. But she did not care; only when her eyes rested on the shepherd did her youthful being fill with a burning desire.

"Now day after day from the high ground about the sheep-fold could be heard the sound of a flute; heard in the stillness of the dusk it roused strange longings in the girl's breast. Then she would steal out of the house, and the shepherd himself would come down towards Gramuste.

"About this time, there broke loose such a storm as had never been seen before. The peaks began to rattle as though the mountains were changing places, striking each other with noise like thunder. Thus it continued for three days. Only on the fourth day, late in the evening, could the shepherd leave the fold: he had taken only a few steps when--what a sight met his eyes by the side of the pool! A big fire, and round it a shadowy form. And suddenly the phantom spoke with hand pointing to the spit which he held above the heap of burning coals: 'The heart of the spirit of Deniscu.'

"In a flash the shepherd realized the meaning of the hurricane of the last few days. The guardian spirits of the mountains had striven together, and one had been overthrown. The shadow continued to speak: 'Turn this spit that I may rest a while. Taste not of the heart, for if you touch it you will immediately die.'

"The shadow fell into a profound slumber.

"By the side of the fire the shepherd looked fearfully on all sides. Far off, in the pale blue sky, a star broke away; it fell with a long tail of fire, and went out. 'Some one will die,' sighed the shepherd. The words of the spirit flashed through his mind. 'H'm!' he said. 'If I taste, perhaps the contrary is true, who knows?' So thinking, he put his finger on the heart on the spit and carried it to his mouth. The sensation was unspeakably pleasant. He laughed; then quickly ate the whole heart. Immediately there rose within him a cruel passion towards the sleeping spirit; upon the spot he killed it and took the heart. At once there came to him the strength of a giant, the ground began to tremble beneath his footsteps, while aerial voices, and voices from the water, sounded round him. Creatures never seen before emerged from the pool; linked together by their white hands they danced round in whirling circles. Thus changed, he reached his comrade at the fold, and tried to explain, but his thoughts were elsewhere, and his voice sounded as though from another world. He finished with broken words: 'The water calls me--tell no one what has happened to me--take my flute: if danger threatens come to the pool and sing to me.'

"During the evenings that followed Virghea saw naught of the shepherd, and she wondered at not seeing him, expecting him from day to day. So days passed that seemed like weeks, and weeks seemed months, and they went by without any news of him till the poor maiden took to her bed from grief. Then the comrade of the hills remembered the shepherd's words. He came at midnight to the side of the pool and sang--a long time he sang. Towards dawn, when the strains of the flute died away, there came from Gramuste the sound of two strokes of a bell, then another two, and others in succession, mournful, prolonged. The echoes answered back, as though other bells were ringing in other places, resounding from hill to hill until they reached the bottom of the pool, and after a time, to the voice of the bells were joined real words, sobbing to the rhythm: 'Virghea is dead--is dead!'"