

Silence reigned over the lake. Water-lilies shone in the golden sunset; the reeds rustled softly; the dragon-flies passed like blue flashes through the light.

Suddenly the girl turned her strange grey eyes upon me.

"So to-night you will lie in wait for the duck?" she asked.

"Yes, I shall wait."

"Good."

Her voice had a melodious, silvery ring. I questioned her:

"That seems strange to you?"

"No," she said, turning her head away; "but aren't you afraid?"

"Of what should I be afraid?"

"Of the fairy of the lake," she replied with conviction.

"Of the water lady? Who is this fairy of the lake?"

"What? Do you not know? The fairy of the lake."

Her eyes scanned my face intently.

The sun had nearly set; the water of the lake grew dark; a heron passed above us scarcely moving its wings; its cries sent a shudder of sadness through the silence of the forest of reeds. The girl looked at me, and her teeth shone with a smile of almost diabolical beauty: her clear-cut face seemed to reflect the colour of the green water. I cannot describe what I felt; only the charm of the speaker was astounding. In that framework of reeds and creepers--set as it were between two skies--she was the fairy of the lake.

The boat struck the side of a cave and remained fast.

"Here we are," said the girl.

Slowly I stepped ashore. But the charm made my head reel. I turned abruptly, took her face between my hands, and would have kissed those eyes in whose depths the secret of the lake lay hid. She resisted gracefully with little movements, and trills of laughter, and instead of kissing her eyes I touched her lips which burnt like fire.

I felt her draw herself away, I felt those strange eyes piercing through me, and the boat shot away into the reeds and creepers. The lake remained desolate, and in the silence only the gentle splash of distant oars could be heard. I prepared myself a little bed of reeds in the cave. I spread out my serge cloak, tried the triggers of my gun, and while I waited for the duck I fell into a brown study. How strange! I was perfectly conscious of my position; I knew quite well that the fairy was none other than Zamfira, the miller's niece, the sunburnt, and perhaps, the simple maiden; and in spite of this, the eyes, and the laughter, had something about them that intoxicated me like the strong perfume of some wild flower.

In the gradually deepening shadows of the twilight she remained like some vision, floating on the bosom of the lake, among the blossoms of the water-lilies. I was roused by the rapid whirr of wings. I started up. A flight of duck passed over me. This event drove away my preoccupation. I steadied the gun in my hands and put it at full cock. In the reeds, torn and beaten by the wings of the duck, coot and moor-hens called to each other; a light breeze ruffled the forest of reeds. Small flocks of birds passed through the darkness of the night. I fired a few shots. The gun made a deep sound which echoed far across the water; one or two duck detached themselves from the group, and fell heavily to the surface of the lake, troubling the water. The