A picture from the ramparts

It is autumn. We stand on the ramparts, and look out over the sea. We look at the numerous ships, and at the Swedish coast on the opposite side of the sound, rising far above the surface of the waters which mirror the glow of the evening sky. Behind us the wood is sharply defined; mighty trees surround us, and the yellow leaves flutter down from the branches. Below, at the foot of the wall, stands a gloomy looking building enclosed in palisades. The space between is dark and narrow, but still more dismal must it be behind the iron gratings in the wall which cover the narrow loopholes or windows, for in these dungeons the most depraved of the criminals are confined.

A ray of the setting sun shoots into the bare cells of one of the captives, for God's sun shines upon the evil and the good. The hardened criminal casts an impatient look at the bright ray. Then a little bird flies towards the grating, for birds twitter to the just as well as to the unjust. He only cries, "Tweet, tweet," and then perches himself near the grating, flutters his wings, pecks a feather from one of them, puffs himself out, and sets his feathers on end round his breast and throat. The bad, chained man looks at him, and a more gentle expression comes into his hard face. In his breast there rises a thought which he himself cannot rightly analyze, but the thought has some connection with the sunbeam, with the bird, and with the scent of violets, which grow luxuriantly in spring at the foot of the wall. Then there comes the sound of the hunter's horn, merry and full. The little bird starts, and flies away, the sunbeam gradually vanishes, and again there is darkness in the room and in the heart of that bad man. Still the sun has shone into that heart, and the twittering of the bird has touched it.

Sound on, ye glorious strains of the hunter's horn; continue your stirring tones, for the evening is mild, and the surface of the sea, heaving slowly and calmly, is smooth as a mirror.

* * *