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BARBARA BLOMBERG

By Georg Ebers

Volume 7.

CHAPTER I.

Through the storm, which lashed her face with whirling clouds of dust and drops of rain, Barbara reached the little Prebrunn castle.

The marquise had not yet left her litter. The wind had extinguished two of the torches. One bearer walked in front of Barbara with his, and the gale blew the smoking flame aside. But, ere she had reached the gate, a man who had been concealed behind the old elm by the path stepped forward to meet her. She started back and, as he called her by name, she recognised the young Wittenberg theologian, Erasmus Eckhart. Sincerely indignant, she ordered him to go away at once, but her first words were interrupted by the shrill voice of the marquise, who had now left her litter, and with loud shrieks ordered the steward to seize the burglar.

Erasmus, however, trusted to his strength and nimbleness and, instead of promptly taking flight, entreated Barbara to listen to him a moment. Not until, far from allowing herself to be softened, she, too, threatened him, did he attempt to escape, but both litters were in his way, and when he had successfully passed around them the gardener, suddenly emerging from the darkness, seized him. But the sturdy young fellow knew how to defend his liberty, and had already released himself from his assailant when other servants grasped him.

Above the roar of the storm now rose the shrieks of the marquise, the shouts of "Stop thief!" from the

men, and Erasmus's protestations that he was no robber, coupled with an appeal to Jungfrau Blomberg, who knew him.

Barbara now stated that he was the son of a respectable family, and had by no means come here to steal the property of others; but the marquise, though she probably correctly interpreted the handsome young fellow's late visit, vehemently insisted upon his arrest. She treated Barbara's remonstrance with bitter contempt; and when Cassian, the almoner's servant, appeared and declared that he had already caught this rascal more than once strolling in a suspicious manner near the castle, and that he himself was here so late only because his beloved bride, in her mistress's absence, was afraid of the robber and his companions, Barbara's entreaties and commands were disregarded, and Erasmus's hands were bound.

By degrees the noise drew most of the inmates of the castle out of doors, and among them Frau Lerch. Lastly, several halberdiers, who were coming from the Lindenplatz and had heard the screams in the garden, appeared, chained the prisoner, and took him to the Prebrunn jail.

But scarcely had Erasmus been led away when the priests of the household also came out and asked what had happened. In doing this Barbara's caution in not calling Erasmus by name proved to have been futile, for Cassian had recognised him, and told the ecclesiastics what he knew. The chaplain then asserted that, as the property of the Prince Abbot of Berchtesgaden, the house and garden were under ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and committed the further disposal of the burglar's fate to the Dominican whom the almoner had placed there. For the present he might remain in secular custody. Early the following morning he must be brought before the Spanish Dominicans who had come with the Emperor, and from whom greater severity might be expected than from the Ratisbon brotherhood, by whom monastic discipline had been greatly relaxed.

Meanwhile the wind had subsided, and the storm had burst with thunder, lightning, and torrents of rain. Priests and laymen retreated into the house, and so did Barbara and the marquise. The latter had exposed herself to the tempest only long enough to emphasize the necessity of delivering the heretical night-bird to the Spanish Dominicans very early the next morning, and to show Barbara that she did not overlook the significance of the incidents under the lindens. With a disagreeable blending of tenderness and malice, she congratulated the young girl on the applause she had received as a dancer, the special favour which she had enjoyed from the Duke of Saxony, and the arrest of the dangerous burglar, which would also be a gratification to his Majesty.

With these words the old aristocrat, coughing slightly, tripped up the stairs; but Barbara, without vouchsafing an answer to this speech, whose purpose she clearly understood, turned her back upon her and went to her own room.

She had desired no gift in return when, to save this contemptible woman's son and his child, she sacrificed her lover's precious memento; but the base reward for the kind deed added a burning sense of pain to the other sorrows which the day had brought. What a shameful crime was ingratitude! None could be equally hateful to eternal justice, for—she now learned it by her own experience—ingratitude repaid kindness with evil instead of with good, and paralyzed the disappointed benefactor's will to perform another generous deed.

When she entered her sleeping-room the courage which she had summoned during the walk, and the hope to which she had yielded, appeared to be scattered and blown away as if by a gust of wind. Besides, she could not conceal from herself that she had drawn the nails from the planks of her wrecked ship of life with her own hand.

Did it not seem as if she had intentionally done precisely what she ought most studiously to have left undone? Her sale of the star had been only an unfortunate act of weakness, but the dance, the luckless dance! Not once only, several times Charles had stated plainly enough how unpleasant it was to him even to hear the amusement mentioned. She had behaved as if she desired to forfeit his favour.

And why, in Heaven's name, why? To arouse his jealousy?

Fool that she was! This plant took root only in a heart filled with love

And his?

Because she perceived that his love was dying, she had awakened this fatal passion. Was it not as if she had expected to make a water-lily blossom in the sands of the desert?

True, still another motive had urged her to this mad act. She knew not what name to give it, yet it was only too possible that, in spite of her recent experiences, it might overpower her again on the morrow.

Surprised at herself, she struck her brow with her hand, and when Frau Lerch, who was just combing her wet hair, perceived it, she sobbed aloud, exclaiming: "Poor, poor young gentleman, and the Hiltners, who love him as if he were their own son! Such a terrible misfortune! Old fool that I am! The first time he asked admittance to show you the tablature, and you did not want to receive him, I persuaded you to do so. Then he fared like all the others whose heads you have turned with your singing. Holy Virgin! If the Hiltners learn that you and I let him be bound without making any real protest. It will fall heaviest upon me; you can believe that, for Fran Hiltner and Jungfrau Martina, since the young girl has gone to dances, have been among my best customers. Now they will say: Frau Lerch, who used to be a good little woman, left the young fellow in the lurch when his life was at stake, for they will take him to the Spanish Dominicans. They belong, to the Holy Inquisition, and think no more of burning people at the stake than we do of a few days in prison."

Here Barbara interrupted her with the remark that Erasmus could be convicted of no crime, and the Holy Inquisition had no authority in Ratisbon.

But Frau Lerch knew better. That was all very well during the Emperor's absence, but now that his Majesty resided in the city the case was different. Erasmus had been arrested on ecclesiastical ground, the chaplain had ordered him to be delivered to the Spaniards early the next morning and, ere the syndic could interpose, the rope would already be twisted for him, for with these gentlemen the executioner stood close beside the judge. Besides, she had heard of a pamphlet against the Pope, which the young theologian had had published, that had aroused great indignation among the priesthood. If he fell into the hands of the Dominicans, he would be lost, as surely as she hoped to be saved. If he were only in the custody of the city, of course a better result might be hoped.

Here she stopped with a shriek, dropping the comb, for the thundercloud was now directly over the city, and a loud peal, following close upon the flash of lightning, shook the house; but Barbara scarcely heeded the dazzling glare and the rattling panes.

She had risen with a face as white as death. She knew what severe sentences could be pronounced by the Council of the Inquisition, and the thought that the keenest suffering should be inflicted upon the Hiltners through her, to whom they had showed so much kindness, seemed unendurable. Besides, what she had just said to herself concerning ingratitude returned to her mind.

And then, Inquisition and the rack were two ideas which could scarcely be separated from one another. What might not be extorted from the accused by the torture! In any case, the almoner's suspicion would obtain fresh nourishment, and her lover had told her more than once—what a special dislike he felt for women who, with their slender intelligence, undertook to set themselves above the eternal truths of the Holy Church. And the jealousy which, fool that she was, she had desired to arouse in her lover, what abundant nourishment it would derive from the events which had occurred on her return from the festival!

But even these grave fears were overshadowed by the thought of Dr. Hiltner's wife and daughter. With what fair-mindedness the former in the Convivium had made her cause her own, how touching had been Martina's effort to approach her, and how ill that very day she had requited their loyal affection! Erasmus was as dear as a beloved son to these good women, and Frau Lerch's reproach that her intercession for him was but lukewarm had not been wholly groundless. The next day these friends who, notwithstanding the difference in their religious belief, had treated her more kindly than any one in Ratisbon, would hear this and condemn her. That should not be! She would not suffer them to think of her as she did of the shameless old woman whose footsteps she still heard over her head.

She must not remain idly here, and what her impetuous nature so passionately demanded must be carried into execution, though reason and the loud uproar of the raging storm opposed it.

Fran Lerch had just finished arranging her hair and handed her her night-coif, when she started up and, with the obstinate positiveness characteristic of her, declared that she was going at once to the Hiltners to inform the syndic of what had happened here. Erasmus was still in the hands of the town guards, and perhaps it would be possible for the former to withdraw the prisoner from ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

Frau Lerch clasped her hands in horror, exclaiming: "Holy Virgin, child! Have you gone crazy? Go out in this weather? Whoever is not killed by lightning will drown in the puddles."

But with that violent peal of thunder the storm had reached its height, and when the next flash of lightning came the thunder did not follow until some time after, though the rain continued to beat as heavily against the panes. Yet even had the tempest continued to rage with full fury, Barbara would not have been dissuaded from the resolution which she had once formed.

True, her attempt to persuade Frau Lerch to accompany her remained futile. Her frail body, the dressmaker protested, was not able to undertake such a walk through the storm. If she yielded, it would be her death. It would kill Barbara, also, and this crazy venture would be too dearly paid for at the cost of two human lives.

Barbara's angry remark that if she would not run the risk of getting wet for the sake of compassion, she might on account of the Hiltners' good custom, finally made the excited woman burst into piteous crying; yet in the midst of it she brought Barbara's dress and old thick cloak and, as she put them on the girl, exclaimed, "But I tell you, child, you'll turn back again when you get halfway there, and all you bring home will be a bad illness."

"Whoever can execute the *gagliarde* to dance herself into misery," replied Barbara impatiently, "will not find it difficult to take a walk through the rain to save some one else from misfortune. The cloak!"

"She will go," sobbed Frau Lerch. "The servants must still obey you. At least order the litter. This crazy night pilgrimage can not remain concealed."

"Then let people talk about it," replied Barbara firmly and, after having the cloak clasped and the hood drawn over her head, she went out. Frau Lerch, who had the key, opened the door for her amid loud lamentations and muttered curses; but when the girl had vanished in the darkness, she turned back, saying fiercely through her set teeth: "Rush on to ruin, you headstrong creature! If I see aright, the magnificence here is already tottering. Go and get wet! I've made my profit, and the two unfinished gowns can be added to the account. The Lord is my witness that I meant well. But will she ever do what sensible people advise? Always running her head against the wall. Whoever will not hear, must feel."

She hastened back into the house as she spoke to escape the pouring rain, but Barbara paid little heed to the wet, and waded on through the mire of the road.

The force of the storm was broken, the wind had subsided, distant flashes of lightning still illumined the northern horizon, and the night air was stiflingly sultry. No one appeared in the road, and yet some belated pedestrian might run against her at any moment, for the dense darkness shrouded even the nearest objects. But she knew the way, and had determined to follow the Danube and go along the woodlands to the tanner's pit, whence the Hiltner house was easily reached. In this way she could pass around the gate, which otherwise she would have been obliged to have opened.

But ere gaining the river she was to learn that she had undertaken a more difficult task than she expected. Her father had never allowed her to go out after dark, unaccompanied, even in the neighbourhood, and the terrors of night show their most hideous faces to those who are burdened by anxious cares. Several times she sank so deep into the mud that her shoe stuck fast in it, and she was obliged to force it on again with much difficulty. As she walked on and a strange, noise reached her from the woodyard on her left, when she constantly imagined that she heard another step following hers like an audible shadow, when drunken raftsmen came toward her, hoarsely singing an obscene song, she pressed against a fence in order not to be seen by the dissolute fellows. But now a light came wavering toward her, looking like a shining bird flying slowly, or a hell-hound, with glowing eyes, and at the sight it seemed to her impossible to wander on all alone. But the mysterious light proved to be only a lantern in the hand of an old woman who had been to fetch a doctor, so she summoned up fresh courage, though she told herself that here near the lumber yards she might easily encounter raftsmen and guards watching the logs and planks piled on the banks of the river, fishermen, and sailors. Already she heard the rushing of the swollen Danube, and horrible tales returned to her memory of hapless girls who had flung themselves into the waves here to put an end to lives clouded by disgrace and fear.

Then a shiver ran through her, and she asked herself what her father would say if he could see her wading alone through the water. Perhaps the fatigues of the long journey had thrown him upon a sick-bed; perhaps he had even—at the fear she felt as though her heart would stop beating—succumbed to them. Then he knew how matters stood with her, the sin she had committed, and the shame she had brought upon him that she might enjoy undisturbed a happiness which was already changing into bitter sorrow. Meanwhile it seemed as if she was gazing into his rugged, soldierly face, reddish-brown, with rolling eyes, as it looked when disfigured by anger, and she raised her hands as if to hold him back; but only for a few minutes, for she perceived that her excited imagination was terrifying her with a delusion.

Drawing a long breath, she pushed her dank hair back into her hood and pressed her hand upon her heart. Then she was calm a while, but a new terror set it throbbing again. Close beside her—this time at her right—the loud laughter of men's harsh voices echoed through the darkness.

Barbara involuntarily stopped, and when she collected her thoughts and looked around her, her features, distorted by anxiety and terror, smoothed again, and she instantly knocked with her little

climbed hand upon the door of the hut from whose open windows the laughter had issued.

It stood close to the river bank, and the tiny dwelling belonged to the Prior of Berchtesgaden's fisherman and boatman, who kept the distinguished prelate's gondolas and boats in order, and acted as rower to the occupants of the little Prebrunn castle. She had often met this man when he brought fish for the kitchen, and he had gone with the boats in the water excursions which she had sometimes taken with Gombert and Appenzelder or with Malfalconnet and several pages. She had treated him kindly, and made him generous gifts.

All was still in the house after her knock, but almost instantly the deep voice of the fisherman Valentin, who had thrust his bearded face and red head out of the window, asked who was there.

The answer received an astonished "Can it be!" But as soon as she informed him that she needed a companion, he shouted something to the others, put on his fisherman's cap, stepped to Barbara's side, and led the way with a lantern which stood lighted on the table.

The road was so softened that, in spite of the light which fell on the ground, it was impossible to avoid the pools and muddy places. But the girl had become accustomed to the wet and the wading. Besides, the presence of her companion relieved her from the terrors with which the darkness and the solitude had tortured her. Instead of watching for new dangers, she listened while Valentin explained how it happened that she found him still awake. He had helped hang the banners and lamps under the lindens, and when the storm arose he assisted in removing the best pieces. In return a jug of wine, with some bread and sausages, had been given to him, and he had just begun to enjoy them with two comrades.

The Hiltner house was soon reached. Nothing had troubled Barbara during the nocturnal walk since the fisherman had accompanied her.

Her heart was lighter as she rapped with the knocker on the syndic's door; but, although she repeated the summons several times, not a sound was heard in the silent house.

Valentin had seen the Hiltners' two men-servants with the litters under the lindens, and Barbara thought that perhaps the maids might have gone to the scene of the festival to carry headkerchiefs and cloaks to the ladies before the outbreak of the storm. That the deaf old grandmother did not hear her was easily understood.

The Hiltners could not have returned, so she must wait.

First she paced impatiently to and fro in the rain, then sat upon a curbstone which seemed to be protected from the shower by the roof. But ever and anon a larger stream of water poured down upon her from the jaws of a hideous monster in which the gutter ended than from the black clouds, and, dripping wet, she at last leaned against the door, which was better shielded by the projecting lintel, while the fisherman inquired about the absent occupants of the house.

Thus minute after minute passed until the first and then the second quarter of an hour ended. When the third commenced, Barbara thought she had waited there half the night. The rain began to lessen, it is true, but the sultry night grew cooler, and a slight chill increased her discomfort.

Yet she did not move from the spot. Here, in front of the house in which estimable women had taken her to their hearts with such maternal and sisterly affection, Barbara had plainly perceived that she, who had never ceased to respect herself, would forever rob herself of this right if she did not make every effort in her power to save Erasmus from the grave peril in which he had become involved on her account. During this self-inspection she did not conceal from herself that, while singing his own compositions to him, she had yielded to the unfortunate habit of promising more with her eyes than she intended to perform. How could this vain, foolish sport have pleased her after she had yielded herself, soul and body, to the highest and greatest of men!

Anne Mirl Woller had often been reprov'd by her mother, in her presence, for her freedom of manner. But who had ever addressed such a warning to her? Now she must atone for her heedlessness, like many other things which her impetuous will demanded and proved stronger than the reason which forbade it. It was a wonder that Baron Malfalconnet and Maestro Gombert had not sued more urgently for her favour. If she was honest, she could not help admitting that her lover—and such a lover!—was justified in wishing many things in her totally different. But she was warned now, and henceforth these follies should be over—wholly and entirely over!

If only he would refrain from wounding her with that irritating sharpness, which made her rebellious blood boil and clouded her clear brain! He was indeed the Emperor, to whom reverence was due; but during the happy hours which tenderly united them he himself desired to be nothing but the man to

whom the heart of the woman he loved belonged. She must keep herself worthy of him, nothing more, and this toilsome errand would prevent her from sullyng herself with an ugly sin.

During these reflections the chill had become more and more unendurable, yet she thought far less of the discomfort which it caused her than of increased danger to Erasmus from the Hiltners' long absence.

The third quarter of an hour was already drawing to an end when Valentin came hurrying up and told Barbara that they were on the way. He had managed to speak to the syndic, and told him who was waiting for him.

A young maid-servant, running rapidly, came first to open the house and light the lamps. She was followed, quite a distance in advance of the others, by Dr. Hiltner.

The fisherman's communication had made him anxious. He, too, had heard that Barbara was the Emperor's favourite. Besides, more than one complaint of her offensive arrogance had reached him. But, for that very reason, the wise man said to himself, it must be something of importance that led her to him at this hour and in such weather.

At first he answered her greeting with cool reserve, but when she explained that she had come, in spite of the storm, because the matter concerned the weal or woe of a person dear to him, and he saw that she was dripping wet, he honestly regretted his long delay, and in his manly, resolute manner requested her to follow him into the house; but Barbara could not be persuaded to do so.

To give the thunderstorm time to pass and take his wife and daughter home dry, he had entered a tavern near the lindens and there engaged in conversation with several friends over some wine. Whenever he urged returning, the young people—she knew why—objected. But at last they had started, and Bernhard Trainer had accompanied the Hiltners, in order to woo Martina on the way. Her parents had seen this coming, and willingly confided their child's happiness to him.

The betrothed couple now came up also, and saw with surprise the earnest zeal with which Martina's father was discussing something, they knew not what, with the singer on whose account they had had their first quarrel. The lover had condemned Barbara's unprecedented arrogance during the dance so severely that Martina found it unendurable to listen longer.

Frau Sabina, too, did not know how to interpret Barbara's presence; but one thing was certain in her kindly heart—this was no place for such conversation. How wet the poor girl must be! The wrong which Barbara had done her child was not taken into consideration under these circumstances and, with maternal solicitude, she followed her husband's example, and earnestly entreated Barbara to change her clothes in her house and warm herself with a glass of hot black currant wine. But Barbara could not be induced to do so, and hurriedly explained to the syndic what he lacked the clew to understand.

In a few minutes she had made him acquainted with everything that it was necessary for him to know. Dr. Hiltner, turning to his wife, and mean while looking his future son-in-law steadily in the eye, exclaimed, "We are all, let me tell you, greatly indebted to this brave girl."

Frau Sabina's heart swelled with joy, and to Martina, too, the praise which her father bestowed on Barbara was a precious gift. The mother and daughter had always espoused her cause, and now it again proved that they had done well.

"So I was right, after all," whispered the young girl to her lover.

"And will prove so often," he answered gaily. But when, a short time after, he proposed to Barbara's warm advocate to accompany the singer home, Martina preferred to detain him, and invited him to stay in the house with her a little while longer.

These incidents had occupied only a brief period, and Dr. Hiltner undertook to escort the young girl himself. To save time, he questioned her about everything which he still desired to know, but left her before she turned into the lane leading to the little castle, because he was aware that she, who belonged to the Emperor's household, might be misjudged if she were seen in his company.

Shortly after, he had freed Erasmus from imprisonment and sent him, in charge of one of the Council's halberdiers, beyond the gate. He was to remain concealed outside the city until the syndic recalled him.

The young theologian willingly submitted, after confessing to his foster-father how strongly love for Barbara had taken possession of him.

This act might arouse strong hostility to the syndic, but he did not fear it. Moreover, the Emperor had

showed at the festival plainly enough his withdrawal of the good opinion which he had formerly testified upon many an occasion. This was on account of his religion, and where that was concerned there was no yielding or dissimulation on either side.

Barbara returned home soothed.

Frau Lerch was waiting for her, and with many tokens of disapproval undressed her. Yet she carefully dried her feet and rubbed them with her hands, that she might escape the fever which she saw approaching.

Barbara accepted with quiet gratitude the attention bestowed upon her, but, though she closed her eyes, the night brought no sleep, for sometimes she shivered in a chill, sometimes a violent headache tortured her.

CHAPTER II.

Sleep also deserted the Emperor's couch. After his return from the festival he tried to examine several documents which the secretary Gastelii had laid ready for him on the writing-table, but he could not succeed. His thoughts constantly reverted to Barbara and her defiant rebellion against the distinct announcement of his will. Had the Duke of Saxony, so much his junior and, moreover, a far handsomer and perhaps more generous prince, won her favour, and therefore did she perhaps desire to break the bond with him?

Why not?

She was a woman, and a capricious one, too, and of what would not such a nature be capable? Besides, there was something else. Jamnitzer, the Nuremberg goldsmith, had intrusted a casket of jewels to Adrian to keep during his absence. They were intended for the diadems which the Emperor was to give his two nieces for bridal presents. The principal gems among them were two rubies and a diamond. On the gold of the old-fashioned setting were a P and an I, the initial letters of his motto "Plus ultra." He had once had it engraved upon the back of the star which he bestowed upon Barbara. His keen eye and faithful memory could not be deceived— Jamnitzer's jewels had been broken from that costly ornament.

From time immemorial it had belonged to the treasures of his family, and he had already doubted whether it was justifiable to give it away.

Was it conceivable that Barbara had parted with this, his first memento, sold it, "turned it into money"?—the base words wounded his chivalrous soul like the blow of a scourge.

She was a passionate, defiant, changeful creature, it is true, yet her nature was noble, hostile to baseness, and what a wealth of the purest and deepest feeling echoed in her execution of solemn songs! This induced him to reject as impossible the suspicion that she could have stooped to anything so unworthy.

Still, it was not easily banished. A long series of the sorest disappointments had rendered him distrustful, and he remembered having asked her several times for the star in vain.

Perhaps it had been stolen from her, and Jamnitzer had obtained it from the thief himself or from the receiver. This thought partially soothed him, especially as, if correct, it would be possible for him to recover the ornament. But he was an economical manager, and to expend thousands of ducats for such a thing just at this time, when immense sums were needed for the approaching war, seemed to him more than vexatious.

Besides, the high price which he had paid for the Saxon's aid rendered him uneasy. He had ceded two large bishoprics to his Protestant ally, and this act of liberality, which, it is true, had been approved and supported by Granvelle, could no longer be undone. Moreover, if he drew the sword, he must maintain the pretence that it was not done for the sake of religion, but solely to chastise the insubordinate Protestant princes, headed by the Elector John Frederick of Saxony and Philip of Hesse, who had seriously angered him.

In ten days the Reichstag would be opened in Ratisbon and, in spite of his special invitation, these princes, who had refused to recognise the Council of Trent, had excused their absence upon trivial

pretexts—the Hessian, who on other occasions, attended by his numberless servants in green livery, had made three times as great a display as he, the Emperor, on the pretext that the journey to Ratisbon would be too expensive.

Maurice now had his imperial word and he the duke's; but since that evening Charles thought he had noticed something which lessened his confidence in the Saxon. It was not only jealousy which showed him this young, clever, brave, and extremely ambitious prince in a more unfavourable light than before. He knew men, and thought that he had perceived in him signs of the most utter selfishness. As Maurice, to gain two bishoprics, and perhaps later the Elector's hat, abandoned his coreligionists, his cousin and his father-in-law, he would also desert him if his own advantage prompted him to do so. True, such an ally was useful for many things, but he could not be trusted implicitly a single hour.

Maurice certainly had not remained ignorant of Barbara's relation to him, the Emperor, and yet, in the sovereign's very presence, he had courted her favour with such defiant boldness that Charles struck the writing-table with his fist as he thought of his manner to the singer. Would Maurice impose greater moderation upon himself in political affairs?

Yet perhaps he judged the Saxon too severely, and made him suffer for another's sin. The man's conduct is governed by the woman's, and he had seen how Barbara, as it were, gave Maurice the right to sue thus boldly for her favour.

Was it conceivable that she loved him, after having wounded him, as if intentionally, by acts which she knew were detestable to him? If her heart was still his, how could she have so inconsiderately favoured in his presence another, younger man?

Angrily excited by the question, he rose from the writing-table. But ere he went to rest he thought of his hapless mother, whose birthday at this hour, beyond midnight, was now over, and, kneeling before the priedieu in his bedroom, he fervently commended her to the mercy of Heaven. This woman had loved her husband so fondly that it was long ere she could resolve to part from his corpse, yet she was the heiress of the mightiest sovereigns; and what was this Ratisbon girl whom he honoured with his affection?

And yet!

While her lips were still glowing from his kisses, she had carried on a reckless game with another, and was now robbing him of the repose of mind which he so urgently, needed.

And the mother of the woman whose birthday had just passed, the proud Queen Isabella, the conqueror of the Moors—what would she have said had she been condemned to see her grandson, the heir of so great an empire, ensnared by such bonds?

He had proved, since he wielded the sceptre, that he did not lack strength of will, and he must show it again.

He reminded himself indignantly that he was not only the ruler of many nations, but the head of perhaps the most illustrious family on earth.

He thought of his royal brothers and sisters, his haughty son Philip, his daughters, nephews, and nieces; and while pouring forth his soul in fervent prayer for his unfortunate mother, with her disordered intellect, he also besought the Redeemer to free him from the evil of this love. Three words from his lips would have sufficed to rid him of Barbara forever, but—he felt it—that would not end the matter. He must also learn to forget her, and for that he needed the aid of the higher powers. He had once more yielded to worldly pleasure. The kiss of her beautiful soft lips had been sweet, the melody of her voice still more blissful. It had given him hours of rapture; but were these joys worth the long repentance which was already beginning? It was wise to sacrifice the transitory pleasures of earth to loftier purposes. One thing alone promised permanent duration even here—what he was achieving for the future greatness of his own name and that of his race. For them he was now going to war, and, by fighting against the heretics, the foes of God, he entered the strife, in a sense, as the instrument of Heaven. Thus, not only his duty as a sovereign, but care for his eternal salvation, compelled him to cast aside everything which might jeopardize the triumph of his good, nay, sacred cause; and what could imperil it more seriously than this late passion, which to-day had rendered it impossible to do his duty?

Firmly resolved to resign Barbara before his brother Ferdinand reached Ratisbon with his family, he rose from the priedieu and sought his couch. But sleep fled from the anxious ruler; besides, the pain of the gout became more severe.

After rising early, he went limping to mass, breakfasted, and began his work.

Many charts and plans had been placed on the writing-table for him, and beside them he found a letter from Granvelle, in which he stated his views concerning the alliance with Duke Maurice, and what advantage might be derived from it. Both as a whole and in detail Charles approved them, and gladly left to the minister the final negotiations with the duke, who intended to leave Ratisbon at noon. If he briefly ratified the terms which had been arranged with Granvelle, and gave Maurice his hand in farewell, he thought he would have satisfied amply the claims of the covetous man, of whose aid, however, he stood in need.

After the thunderstorm the weather had grown cloudy and cool. Perhaps the change had caused his increased suffering and unhappy mood. But the true reason was doubtless the resolution formed the night before, and which now by day seemed more difficult to execute than he had thought at the priedieu. He was still resolved to keep it, but earthly life appeared less short, and he could not conceal from himself that, without Barbara's sunny cheerfulness, bewitching tenderness, and, alas! without her singing, his future existence would lack its greatest charm. His life would be like this gloomy day. Put he would not relinquish what he had once firmly determined and proved to himself by reasoning to be the correct course.

He could not succeed in burying himself in charts and plans as usual and, while imagining how life could be endured without the woman he loved, he pushed the papers aside.

In days like these, when the old ache again attacked him, Barbara and her singing had brightened the dreary gloom and lessened the pain, or she had caressed and sung it entirely away. He seemed to himself like a surly patient who throws aside the helpful medicine because it once tasted badly to him and was an annoyance to others. Yet no. It contained poison also, so it was wise to put it away. But had not Dr. Mathys told him yesterday that the strongest remedial power was concealed in poisons, and that they were the most effective medicines? Ought he not to examine once more the reasons which had led him to this last resolution? He bowed his head with an irresolution foreign to his nature, and when his greyhound touched his aching foot he pushed the animal angrily away.

The confessor De Soto found him in this mood at his first visit.

Ere he crossed the threshold he saw that Charles was suffering and felt troubled by some important matter, and soon learned what he desired to know. But if Charles expected the Dominican to greet his decision with grateful joy, he was mistaken, for De Soto had long since relinquished the suspicion which had prejudiced him against Barbara and, on the contrary, with the Bishop of Arras, had reached the certainty that the love which united the monarch to the singer would benefit him.

Both knew the danger which threatened the sovereign from his tendency to melancholy, and now that he saw his efforts to urge the Emperor to a war with the Smalcalds crowned with success, he wished to keep alive in him the joyousness which Barbara, and she alone, had aroused and maintained.

So he used the convincing eloquence characteristic of him to shake the monarch's resolve, and lead him back to the woman he loved.

The Church made no objection to this bond of free love formed by a sovereign whom grave political considerations withheld from a second marriage. If his Majesty's affection diminished the success of his work, the separation from so dear a being, who afforded him so much pleasure, would do this to a far greater degree. That Barbara had allowed the bold Saxon too much liberty on the dancing ground he did not deny, but took advantage of the opportunity to point out the unscrupulousness which characterized Maurice, like all heretics. As for Barbara, the warm blood and fresh love of pleasure of youth, qualities which to many were her special charm, had led her into the error of the luckless dance. But the Emperor, who until then had listened to De Soto' here interrupted him to confide the unfortunate suspicion which had been aroused in him the day before.

The mention of this matter, however, was very opportune to the almoner, for he could easily turn it to the advantage of the suspected girl. The day before yesterday she had confessed to him the fate of the valuable star, and begged him, if her imprudent deed of charity should be discovered, to relieve her of the painful task of explaining to Charles how she had been induced to sell a memento so dear to her. Thereupon the confessor himself had ascertained from the marquise and the goldsmith Jamnitzer that Barbara had told him the whole truth.

So in his eyes, and probably in those of a higher power, this apparently ignoble act would redound no little to the credit of the girl's heart.

Charles listened to this explanation with a silent shrug of the shoulders. Such a deed could scarcely be otherwise regarded by the priest, but Barbara's disregard of his first gift offended him far more than the excellent disposition evinced by the hasty act pleased him. She had flung the first tangible token of

his love into the insatiable jaws of a worthless profligate, like a copper coin thrown as alms to a beggar. It grieved the soul of the economical manager and lover of rare works of art to have this ancient and also very valuable family heirloom broken to pieces. Malfalconnet would not fail to utter some biting jest when he heard that Charles must now, as it were, purchase this costly ornament of himself. He would have forgiven Barbara everything else more easily than this mad casting away of a really royal gift.

Expressing his indignation to the almoner without reserve, he closed the interview with him. When Charles was again alone he tried to rise, in order, while pacing up and down the room, to examine his resolution once more. But his aching foot prevented this plan and, groaning aloud, he sank back into his arm-chair.

His heart had not been so sore for a long time, and it was Barbara's fault. Yet he longed for her. If she had laid her delicate white hand upon his brow, he said to himself, or had he been permitted to listen to even one of her deeply felt religious songs, it would have cheered his soul and even alleviated his physical suffering. Several times he stretched his hand toward the bell to send for her; but she had offended him so deeply that he must at least let her feel how gravely she had erred, and that the lion could not be irritated unpunished, so he conquered himself and remained alone. The sense of offended majesty strengthened his power of resisting the longing for her.

Indignant with himself, he again drew the maps toward him. But like a cloth fluttering up and down between a picture and the beholder, memories of Barbara forced themselves between him and the plans over which he was bending.

This could not continue!

Perhaps, after all, her singing was the only thing which could restore his lost composure. He longed for it even more ardently than for her face. If he sent for her, he could show her by his manner what fruit her transgressions had borne. The rest would follow as a matter of course. Now every fibre of his being yearned for the melody of her voice.

Obeying a hasty resolution, he rang the bell and ordered Adrian to call Quijada and command Barbara to sing in the Golden Cross that afternoon.

After the valet had replaced his aching foot in the right position, Don Luis appeared. Without any further comment the Emperor informed him that he had determined to sever the bond of love which united him to the singer.

While speaking, he looked his friend sharply in the face, and when he saw, by his silent bow, that his decision called forth no deeper emotion in him, he carelessly added that, nevertheless, he intended to hear her sing that day, and perhaps many times more.

Perceiving a significant smile upon the lips of the faithful follower, and recognising the peril contained in the last resolve, he shook his finger at Quijada, saying: "As if even the inmost recesses of your soul were concealed from me! You are asking yourself, Why does Charles deny me leave to visit Villagarcia, and thereby cruelly prevent my being happy with my dear, beautiful young wife, after so long a separation, if he considers himself strong enough to turn his back, without further ceremony, upon the woman he loves, after seeing and hearing her again?"

Your Majesty has read correctly," replied Don Luis, "yet my wish for a brief stay with Doha Magdalena de Ulloa is very different from your Majesty's desire."

"How?" demanded Charles in a sharp tone of inquiry. "Is my strength of will, in your opinion, so far inferior to yours?"

"Your Majesty can scarcely deem me capable of so presumptuous an error," replied Quijada. "But your Majesty is Charles V, who has no superior save our Lord in heaven. I, on the contrary, am only a Castilian nobleman, and as such prize my honour as my highest treasure; but, above all other things, even above the lady of my heart, stands the King."

"I might know that," cried the Emperor, holding out his hand to his friend. "Yet I refused you the leave of absence, you faithful fellow. The world calls this selfishness. But since it still needs me, it ought in justice to excuse me, for never have I needed you so much as during these decisive weeks, whether war is declared—and it will come to that— or not. Think how many other things are also impending! Besides, my foot aches, and my heart, this poor heart, bears a wound which a friend's careful hand will soothe. So you understand, Luis, that the much-tormented Charles can not do without you just now."

Quijada, with sincere emotion, bent over the monarch's hand and kissed it tenderly, but the Emperor,

for the first time, hastily stroked his bearded cheek, and said in an agitated tone, "We know each other."

"Yes, your Majesty," cried the Spaniard. "In the first place, I will not again annoy my master with the request for a leave of absence. Dona Magdalena must try how she can accommodate herself to widowhood while she has a living husband, if the Holy Virgin will only permit me to offer your Majesty what you expect from me."

"I will answer for that," the Emperor was saying, when Adrian interrupted him.

The messenger had returned from Prebrunn with the news that the singer had taken cold the day before, and could not leave the house.

Charles angrily exclaimed that he knew what such illness meant, and his under lip protruded so far that it was easy to perceive how deeply this fresh proof of Barbara's defiance and vanity incensed him.

But when the chamberlain said that the singer had been attacked by a violent fever, Charles changed colour, and asked quickly in a tone of sincere anxiety: "And Dr. Mathys? Has he seen her? No? Then he must go to her at once, and I shall expect tidings as soon as he returns. Perhaps the fever was seething in her blood yesterday."

He had no time to make any further remarks about the sufferer, for one visitor followed another.

Shortly before noon the Bishop of Arras ushered in Duke Maurice, who wished to take leave of him.

Granvelle, in a businesslike manner, summed up the result of the negotiations, and Charles made no objection; but after he had said farewell to the Saxon prince, he remarked, with a smile which was difficult to interpret: "One thing more, my dear Prince. The beautiful singer has suffered from the *gagiarde*, which she had the honour of dancing with you; she is lying ill of a fever. We will, however, scarcely regard it as an evil omen for the agreements which we concluded on the same day. With our custom of keeping our hands away from everything which our friendly ally claims as his right, our alliance, please God, will not fail to have good success."

A faint flush crimsoned the intelligent face of the Saxon duke, and an answer as full of innuendo as the Emperor's address was already hovering on his lips, when the chief equerry's entrance gave him power to restrain it.

Count Lanoi announced that his Highness's travelling escort was ready, and the Emperor, with an air of paternal affection, bade the younger sovereign farewell.

As soon as the door had closed behind Maurice, Charles, turning to Granvelle, remarked, "The Saxon cousin returned our clasp of the hand some what coldly, but the means of rendering it warmer are ready."

"The Elector's hat," replied the Bishop of Arras. "I hope it will prevent him from making our heads hot, as the Germans say, instead of his own."

"If only our brains keep cool," replied the Emperor. "It is needful in dealing with this young man."

"He knows his Machiavelli," added the statesman, "but I think the Florentine did not write wholly in vain for us also."

"Scarcely," observed the Emperor, smiling, and then rang the little bell to have his valet summon Dr. Mathys.

The leech had returned from his visit to Barbara, and feared that the burning fever from which she was suffering might indicate the commencement of inflammation of the lungs.

Charles started up and expressed the desire to be conveyed at once in the litter to Prebrunn; but the physician declared that his Majesty's visit would as certainly harm the feverish girl as going out in such weather would increase the gout in his royal master's foot.

The monarch shrugged his shoulders, and seized the despatches and letters which had arrived. The persons about him suffered severely from his detestable mood, but the dull weather of this gloomy day appeared also to have a bad effect upon the confessor De Soto, for his lofty brow was scarcely less clouded than the sky. He did not allude to Barbara by a single word, yet she was the cause of his depression.

After his conversation with the sovereign he had retired to his private room, to devote himself to the philological studies which he pursued during the greater portion of the day with equal zeal and

success. But he had scarcely begun to be absorbed in the new copy of the best manuscript of Apuleius, which had readied him from Florence, and make notes in the first Roman printed work of this author, when Cassian interrupted him.

He had missed the servant in the morning. Now the fellow, always so punctual when he had not gazed too deeply into the wine-cup, stood before him in a singular plight, for he was completely drenched, and a disagreeable odour of liquor exhaled from him. The flaxen hair, which bristled around his head and hung over his broad, ugly face, gave him so unkempt and imbecile an appearance that it was repulsive to the almoner, and he harshly asked where he had been loitering.

But Cassian, confident that his master's indignation would soon change to approval and praise, rapidly began to relate what had occurred outside the little castle at Prebrunn when the festival under the lindens was over.

After helping to place the Wittenberg theologian in custody, he had followed Barbara at some distance during her nocturnal walk. While she waited in front of Dr. Hiltner's house and talked with the members of the syndic's family after their return, he had remained concealed in the shadow of a neighbouring dwelling, and did not move until the doctor had gone away with the singer. He cautiously glided behind them as far as the garden, witnessed the syndic's cordial farewell to his companion, and dogged the former to the Prebrunn jail. Here he had again been obliged to wait patiently a long while before the doctor came out into the open air with the prisoner. The rope had been removed from Erasmus's hands, and Cassian had remained at his heels until he stopped in the village of Kager, on the Nuremberg road. The young man had taken a lunch in the tavern there; the money for it was given him by the syndic. Cassian had seen the gold pieces which had been placed in Erasmus's hand, to pay his travelling expenses, glitter in the rosy light of dawn.

In reply to the almoner's question whether he remembered any portion of the conversation between the syndic and the singer, Cassian admitted that he had been obliged to keep too far away from them to hear it, but Dr. Hiltner's manner to the girl had been very friendly, especially when he took leave of her.

The anything but grateful manner with which the almoner received this story was a great disappointment to the overzealous servant; nay, he secretly permitted himself to doubt his master's wisdom and energy when the latter remarked that the arrest of a man who had merely entered a stranger's garden was entirely unjustifiable, and that he was aware of the singer's acquaintanceship with the Hiltners.

With these words he motioned Cassian to the door.

When the prelate was again alone he gazed thoughtfully into vacancy. He understood human beings sufficiently well to know that Barbara had not deceived him in her confession. In spite of the nocturnal walk with the head of the Ratisbon heretics, she was faithful to the Catholic Church.

Erasmus's visit at night alone gave him cause for reflection, and suggested the doubt whether he might not have interceded too warmly for this peculiar creature and her excitable artist nature.

CHAPTER III.

Silence pervaded the little castle in Prebrunn; nay, there were days when a thick layer of straw in the road showed that within the house lay some one seriously ill, who must be guarded from every sound.

In Ratisbon and the Golden Cross, on the contrary, the noise and bustle constantly increased. On the twenty-eighth of May, King Ferdinand arrived with his family to visit his brother Charles. The Reichstag would be opened on the fifth of June, and attracted to the Danube many princes and nobles, but neither the Elector John of Saxony nor the Landgrave Philip of Hesse, the heads of the Smalcald league. King Ferdinand's two daughters were to be married the first of July, and many a distinguished guest came to Ratisbon in June. Besides, several soldiers began to appear.

The Emperor Charles's hours were filled to the brim with work and social obligations. The twinges of the gout had not wholly disappeared, but remained bearable.

The quiet good-breeding of the two young archduchesses pleased the Emperor, and their young

brother Maximilian's active mind and gay, chivalrous nature delighted him, though many a trait made him, as well as the confessor, doubt whether he did not incline more toward the evangelical doctrine than beseemed a son of his illustrious race. But Charles himself, in his youth, had not been a stranger to such leanings. If Maximilian was intrusted with the reins of government, he would perceive in what close and effective union stood the Church and the state. Far from rousing his opposition by reproaches, the shrewd uncle won his affection and merely sowed in his mind, by apt remarks, the seeds which in due time would grow and bear their fruit.

The Austrians watched with sincere admiration the actually exhausting industry of the illustrious head of their house, for he allowed himself only a few hours' sleep, and when Granvelle had worked with him until he was wearied, he buried himself, either alone or with some officers of high rank, in charts of the seat of war, in making calculations, arranging the levying of recruits and military movements, and yet did not withdraw from the society of his Viennese relatives and other distinguished guests.

Still, he did not forget Barbara. The leech was daily expected to give a report of her health, and when, during the middle of June, Dr. Mathys expressed doubts of her recovery, it rendered him so anxious that his relatives noticed it, and attributed it to the momentous declaration of war which was on the eve of being made.

When the sufferer at last began to recover, his selfishness was satisfied with the course of events. True, he thought of the late springtime of love which he had enjoyed as an exquisite gift of Fortune, and when he remembered many a tender interview with Barbara a bright smile flitted over his grave countenance. But, on the whole, he was glad that this love affair had come to so honourable an end. The last few weeks had claimed his entire time and strength so rigidly and urgently that he would have been compelled to refuse Barbara's demands upon his love or neglect serious duties.

Besides, a meeting between Barbara and his nephew and young nieces could scarcely have been avoided, and this would have cast a shadow upon the unbounded reverence and admiration paid him by the wholly inexperienced, childlike young archduchesses, which afforded him sincere pleasure. The confessor had taken care to bring this vividly before his mind. While speaking of Barbara with sympathizing compassion, he represented her illness as a fresh token of the divine favour which Heaven so often showed to the Emperor Charles, and laid special stress upon the disadvantages which the longer duration of this love affair— though in itself, pardonable, nay, even beneficial—would have entailed.

Queen Mary's boy choir was to remain in Ratisbon some time longer, and whenever the monarch attended their performances—which was almost daily— the longing for Barbara awoke with fresh strength. Even in the midst of the most arduous labour he considered the question how it might be possible to keep her near him—not, it is true, as his favourite, but as a singer, and his inventive brain hit upon a successful expedient.

By raising her father to a higher rank, he might probably have had her received by his sister Mary among her ladies in waiting, but then there would always have been an unwelcome temptation existing. If, on the other hand, Barbara would decide to take the veil, an arrangement could easily be made for him to hear her often, and her singing might then marvellously beautify the old age, so full of suffering and destitute of pleasure, that awaited him. He realized more and more distinctly that it was less her rare beauty than the spell of her voice and of her art which had constrained him to this late passion.

The idea that she would refuse to accept the fate to which he had condemned her was incomprehensible to his sense of power, and therefore did not occur to his mind.

Yet, especially when he was bearing pain, he did not find it difficult to silence even this wish for the future, for then memories of the last deeply clouded hours of their love bond forced themselves upon him.

He saw her swinging like a Bacchante in the dance with the young Saxon duke; the star which had been thrown away appeared before his eyes, and his irritated soul commanded him never to see her again.

But the suffering of a person whom we have once loved possesses a reconciling power, and he who usually forgot no insult, even after the lapse of years, was again disposed to forgive her, and reverted to the wish to continue to enjoy her singing.

When, before their wedding day, he gave his nieces the diadems which Jammtzer had made for them, his resentment concerning the ornament sold by Barbara again awoke. He could no longer punish her for this "loveless" deed, as he called it, but he made the marquise feel severely enough his indignation

for her abuse of the young girl's inexperience, for, without granting her a farewell audience, he sent her back to Brussels, with letters to Queen Mary expressing his displeasure. Instead of her skilful maid Alphonsine, a clumsy Swabian girl accompanied her—the former had married Cassian.

Barbara heard nothing of all these things; her recovery was slow, and every source of anxiety was kept from her.

She had never been ill before, and to be still at a time when every instinct urged her to battle for her life happiness and her love, to prove the power of her beauty and her art, put her slender stock of patience to the severest test.

During the first few days she was perfectly conscious, and watched with keen suspense what was passing around her. It made her happy to find that Charles sent his own physician to her but, on the other hand, she was deeply and painfully agitated by his failure to grant the entreaty which she sent by Dr. Mathys to let her see his face, even if only for a moment.

Gombert and Appenzelder, Massi, the Wollers from the Ark, Dr. Hiltner's wife and daughter, the boy singer Hannibal, and many gentlemen of the court-nay, even the Bishop of Arras—came to inquire for her, and Barbara had strictly enjoined Frau Lerch to tell her everything that concerned her; for every token of sympathy filled the place, as it were, of the applause to which she was accustomed.

When, on the second day, she heard that old Ursula had been there to ask about her for Wolf, who was now convalescing, she passionately insisted upon seeing her, but, obedient to the physician's orders, Frau Lerch would not admit her. Then Barbara flew into such a rage that the foolish woman forgot to take the fever into account, and determined to return home. Many motives drew her there, but especially her business; day and night her mind was haunted by the garments which, just at this time, before the commencement of the Reichstag, other dressmakers were fashioning for her aristocratic customers.

A certain feeling of shame had restrained her from leaving Barbara directly after the beginning of her illness. Besides, delay had been advisable, because the appearance of the Emperor's physician proved that the monarch's love was not wholly dead. But Barbara's outbreak now came at an opportune time, for yesterday, by the leech's suggestion, and with the express approval of the Emperor, one of the Dominican nuns, Sister Hyacinthe, had come from the Convent of the Holy Cross and, with quiet dignity, assumed her office of nurse beside her charge's sick-bed. This forced Fran Lerch into a position which did not suit her, and as, soon after Barbara's outbreak, Dr. Mathys sternly ordered her to adopt a more quiet and modest bearing, she declared that she would not bear such insult and abuse, hastily packed her property, and returned to the Grieb with a much larger amount of luggage than she had brought with her.

Sister Hyacinthe now ruled alone in the sickroom, and the calm face of the nun, whose cap concealed hair already turning gray, exerted as soothing an influence upon the patient as her low, pleasant voice. She was the daughter of a knightly race, and had taken the veil from a deep inward vocation, as one of the elect who, in following Christ, forget themselves, in order to dedicate to her suffering neighbours all her strength and the great love which filled her heart. They were her world, and her sole pleasure was to satisfy the compassionate impulse in her own breast by severe toil, by tender solicitude, by night watching, and by exertions often continued to actual suffering. Death, into whose face she had looked beside so many sickbeds, was to her a kind friend who held the key of the eternal home where the Divine Bridegroom awaited her.

The events occurring in the world, whether peace reigned or the nations were at war with one another, affected her only so far as they were connected with her patient. Her thoughts and acts, all her love and solicitude, referred solely to the invalid in her care.

The departure of Frau Lerch was a relief to her mind, and it seemed an enigma that Barbara, whose beauty increased her interest, and whom the physician had extolled as a famous singer, could have given her confidence, in her days of health, to this woman.

Sister Hyacinthe's appearance beside her couch had at first perplexed Barbara, because she had not asked for her; but the mere circumstance that her lover had sent her rendered it easy to treat the nun kindly, and the tireless, experienced, and invariably cheerful nurse soon became indispensable.

On the whole, both the leech and Sister Hyacinthe could call Barbara a docile patient, and she often subjected herself to a restraint irksome to her vivacious temperament, because she felt how much gratitude she owed to both.

Not until the fever reached its height did her turbulent nature assert its full power, and the experienced disciple of the art of healing had seen few invalids rave more wildly.

The delusions that tortured her were by no means varied, for all revolved about the person of her imperial lover and her art. But under the most careful nursing her strong constitution resisted even the most violent attacks of the fever, and when June was drawing toward an end all danger seemed over.

Dr. Mathys had already permitted her to sit out of doors, and informed the Emperor that there was no further occasion for fear.

The monarch expressed his gratification but, instead of asking more particularly about the progress of her convalescence, he hastily turned the conversation to his own health.

Dr. Mathys regretted this for the sake of the beautiful neglected creature, who had won his sympathy, but it did not surprise him, for duty after duty now filled every hour of Charles's day. Besides, on the day after to-morrow, the fourth of July, the marriages of his two nieces were to take place, and he himself was to accompany the bridal procession and attend the wedding. On the fifth the Reichstag would be opened, and the Duke of Alba, with several experienced colonels, had arrived as harbingers of the approaching war. Where this stern and tried general appeared, thoughts of war began to stir, and already men equipped with helmets and armour began to be seen in unusual numbers in all the streets and squares of Ratisbon.

The Emperor's room, too, had an altered aspect, for, instead of a few letters and despatches, his writing-table was now covered not only with maps and plans, but lists and tables referring to the condition of his army.

What could the health of a half-convalescent girl now be to the man to whom even his most trusted friend would no longer have dared to mention her as his favourite?

Of course, Dr. Mathys told Barbara nothing about the Emperor's lack of interest, for any strong mental excitement might still be injurious to her. Besides, he was a reserved man, who said little more to Barbara than was necessary. Toward the Emperor Charles he imposed a certain restraint upon himself; but the royal adept in reading human nature knew that in him he possessed one of the most loyal servants, and gave him his entire confidence. For his sake alone this wealthy scholar devoted himself to the laborious profession which so often kept him from library and laboratory. Although his smooth, brown hair had turned gray long ago, he had never married, for he had decided in the Emperor's favour— this Charles knew also—whenever the choice presented itself to follow his royal patient during his journeys and expeditions or to find rest and comfort in a home of his own.

The calm, kindly manner of this far-famed physician very soon gained a great influence over the vivacious Barbara. Since she had felt sure of his good will, she had willingly obeyed him. Though he was often obliged to shake his finger at her and tell her how much she herself could contribute toward regaining freedom of motion and the use of her voice, she really did nothing which he could seriously censure, and thus her recovery progressed in the most favourable manner until the wedding day was close at hand.

She had already been permitted to receive visits from old acquaintances and, without saying much herself, listen to the news they brought. The little Maltese, Hannibal, had also appeared again, and the lively boy told her many things which Gombert and Appenzelder had not mentioned.

The morning of the day before the princesses' marriage he informed her, among other things, that the bridal procession would march the following morning. It was to start from the cathedral square and go to Prebrunn, where it would turn back and disband in front of the Town Hall. All the distinguished noblemen and ladies who had come to Ratisbon to attend the wedding and the Reichstag would show themselves to the populace on this occasion, and it was even said that the Emperor intended to lead the train with his royal brother. It must pass by the garden; but the road could scarcely be seen from the little castle—the lindens, beeches, and elms were too tall and their foliage was too thick to permit it.

This news destroyed Barbara's composure. Though she had slept well during the past few nights, on this one slumber deserted her. She could not help thinking constantly of the possibility that the Emperor might be present in the procession, and to see her lover again was the goal of her longing.

Even in the morning, while the physician permitted her to remain in the open air because the clay was hot and still, the bridal procession was continually in her thoughts. Yet she did not utter a word in allusion to it.

At the noon meal she ate so little that Sister Hyacinthe noticed it, and anxiously asked if she felt worse; but Barbara reassured her and, after a short rest in the house, she asked to be taken out again under the lindens where she had reclined in an armchair that morning.

Scarcely had she seated herself when all the bells in the city began to ring, and the heavy ordnance

and howitzers shook the air with their thunder.

What a festal alarum!

How vividly it reminded her of the brilliant exhibitions and festivities which she had formerly attended!

She listened breathlessly to the sounds from the city, and now a distant blare of trumpets drowned the dull roar of the ordnance and the sharp rattle of the culverins.

The confused blending of many human voices reached her from beyond the garden wall.

The road must be full of people. Now single shrill trumpet notes echoed from afar amid the trombones and the dull roll of the drums, the noise increasing every moment. From a large, old beech tree close to the wall, into which a dozen lads had climbed, she already saw handkerchiefs waving and heard the shouts of clear, boyish voices.

Sister Hyacinthe had just gone into the house, and like an illumination the thought darted through Barbara's mind that the road could be seen from the little summer house which the reverend owner of the castle called his "frigidarium," because it was cool even during the warmest summer day.

It was a small, towerlike building close to the garden wall, whose single inner room was designed to imitate a rock cave. The walls were covered with tufa and stalagmites, shells, mountain crystals, and corals, and from the lofty ceiling hung large stalactites. From one of the walls a fountain plashed into a large shell garlanded with green aquatic plants and tenanted by several goldfish and frogs.

The single open window resembled a cleft in the rocks, and looked out upon the road. Blocks of stone, flung one upon another without regard to order, formed steps from which to look out of doors.

These stairs afforded a view of the road to the city. Barbara had often used them when watching in the dusk of evening for her lover's litter or, at a still later hour, for the torch-bearers who preceded it.

She could already walk firmly enough to mount the few rough steps which led to the opening in the rocks and, obeying the tameless yearning of her heart, she rose from the arm-chair and walked as rapidly as her feeble strength permitted toward the frigidarium.

It was more difficult to traverse the path, illumined by the hot July sun, than she had expected; but the pealing of the bells and the roar of the cannon continued, and now it was drowned by the fanfare of the trumpets and the shouts of the people.

All this thundering, ringing, clashing, chiming, and cheering was a greeting to him for the sight of whom her whole being so ardently longed; and when, halfway down the path, she felt the need of resting on a bench under a weeping ash, she did not obey it, but forced herself to totter on.

Drops of perspiration covered her forehead when she entered the frigidarium, but there the most delicious coolness greeted her. Here, too, however, she could allow herself no rest, for the boys in the top of the beech, and some neighbouring trees, were already shouting their clear voices hoarse and waving caps and branches.

With trembling knees she forced herself to climb one after another of the blocks that formed the staircase. When a slight faintness attacked her, a stalactite afforded her support, and it passed as quickly as it came. Now she had reached her goal. The rock on which she stood gave her feet sufficient support, as it had done many times before.

Barbara needed a few minutes in this wonderfully cool atmosphere to recover complete self-control. Only the wild pulsation of her heart still caused a painful feeling; but if she was permitted to see the object of her love once more, the world might go to ruin and she with it.

Now she gazed from the lofty window over the open country.

She had come just at the right time. Imperial halberdiers and horse guards, galloping up and down, kept the centre of the road free. On the opposite side of the highway which she overlooked was a dense, countless multitude of citizens, peasants, soldiers, monks, women, and children, who with difficulty resisted the pressure of those who stood behind them, shoulder to shoulder, head to head. Barbara from her lofty station saw hats, barets, caps, helmets, women's caps and coifs, fair and red hair on uncovered heads and, in the centre of many, the priestly tonsure.

Then a column of dust advanced along the road from which the fanfare resounded like the scream of the hawk from the gray fog. A few minutes later, the cloud vanished; but the shouts of the multitude

increased to loud cheers when the heralds who rode at the head of the procession appeared and raised their long, glittering trumpets to their lips. Behind them, on spirited stallions, rode the wedding marshals, members of royal families, in superb costumes with bouquets of flowers on their shoulders.

Now the tumult died away for a few minutes, and Barbara felt as though her heart stood still, for the two stately men on splendid chargers who now, after a considerable interval, followed them, were the royal brothers, the Emperor Charles and King Ferdinand.

The man for whom Barbara's soul longed, as well as her eyes, rode on the side toward her.

He was still half concealed by dust, but it could be no one else, for now the outburst of enthusiasm, joy, and reverence from the populace reached its climax. It seemed as though the very trees by the wayside joined in the limitless jubilation. The greatness of the sovereign, the general, and the happy head of the family, made the Protestants around him forget with what perils this monarch threatened their faith and thereby themselves; and he, too, the defender and loyal son of the Church, appeared to thrust aside the thought that the people who greeted him with such impetuous delight, and shared the two-fold festival of his family with such warm devotion, were heretics who deserved punishment. At least he saluted with gracious friendliness the throng that lined both sides of the road, and as he passed by the garden of the little castle he even smiled, and glanced toward the building as though a pleasant memory had been awakened in his mind. At this moment Barbara gazed into the Emperor's face.

Those were the features which had worn so tender an expression when, for the first time, he had uttered the never-to-be-forgotten "Because I long for love," and her yearning heart throbbed no less quickly now than on that night. The wrong and suffering which he had inflicted upon her were forgotten. She remembered nothing save that she loved him, that he was the greatest and, to her, the dearest of all men.

It was perfectly impossible for him to see her, but she did not think of that; and when he looked toward her with such joyous emotion, and the cheers of the populace, like a blazing fire which a gust of wind fans still higher, outstripped, as it were, themselves, she could not have helped joining in the huzzas and shouts and acclamations around her though she had been punished with imprisonment and death.

And clinging more firmly to the stalactite, Barbara rose on tiptoe and mingled her voice with the joyous cheers of the multitude.

In the act her breath failed, and she felt a sharp pain in her chest, but she heeded the suffering as little as she did the weakness of her limbs. The physical part of her being seemed asleep or dead. Nothing was awake or living except her soul. Nothing stirred within her breast save the rapture of seeing him again, the indescribable pleasure of showing that she loved him.

Already she could no longer see his face, already the dust had concealed him and his charger from her eyes, yet still, filled with peerless happiness, she shouted "Charles!" and again and again "Charles!" It seemed to her as though the air or some good spirit insist bear the cry to him and assure him of her ardent, inextinguishable love.

The charming royal brides, radiant in their jewels, their betrothed husbands, and the lords and ladies of their magnificent train passed Barbara like shadows. The procession of German, Spanish, Hungarian, Bohemian, and Italian dignitaries swam in a confused medley before her eyes. The glittering armour of the princes, counts, and barons, the gems on the heads, the robes, and the horses' trappings of the ladies and the Magyar magnates flashed brightly before her, the red hats and robes of the cardinals gleamed out, but usually everything that her eyes beheld mingled in a single motley, shining, moving, many-limbed body.

The end of the procession was now approaching, and physical weakness suddenly asserted itself most painfully.

Barbara felt only too plainly that it was time to leave her post of observation; her feet would scarcely carry her and, besides, she was freezing.

She had entered the damp cave chamber in a thin summer gown, and it now seemed to be continually growing colder and colder.

Climbing down the high steps taxed her like a difficult, almost impossible task, and perhaps she might not have succeeded in accomplishing it unaided; but she had scarcely commenced the descent when she heard her name called, and soon after Sister Hyacinthe entered the frigidarium and, amid no lack of kindly reproaches, helped her to reach the open air.

When even in the warm sunshine the chill did not pass away, Barbara saw that the sister was right, yet she was far from feeling repentant.

During the night a violent attack of fever seized her, and her inflamed throat was extremely painful.

When Dr. Mathys came to her bedside he already knew from the nun the cause of this unfortunate relapse, and he understood only too well what had induced Barbara to commit the grave imprudence. Reproof and warnings were useless here; the only thing he could do was to act, and renew the conflict with the scarcely subdued illness. Thanks to his indefatigable zeal, to the girl's strong constitution, and to the watchful care of the nurse, he won the victory a second time. Yet he could not rejoice in a complete triumph, for the severe inflammation of the bronchial tubes had caused a hoarseness which would yield to none of his remedies. It might last a long time, and the thought that the purity of his patient's voice was perhaps forever destroyed occasioned sincere regret.

True, he opposed the girl when she expressed this fear; but as July drew to its close, and her voice still remained husky, he scarcely hoped to be able to restore the old melody. In other respects he might consider Barbara cured, and intrust her entire convalescence to her own patience and caution.

Perhaps the ardent desire to regain the divine gift of song would protect her from perilous ventures like this last one, and even more certainly the hope which she had confided to the nun and then to him also. The physician noticed, with warm sympathy, how deeply this mysterious expectation had influenced her excitable nature, ever torn by varying emotions, and the excellent man was ready to aid her as a friend and intercessor.

Unfortunately, just at this time the pressure of business allowed the Emperor little leisure to listen to the voice of the heart.

The day before yesterday the Elector John Frederick of Saxony and the Landgrave Philip of Hesse had been banned, and with this the war began.

Already twelve troops of Spaniards who had served in Hungary, and other bands of soldiers had entered Ratisbon; cannon came up the Danube from Austria, and the city, had gained a warlike aspect. To disturb the Emperor in his work as a general at such a time, with a matter which must agitate him so deeply, was hazardous, and few would have been bold enough to bring it before the overburdened monarch; but the leech's interest in Barbara was so warm and sincere that he allowed himself to be persuaded to act the mediator between her and the man who had interfered so deeply in the destiny of her life. For the first time he saw her weep, and her winning manner seemed to him equally touching, whether she yielded to anxious distress of mind or to joyous hopes.

His intercession in her behalf would permit no delay, for the Emperor's departure to join the troops was close at hand.

Firmly resolved to plead the cause of the unfortunate girl, whose preservation, he might say, was his work, yet with slight hope of success, he crossed the threshold of the imperial apartments.

When the physician informed the sovereign that Barbara might be considered saved for the second time, the latter expressed his pleasure by a warm "We are indebted to you for it again "; but when Mathys asked if he did not intend to hasten Barbara's recovery by paying her a visit, though only for a few moments, the Emperor looked into the grave countenance of the physician, in whom he noticed an embarrassment usually foreign to him, and said firmly, "Unfortunately, my dear Mathys, I must deny myself this pleasure."

The other bowed with a sorrowful face, for Barbara's dearest wish had been refused. But the Emperor saw what was passing in the mind of the man whom he esteemed, and in a lighter tone added: "So even your invulnerable dragon hide was not proof against the shafts—you know! If I see aright, something else lies near your heart. My refusal—that is easily seen—annoys you; but, much as I value your good opinion, Mathys, it is firm. The more difficult I found it to regain my peace of mind, the more foolish it would be to expose it to fresh peril. Now, if ever, I must shun every source of agitation. Think! With the banning, the general's work begins. How you look at me! Well, yes! You, too, know how easy it is for the man who has most to do to spare a leisure hour which the person without occupation does not find, and neither of us is accustomed to deceive the other. Besides, it would be of little avail. So, to cut the matter short, I am unwilling to see Barbara again and awaken false hopes in her mind! But even these plain words do not seem to satisfy you."

"By your Majesty's permission," replied the leech, "deeply as I regret it for the invalid's sake, I believe, on the contrary, that you are choosing the right course. But I have only discharged the first part of my patient's commission. Though I have no pleasant tidings to take back to her, I am still permitted to tell her the truth. But your Majesty, by avoiding an interview with the poor girl, will spare

yourself a sad, nay, perhaps a painful hour."

"Did the disease so cruelly mar this masterpiece of the Creator?" asked the Emperor. "With so violent a fever it was only too natural," replied the physician. "Time and what our feeble skill can do will improve her condition, I hope, but—and this causes the poor girl the keenest suffering—the unfortunate inflammation of the bronchial tubes most seriously injures the tone of her clear voice."

"Ah!" exclaimed the startled Emperor with sincere compassion. "Do everything in your power, Mathys, to purify this troubled spring of melody. I will repay you with my warmest gratitude, for, though the Romans said that Cupid conquered through the eyes, yet Barbara's singing exerted a far more powerful influence over my heart than even her wonderful golden hair. Restore the melting tones of her voice and, though the bond of love which rendered this month of May so exquisitely beautiful to us must remain severed, I will not fail to remember it with all graciousness."

"That, your Majesty, can scarcely be avoided," the physician here remarked with an embarrassment which was new in him to Charles, "for the continuance of the memory of the spring days which your Majesty recalls with such vivid pleasure seems to be assured. Yet, if it pleases Heaven, as I have learned to-day for the first time, to call a living being into existence for this purpose——"

"If I understand you correctly," cried the Emperor, starting up, "I am to believe in hopes——"

"In hopes," interrupted the physician with complete firmness, "which must not alarm your Majesty, but render you happy. This new branch of the illustrious trunk of your royal race I, who am only 30 a plain man, hail with proud joy, and half the world, I know, will do so with me."

Charles, with brows contracted in a gloomy frown, gazed for a long time into vacancy.

The leech perceived how mighty a conflict between contradictory emotions would be waged in his breast, and silently gave him time to collect his thoughts.

At last, rising from his arm-chair, the Emperor struck the table with his open hand, and said: "Whether the Lord our God awoke this new life for our punishment or our pleasure the future will teach. What more must be done in this matter? You know my custom in regard to such important affairs. They are slept upon and maturely considered. Only there is one point," and as he uttered the words his voice assumed an imperious tone, "which is already irrevocably decided. The world must not suspect what hope offers itself to me and another. Tell her, Mathys, we wish her happiness; but if her maternal heart expects that I will do her child the honour of calling it mine, I must require her to keep silence, and intrust the newborn infant's destiny, from the first hour of its birth, to my charge."

Here he hesitated, and, after looking the physician in the face, went on: "You again think that harsh, Mathys—I see it in your expression—but, as my friend, you yourself can scarcely desire the world to see the Emperor Charles performing the same task with a Barbara Blomberg. She is free to choose. Either I will rear the child, whether it is a boy or a girl, as my own, as I did my daughter, Duchess Margaret of Parma, or she will refuse to give me the child from its birth and I must deny it recognition. I have already shared far too much with that tempting creature; I can not permit even this new dispensation to restore my severed relationship with the singer. If Barbara's maternal love is unselfish, the choice can not be difficult for her. That the charge of providing for this new life will fall upon me is a matter of course. Tell her this, Mathys, and if in future—But no. We will confide this matter to Quijada."

As the door closed behind the physician, Charles stood motionless. Deep earnestness furrowed his brow, but suddenly an expression of triumphant joy flashed over his face, and then yielded to a look of grateful satisfaction. Soon, however, his lofty brow clouded again, and his lower lip protruded. Some idea which excited his indignation must have entered his mind. He had just been thinking with the warmest joy of the gift of Fate of which the physician had told him, but now the reasons which forbade his offering it a sincere welcome crowded upon the thinker.

If Heaven bestowed a son upon him, would not only the Church, but also the law, which he knew so well, refuse to recognise his rights? A child whose mother had offended him, whose grandfather was a ridiculous, impoverished old soldier, whose cousins——

Yet for what did he possess the highest power on earth if he would not use it to place his own child, in spite of every obstacle, at the height of earthly grandeur?

What need he care for the opinion of the world? And yet, yet——

Then there was a great bustle below. The loud tramping of horses' hoofs was heard. A troop of Lombardy cavalry in full armour appeared on the Haidplatz—fresh re-enforcements for the war just commencing. The erect figure of the Duke of Alba, a man of middle height, followed by several colonels,

trotted toward it. The standard-bearer of the Lombards lowered the banner with the picture of the Madonna before the duke, and the Emperor involuntarily glanced back into the room at the lovely Madonna and Child by the master hand of Giovanni Bellini which his royal sister had hung above his writing table.

How grave and lovely, yet how full of majesty, the Christ-child looked, how touching a grace surrounded the band of angels playing on violins above the purest of mothers!

Then the necessity of appealing to her in prayer seized upon him, and with fervent warmth he besought her to surround with her gracious protection the young life which owed its existence to him.

He did not think of the child's mother. Was he still angry with her?

Did she seem to him unworthy of being commended to the protection of the Queen of Heaven? Barbara was now no more to him than a cracked bell, and the child which she expected to give him, no matter to what high' honours he raised it, would bear a stain that nothing could efface, and this stain would be called "his mother."

No deviation from the resolve which he had expressed to the physician was possible. The child could not be permitted to grow up amid Barbara's surroundings. To prevent this she must submit to part from her son or her daughter, and to take the veil. In the convent she could remember the happiness which had once raised her to its loftiest height. She could and must atone for her sin and his by prayers and pious exercises. To return to the low estate whence he had raised her must appear disgraceful to herself. How could one who had once dined at the table of the gods still relish the fare of mortals? Even now it seemed inconceivable to him that she could oppose his will. Yet if she did, he would withdraw his aid. He no longer loved her. In this hour she was little more to him than the modest casket to which was confided a jewel of inestimable value, an object of anxiety and care. The determination which he had confided to his physician was as immovable as everything which he had maturely considered. Don Luis Quijada should provide for its execution.

CHAPTER IV.

Dr. Mathys had himself carried in the litter from the Golden Cross to Barbara.

This errand was a disagreeable one, for, though the Emperor's remark that he had yielded to the rare charm of this woman was not true, his kindly heart had become warmly attached to Barbara. For the first time he saw in her the suffering which often causes a metamorphosis in certain traits in a sick person's character extend their transforming power to the entire nature. Passionate love for her art gave her the ability to maintain with punctilious exactness the silence which he had been compelled to impose upon her, and the once impetuous, obstinate creature obeyed his directions and wishes with the patience of a docile child.

The manner in which, after he permitted her to speak, she had disclosed in a low whisper her happy yet disquieting secret, hovered before him now as one of the most pathetic incidents in a life full of varied experiences.

How touchingly deep misery and the greatest rapture, gloomy anxiety and radiant joy, bitter dread and sweet anticipation, despairing helplessness and firm confidence had looked forth at him from the beautiful face whose noble outlines were made still more delicate by the illness through which she had passed! He could not have refused even a more difficult task to this petitioner.

Now he was returning from the Emperor, and he felt like a vanquished general.

In what form was he to clothe the bad news which he was bringing to the convalescent girl? Poor child! How heavily she had to atone for her sin, and how slight was his own and every other influence upon the man, great even in his selfishness, who had had the power to render him a messenger of joy!

While the physician was approaching the little castle, she of whom he was so eagerly thinking awaited his return with feverish suspense. Yet she was obliged at this very time to devote herself to a visitor. True, he was the only person whom she would not have refused to see at this hour.

Wolf Hartschwert was with her.

His first errand after the period of severe suffering through which he had passed was to Barbara, earnestly as old Ursel had endeavoured to prevent him.

He had found her under a linden tree in the garden.

How they had met again!

Wolf, pale and emaciated, advanced toward her, leaning on a cane, while Barbara, with slightly flushed cheeks, reclined upon the pillows which Sister Hyacinthe had just arranged for her.

Her head seemed smaller, her features had become more delicate and, in spite of the straw hat which protected her from the dazzling sunshine, he perceived that her severe illness had cost her her magnificent golden hair. Still wavy, it now fell only to her neck, and gave her the appearance of a wonderfully handsome boy.

The hand she extended to him was transparently thin, and when he clasped it in his, which was only a little larger, and did not seem much stronger, and she had hoarsely whispered a friendly greeting, his eyes filled with tears. For a time both were silent. Barbara was the first to find words and, raising her large eyes beseechingly to his, said: "If you come to reproach me—But no! You look pale, as though you had only partially recovered yourself, yet kind and friendly. Perhaps you do not know that it was through my fault that all these terrible things have befallen you."

Here a significant smile told her that he was much better informed than she supposed, and, lowering her eyes in timid embarrassment, she asked,

"Then you know who it was for whom this foolish heart——"

Here her breath failed, and while she pressed her hand upon her bosom, Wolf said softly: "If you had only trusted me before! Many things would not have happened, and much suffering might have been spared. You did wrong, Wawerl, certainly, but my guilt is the greater, and we were both punished—oh, how sorely!"

Barbara, amid low sobbing, nodded assent, but he eagerly continued: "Quijada confided everything to me, and if he—you know—now forgets all other matters in the war and the anxieties of the general, and, you need my counsel and aid, we will let what came between us be buried, and think that we are brother and sister."

The girl held out her hand to him, saying: "How long you have been a brother to me! But, as for your advice—Holy Virgin!—I know now less than ever how I am to fare; but I shall soon learn. I can say no more. It must be a severe trial to listen to me. Such a raven's croak from the throat which usually gave you pleasure, and to which you gladly listened! Shall I myself ever grow accustomed to this discord? And you? Answer honestly—I should like to know whether it is very, very terrible to hear."

"You are still hoarse," was the reply. "Such things pass away in a few weeks, and it will again be a pleasure to hear you sing."

"Do you really think so?" she cried with sparkling, eyes.

"Firmly and positively," answered the young knight in a tone of most honest conviction; but she repeated in joyous excitement, "Firmly and positively," and then eagerly continued: "Oh, if you should be right, Wolf, how happy and grateful I would be, in spite of everything! But I can talk no longer now. Come again to-morrow, and then the oftener the better."

"Unfortunately, that can not be, gladly as I would do so," he answered sadly, extending his hand in farewell. "In a few days I shall return to Brussels."

"To remain with the regent?" asked Barbara eagerly.

"No," he answered firmly. "After a short stay with her Majesty, I shall enter the service of Don Luis Quijada, or rather of his wife."

"O-o-oh!" she murmured slowly. "The world seems wholly strange to me after my long illness. I must first collect my thoughts, and that is now utterly impossible. To-morrow, Wolf! Won't you come to-morrow? Then I shall know better what is before me. Thanks, cordial thanks, and if tomorrow I deny myself to every one else, I will admit you."

After Wolf had gone, Barbara gazed fixedly into vacancy. What did the aspiring young musician seek with a nobleman's wife in a lonely Spanish castle? Were his wings broken, too, and did he desire only

seclusion and quiet?

But the anxiety which dominated her mind prevented her pursuing the same thought longer. Dr. Mathys had promised to tell her the result of his conversation with the Emperor as soon as possible, and yet he had not returned.

Fool that she was!

Even on a swift steed he could not have traversed the road back to the castle if he had been detained only half an hour in the Golden Cross. It was impatience which made the minutes become quarters of an hour. She would have liked to go to the cool frigidarium again to watch for the physician's litter; but she was warned, and had accustomed herself to follow the doctor's directions as obediently as a dutiful child. Besides, Sister Hyacinthe no longer left her alone out of doors, and possessed a reliable representative, who had won Barbara's confidence and affection, in Frau Lamperi, the garde-robier, whom the Queen of Hungary had not yet summoned.

So she remained under the linden, and Dr. Mathys did not put her newly won virtue of patience, which he prized so highly, to too severe a trial.

Fran Lamperi had watched for him, and hastily announced that his litter had already passed the Reichart pottery.

Now Barbara did not turn her eyes from the garden door through which the man she ardently longed to see usually came, and when it opened and the stout, broad-shouldered leech, with his peaked doctor's hat, long staff, and fine linen kerchief in his right hand advanced toward her, she motioned to the nun and the maid to leave them, and pressed her left hand upon her heart, for her emotion at the sight of him resembled the feeling of the prisoner who expects the paper with which the judge enters his cell to contain his death-warrant.

She thought she perceived her own in the physician's slow, almost lagging step. His gait was always measured; but if he had had good news to bring, he would have approached more rapidly. A sign, a gesture, a shout would have informed her that he was bearing something cheering.

But there was nothing of this kind.

He did not raise his hat until he stood directly in front of her, and while mopping his broad, clump brow and plump cheeks with his handkerchief, she read in his features the confirmation of her worst fears.

Now in his grave voice, which sounded still deeper than usual, he uttered a curt "Well, it can't be helped," and shrugged his shoulders sorrowfully.

This gesture destroyed her last hope. Unable to control herself longer, she cried out in the husky voice whose hoarse tone was increased by her intense agitation: "I see it in your face, Doctor; I must be prepared for the worst."

"Would to Heaven I could deny it!" he answered in a hollow tone; but Barbara urged him to speak and conceal nothing from her, not even the harshest news.

The leech obeyed.

With sincere compassion he saw how her face blanched at his information that, owing to the pressure of duties which the commencement of the war imposed upon him, his Majesty would be unable to visit her here. But when, to sweeten the bitter potion, he had added that when her throat was well again, and her voice had regained its former melody, the monarch would once more gladly listen to her, he was startled; for, instead of answering, she merely shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, while her face grew corpse-like in its pallor. He would have been best pleased to end his report here, but she could not be spared the suffering to which she was doomed, and pity demanded that the torture should be ended as quickly as possible. So, to raise her courage, he began with the Emperor's congratulations, and while her eyes were sparkling brightly and her pale cheeks were crimsoned by a fleeting flush, he went on, as considerately as he could, to inform her of the Emperor's resolution, not neglecting while he did so to place it in a milder light by many a palliating remark.

Barbara, panting for breath, listened to his report without interrupting him; but as the physician thought he perceived in the varying expression of her features and the wandering glance with which she listened tokens that she did not fully understand what the Emperor required of her, he summed up his communications once more.

"His Majesty," he concluded, "was ready to recognise as his own the young life to be expected, if she

would keep the secret, and decide to commit it to his sole charge from its arrival in the world; but, on the other hand, he would refuse this to her and to the child if she did not agree to impose upon herself sacrifice and silence."

At this brief, plain statement Barbara had pressed her hands upon her temples and stretched her head far forward toward the physician. Now she lowered her right hand, and with the question, "So this is what I must understand?" impetuously struck herself a blow on the forehead.

The patient man again raised his voice to make the expression of the monarch's will still plainer, but she interrupted him after the first few words with the exclamation: "You can spare yourself this trouble, for the meaning of the man whose message you bear is certainly evident enough. What my poor intellect fails to comprehend is only—do you hear?—is only where the faithless traitor gains the courage to make me so unprecedented a demand. Hitherto I was only not wicked enough to know that there— there was such an abyss of abominable hard-heartedness, such fiendish baseness, such——"

Here an uncontrollable fit of coughing interrupted her, but Dr. Mathys would have stopped her in any case; it was unendurable to him to listen longer while the great man who was the Emperor, and whom he also honoured as a man, was reviled with such savage recklessness.

As in so many instances, Charles's penetration had been superior to his; for he had not failed to notice to what tremendous extremes this girl's hasty temper could carry her. What burning, almost evil passion had flamed in her eyes while uttering these insults! How perfectly right his Majesty was to withdraw from all association with a woman of so irresponsible a nature!

He repressed with difficulty the indignation which had overpowered him until her coughing ceased, then, in a tone of stern reproof, he declared that he could not and ought not to listen to such words. She whom the Emperor Charles had honoured with his love would perhaps in the future learn to recognise his decision as wise, though it might offend her now. When she had conquered the boundless impetuosity which so ill beseeemed her, she herself would probably perceive how immeasurably deep and wide was the gulf which separated her from the sacred person of the man who, next to God, was the highest power on earth. Not only justice but duty would command the head of the most illustrious family in the world to claim the sole charge of his child, that it might be possible to train it unimpeded to the lofty position of the father, instead of the humble one of the mother.

Hitherto Barbara had remained silent, but her breath had come more and more quickly, the tremor of the nostrils had increased; but at the physician's last remark she could control herself no longer, and burst forth like a madwoman: "And you pretend to be my friend, pretend to be a fairminded man? You are the tool, the obedient echo of the infamous wretch who now stretches his robber hand toward my most precious possession! Ay, look at me as though my frank speech was rousing the greatest wrath in your cowardly soul! Where was the ocean-deep gulf when the perjured betrayer clasped me in his arms, uttered vows of love, and called himself happy because his possession of me would beautify the evening of his life? Now my voice has lost its melting music, and he sends his accomplice to leave the mute 'nightingale'—how often he has called me so!—to her fate."

Here she faltered, and her cheeks glowed with excitement as, with her clinched hand on her brow, she continued: "Must everything be changed and overturned because this traitor is the Emperor, and the betrayed only the child of a man who, though plain, is worthy of all honour, and who, besides, was not found on the highway, but belongs to the class of knights, from whom even the proudest races of sovereigns descend? You trample my father and me underfoot, to exalt the grandeur of your master. You make him the idol, to humble me to a worm; and what you grant the she-wolf—the right of defence when men undertake to rob her of her young—you deny me, and, because I insist upon it, I must be a deluded, unbridled creature."

Here she sobbed aloud and covered her face with her hands; but Dr. Mathys had been obliged to do violence to his feelings in order not to put a speedy end to the fierce attack. Her glance had been like that of an infuriated wild beast as the rage in her soul burst forth with elementary power, and the sharpness of her hoarse voice still pierced him to the heart.

Probably the man of honour whom she had so deeply-insulted felt justified in paying her in the same coin, but the mature and experienced physician knew how much he must place to the account of the physical condition of this unfortunate girl, and did not conceal from himself that her charges were not wholly unjustifiable. So he restrained himself, and when she had gained control over the convulsive sobbing which shook her bosom, he told her his intention of leaving her and not returning until he could expect a less hostile reception. Meanwhile she might consider whether the Emperor's decision was not worthy of different treatment. He would show his good will to her anew by concealing from his Majesty what he had just heard, and what she, at no distant day, would repent as unjust and unworthy of her.

Then Barbara angrily burst forth afresh: "Never, never, never will that happen! Neither years nor decades would efface the wrong inflicted upon me to-day. But oh, how I hate him who makes this shameful demand—yes, though you devour me with your eyes—hate him, hate him! I do so even more ardently than I loved him! And you? Why should you conceal it? From kindness to me? Perhaps so! Yet no, no, no! Speak freely! Yes, you must, must tell him so to his face! Do it in my name, abused, ill-treated as I am, and tell him——"

Here the friendly man's patience gave out, and, drawing his little broad figure stiffly up, he said repellently: "You are mistaken in me, my dear. If you need a messenger, you must seek some one else. You have taken care to make me sincerely regret having discharged this office for your sake. Besides, your recovery will progress without my professional aid; and, moreover, I shall leave Ratisbon with my illustrious master in a few days."

He turned his back upon her as he spoke. When toward evening the Emperor asked him how Barbara had received his decision, he shrugged his shoulders and answered: "As was to be expected. She thinks herself ill-used, and will not give up the child."

"She will have a different view in the convent," replied the Emperor. "Quijada shall talk with her tomorrow, and De Soto and the pious nuns here will show her where she belongs. The child—that matter is settled—will be taken from her."

The execution of the imperial will began on the very next morning. First the confessor De Soto appeared, and with convincing eloquence showed Barbara how happily she could shape her shadowed life within the sacred quiet of the convent. Besides, the helpless creature whose coming she was expecting with maternal love could rely upon the father's recognition and aid only on condition that she yielded to his Majesty's expressed will.

Barbara, though with no little difficulty, succeeded in maintaining her composure during these counsels and the declaration of the servant of the Holy Church. Faithful to the determination formed during the night, she imposed silence upon herself, and when De Soto asked for a positive answer, she begged him to grant her time for consideration.

Soon after Don Luis Quijada was announced. This time he did not appear in the dark Spanish court costume, but in the brilliant armour of the Lombard regiment whose command had been entrusted to him.

When he saw Barbara, for the first time after many weeks, he was startled.

Only yesterday she had seemed to Wolf Hartschwert peerlessly beautiful, but the few hours which had elapsed between the visit of the physician and the major-domo had sadly changed her. Her large, bright eyes were reddened by weeping, and the slight lines about the corners of the mouth had deepened and lent her a severe expression.

A hundred considerations had doubtless crowded upon her during the night, yet she by no means repented having showed the leech what she thought of the betrayer in purple and the demand which he made upon her. De Soto's attempt at persuasion had only increased her defiance. Instead of reflecting and thinking of her own welfare and of the future of the beloved being whose coming she dreaded, yet who seemed to her the most precious gift of Heaven, she strengthened herself more and more in the belief that it was due to her own dignity to resist the Emperor's cruel encroachments upon her liberty. She knew that she owed Dr. Mathys a debt of gratitude, but she thought herself freed from that duty since he had made himself the blind tool of his master.

Now the Spaniard, who had never been her friend, also came to urge the Emperor's will upon her. Toward him she need not force herself to maintain the reserve which she had exercised in her conversation with the confessor.

On the contrary!

He should hear, with the utmost plainness, what she thought of the Emperor's instructions. If he, his confidant, then showed him that there was one person at least who did not bow before his pitiless power, and that hatred steeled her courage to defy him, one of the most ardent wishes of her indignant, deeply wounded heart would be fulfilled. The only thing which she still feared was that her aching throat might prevent her from freely pouring forth what so passionately agitated her soul.

She now confronted the inflexible nobleman, not a feature in whose clear-cut, nobly moulded, soldierly face revealed what moved him.

When, in a businesslike tone, he announced his sovereign's will, she interrupted him with the remark

that she knew all this, and had determined to oppose her own resolve to his Majesty's wishes.

Don Luis calmly allowed her to finish, and then asked: "So you refuse to take the veil? Yet I think, under existing circumstances, nothing could become you better."

"Life in a convent," she answered firmly, "is distasteful to me, and I will never submit to it. Besides, you were hardly commissioned to discuss what does or does not become me."

"By no means," replied the Spaniard calmly; "yet you can attribute the remark to my wish to serve you. During the remainder of our conference I will silence it, and can therefore be brief."

"So much the better," was the curt response. "Well, then, so you insist that you will neither keep the secret which you have the honour of sharing with his Majesty, nor——"

"Stay!" she eagerly interrupted. "The Emperor Charles took care to make the bond which united me to him cruelly hateful, and therefore I am not at all anxious to inform the world how close it once was."

Here Don Luis bit his lips, and a frown contracted his brow. Yet he controlled himself, and asked with barely perceptible excitement, "Then I may inform his Majesty that you would be disposed to keep this secret?"

"Yes," she answered curtly.

"But, so far as the convent is concerned, you persist in your refusal?"

"Even a noble and kind man would never induce me to take the veil."

Now Quijada lost his composure, and with increasing indignation exclaimed: "Of all the men on earth there is probably not one who cares as little for the opinion of an arrogant woman wounded in her vanity. He stands so far above your judgment that it is insulting him to undertake his defence. In short, you will not go to the convent?"

"No, and again no!" she protested bitterly. "Besides, your promise ought to bind you to still greater brevity. But it seems to please your noble nature to insult a defenceless, ill-treated woman. True, perhaps it is done on behalf of the mighty man who stands so far above me."

"How far, you will yet learn to your harm," replied Don Luis, once more master of himself. "As for the child, you still seem determined to withhold it from the man who will recognise it as his solely on this condition?"

Barbara thought it time to drop the restraint maintained with so much difficulty, and half with the intention of letting Charles's favourite hear the anguish that oppressed her heart, half carried away by the resentment which filled her soul, she permitted it to overflow and, in spite of the pain which it caused her to raise her voice, she ceased whispering, and cried: "You ask to hear what I intend to do? Nothing, save to keep what is mine! Though I know how much you dislike me, Don Luis Quijada, I call upon you to witness whether I have a right to this child and to consideration from its father; for when you, his messenger of love, led me for the first time to the man who now tramples me so cruelly under his feet, you yourself heard him greet me as the sun which was again rising for him. But that is forgotten! If his will is not executed, mother and child may perish in darkness and misery. Well, then, will against will! He has the right to cease to love me and to thrust me from him, but it is mine to hate him from my inmost soul, and to make my child what I please. Let him grow up as Heaven wills, and if he perishes in want and shame, if he is put in the pillory or dies on the scaffold, one mission at least will be left for me. I will shriek out to the world how the royal betrayer provided for the welfare of his own blood!"

"Enough!" interrupted Don Luis in mingled wrath and horror. "I will not and can not listen longer while gall and venom are poured upon the sacred head of the greatest of men."

"Then leave me!" cried Barbara, scarcely able to use her voice. "This room, at least, will be mine until I can no longer accept even shelter from the traitor who—you used the words yourself—instilled venom and bitter gall into my soul."

Quijada, with a slight bend of the head, turned and left the room.

When the door closed behind him, Barbara, with panting breath and flashing eyes, threw herself into an arm-chair, content as if she had been relieved of a heavy burden, but the Emperor's envoy mounted the horse on which he had come, and rode away.

He fared as the leech had done the day before. Barbara's infamous abuse still fired his blood, but he

could not conceal from himself that this unfortunate woman had been wronged by his beloved and honoured master. In truth, he had more than once heard the ardent professions of love with which Charles had greeted and dismissed her, and his chivalrous nature rebelled against the severity with which he made her suffer for the cruelty of Fate that had prematurely robbed her of what had been to him her dearest charm.

Before he went to Prebrunn, Dr. Mathys had counselled him not to forget during the disagreeable reception awaiting him that he was dealing with an irritable invalid, and the thoroughly noble man resolved to remember it as an excuse. The Emperor Charles should learn only that Barbara refused to submit to his arrangements, that his harshness deeply wounded her and excited her quick temper. He was unwilling to expose himself again to an outburst of her rage, and he would therefore intrust to another the task of rendering her more docile, and this other was Wolf Hartschwert.

A few days before he had visited the recovering knight, and obtained from him a decision whose favourable nature filled him with secret joy whenever he thought of it.

Wolf had already learned from the valet Adrian the identity of the person to whom he had been obliged to yield precedence in Barbara's heart, and how generously Quijada had kept silence concerning the wound which he had dealt him. When Don Luis freely forgave him for the unfortunate misunderstanding for which he, too, was not wholly free from blame, Wolf had thrown himself on his knees and warmly entreated him to dispose of him, who owed him more than life, as he would of himself. Then, opening his whole heart, he revealed what Barbara had been to him, and how, unable to control his rage, he had rushed upon him when he thought he had discovered, in the man who had just asked him to go far away from the woman he loved, her betrayer.

After this explanation, Quijada had acquiesced in the knight's wish that he should give him the office offered on that luckless evening, and he now felt disposed also to intrust to him further negotiations with the singer.

In the report made to the Emperor, Don Luis suppressed everything which could offend him; but Charles remained immovable in his determination to withdraw the expected gift of Fate, from its first entrance into the world, from every influence except his own. Moreover, he threatened that if the blinded girl continued to refuse to enter the convent and yield up the child, he would withdraw his aid from both. After a sleepless night, however, he remarked, on the following morning, that he perceived it to be his duty, whatever might happen, to assume the care of the child who was entitled to call him its father. What he would do for the mother must depend upon her future conduct. This was another instance how every trespass of the bounds of the moral order which the Church ordains and hallows entails the most sorrowful consequences even here below. Precisely because he was so strongly attached to this unfortunate woman, once so richly gifted, he desired to offer her the opportunity to obtain pardon from Heaven, and therefore insisted upon her retiring to the convent. His own guilt was causing him great mental trouble and, in fact, notwithstanding the arduous labour imposed upon him by the war, the most melancholy mood again took possession of him.

The day before his departure to join the army which was gathered near by at Landshut, he withdrew once more into the apartment draped with sable hangings.

When he was informed that Barbara wished to leave the Prebrunn castle, he burst into a furious passion, and commanded that she should be kept there, even if it was necessary to use force.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Whoever will not hear, must feel

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