

In the Fire of the Forge — Volume 01 eBook

In the Fire of the Forge — Volume 01 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER I.

On the eve of St. Medard's Day in the year 1281, the moon, which had just risen, was shining brightly upon the imperial free city of Nuremberg; its rays found their way into the street leading from the strong Marienthurm to the Frauenthor, but entrance to the Ortlieb mansion was barred by a house, a watchtower, and—most successfully of all—by a tall linden tree. Yet there was something to be seen here which even now, when Nuremberg sheltered the Emperor Rudolph and so many secular and ecclesiastical princes, counts, and knights, awakened Luna's curiosity. True, this something had naught in common with the brilliant spectacles of which there was no lack during this month of June; on the contrary, it was very quiet here. An imperial command prohibited the soldiery from moving about the city at night, and the Frauenthor, through which during the day plenty of people and cattle passed in and out had been closed long before. Very few of the worthy burghers—who went to bed betimes and rose so early that they rarely had leisure to enjoy the moonlight long—passed here at this hour. The last one, an honest master weaver, had moved with a very crooked gait. As he saw the moon double—like everything else around and above him—he had wondered whether the man up there had a wife. He expected no very pleasant reception from his own at home. The watchman, who—the moon did not exactly know why—lingered a short time in front of the Ortlieb mansion, followed the burgher. Then came a priest who, with the sacristan and several lantern bearers, was carrying the sacrament to a dying man in St. Clarengasse.

There was usually more to be seen at this hour on the other side of the city—the northwestern quarter—where the fortress rose on its hill, dominating the Thiergartenthor at its foot; for the Emperor Rudolph occupied the castle, and his brother-in-law, Burgrave Friedrich von Zollern, his own residence. This evening, however, there was little movement even there; the Emperor and his court, the Burgrave and his train, with all the secular and ecclesiastical princes, counts, and knights, had gone to the Town Hall with their ladies. High revel was held there, and inspiring music echoed through the open windows of the spacious apartment, where the Emperor Rudolph also remained during the ball. Here the moonbeams might have been reflected from glittering steel or the gold, silver, and gems adorning helmets, diadems, and gala robes; or they might surely have found an opportunity to sparkle on the ripples of the Pegnitz River, which divided the city into halves; but the heavenly wanderer, from the earliest times, has preferred leafy hidden nooks to scenes of noisy gaiety, a dim light to a brilliant glare. Luna likes best to gaze where there is a secret to be discovered, and mortals have always been glad to choose her as a confidante. Something exactly suited to her taste must surely be going on just now near the linden which, in all the splendour of fullest bloom, shaded the street in front of the Ortlieb mansion; for she had seen two fair girls grow up in the ancient dwelling with the carved escutcheon above the lofty oak door, and the ample garden—and the younger, from her earliest childhood, had been on especially intimate terms with her.

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Now the topmost boughs of the linden, spite of their dense foliage, permitted a glimpse of the broad courtyard which separated the patrician residence from the street.

A chain, which with graceful curves united a short row of granite posts, shut out the pedestrians, the vehicles and horsemen, the swine and other animals driven through the city gate. In contrast with the street, which in bad weather resembled an almost impassable swamp, it was always kept scrupulously clean, and the city beadle might spare himself the trouble of looking there for the carcasses of sucking pigs, cats, hens, and rats, which it was his duty to carry away.

A young man with an unusually tall and powerful figure was standing in this yard, gazing up at a window in the second story. The shadow of the linden concealed his features and his dress, but the moon had already seen him more than once in this very spot and knew that he was a handsome fellow, whose bronzed countenance, with its prominent nose and broad brow, plainly indicated a strong will. She had also seen the scar stretching from the roots of his long brown locks across the whole forehead to the left cheek-bone, that lent the face a martial air. Yet he belonged to no military body, but was the son of a noble family of Nuremberg, which boasted, it is true, of "knightly blood" and the right of its sons to enter the lists of the tournament, but was engaged in peaceful pursuits; for it carried on a trade with Italy and the Netherlands, and every male scion of the Eysvogel race had the birthright of being elected a member of the Honourable Council and taking part in the government of Nuremberg.

The moon had long known that the young man in the courtyard was an Eysvogel, nor was this difficult to discover. Every child in Nuremberg was familiar with the large showy coat of arms lately placed above the lofty doorway of the Eysvogel mansion; and the nocturnal visitor wore a doublet on whose left breast was embroidered the same coat of arms, with three birds in the shield and one on the helmet.

He had already waited some time in vain, but now a young girl's head appeared at the window, and a gay fresh voice called his Christian name, "Wolff!"

Waving his cap, he stepped nearer to the casement, greeted her warmly, and told her that he had come at this late hour to say good-night, though only from the front yard.

"Come in," she entreated. "True, my father and Eva have gone to the dance at the Town Hall, but my aunt, the abbess, is sitting with my mother."

"No, no," replied Wolff, "I only stopped in passing. Besides, I am stealing even this brief time."

"Business?" asked the young girl. "Do you know, I am beginning to be jealous of the monster which, like an old spider, constantly binds you closer and closer in its web."

What sort of dealing is this?—to give the whole day to business, and only a few minutes of moonlight to your betrothed bride!

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"I wish it were otherwise," sighed Wolff. "You do not know how hard these times are, Els! Nor how many thoughts beset my brain, since my father has placed me in charge of all his new enterprises."

"Always something new," replied Els, with a shade of reproach in her tone. "What an omnivorous appetite this Eysvogel business possesses! Ullmann Nutzel said lately: 'Wherever one wants to buy, the bird— [vogel]—has been ahead and snapped up everything in Venice and Milan. And the young one is even sharper at a bargain,' he added."

"Because I want to make a warm nest for you, dearest," replied Wolff.

"As if we were shopkeepers anxious to secure customers!" said the girl, laughing. "I think the old Eysvogel house must have enough big stoves to warm its son and his wife. At the Tuckers the business supports seven, with their wives and children. What more do we want? I believe that we love each other sincerely, and though I understand life better than Eva, to whom poverty and happiness are synonymous, I don't need, like the women of your family, gold plates for my breakfast porridge or a bed of Levantine damask for my lapdog. And the dowry my father will give me would supply the daughters of ten knights."

"I know it, sweetheart," interrupted Wolff dejectedly; "and how gladly I would be content with the smallest—"

"Then be so!" she exclaimed cheerily. "What you would call 'the smallest,' others term wealth. You want more than competence, and I—the saints know—would be perfectly content with 'good.' Many a man has been shipwrecked on the cliffs of 'better' and 'best.'"

Fired with passionate ardour, he exclaimed, "I am coming in now."

"And the business?" she asked mischievously. "Let it go as it will," he answered eagerly, waving his hand. But the next instant he dropped it again, saying thoughtfully: "No, no; it won't do, there is too much at stake."

Els had already turned to send Katterle, the maid, to open the heavy house door, but ere doing so she put her beautiful head out again, and asked:

"Is the matter really so serious? Won't the monster grant you even a good-night kiss?"

"No," he answered firmly. "Your menservants have gone, and before the maid could open—There is the moon rising above the linden already. It won't do. But I'll see you to-morrow and, please God, with a lighter heart. We may have good news this very day."

“Of the wares from Venice and Milan?” asked Els anxiously.

“Yes, sweetheart. Two waggon trains will meet at Verona. The first messenger came from Ingolstadt, the second from Munich, and the one from Landshut has been here since day before yesterday. Another should have arrived this morning, but the intense heat yesterday, or some cause—at any rate there is reason for anxiety. You don’t know what is at stake.”

“But peace was proclaimed yesterday,” said Els, “and if robber knights and bandits should venture——But, no! Surely the waggons have a strong escort.”

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"The strongest," answered Wolff. "The first wain could not arrive before to-morrow morning."

"You see!" cried the girl gaily. "Just wait patiently. When you are once mine I'll teach you not to look on the dark side. O Wolff, why is everything made so much harder for us than for others? Now this evening, it would have been so pleasant to go to the ball with you."

"Yet, how often, dearest, I have urged you in vain——" he began, but she hastily interrupted "Yes, it was certainly no fault of yours, but one of us must remain with my mother, and Eva——"

"Yesterday she complained to me with tears in her eyes that she would be forced to go to this dance, which she detested."

"That is the very reason she ought to go," explained Els. "She is eighteen years old, and has never yet been induced to enter into any of the pleasures other girls enjoy. When she isn't in the convent she is always at home, or with Aunt Kunigunde or one of the nuns in the woods and fields. If she wants to take the veil later, who can prevent it, but the abbess herself advises that she should have at least a glimpse of the world before leaving it. Few need it more, it seems to me, than our Eva."

"Certainly," Wolff assented. "Such a lovely creature! I know no girl more beautiful in all Nuremberg."

"Oh! you——," said his betrothed bride, shaking her finger at her lover, but he answered promptly,

"You just told me that you preferred 'good' to 'better,' and so doubtless 'fair' to 'fairer,' and you are beautiful, Els, in person and in soul. As for Eva, I admire, in pictures of madonnas and angels, those wonderful saintly eyes with their uplifted gaze and marvellously long lashes, the slight droop of the little head, and all the other charms; yet I gladly dispense with them in my heart's darling and future wife. But you, Els— if our Lord would permit me to fashion out of divine clay a life companion after my own heart, do you know how she would look?"

"Like me—exactly like Els Ortlieb, of course," replied the girl laughing.

"A correct guess, with all due modesty," Wolff answered gaily. "But take care that she does not surpass your wishes. For you know, if the little saint should meet at the dance some handsome fellow whom she likes better than the garb of a nun, and becomes a good Nuremberg wife, the excess of angelic virtue will vanish; and if I had a brother—in serious earnest— I would send him to your Eva."



“And,” cried Els, “however quickly her mood changes, it will surely do her no harm. But as yet she cares nothing about you men. I know her, and the tears she shed when our father gave her the costly Milan suckenie, in which she went to the ball, were anything but tears of joy.”

[Suckenie—A long garment, fitting the upper part of the body closely and widening very much below the waist, with openings for the arms.]

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"I only wonder," added Wolff, "that you persuaded her to go; the pious lamb knows how to use her horns fiercely enough."

"Oh, yes," Els assented, as if she knew it by experience; then she eagerly continued, "She is still just like an April day."

"And therefore," Wolff remarked, "the dance which she began with tears will end joyously enough. The young knights and nobles will gather round her like bees about honey. Count von Montfort, my brother-in-law Siebenburg says, is also at the Town Hall with his daughter."

"And the comet Cordula was followed, as usual, by a long train of admirers," said Els. "My father was obliged to give the count lodgings; it could not be avoided. The Emperor Rudolph had named him to the Council among those who must be treated with special courtesy. So he was assigned to us, and the whole suite of apartments in the back of the house, overlooking the garden, is now filled with Montforts, Montfort household officials, menservants, squires, pages, and chaplains. Montfort horses and hounds crowd our good steeds out of their stalls. Besides the twenty stabled here, eighteen were put in the brewery in the Hundsgasse, and eight belong to Countess Cordula. Then the constant turmoil all day long and until late at night! It is fortunate that they do not lodge with us in the front of the house! It would be very bad for my mother!"

"Then you can rejoice over the departure all the more cordially," observed Wolff.

"It will hardly cause us much sorrow," Els admitted. "Yet the young countess brings much merriment into our quiet house. She is certainly a tireless madcap, and it will vex your proud sister Isabella to know that your brother-in-law Siebenburg is one of her admirers. Did she not go to the Town Hall?"

"No," Wolff answered; "the twins have changed her wonderfully. You saw the dress my mother pressed upon her for the ball—Genoese velvet and Venetian lace! Its cost would have bought a handsome house. She was inclined, too, to appear as a young mother at the festival, and I assure you that she looked fairly regal in the magnificent attire. But this morning, after she had bathed the little boys, she changed her mind. Though my mother, and even my grandmother, urged her to go, she insisted that she belonged to the twins, and that some evil would befall the little ones if she left them."

"That is noble!" cried Els in delight, "and if I should ever—. Yet no, Isabella and I cannot be compared. My husband will never be numbered among the admirers of another woman, like your detestable brother-in-law. Besides, he is wasting time with Cordula. Her worldliness repels Eva, it is true, but I have heard many pleasant things about her. Alas! she is a motherless girl, and her father is an old reveller and huntsman, who rejoices whenever she does any audacious act. But he keeps his purse open to her, and she is kind-hearted and obliging to a degree—"

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"Equalled by few," interrupted Wolff, with a sneer. "The men know how to praise her for it. No paternoster would be imposed upon her in the confessional on account of cruel harshness."

"Nor for a sinful or a spiteful deed," replied Els positively. "Don't say anything against her to me, Wolff, in spite of your dissolute brother-in-law. I have enough to do to intercede for her with Eva and Aunt Kunigunde since she singed and oiled the locks of a Swiss knight belonging to the Emperor's court. Our Katterle brought the coals. But many other girls do that, since courtesy permits it. Her train to the Town Hall certainly made a very brave show; the fifty freight waggons you are expecting will scarcely form a longer line."

The young merchant started. The comparison roused his forgotten anxiety afresh, and after a few brief, tender words of farewell he left the object of his love. Els gazed thoughtfully after him; the moonlight revealed his tall, powerful figure for a long time. Her heart throbbed faster, and she felt more deeply than ever how warmly she loved him. He moved as though some heavy burden of care bowed his strong shoulders. She would fain have hastened after him, clung to him, and asked what troubled him, what he was concealing from her who was ready to share everything with him, but the Frauenthor, through which he entered the city, already hid him from her gaze.

She turned back into the room with a faint sigh. It could scarcely be solely anxiety about his expected goods that burdened her lover's mind. True, his weak, arrogant mother, and still more his grandmother, the daughter of a count, who lived with them in the Eysvogel house and still ruled her daughter as if she were a child, had opposed her engagement to Wolff, but their resistance had ceased since the betrothal. On the other hand, she had often heard that Fran Eysvogel, the haughty mother, dowerless herself, had many poor and extravagant relations besides her daughter and her debt-laden, pleasure-loving husband, Sir Seitz Siebenburg, who, it could not be denied, all drew heavily upon the coffers of the ancient mercantile house. Yet it was one of the richest in Nuremberg. Yes, something of which she was still ignorant must be oppressing Wolff, and, with the firm resolve to give him no peace until he confessed everything to her, she returned to the couch of her invalid mother.

CHAPTER II.

Wolff had scarcely vanished from the street, and Els from the window, when a man's slender figure appeared, as if it had risen from the earth, beside the spurge-laurel tree at the left of the house. Directly after some one rapped lightly on the pavement of the yard, and in a few minutes the heavy ironbound oak doors opened and a woman's hand beckoned to the late guest, who glided swiftly along in the narrow line of shadow cast by the house and vanished through the entrance.

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The moon looked after him doubtfully. In former days the narrow-shouldered fellow had been seen near the Ortlieb house often enough, and his movements had awakened Luna's curiosity; for he had been engaged in amorous adventure even when work was still going on at the recently completed convent of St. Clare—an institution endowed by the Ebner brothers, to which Herr Ernst Ortlieb added a considerable sum. At that time—about three years before—the bold fellow had gone there to keep tryst evening after evening, and the pretty girl who met him was Katterle, the waiting maid of the beautiful Els, as Nuremberg folk called the Ortlieb sisters, Els and Eva. Many vows of ardent, changeless love for her had risen to the moon, and the outward aspect of the man who made them afforded a certain degree of assurance that he would fulfil his pledges, for he then wore the long dark robe of reputable people, and on the front of his cap, from which a net shaped like a bag hung down his back, was a large S, and on the left shoulder of his long coat a T, the initials of the words Steadfast and True. They bore witness that the person who had them embroidered on his clothing deemed these virtues the highest and noblest. It might have been believed that the lean fellow, who scarcely looked his five-and-thirty years, possessed these lofty traits of character; for, though three full years had passed since his last meeting with Katterle at the building site, he had gone to his sweetheart with his wonted steadfastness and truth immediately after the Emperor Rudolph's entry.

He had given her reason to rely upon him; but the moon's gaze reaches far, and had discovered the quality of Walther Biberli's "steadfastness and truth."

In one respect it proved the best and noblest; for among thousands of servitors the moon had not seen one who clung to his lord with more loyal devotion. Towards pretty young women, on the contrary, he displayed his principal virtues in a very singular way; for the pallid nocturnal wanderer above had met him in various lands and cities, and wherever he tarried long another maid was added to the list of those to whom Biberli vowed steadfastness and truth.

True, whenever Sir Long Coat's travels led him back to any one to whom he had sworn eternal love, he went first to her, if she, too, retained the old affection. But Katterle had cause to care for him most, for he was more warmly devoted to her than to any of the others, and in his own fashion his intentions were honest. He seriously intended, as soon as his master left the imperial court—which he hoped would not happen too soon—and returned to his ancestral castle in his native Switzerland, to establish a home of his own for his old age, and no one save Katterle should light the hearth fire. Her outward circumstances pleased him, as well as her disposition and person. She was free-born, like himself—the son of a forest keeper—and, again like him, belonged to a Swiss family; her heritage (she was an orphan), which consisted of a house and arable land in her home, Sarnen, where she still sent her savings, satisfied his requirements. But above all she believed in him and admired his versatile mind and his experience. Moreover, she gave him absolute obedience, and loved him so loyally that she had remained unwedded, though a number of excellent men had sought her in marriage.

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Katterle had met him for the first time more than three years before when, after the battle of Marchfield, he remained several weeks in Nuremberg. They had sat side by side at a tournament, and, recognising each other as Swiss-born by the sharp sound of the letters “ch” and the pronunciation of other words, were mutually attracted.

Katterle had a kind heart; yet at that time she almost yielded to the temptation to pray Heaven not to hasten the cure of a brave man’s wounds too quickly, for she knew that Biberli was a squire in the service of the young Swiss knight Heinz Schorlin, whose name was on every lip because, in spite of his youth, he had distinguished himself at the battle of Marchfield by his rare bravery, and that the young hero would remain in Nuremberg only until his severe injuries were completely healed. His departure would bring to her separation from his servant, and sometimes when homesickness tortured her she thought she would be unable to survive the parting. Meanwhile Biberli nursed his master with faithful zeal, as if nothing bound him to Nuremberg, and even after his departure Katterle remained in good health.

Now she had him again. Directly after the Emperor Rudolph’s entrance, five days before, Biberli had come openly to the Ortlieb house and presented himself to Martsche, —[Margaret]—the old house keeper, as the countryman and friend of the waiting maid, who had brought her a message from home.

True, it had been impossible to say anything confidential either in the crowded kitchen or in the servants’ hall. To-night’s meeting was to afford the opportunity.

The menservants, carrying sedan chairs and torches, had all gone out with their master, who had taken his younger daughter, Eva, to the dance. They were to wait in front of the Town Hall, because it was doubtful whether the daughter of the house, who had been very reluctant to go to the entertainment, might not urge an early departure. Count von Montfort, whose quarters were in the Ortlieb mansion, and his whole train of male attendants, certainly would not come back till very late at night or even early morning, for the Countess Cordula remained at a ball till the close, and her father lingered over the wine cup till his daughter called him from the revellers.

All this warranted the lovers in hoping for an undisturbed interview. The place of meeting was well chosen. It was unsatisfactory only to the moon for, after Biberli had closed the heavy door of the house behind him, Luna found no chink or crevice through which a gliding ray might have watched what the true and steadfast Biberli was saying to Katterle. There was one little window beside the door, but it was closed, and the opening was covered with sheepskin. So the moon’s curiosity was not gratified.

Instead of her silver rays, the long entry of the Ortlieb house, with its lofty ceiling, was illumined only by the light of three lanterns, which struggled dimly through horn panes. The shining dots in a dark corner of the spacious corridor were the eyes of a black cat, watching there for rats and mice.

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The spot really possessed many advantages for the secret meeting of two lovers, for as it ran through the whole width of the house, it had two doors, one leading to the street, the other into the yard. In the right wall of the entry there were also two small doors, reached by a flight of steps. At this hour both closed empty rooms, for the office and the chamber where Herr Ernst Ortlieb received his business friends had not been occupied since sunset, and the bathroom and dressing-room adjoining were used only during the day.

True, some unbidden intruder might have come down the long broad staircase leading to the upper story. But in that case the lovers had the best possible hiding-place close at hand, for here large and small boxes, standing side by side and one above another, formed a protecting wall; yonder heaps of sacks and long rows of casks afforded room for concealment behind them. Rolls of goods packed in sacking leaned against the chests, inviting a fugitive to slip back of them, and surely no one would suspect the presence of a pair of lovers in the rear of these mountains of hides and bales wrapped in matting. Still it would scarcely have been advisable to remain near them; for these packages, which the Ortlieb house brought from Venice, contained pepper and other spices that exhaled a pungent odor, endurable only by hardened nerves.

Valuable goods of various kinds lay here until they could be placed in cellars or storehouses or sold. But there was many an empty space, too, in the broad corridor for, spite of Emperor Rudolph's strictness, robbery on the highroads had by no means ceased, and Herr Ernst Ortlieb was still compelled to use caution in the transportation of costly wares.

After Biberli and his sweetheart had assured themselves that the ardour of their love had by no means cooled, they sat down on some bags filled with cloves and related to each other the experiences through which they had passed during the period of separation.

Katterle's life had flowed on in a pleasant monotony. She had no cause to complain of her employers.

Fran Maria Ortlieb, the invalid mistress of the house, rarely needed her services.

During a ride to visit relatives in Ulm, the travellers, who were under the same escort of men at arms as a number of Nuremberg freight waggons, had been attacked by the robber knights Absbach and Hirschhorn. An arrow had struck Frau Ortlieb's palfrey, causing the unfortunate woman a severe fall, which produced an internal injury, from which she had not yet recovered. The assault resulted unfortunately for young Hirschhorn, who led it; he met with a shameful death on the gallows.

The information enraged Biberli. Instead of feeling any sympathy for the severely injured lady, he insisted that the Nuremberg burghers had dealt with Hirschhorn in a

rascally fashion; for he was a knight, and therefore, as honest judges familiar with the law, they ought to have put him to death by the sword instead of with the rope. And Katterle agreed with him; she never contradicted his opinions, and surely Biberli must know what treatment befitted a knight, since he was the foster-brother of one.

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Nor did the maid, who was in the personal service of the daughters of the house, make any complaint against them. Indeed, she could not praise Els, the elder, sufficiently. She was very just, the careful nurse of her invalid mother, and always unvarying in her cheerful kindness.

She had no fault to find with Eva either, especially as she was more religious than any one in the whole house. Spite of her marvellous beauty—Katterle knew that there was nothing false about it—she would probably end by joining the nuns in the convent. But her mood changed with every breath, like the weathercock on the steeple. If she got out of bed the wrong way, or one did not guess her wishes before they were uttered, she would fly into a rage at the least trifle. Then she sometimes used very unkind words; but no one could cherish anger against her long, for she had an indescribably lovely manner of trying to atone for the offences which her hasty young blood made her commit. She had gone to the ball that night as if it were a funeral; she shunned men like poison, and even kept out of the way of her sister's friends.

Biberli laughed, as if there could be no doubt of his opinion, and exclaimed: "Just wait a while! My master will meet her at the Town Hall tonight, and if the scrawny little squirrel I saw three years ago has really grown up into such a beauty, if he does not get on her track and capture her, my name isn't Biberli."

"But surely," replied Katterle doubtfully, "you told me that you had not yet succeeded in persuading him to imitate you in steadfastness and truth."

"But he is a knight," replied the servant, striking himself pompously under the T on his shoulder, as if he, too, belonged to this favoured class, "and so he is as free to pursue a woman as to hunt the game in the forest. And my Heinz Schorlin! You saw him, and admitted that he was worth looking at. And that was when he had scarcely recovered from his dangerous wounds, while now——The French Knight de Preully, in Paris, with whom my dead foster-brother, until he fell sick-----" Here he hesitated; an enquiring look from his sweetheart showed that—perhaps for excellent reasons—he had omitted to tell her about his sojourn in Paris.

Now that he had grown older and abandoned the wild revelry of that period in favour of truth and steadfastness, he quietly related everything she desired to know.

He had acquired various branches of learning while sharing the studies of his foster-brother, the eldest son of the old Knight Schorlin, who was then living, and therefore, when scarcely twenty, was appointed schoolmaster at Stansstadt. Perhaps he might have continued to teach—for he promised to be successful—had not a vexatious discovery disgusted him with his calling.

He was informed that the mercenaries in the Schnitzthurm guard were paid five shillings a week more than he, spite of the knowledge he had gained by so much toil.

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In his indignation he went back to Schorlin Castle, which was always open to him, and he arrived just at the right time.

His present master's older brother, whose health had always been delicate, being unable to follow the profession of arms, was on the eve of departing to attend the university at Paris, accompanied by the chaplain and an equerry. When the Lady Wendula, his master's mother, learned what an excellent reputation Biberli had gained as a schoolmaster, she persuaded her husband to send him as esquire with their sickly son.

In Paris there was at first no lack of pleasures of every description, especially as they met among the king's mercenaries many a dissolute Swiss knight and man at arms. His foster-brother, to his sorrow, was unable to resist the temptations which Satan scatters in Paris as the peasants elsewhere sow rye and oats, and the young knight was soon attacked, by a severe illness. Then Biberli's gay life ended too. For months he did not leave his foster-brother's sick bed a single hour, by day or night, until death released him from his suffering.

On his return to Castle Schorlin he found many changes; the old knight had been called away from earth a few days before his son's death, and Heinz Schorlin, his present master, had fallen heir to castle and lands. This, however, was no great fortune, for the large estates of the Schorlin family were burdened by heavy debts.

The dead lord, as countryman, boon companion, and brother in arms of the Emperor Rudolph, had been always ready to place his sword at his service, and whenever a great tournament was held he never failed to be present. So the property had been consumed, and the Lady Wendula and her son and three daughters were left in moderate circumstances. The two older girls had taken the veil, while the youngest, a merry little maiden, lived with her mother.

But the Emperor Rudolph had by no means forgotten the Lady Wendula and her dead husband, and with the utmost kindness requested her to send him her only son as soon as he was able to wield a sword and lance. He intended to repay Heinz for the love and loyalty his father had shown him through his whole life.

"And the Hapsburg," Biberli added, "had kept his word."

In a few years his young lord was ready for a position at court.

Gotthard von Ramsweg, the Lady Wendula's older brother, a valiant knight, went to his sister's home after her husband's death to manage the estate and instruct his nephew in all the exercises of knighthood. Soon the strong, agile, fearless son of a brave father, under the guidance of such a teacher, excelled many an older youth. He was barely eighteen when the Lady Wendula sent him to his imperial master. She had given him,

with her blessing, fiery horses, the finest pieces of his father's suits of mail, an armour bearer, and a groom to take with him on his journey; and his uncle

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had agreed to accompany him to Lausanne, where the Emperor Rudolph was then holding his court to discuss with Pope Gregory—the tenth of the name—arrangements for a new crusade. But nothing had yet been said about Biberli. On the evening before the young noble's departure, however, a travelling minstrel came to the castle, who sang of the deeds of former crusaders, and alluded very touchingly to the loneliness of the wounded knight, Herr Weisenthau, on his couch of pain. Then the Lady Wendula remembered her eldest son, and the fraternal tendance which Biberli had given him.

“And so,” the servant went on, “in the anxiety of a mother's heart she urged me to accompany Heinz, her darling, as esquire; and watch over his welfare.”

“Since I could use a pen, I was to write now and then what a mother desires to hear of a son. She felt great confidence in me, because she believed that I was true and steadfast. And I have kept in every respect the vow I then made to the Lady Wendula—that she should not find herself mistaken in me. I remember that evening as if it were only yesterday. To keep constantly before my eyes the praise my mistress had bestowed upon me, I ventured to ask my young master's sister to embroider the T and the S on the cap and the new coat, and the young lady did so that very night. Since that time these two initials have gone with me wherever our horses bear us, and as, after the battle of Marchfield, Biberli nursed his master back to health with care and toil, he thinks he can prove to you, his sole sweetheart, that he wears his T and S with good reason.”

In return for these words Katterle granted her friend the fitting reward with such resignation that it was robbing the moon not to permit her to look on. Her curiosity, however, was not to remain wholly ungratified; for when Biberli found that it was time for him to repair to the Town Hall to learn whether his master, Heinz Schorlin, needed his services, Katterle came out of the house door with him.

They found much more to say and to do ere they parted.

First, the Swiss maid-servant wished to know how the Emperor Rudolph had received Heinz Schorlin; and she had the most gratifying news.

During their stay at Lausanne, where he won the victory in a tournament, Heinz was knighted; but after the battle of Marchfield he became still dearer to the Emperor, especially when a firm friendship united the young Swiss to Hartmann, Rudolph's eighteen-year-old son, who was now on the Rhine. That very day Heinz had received a tangible proof of the imperial favour, on account of which he had gone to the dance in an extremely cheerful mood.

This good news concerning the knight, whom her young mistress had perhaps already met, awakened in the maid, who was not averse to the business of matchmaking, so

dear to her sex, very aspiring plans which aimed at nothing less than a union between Eva and Heinz Schorlin. But Biberli had scarcely perceived the purport of Katterle's words when he anxiously interrupted her and, declaring that he had already lingered too long, cut short the suggestion by taking leave.

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His master's marriage to a young girl who belonged to the city nobility, which in his eyes was far inferior in rank to a Knight Schorlin, should cast no stone in the pathway of fame that was leading him so swiftly upward. Many things must happen before Biberli could honestly advise him to give up his present free and happy life and seek rest in his own nest.

If Eva Ortlieb were as lovely as the Virgin herself, and Sir Heinz's inflammable heart should blaze as fervently as it always did, she should not lure him into the paralysing bondage of wedlock so long as he was there and watched over him.

If he must be married, Biberli had something else in view for him— something which would make him a great lord at a single stroke. But it was too soon even for that.

When he crossed the Fleischbrucke in the market place and approached the brilliantly lighted Town Hall, he had considerable difficulty in moving forward, for the whole square was thronged with curious spectators, servants in gala liveries, sedan chairs, richly caparisoned steeds, and torchbearers. The von Montfort retinue, which had quarters in the Ortlieb house, was one of the most brilliant and numerous of all, and Biberli's eyes wandered with a look of satisfaction over the gold-mounted sedan chair of the young countess. He would rather have given his master to her than to the Nuremberg maiden whom Katterle compared to a weathercock, and who therefore certainly did not possess the lofty virtue of steadfastness.

CHAPTER III.

Sir Heinz Schorlin's servant was on intimate terms with many of the servitors of the imperial family, and one of them conducted him to the balcony of the city pipers, which afforded a view of the great hall. The Emperor sat there at the head of the banquet table, and by his side, on a lower throne, his sister, the Burgravine von Zollern. Only the most distinguished and aristocratic personages whom the Reichstag attracted to Nuremberg, with their ladies, shared the feast given by the city in their honour.

But yonder, at a considerable distance from them, though within the space enclosed by a black and yellow silk cord, separated from the glittering throng of the other guests, he perceived—he would not trust his own eyes—the Knight Heinz Schorlin, and by his side a wonderfully charming young girl.

Biberli had not seen Eva Ortlieb for three years, yet he knew that it was no other than she. But into what a lovely creature the active, angular child with the thin little arms had developed!

The hall certainly did not lack superb women of all ages and every style of figure and bearing suited to please the eye. Many might even boast of more brilliant, aristocratic

beauty, but not one could vie in witchery with her on whom Katterle had cast an eye for his master. She had only begun a modest allusion to it, but even that was vexatious; for Biberli fancied that she had thereby “talked of the devil,” and he did not wish him to appear.

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With a muttered imprecation, by no means in harmony with his character, he prepared to leave the balcony; but the scene below, though it constantly filled him with fresh vexation, bound him to the spot as if by some mysterious spell.

Especially did he fancy that he had a bitter taste in his mouth when his gaze noted the marvellous symmetry of Heinz Schorlin's powerful though not unusually tall figure, his beautiful waving locks, and the aristocratic ease with which he wore his superb velvet robe-sapphire blue on the left side and white on the right, embroidered with silver falcons-or perceived how graciously the noblest of the company greeted him after the banquet; not, indeed, from envy, but because it pierced his very heart to think that this splendid young favourite of fortune, already so renowned, whom he warmly loved, should throw himself away on the daughter of a city merchant, though his motley wares, which he had just seen, were adorned by the escutcheon of a noble house.

But Heinz Schorlin had already been attracted by many more aristocratic fair ones, only to weary of them speedily enough. This time, also, Biberli would have relied calmly on his fickleness had Katterle's foolish wish only remained unuttered, and had Heinz treated his companion in the gay, bold fashion which usually marked his manner to other ladies. But his glance had a modest, almost devout expression when he gazed into the large blue eyes of the merchant's daughter. And now she raised them! It could not fail to bewitch the most obdurate woman hater!

Faithful, steadfast Biberli clenched his fists, and once even thought of shouting "Fire!", into the ballroom below to separate all who were enjoying themselves there wooing and being wooed.

But those beneath perceived neither him nor his wrath—least of all his master and the young girl who had come hither so reluctantly.

At home Eva had really done everything in her power to be permitted to stay away from the Town Hall. Herr Ernst Ortlieb, her father, however, had been inflexible. The chin of the little man with beardless face and hollow cheeks had even begun to tremble, and this was usually the precursor of an outburst of sudden wrath which sometimes overpowered him to such a degree that he committed acts which he afterwards regretted.

This time he had been compelled not to tolerate the opposition of his obstinate child. Emperor Rudolph himself had urged the "honourable" members of the Council to gratify him and his daughter-in-law Agnes, whom he wished to entertain pleasantly during her brief visit, by the presence of their beautiful wives and daughters at the entertainment in the Town Hall.

Herr Ortlieb's invalid wife could not spare Els, her older daughter and faithful nurse, so he required Eva's obedience, and compelled her to give up her opposition to attending the festival; but she dreaded the vain, worldly gaiety—nay, actually felt a horror of it.

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Even while still a pupil at the convent school she had often asked herself whether it would not be the fairest fate for her, like her Aunt Kunigunde, the abbess of the convent of St. Clare, to vow herself to the Saviour and give up perishable joys to secure the rapture of heaven, which lasted throughout eternity, and might begin even here on earth, in a quiet life with God, a complete realisation of the Saviour's loving nature, and the great sufferings which he took upon himself for love's sake. Oh, even suffering and bleeding with the Most High were rich in mysterious delight! Aye, no earthly happiness could compare with the blissful feeling left by those hours of pious ecstasy.

Often she had sat with closed eyes for a long time, dreaming that she was in the kingdom of heaven and, herself an angel, dwelt with angels. How often she had wondered whether earthly love could bestow greater joy than such a happy dream, or the walks through the garden and forest, during which the abbess told her of St. Francis of Assisi, who founded her order, the best and most warmhearted among the successors of Christ, of whom the Pope himself said that he would hear even those whom God would not! Moreover, there was no plant, no flower, no cry of any animal in the woods which was not familiar to the Abbess Kunigunde. Like St. Francis; she distinguished in everything which the ear heard and the eye beheld voices that bore witness to the goodness and greatness of the Most High. The abbess felt bound by ties of sisterly affection to every one of God's creatures, and taught Eva to love them, too, and, as a person who treats a child kindly wins the mother's heart also, to obtain by love of his creatures that of the Creator.

Others had blamed her because she held aloof from her sister's friends and amusements. They were ignorant of the joys of solitude, which her aunt and her saint had taught her to know.

She had endured interruptions and reproaches, often humbly, oftener still, when her hot blood swept away her self-control, with vehement indignation and tears; but meanwhile she had always cherished the secret thought that the time would come when she, too, would be permitted, at one with God and the Saviour, to enjoy the raptures of eternal bliss. She loved her invalid mother and, often as his sudden fits of passion alarmed her, she was tenderly attached to her father; yet it would have seemed to her an exquisite delight to be permitted to imitate the saints and sever all bonds which united her to the world and its clogging demands. She had long been yearning for the day when she would be allowed to entreat the abbess to grant her admittance to the convent, whose doors would be flung wide open for her because, next to the brothers Ebner, who founded it, her parents had contributed the largest sum for its support.

But she was obliged to wait patiently, for Els, her older sister, would probably soon marry her Wolff, and then it would be her turn to nurse her invalid mother. Her own heart dictated this, and the abbess had said: "Let her enter eternity clasping your hand before you begin, with us, to devote all your strength to securing your own salvation. Besides, you will thereby ascend a long row of steps nearer to your sublime goal."

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But Eva would far rather have given her hand now, aloof from the world, to the Most High in an inviolable bond. What marvel that, with such a goal in view, she was deeply reluctant to enter the gay whirl of a noisy ball!

With serious repugnance she had allowed Katterle and her sister to adorn her, and entered the sedan chair which was to convey her to the Town Hall. Doubtless her own image, reflected in the mirror, had seemed charming enough, and the loud expressions of delight from the servants and others who admired her rich costume had pleased her; but directly after she realized the vanity of this emotion and, while approaching the ballroom in her chair, she prayed to her saint to help her conquer it.

Striving honestly to vanquish this error, she entered the hall soon after the Emperor and his young daughter-in-law; but there she was greeted from the balcony occupied by the city pipers and musicians, long before Biberli entered it, with the same fanfare that welcomed the illustrious guests of the city, and with which blended the blare of the heralds' trumpets. Thousands of candles in the chandeliers and candelabra diffused a radiance as brilliant as that of day and, confused by the noise and waves of light which surged around her, she had drawn closer to her father, clinging to him for protection. She especially missed her sister, with whom she had grown up, who had become her second self, and whom she needed most when she emerged from her quiet life of introspection into the gay world.

At first she had stood with downcast lashes, but soon her eyes wandered over the waving plumes and flashing jewels, the splendour of silk and velvet, the glitter of gold and glimmer of pearls.

Sometimes the display in church had been scarcely less brilliant, and even without her sister's request she had gazed at it, but how entirely different it was! There she had rejoiced in her own modest garb, and told herself that her simplicity was more pleasing to God and the saints than the vain splendour of the others, which she might so easily have imitated or even surpassed. But here the anxious question of how she appeared among the rest of the company forced itself upon her.

True, she knew that the brocade suckenie, which her father had ordered from Milan, was costly; that the sea-green hue of the right side harmonised admirably with the white on the left; that the tendrils and lilies of the valley wrought in silver, which seemed to be scattered over the whole, looked light and airy; yet she could not shake off the feeling that everything she wore was in disorder—here something was pulled awry, there something was crushed. Els, who had attended to her whole toilet, was not there to arrange it, and she felt thoroughly uncomfortable in the midst of this worldly magnificence and bustle.

Notwithstanding her father's presence, she had never been so desolate as among these ladies and gentlemen, nearly all of whom were strangers.

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Her sister was intimate with the other girls of her age and station, few of whom were absent, and if Eva could have conjured her to her side doubtless many would have joined them; but she knew no one well, and though many greeted her, no one lingered. Everybody had friends with whom they were on far more familiar terms. The young Countess von Montfort, a girl of her own age and an inmate of her own home, also gave her only a passing word. But this was agreeable to her—she disliked Cordula's free manners.

Many who were friends of Els had gathered around Ursula Vorchtel, the daughter of the richest man in the city, and she intentionally avoided the Ortliebs because, before Wolff Eysvogel sued for Els's hand, he and Ursula had been intended for each other.

Eva was just secretly vowing that this first ball should also be the last, when the imperial magistrate, Herr Berthold Pfinzing, her godfather, came to present her to the Emperor, who had requested to see the little daughter of the Herr Ernst Ortlieb whose son had fallen in battle for him. His "little saint," Herr Pfinzing added, looked no less lovely amid the gay music of the Nuremberg pipers than kneeling in prayer amid the notes of the organ.

Every tinge of colour had faded from Eva's cheeks, and though a few hours before she had asked her sister what the Emperor's greatness signified in the presence of God that she should be forced, for his sake, to be faithless to the holiest things, now fear of the majesty of the powerful sovereign made her breath come quicker.

How, clinging to her godfather's hand, she reached the Emperor Rudolph's throne she could never describe, for what happened afterwards resembled a confused dream of mingled bliss and pain, from which she was first awakened by her father's warning that the time of departure had come.

When she raised her downcast eyes the monarch was standing before the throne placed for him. She had been compelled to bend her head backward in order to see his face, for his figure, seven feet in height, towered like a statue of Roland above all who surrounded him. But when, after the Austrian duchess, his daughter-in-law, who was scarcely beyond childhood, and the Burgrave von Zollern, his sister, had graciously greeted her, and Eva with modest thanks had also bowed low before the Emperor Rudolph, a smile, spite of her timidity, flitted over her lips, for as she bent the knee her head barely reached above his belt. The Burgravine, a vivacious matron, must have noticed it, for she beckoned to her, and with a few kind words mentioned the name of the young knight who stood behind her, between her own seat and that of the young Duchess Agnes of Austria, and recommended him as an excellent dancer. Heinz Schorlin, the master of the true and steadfast Biberli, had bowed courteously, and answered respectfully that he hoped he should not prove himself unworthy of praise from such lips.

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Meanwhile his glance met Eva's, and the Burgravine probably perceived with what, ardent admiration the knight's gaze rested on the young Nuremberg beauty, for she had scarcely stepped back after the farewell greeting when the noble lady said in a low tone, but loud enough for Eva's quick ear to catch the words, "Methinks yonder maiden will do well to guard her little heart this evening against you, you unruly fellow! What a sweet, angelic face!"

Eva's cheeks crimsoned with mingled shame and pleasure at such words from such lips, and she would have been only too glad to hear what the knight whispered to the noble lady.

The attention of the young Duchess Agnes, daughter of King Ottocar of Bohemia and wife of the Emperor's third son, who also bore the name of Rudolph, had been claimed during this incident by the Duke of Nassau, who had presented his ladies to her, but they had scarcely retired when she beckoned to Heinz Schorlin, and while talking with him gazed into his eyes with such warm, childlike pleasure that Eva was incensed; she thought it unseemly for a wife and a duchess to be on such familiar terms with a simple knight. Nay, her disapproval of the princess's conduct must have been very deep, for during the whole time of her conversation with the knight there was a loud singing in the young girl's ears. The Bohemian's face might be considered pretty; her dark eyes sparkled brightly, animating the immature features, now slightly sunburnt; and although four years younger than Eva, her figure, though not above middle height, was well developed and, in spite of its flexibility, aristocratic in bearing. While conversing with Heinz Schorlin she seemed joyously excited, unrestrainedly cordial, but her manner expressed disappointment and royal hauteur as another group of ladies and gentlemen came forward to be presented, compelling her to turn her back upon the young Swiss with a regretful shrug of her shoulders.

The counts and countesses, knights and ladies who thronged around her concealed her from Eva's eyes, who, now that Heinz Schorlin had left the Bohemian, again turned her attention to the Emperor, and even ventured to approach him. What paternal gentleness Rudolph's deep tones expressed! How much his face attracted her!

True, it could make no pretensions to beauty—the thin, hooked nose was far too large and long; the corners of the mouth drooped downward too much; perhaps it was this latter peculiarity which gave the whole face so sorrowful an aspect. Eva thought she knew its source. The wound dealt a few months before by the death of his faithful wife, the love of his youth, still ached. His eyes could not be called either large or bright; but how kindly, how earnest, shrewd and, when an amusing thought passed through his mind, how mischievous they could look! His light-brown hair had not yet turned very grey, spite of his sixty-three years, but the locks had lost their luxuriance and fell straight, except for a slight curl at the lower ends, below his neck.

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Eva's father, when a young man, had met Frederic II, of the Hohenstaufen line, in Italy, and was wont to call this a special boon of fate. True, her aunt, the abbess, said she did not envy him the honour of meeting the Antichrist; yet that very day after mass she had counselled Eva to impress the Emperor Rudolph's appearance on her memory. To meet noble great men elevates our hearts and makes us better, because in their presence we become conscious of our own insignificance and the duty of emulating them. She would willingly have given more than a year of her life to be permitted to gaze into the pure, loving countenance of St. Francis, who had closed his eyes seven years after her birth.

So Eva, who was accustomed to render strict obedience to her honoured aunt, honestly strove to watch every movement of the Emperor; but her attention had been continually diverted, mainly by the young knight, from whom—the Emperor's sister, Burgravine Elizabeth, had said so herself—danger threatened her heart.

But the young Countess Cordula von Montfort, the inmate of her home, also compelled her to gaze after her, for Heinz Schorlin had approached the vivacious native of the Vorarlberg, and the freedom with which she treated him—allowing herself to go so far as to tap him on the arm with her fan—vexed and offended her like an insult offered to her whole sex. To think that a girl of high station should venture upon such conduct before the eyes of the Emperor and his sister!

Not for the world would she have permitted any man to talk and laugh with her in such a way. But the young knight whom she saw do this was again the Swiss. Yet his bright eyes had just rested upon her with such devout admiration that lack of respect for a lady was certainly not in his nature, and he merely found himself compelled, contrary to his wish, to defend himself against the countess and her audacity.

Eva had already heard much praise of the great valour of the young knight Heinz Schorlin. When Katterle, whose friend and countryman was in his service, spoke of him—and that happened by no means rarely—she had always called him a devout knight, and that he was so, in truth, he showed her plainly enough; for there was fervent devotion in the eyes which now again sought hers like an humble penitent.

The musicians had just struck up the Polish dance, and probably the knight, whom the Emperor's sister had recommended to her for a partner, wished by this glance to apologise for inviting Countess Cordula von Montfort instead. Therefore she did not need to avoid the look, and might obey the impulse of her heart to give him a warning in the language of the eyes which, though mute, is yet so easily understood. Hitherto she had been unable to answer him, even by a word, yet she believed that she was destined to become better acquainted, if only to show him that his power, of which the Burgravine had spoken, was baffled when directed against the heart of a pious maiden.

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And something must also attract him to her, for while she had the honour of being escorted up and down the hall by one of the handsome sons of the Burgrave von Zollern to the music of the march performed by the city pipers, Heinz Schorlin, it is true, did the same with his lady, but he looked away from her and at Eva whenever she passed him.

Her partner was talkative enough, and his description of the German order which he expected to enter, as his two brothers had already done, would have seemed to her well worthy of attention at any other time, but now she listened with but partial interest.

When the dance was over and Sir Heinz approached, her heart beat so loudly that she fancied her neighbours must hear it; but ere he had spoken a single word old Burgrave Frederick himself greeted her, inquired about her invalid mother, her blithe sister, and her aunt, the abbess, who in her youth had been the queen of every dance, and asked if she found his son a satisfactory partner.

It was an unusual distinction to be engaged in conversation by this distinguished gentleman, yet Eva would fain have sent him far away, and her replies must have sounded monosyllabic enough; but the sweet shyness that overpowered her so well suited the modest young girl, who had scarcely passed beyond childhood, that he did not leave her until the 'Rai' began, and then quitted her with the entreaty that she would remove the cap which had hitherto rendered her invisible, to the injury of knights and gentlemen, and be present at the dance which he should soon give at the castle.

The pleasant old nobleman had scarcely left her when she turned towards the young man who had just approached with the evident intention of leading her to the dance, but he was again standing beside Cordula von Montfort, and a feeling of keen resentment overpowered her.

The young countess was challenging his attention still more boldly, tossing her head back so impetuously that the turban-like roll on her hair, spite of the broad ribbon that fastened it under her chin, almost fell on the floor. But her advances not only produced no effect, but seemed to annoy the knight. What charm could he find in a girl who, in a costume which displayed the greatest extreme of fashion, resembled a Turk rather than a Christian woman? True, she had an aristocratic bearing, and perhaps Els was right in saying that her strongly marked features revealed a certain degree of kindliness, but she wholly lacked the spell of feminine modesty. Her pleasant grey eyes and full red lips seemed created only for laughter, and the plump outlines of her figure were better suited to a matron than a maiden in her early girlhood. Not the slightest defect escaped Eva during this inspection. Meanwhile she remembered her own image in the mirror, and a smile of satisfaction hovered round her red lips.

Now the knight bowed.

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Was he inviting the countess to dance again? No, he turned his back to her and approached Eva, whose lovely, childlike face brightened as if a sun beam had shone upon it. The possibility of refusing her hand for the 'Rai' never entered her head, but he told her voluntarily that he had invited Countess Cordula for the Polish dance solely in consequence of the Burgravine's command, but now that he was permitted to linger at her side he meant to make up for lost time.

He kept his word, and was by no means content with the 'Rai'; for, after the young Duchess Agnes had summoned him to a 'Zauner', and during its continuance again talked with him far more confidentially than the modest Nuremberg maiden could approve, he persuaded Eva to try the 'Schwabeln' with him also; and though she had always disliked such dances she yielded, and her natural grace, as well as her quick ear for time, helped her to catch the unfamiliar steps without difficulty. While doing so he whispered that even the angels in heaven could have no greater bliss than it afforded him to float thus through the hall, clasping her in his arm, while she glanced up at him with a happy look and bent her little head in assent. She would gladly have exclaimed warmly: "Yes, indeed! Yet the Burgravine says that danger threatens me from you, you dear, kind fellow, and I should do well to avoid you."

Besides, she felt indebted to him. What would have befallen her here in his absence! Moreover, it gave her a strange sense of pleasure to gaze into his eyes, allow herself to be borne through the wide hall by his strong arm, and while pressed closely to his side imagine that his swiftly throbbing heart felt the pulsing of her own. Instead of injuring her, wishing her evil, and asking her to do anything wrong, he certainly had only good intentions. He had cared for her as if he occupied the place of her own brother who fell in the battle of Marchfield. It would have given him most pleasure—he had said so himself—to dance everything with her, but decorum and the royal dames who kept him in attendance would not permit it. However, he came to her in every pause to exchange at least a few brief words and a glance. During the longest one, which lasted more than an hour and was devoted to the refreshment of the guests, he led her into a side room which had been transformed into a blossoming garden.

Seats were placed behind the green birch trees—amid whose boughs hung gay lamps—and the rose bushes which surrounded a fountain of perfumed water, and Eva had already followed the Swiss knight across the threshold when she saw among the branches at the end of the room the Countess Cordula, at whose feet several young nobles knelt or reclined, among them Seitz Siebenburg, the brother-in-law of Wolff Eysvogel, her sister's betrothed bridegroom.

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The manner of the husband and father whose wife, only six weeks before, had become the mother of twin babies—beautiful boys—and who for Cordula's sake so shamefully forgot his duties, crimsoned her cheeks with a flush of anger, while the half-disapproving, half-troubled look that Sir Boemund Altrosen cast, sometimes at the countess, sometimes at Siebenburg, showed her that she herself was on the eve of doing something which the best persons could not approve; for Altrosen, who leaned silently against the wall beside the countess, ever and anon pushing back the coal-black hair from his pale face, had been mentioned by her godfather as the noblest of the younger knights gathered in Nuremberg. A voice in her own heart, too, cried out that this was no fitting place for her.

If Els had been with her, Eva said to herself, she certainly would not have permitted her to enter this room, where such careless mirth prevailed, alone with a knight, and the thought roused her for a short time from the joyous intoxication in which she had hitherto revelled, and awakened a suspicion that there might be peril in trusting herself to Heinz Schorlin without reserve.

“Not here,” she entreated, and he instantly obeyed her wish, though the Countess Cordula, as if he were alone, instead of with a lady, loudly and gaily bade him stay where pleasure had built a hut under roses.

Eva was pleased that her new friend did not even vouchsafe the young countess an answer. His obedience led her also to believe that her anxiety had been in vain. Yet she imposed greater reserve of manner upon herself so rigidly that Heinz noticed it, and asked what cloud had dimmed the pure radiance of her gracious sunshine.

Eva lowered her eyes and answered gently: “You ought not to have taken me where the diffidence due to modesty is forgotten.” Heinz Schorlin understood her and rejoiced to hear the answer. In his eyes, also, Countess Cordula this evening had exceeded the limits even of the liberty which by common consent she was permitted above others. He believed that he had found in Eva the embodiment of pure and beautiful womanhood.

He had given her his heart from the first moment that their eyes met. To find her in every respect exactly what he had imagined, ere he heard a single word from her lips, enhanced the pleasure he felt to the deepest happiness which he had ever experienced.

He had already been fired with a fleeting fancy for many a maiden, but not one had appeared to him, even in a remote degree, so lovable as this graceful young creature who trusted him with such childlike confidence, and whose innocent security by the side of the dreaded heart-breaker touched him.



Never before had it entered his mind concerning any girl to ask himself the question how she would please his mother at home. The thought that she whom he so deeply honoured might possess a magic mirror which showed her her reckless son as he dallied with the complaisant beauties whose graciousness, next to dice-playing, most inflamed his blood, had sometimes disturbed his peace of mind when Biberli suggested it. But when Eva looked joyously up at him with the credulous confidence of a trusting child, he could imagine no greater bliss than to hear his mother, clasping the lovely creature in her arms, call her her dear little daughter.

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His reckless nature was subdued, and an emotion of tenderness which he had never experienced before thrilled him as she whispered, "Take me to a place where everybody can see us, but where we need not notice anyone else."

How significant was that little word "we"! It showed that already she united herself and him in her thoughts. To her pure nature nothing could be acceptable which must be concealed from the light of the sun and the eyes of man. And her wish could be fulfilled.

The place where Biberli had discovered them, and where refreshments had just been served to the Emperor and the ladies and gentlemen nearest to his person, who had been joined by several princes of the Church, was shut off by the bannerets, thus preventing the entrance of any uninvited person; but Heinz Schorlin belonged to the sovereign's suite and had admittance everywhere.

So he led Eva behind the black and yellow rope to two vacant chairs at the end of the enclosed space where the banquet had been swiftly arranged for the Emperor and the other illustrious guests of Nuremberg.

These seats were in view of the whole company, yet it would have been as difficult to interrupt him and his lady as any of the table companions of the imperial pair. Eva followed the knight without anxiety, and took her place beside him in the well-chosen seat.

A young cup-bearer of noble birth, with whom Heinz was well acquainted, brought unasked to him and his companion sparkling Malvoisie in Venetian glasses, and Heinz began the conversation by inviting Eva to drink to the many days brightened by her favour which, if the saints heard his prayer, should follow this, the most delightful evening of his life. He omitted to ask her to pour the wine for him, knowing that many of the guests in the ballroom were watching them; besides the saucy little count came again and again to fill his goblet, and he wished to avoid everything which might elicit sarcastic comment. The young cup-bearer desisted as soon as he noticed the respectful reserve with which Heinz treated his lady, and the youth was soon obliged to leave the hall with his liege lord, Duke Rudolph of Austria, who was to set out for Carinthia early the following morning, and withdrew with his wife without sharing the banquet. The latter accompanied her husband to the castle, but she was to remain in Nuremberg during the session of the Reichstag with the lonely widowed Emperor, who was especially fond of the young Bohemian princess. Before and during the dance with Heinz the latter had requested him to use the noble Arabian steed, a gift from the Sultan Kalaun to the Emperor, who had bestowed it upon her, and also expressed the hope of meeting the knight frequently.

In the conversation which Heinz began with Eva he was at first obliged to defend himself, for she had admitted that she had heard the Burgravine's warning to beware of him.

At the same time she had found opportunity to tell him that her heart yearned for something different from worldly love, and that she felt safe from every one because St. Clare was constantly watching over her.

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He replied that he had been reared in piety, that he knew the close relations existing between her patron saint and the holy Francis of Assisi, and that he, too, had experienced many things from this man of God. Eva, with warm interest, asked when and where, and he willingly told her.

On the way from Augsburg to Nuremberg, while riding in advance of the imperial court, he had met an old barefooted man who, exhausted by the heat of the day, had sunk down by the side of the road as if lifeless, with his head resting against the trunk of a tree. Moved with compassion, he dismounted, to try to do something for the greybeard. A few sips of wine had restored him to consciousness, but his weary, wounded feet would carry him no farther. Yet it would have grieved the old man sorely to be forced to interrupt his journey, for the Chapter General in Portiuncula, in Italy, had sent him with an important message to the brothers of his order in Germany, and especially in Nuremberg.

The old Minorite monk was especially dignified in aspect, and when he chanced to mention that he had known St. Francis well and was one of those who had nursed him during his last illness, a dispute had arisen between Heinz Schorlin, the armor bearer, and his servant Walther Biberli, for each desired to give up his saddle to the old man and pursue his journey on foot for his sake and the praise of God.

But the Minorite could not be persuaded to break his vow never again to mount a knight's charger and, even had it not been evident from his words, Heinz asserted that the aristocratic dignity of his bearing would have shown that he belonged to a noble race.

Biberli's eloquence gained the victory in this case also, and though the groom led by the bridle another young stallion which the ex-schoolmaster might have mounted, he had walked cheerily beside the old monk, sweeping up the dust with his long robe. At the tavern the knight and his attendants had been abundantly repaid for their kindness to the Minorite, for his conversation was both entertaining and edifying; and Heinz repeated to his lady, who listened attentively, much that the monk had related about St. Francis.

Eva, too, was also on the ground dearest and most familiar to her. Her little tongue ran fast enough, and her large blue eyes sparkled with an unusually bright and happy lustre as she completed and corrected what the young knight told her about the saint.

How much that was lovable, benevolent, and wonderful there was to relate concerning this prophet of peace and good-will, this apostle of poverty and toil who, in every movement of nature, perceived and felt a summons to recognise the omnipotence and goodness of God, an invitation to devout submission to the Most High!



How many amusing, yet edifying and touching anecdotes, the Abbess Kunigunde had narrated of him and the most beloved of his followers! Much of this conversation Eva repeated to the knight, and her pleasure in the subject of the conversation increased the vivacity of her active mind, and soon led her to talk with eager eloquence. Heinz Schorlin fairly hung on her lips, and his eyes, which betrayed how deeply all that he was hearing moved him, rested on hers until a flourish of trumpets announced that the interval between the dances was over.

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He had listened in delight and, he felt, was forever bound to her. When duty summoned him to attend the Emperor he asked himself whether such a conversation had ever been held in the midst of a merry dance; whether God, in his goodness, had ever created a being so perfect in soul and body as this fair saint, who could transform a ballroom into a church.

Aye, Eva had done so; for, ardent as was the knight's love, something akin to religious devotion blended with his yearning desire. The last words which he addressed to her before leading her back to the others contained the promise to make her patron saint, St. Clare, his own.

The Princess of Nassau had invited him for the next dance, but she found Heinz Schorlin, whom the young Duchess Agnes had just said was merry enough to bring the dead to life, a very quiet partner; while young Herr Schurstab, who danced with Eva and, like all the members of the Honourable Council, knew that she desired to take the veil, afterwards told his friends that the younger beautiful E would suit a Carthusian convent, where speech is prohibited, much better than a ballroom.

But after this "Zauner" Heinz Schorlin again loosed her tongue. When he had told her how he came to the court, and she had learned that he had joined the Emperor Rudolph at Lausanne just as he took the vow to take part in the crusade, there was no end to her questions concerning the reason that the German army had not already marched against the infidels, and whether he himself did not long to make them feel his sword.

Then she asked still further particulars concerning Brother Benedictus, the old Minorite whom he had treated so kindly. Heinz told her what he knew, and when he at last enquired whether she still regretted having met him whom she feared, she gazed frankly into his eyes and, smiling faintly, shook her head.

This increased his ardour, and he warmly entreated her to tell him where he could meet her again, and permit him to call her his lady. But she hesitated to reply, and ere he could win from her even the faintest shadow of consent, Ernst Ortlieb, who had been talking with other members of the council in the room where the wine was served, interrupted him to take his daughter home.

She went reluctantly. The clasp of the knight's hand was felt all the way to the house, and it would have been impossible and certainly ungracious not to return it.

Heinz Schorlin had obtained no assent, yet the last glance from her eyes had been more eloquent than many a verbal promise, and he gazed after her enraptured.

It seemed like desecration to give the hand in which hers had rested to lead any one else to the dance, and when the rotund Duke of Pomerania invited him to a drinking bout at his quarters at the Green Shield he accepted; for without Eva the hall seemed

deserted, the light robbed of its brilliancy, and the gay music transformed to a melancholy dirge.

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But when at the Green Shield the ducal wine sparkled in the beakers, the gold shone and glistened on the tables, and the rattle of the dice invited the bystanders to the game, he thought that whatever he undertook on such a day of good fortune must have a lucky end.

The Emperor had filled his purse again, but the friendly gift did not cover his debts, and he wanted to be rid of them before he told his mother that he had found a dear, devout daughter for her, and intended to return home to settle in the ancestral castle, his heritage, and share with his uncle the maintenance of his rights and the management of fields and forests.

Besides, he must test for the first time the power of his new patroness, St. Clare, instead of his old one, St. Leodegar. But the former served him ill enough—she denied him her aid, at any rate in gambling. The full purse was drained to its last ‘zecchin’ only too soon, and Heinz, laughing, turned it inside out before the eyes of his comrades. But though the kind-hearted Duke of Pomerania, with whom Heinz was a special favourite, pushed a little heap of gold towards him with his fat hands, that the Swiss might try his luck again with borrowed money, which brings good fortune, he remained steadfast for Eva’s sake.

On his way to the Green Shield he had confessed to Biberli—who, torch in hand, led the way—that he intended very shortly to turn his back on the court and ride home, because this time he had found the right chatelaine for his castle.

“That means the last one,” the ex-schoolmaster answered quietly, carefully avoiding fanning the flame of his young master’s desire by contradiction. Only he could not refrain from entreating him not to burn his fingers with the dice, and, to confirm it, added that luck in gambling was apt to be scanty where fortune was so lavish in the gifts of love.

Heinz now remembered this warning. It had been predicted to his darling that meeting him would bring her misfortune, but he was animated by the sincere determination to force the jewel of his heart to remember Heinz Schorlin with anything but sorrow and regret.

What would have seemed impossible to him a few hours before, he now realised. With a steady hand he pushed back the gold to the duke, who pressed it upon him with friendly glances from his kind little eyes and an urgent whispered entreaty, and took his leave, saying that to-night the dice and he were at odds.

With these words he left the room, though the host tried to detain him almost by force, and the guests also earnestly endeavoured to keep the pleasant, jovial fellow. The loss, over which Biberli shook his head angrily, did, not trouble him. Even on his couch Heinz found but a short time to think of his empty purse and the lovely maid who was to make

the old castle among his beloved Swiss mountains an earthly paradise, for sleep soon closed his eyes.

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The next morning the events of the evening seemed like a dream. Would that they had been one! Only he would not have missed, at any cost, the sweet memories associated with Eva. But could she really become his own? He feared not; for the higher the sun rose the more impracticable his intentions of the night before appeared. At last he even thought of the religious conversation in the dancing hall with a superior smile, as if it had been carried on by some one else. The resolve to ask from her father the hand of the girl he loved he now rejected. No, he was not yet fit for a husband and the quiet life in the old castle. Yet Eva should be the lady of his heart, her patron saint should be his, and he would never sue for the love of any other maiden. Hers he must secure. To press even one kiss on her scarlet lips seemed to him worth the risk of life. When he had stilled this fervent longing he could ride with her colour on helm and shield from tourney to tourney, and break a lance for her in every land through which he passed with the Emperor. What would happen afterwards let the saints decide. As usual, Biberli was his confidant, and declared himself ready to use Katterle's services in his master's behalf.

He had his own designs in doing this. He could rely upon the waiting maid's assistance, and if there were secret meetings between Eva Ortlieb and his lord, which would appease the knight's ardour, even in a small degree, the task of disgusting Heinz with his luckless idea of an early marriage would not prove too difficult.

CHAPTER IV.

Eva Ortlieb had been borne home from the ball in her sedan chair with a happy smile hovering round her fresh young lips.

It still lingered there when she found her sister in their chamber, sitting at the spinning wheel. She had not left her suffering mother until her eyes closed in slumber, and was now waiting for Eva, to hear whether the entertainment had proved less disagreeable than she feared, and—as she had sent her maid to bed—to help her undress.

One glance at Eva told her that she had perhaps left the ballroom even more reluctantly than she entered it; but when Els questioned her so affectionately, and with maternal care began to unfasten the ribbon which tied her cap, the young girl, who in the sedan chair had determined to confess to no one on earth what so deeply moved her heart, could not resist the impulse to clasp her in her arms and kiss her with impetuous warmth.

Els received the caress with surprise for, though both girls loved each other tenderly, they, like most sisters, rarely expressed it by tangible proofs of tenderness. Not until Eva released her did Els exclaim in merry amazement: "So it was delightful, my darling?"

“Oh, so delightful!” Eva protested with hands uplifted, and at the same time met her sister’s eyes with a radiant glance.

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Yet the thought entered her mind that it ill beseemed her to express so much pleasure in a worldly amusement. Her glance fell in shame, and she gently continued in that tone of self-compassion which was by no means unfamiliar to the members of her family. "True, though the Emperor is so noble, and both he and the Burgravine were so gracious to me, at first— and not only for a brief quarter of an hour, but a very long time I could feel no real pleasure. What am I saying? Pleasure! I was indescribably desolate and alone among all those vain, bedizened strangers. I was like a shipwrecked sailor washed ashore by the waves and surrounded by people whose language is unfamiliar."

"But half Nuremberg was at the ball," her sister interrupted. "Now you see the trouble, darling. Whoever, like you, remains in seclusion and mounts a tall tree to be entirely alone, will be deserted; for who would be kind-hearted enough to learn to climb for your sake? But it seems that afterwards one and another——"

"Oh!" Eva interrupted, "if you think that any of your friends gave me more than a passing greeting, you are mistaken. Not even Barbel, Ann, or Metz took any special notice of your sister. They kept near Ursel Vorchtel, and she and her brother Ulrich, of course, behaved as if I wore a fern cap and had become invisible. I cannot tell you how uncomfortable I felt, and then—yes, Els, then I first realised distinctly what you are to me. Obstinate as I often am, in spite of all your kindness and care, ungraciously as I often treat you, to-night I clearly perceived that we belong together, like a pair of eyes, and that without you I am only half myself—or, at any rate—not complete. And—as we are speaking in images—I felt like a sapling whose prop has been removed; even your Wolff can never have longed for you more ardently. My father found little time to give me. As soon as he saw me take my place in the Polish dance he went with Uncle Pfinzing to the drinking room, and I did not see him again till he came to bring me home. He had asked Fran Nutzelt to look after me, but her Kathrin was taken ill, as I heard when we were leaving, and she disappeared with her during the first dance. So I moved forlornly here and there until he—Heinz Schorlin—came and took charge of me."

"He? Sir Heinz Schorlin?" asked Els in surprise, a look of anxious suspense clouding her pretty, frank face. "The reckless Swiss, whom Countess Cordula said yesterday was the pike in the dull carp pond of the court, and the only person for whom it was worth while to bear the penance imposed in the confessional?"

"Cordula von Montfort!" cried Eva scornfully. "If she speaks to me I shall not answer her, I can tell you. My cheeks crimson when I think of the liberty——"

"Never mind her," said her sister soothingly. "She is a motherless child, and therefore unlike us. As for Heinz Schorlin, he is certainly a gallant knight; but, my innocent lambkin, he is a wolf nevertheless."

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“A wolf?” asked Eva, opening her large eyes as wide as if they beheld some terrible object. But she soon laughed softly, and added quietly: “But a very harmless wolf, who humbly changes his nature when the right hand strokes him. How you stare at me! I am not thinking of your beloved Wolff, whom you have tamed tolerably well, but the wolf of Gubbio, which did so much mischief, and to which St. Francis went forth, accosted him as Brother Wolf, and reminded him that they both owed their lives to the goodness of the same divine Father. The animal seemed to understand this, for it nodded to him. The saint now made a bargain with the wolf, which gave him its paw in pledge of the oath; and it kept the promise, for it followed St. Francis into the city, and never again harmed anyone. The citizens of Gubbio fed the good beast, and when it died sincerely mourned it. If you wish to know from whom I heard this edifying story—which is true, and can be confirmed by some one now in Nuremberg who witnessed it—let me tell you that it was the wicked wolf himself; not the Gubbio one, but he from Switzerland. An old Minorite monk, to whom he compassionately gave his horse, is the witness I mentioned. At the tavern the priest told him what he had beheld with his own eyes. Do you still inveigh against the dangerous beast, which acts like the good Samaritan, and finds nothing more delightful than hearing or speaking of our dear saint?”

“And this in the Town Hall during the dance?” asked Els, clasping her hands as if she had heard something unprecedented.

Eva, fairly radiant with joy, nodded assent; and Els heard the ring of pleasure in her clear voice, too, as she exclaimed: “That was just what made the ball so delightful. The dancing! Oh, yes, it is easy enough to walk and turn in time to the music when one has such a knight for a partner; but that was by no means the pleasantest part of it. During the interval—it seemed but an instant, yet it really lasted a considerable time—we first entered into conversation.”

“In one of the side rooms?” asked Els, the bright colour fading from her cheeks.

“What are you thinking of?” replied Eva in a tone of offence. “I believe I know what is seemly as well as anybody else. True, your Countess Cordula did not set the most praiseworthy example. She allowed the whole throng of knights to surround her in the ante-room, and your future brother-in-law, Siebenburg, outdid them all. We—Heinz Schorlin and I—sat near the Emperor’s table in the great hall, where everybody could see us. There the conversation naturally passed from the old Minorite to the holy founder of his order, and remained there. And if ever valiant knight possessed a devout mind, it is Heinz Schorlin. Whoever goes into battle without relying upon God and his saints,’ he said, ‘will find his courage lack wings, and his armour the surest defensive ‘weapon.’”

“In the ballroom!” again fell from her sister’s lips in the same tone of amazement.

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"Where else?" asked Eva angrily. "I never met him except there. What do you other girls talk about at such entertainments, if it surprises you? Besides, St. Francis was by no means our only subject; we spoke of the future crusade, too. And oh!—you may believe me—we would have been glad to talk of such things for hours. He knew many things about our saint; but the precise one which makes him especially great and lovable, and withal so powerful that he attracted all whom he deemed worthy to follow him, he had not understood, and I was permitted to be the first person to bring it clearly before his mind. Ah! and his wit is as keen as his sword, and his heart is as open to all that is noble and sacred as it is loyal to his lord and Emperor. If we meet again I shall win him for the white cross on the black mantle and the battle against the enemies of the faith."

"But, Eva," interrupted her sister, still under the spell of astonishment, "such conversation amid the merry music of the pipers!"

"Wherever three Christians meet, even though they are only laymen, there is a church," says Tertullian," Eva answered impressively. "One need not go to the house of God to talk about the things which ought to be the highest and dearest to every one; and Heinz Schorlin—I know it from his own lips—is of the same opinion, for he told me voluntarily that he would never forget the few hours which we had enjoyed together."

"Indeed!" said her sister thoughtfully. "But whether he does not owe this pleasure more to the dancing than to the edifying conversation——"

"Certainly not!" replied Eva, very positively. "I can prove it, too; for later, after he had heard many things about St. Clare, the female counterpart of Francis, he vowed to make her his patron saint. Or do you suppose that a knight changes his saints, as he does his doublet and coat of mail, without having any great and powerful motive? Do you think it possible that the idle pleasure of the dance led him to so important a decision?"

"Certainly not. Nothing led him to it except the irresistible zeal of my devout sister," answered Els, smiling, as she continued to comb her fair hair. "She spoke with tongues in the ballroom, as the apostles did at Pentecost, and thus our 'little saint' performed her first miracle: the conversion of a godless knight during the dancing."

"Call it so, if you choose," replied Eva, her red lips pouting scornfully, as if she felt raised above such pitiful derision. "How you hurt, Els! You are pulling all the hair out of my head!"

The object of this rebuke had used the comb with the utmost care, but the great luxuriance of the long, fair, waving locks had presented many an impediment, and Eva seemed unusually sensitive that night. Els thought she knew why, and made no answer to the unjust charge. She knew her sister; and as she wound the braids about her

head, and then, in the maid's place, hung part of her finery on hooks, and laid part carefully in the chest, she asked her numerous questions about the dance, but was vouchsafed only monosyllabic replies.

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At last Els knelt before the prie-dieu. Eva did the same, resting her head so long upon her clasped hands that the patient older sister could not wait for the “Amen,” but, in order not to disturb Eva’s devotion, only pressed a light kiss upon her head and then carefully drew the curtains closely over the windows which, instead of glass, contained oiled parchment.

Eva’s excitement filled her with anxiety. She knew, too, what a powerful influence the bright moonlight sometimes exerted upon her while she slept, and cast another glance at the closely curtained window before she went to her own bed. There she lay a long time, with eyes wide open, pondering over her sister’s words, and in doing so perceived more and more clearly that love was now knocking at the heart of the child kneeling before the prie-dieu. Sir Heinz Schorlin, the wild butterfly, desired to sip the honey from this sweet, untouched flower, and then probably abandon her like so many before her. Love and anxiety made the girl, whose opinion was usually milder than her sister’s, a stern and unwise judge, for she assumed that the Swiss—whose character in reality was far removed from base hypocrisy—the man whom she had just termed a wolf, had donned sheep’s clothing to make her poor lambkin an easier prey. But she was on guard and ready to spoil his game.

Did Eva really fail to understand the new feeling which had seized her so swiftly and powerfully? Did she lull herself in the delusion that she cared only for the welfare of the soul of the pious young knight?

Yes, it might be so, and prudent Els, who had watched her own little world intently enough, said to herself that it would be pouring oil upon the flames to tease Eva about the defeat which she, the “little saint,” had sustained in the battle against the demands of the world and of the feminine heart. Besides, her sister was too dear for her to rejoice in her humiliation. Els resolved not to utter a word about the Swiss unless compelled to do so.

Eva’s prayers before retiring were often very long, but to-night it seemed as if they would never end.

“She is not appealing to St. Clare for herself alone, but for another,” thought Els. “I spend less time in doing it. True, a Heinz Schorlin needs longer intercession than my Eva, my Wolff, and my poor pious mother. But I won’t disturb her yet.”

Sighing faintly, she changed her position, but remained sitting propped against the white pillows in order not to allow herself to be overcome by sleep. But it was a hard struggle, and her lids often fell, her head drooped upon her breast.

Dawn was already glimmering without when the suppliant at last rose and sought her couch. Her sister let her lie quietly for a while, then she rose and put out the lamp which Eva had forgotten to extinguish. The latter noticed it, turned her face towards her and

called her gently. “To think that you should have to get up again, my poor Els! Give me a good-night kiss.”

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"Gladly, dearest," replied the other. "But it is really quite time to say 'good-morning.'"

"And you have kept awake so long!" replied Eva compassionately, as she threw her arms gratefully around her sister's neck, kissed her tenderly, and then pressed her hot cheek to hers.

"What is this?" cried Els, with sincere anxiety. "Are you hurt, child? Surely you are weeping?"

"No, no," was the reply. "I am only—I only thought that I had adorned myself, decked myself out with idle finery, although I know how many poor people are starving in want and misery, and how much more pleasing in the sight of the Lord is the grey robe of the cloistered nun. I could scarcely leave the hall in my overweening pleasure, and yet it would have beseemed me far better to share the sufferings of the crucified Saviour."

"But, child," replied Els, striving to soothe her sister, "how often I have heard from you and our aunt, the abbess, that no one was so cheerful and so glad to witness the enjoyment of human beings and animals as your St. Francis!"

"He—he!" groaned Eva, "he who attained the highest goal, who heard the voice of the Lord wherever he listened; he who chose poverty as his beloved bride, who scorned show and parade and the trappings of wealth, as he disdained earthly love; he who celebrated in song the love of the soul glowing for the highest things, as no troubadour could do—oh, how ardently he knew how to love, but to love the things which do not belong to this world!"

Els longed to ask what Eva knew about the ardent fire of love; but she restrained herself, darkened the bed as well as she could with the movable curtain which hung from the ceiling on both sides above the double couch, and said: "Be sensible, child, and put aside such thoughts. How loudly the birds are twittering outside! If our father is obliged to breakfast alone there may be a storm, and I should be glad to have an hour's nap. You need slumber, too. Dancing is tiresome. Shut your eyes and sleep as long as you can. I'll be as quiet as a mouse while I am dressing."

As she spoke she turned away from her sister and no longer resisted the sleep which soon closed her weary eyes.

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