

Margery — Volume 07 eBook

Margery — Volume 07 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER X.

"The old owl! I will give him somewhat to remember me by till some one else can say 'Gone' over him!" This was what my Uncle Christian growled a little later, out near the stables, where Matthew was putting the bridle on my bay nag, while the other serving-men were saddling the horses for the gentlemen. I had stolen hither, knowing full well that the old folks would not have suffered me to ride forth after Ann, and my good godfather even now ceased not from railing, in his fears for his darling. "What else did we talk of yestereve, Master leech and I, all the way we rode with the misguided maid, but of the wicked deeds done in these last few weeks on the high roads, and here in this very wood? With her own ears, she heard us say that the town constable required us to take seven mounted men as outriders, by reason that the day before yesterday the whole train of waggons of the Borchtels and the Schnods was overtaken, and the convoy would of a certainty have been beaten if they had not had the aid, by good-hap, of the fellowship marching with the Maurers and the Derrers.—And it was pitch dark, owls were flitting, foxes barking; it was enough to make even an old scarred soldier's blood run cold. It is a sin and a shame how the rogues ply their trade, even close under the walls of the city! They cut off a bleacher's man's ears, and when I wished that young Eber of Wichsenstein, and all the rout that follows him might come to the gallows, Ann made bold to plead for them, by reason that he only craved to visit on the Nurembergers the cruel death they brought upon his father the famous thief. As if she did not know full well that, since Epplein of Gailingen was cast into prison, our land has never been such a den of murder and robbery as at this day. If there is less dust to be seen on the high-ways, said the keeper, it is by reason that it is washed away in blood. And notwithstanding all this the crazy maid runs straight into the Devil's arms, with that old dolt."

Then, when I went into the stable to mount, Uncle Conrad turned on Kubbeling in stormy ire for that he had suffered Uhlwurm to lead Ann into such peril; howbeit the Brunswicker knew how to hold his own, and declared at last that he could sooner have looked to see a falcon grow a lion's tail in place of feathers, than that old death-watch make common cause with a young maiden. "He had come forth," quoth he, "to counsel their excellencies to take horse." But my uncle's question, whether he, Kubbeling, believed that they had come forth to the stables to hear mass, put an end to his discourse; the gentlemen called to the serving-men to make speed, and I was already in the saddle. Then, when I had commanded Endres to open the great gate, I bowed my head low and rode out through the stable door, and bade the company a hearty good-day. To this they made reply, while Uncle Conrad asked whether I had forgotten his counsels, and whither it was my intent to ride; whereupon I hastily replied: "Under safe guidance, that is to say yours, to follow Ann."

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My uncle slashed his boot with his whip, and asked in wrath whether I had considered that blood would perchance be shed, and ended by counselling me kindly: "So stay at home, little Margery!"

"I am as obedient as ever," was my ready answer, "but whereas I am now well in the saddle, I will stay in the saddle."

At this the old man knew not whether to take a jest as a jest, or to give me a stern order; and while he and the others were getting into their stirrups he said: "Have done with folly when matters are so serious, madcap child! We have enough to do to think of Ann, and more than enough! So dismount, Margery, with all speed."

"All in good time," said I then, "I will dismount that minute when we have found Ann. Till then the giant Goliath shall not move me from the saddle!"

Hereupon the old man lost patience, he settled himself on his big brown horse and cried out in a wrathful and commanding tone: "Do not rouse me to anger, Margery. Do as I desire and dismount."

But that moment he could more easily have made me to leap into the fire than to leave Ann in the lurch; I raised the bridle and whip, and as the bay broke into a gallop Uncle Conrad cried out once more, in greater wrath than before: "Do as I bid you!" and I joyfully replied "That I will if you come and fetch me!" And my horse carried me off and away, through the open gate.

The gentlemen tore after me, and if I had so desired they would never have caught me till the day of judgment, inasmuch as that my Hungarian palfrey, which my Hans had brought for me from the stables of Count von Cilly, the father of Queen Barbara, was far swifter than their heavy hook-nosed steeds; yet as I asked no better than to seek Ann in all peace with them, and as my uncle was a mild and wise man, who would not take the jest he could not now spoil over seriously, I suffered them to gain upon me and we concluded a bargain to the effect that all was to be forgotten and forgiven, but that I was pledged to turn the bay and make the best of my way home at the first sign of danger. And if the gentlemen had come to the stables in a gloomy mood and much fear, the wild chase after me had recovered their high spirits; and, albeit my own heart beat sadly enough, I did my best to keep of good cheer, and verily the sight of Kubbeling helped to that end. He was to show us the way to the spot where he had found Eppel, and was now squatted on a very big black horse, from which his little legs, with their strange gear of catskins, stuck out after a fashion wondrous to behold. After we had thus gone at a steady pace for some little space, my confidence began to fail once more; even if Ann and her companion had been somewhat delayed by their search, still ought we to have met them by this time, if they had gone to the place without tarrying, and set forth to return unhindered. And when, presently, we came to an open plot whence we might see a long piece of the

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forest path, and yet saw nought but a little charcoal burner's cart, meseemed as though a cold hand had been laid on my heart. Again and again I spied the distance, while a whole army of thoughts and terrors tossed my soul. I pictured them in the power of the vengeful Eber von Wichsenstein and his fierce robber fellows; methought the covetous Bremberger had dragged them into his castle postern to exact a great ransom—nor was this the worst that might befall. If Abersfeld the wildest freebooter of all the plundering nobles far or near were to seize her? My blood ran cold as I conceived of this chance. Ann was so fair; what lord who might carry her off could she fail to inflame? And then I minded me of what I had read of the Roman Lucretia, and if I had been possessed of any magic art, I would have given the first raven by the way a sharp bodkin that he should carry it to her.

In my soul's anguish, while I held my bridle and whip together in my left hand, with the right I lifted the gold cross on my breast to my lips and in a silent heartfelt prayer I besought the Blessed Virgin, and my own dear mother in Heaven to have her in keeping.

And so we rode on and on till we came to the pools by Pillenreuth. Hard by the larger of these, known as the King's pool, was a sign-post, and not far away was the spot where they had found Eppelein, stripped and plundered; and in truth it was the very place for highwaymen and freebooters, lying within the wood and aside from the highway; albeit, if it came to their taking flight, they might find it again by Reichelstorf. Nor was there any castle nor stronghold anywhere nigh; the great building with walls and moats which stood on the south side of the King's pool was but the peaceful cloister of the Augustine Sisters of Pillenreuth. All about the water lay marsh-ground overgrown with leafless bushes, rushes, tall grasses, and reeds. It was verily a right dismal and ill-boding spot.

The boggy tract across which our path lay was white with fresh hoar-frost, and the thicket away to the south was a haunt for crows such as I never have seen again since; the black birds flew round and about it in dark clouds with loud shrieks, as though in its midst stood a charnel and gallows, and from the brushwood likewise, by the pool's edge, came other cries of birds, all as full of complaining as though they were bewailing the griefs of the whole world.

Here we stayed our horses, and called and shouted; but none made answer, save only toads and crows. "This is the place, for certain," said Young Kubbeling, and Grubner the head forester, sprang to his feet to help him down from his tall mare. The gentlemen likewise dismounted, and were about to follow the Trunswicker across the mead to the place where Eppelein had been found; but he bid them not, inasmuch as they would mar the track he would fain discover.

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They, then, stood still and gazed after him, as I did likewise; and my fears waxed greater till I verily believed that the crows were indeed birds of ill-omen, as I saw a large black swarm of them wheel croaking round Kubbeling. He, meanwhile, stooped low, seeking any traces on the frosted grass, and his short, thick-set body seemed for all the world one of the imps, or pixies, which dwell among the roots of trees and in the holes in the rocks. He crept about with heedful care and never a word, prying as he went, and presently I could see that he shook his big head as though in doubt, nay, or in sorrow. I shuddered again, and meseemed the grey clouds in the sky waxed blacker, while deathly pale airy forms floated through the mist over the pools, in long, waving winding-sheets. The thick black heads of the bulrushes stood up motionless like grave-stones, and the grey silken tufts of the bog-grass, fluttering in the cold breath of a November morning, were as ghostly hands, threatening or warning me.

Ere long I was to forget the crows, and the fogs, and the reed-grass, and all the foolish fears that possessed me, by reason of a real and well-founded terror; again did Kubbeling shake his head, and then I heard him call to my Uncle Conrad and Grubner the headforester, to come close to him, but to tread carefully. Then they stood at his side, and they likewise stooped low and then my uncle clasped his hands, and he cried in horror, "Merciful Heaven!"

In two minutes I had run on tip-toe across the damp, frosted grass to join them, and there, sure enough, I could see full plainly the mark of a woman's dainty shoe. The sole and the heel were plainly to be seen, and, hard by, the print of a man's large, broad shoes, with iron-shod heels, which told Kubbeling that they were those of Uhlwurm's great boots. Yet though we had not met those we sought, the forest was full of by-ways, by which they might have crossed us on the road; but nigh to the foot-prints of the maid and the old man were there three others. The old woodsman could discern them only too well; they had each and all been made in the hoar-frost by men's boots. Two, it was certain, had been left by finely-cut soles, such as are made by skilled city cordwainers; and one left a track which could only be that of a spur; whereas the third was so flat and broad that it was for sure that of the shoe of a peasant, or charcoal burner.

There was a green patch in the frost which could only be explained as having been made by one who had lain long on the earth, and the back of his head, where he had fallen, had left a print in the grass as big as a man's fist. Here was clear proof that Ann and her companion had, on this very spot, been beset by three robbers, two of them knights and one of low degree, that Uhlwurm had fought hard and had overpowered one of them or had got the worst of it, and had been flung on the grass.

Alas! there could be no doubt, whereas Kubbeling found a foot-print of Ann's over which the spurred mark lay, plainly showing that she had come thither before those men. And on the highway we found fresh tracks of horses and men; thus it was beyond all doubt that knavish rogues had fallen upon Ann and Uhlwurm, and had carried them off without bloodshed, for no such trace was to be seen anywhere on the mead.

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Meanwhile the forester had followed the scent with the bloodhounds, starting from the place where the man had lain on the grass, and scarce were they lost to sight among the brushwood when they loudly gave tongue, and Grubner cried to us to come to him. Behind a tall alder bush, which had not yet lost its leaves, was a wooden lean-to on piles, built there by the Convent fisherman wherein to dry his nets; and beneath this shelter lay an old man in the garb of a serving-man, who doubtless had lost his life in the struggle with Uhlwurm. But Kubbeling was soon kneeling by his side, and whereas he found that his heart still beat, he presently discovered what ailed the fellow. He was sleeping off a drunken bout, and more by token the empty jar lay by his side. Likewise hard by there stood a hand-barrow, full of such wine-jars, and we breathed more freely, for if the drunken rogue were not himself one of the highway gang, they must have found him there and seized the good liquor.

Now, while Kubbeling fetched water from the pool, Uncle Christian tried the quality of the jars in the barrow, and the first he opened was fine Malvoisie. Whether this were going to the Convent or no the drunken churl should tell, and a stream of cold November-water ere long brought him to his wits. Then was there much mirth, as the rogue thus waked on a sudden from his sleep let the water drip off him in dull astonishment, and stared at us open-mouthed; and it needed some patience till he was able to tell us of many matters which we afterwards heard at greater length and in fuller detail.

He was a serving-man to Master Rummel of Nuremberg, who had been sent forth from Lichtenau to carry this good liquor to the nuns at Pillenreuth; the market-town of Lichtenau lieth beyond Schwabach and had of yore belonged to the Knight of Heideck, who had sold it to that city, of which the Rummels, who were an old and honored family, had bought it, with the castle.

Now, whereas yestereve the Knight of Heideck, the former owner of the castle, a noble of staunch honor, was sitting at supper with Master Rummel in the fortress of Lichtenau, a rider from Pillenreuth had come in with a petition from the Abbess for aid against certain robber folk who had carried away some cattle pertaining to the convent. Hereupon the gentlemen made ready to go and succor the sisters, and with wise foresight they sent a barrow-load of good wine to Pillenreuth, to await them there, inasmuch as that no good liquor was to be found with the pious sisters. When the gentlemen had, this very morning, come to the place where the highwaymen had fallen on Eppelein, they had met Ann who was known to them at the Forest lodge, where she was in the act of making search for Herdegen's letter, and they, in their spurred boots, had helped her. At last they had besought her to go with them to the Convent, by reason that the men-at-arms of Lichtenau had yesternight gone forth to meet the thieves, and by this time peradventure

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had caught them and found the letter on them. Ann had consented to follow this gracious bidding, if only she might give tidings of where she would be to those her friends who would for certain come in search of her. Thereupon Master Rummel had commanded the servingman, who had come up with the barrow, to tarry here and bid us likewise to the Convent; the fellow, however, who had already made free on his way with the contents of the jars, had tried the liquor again. And first he had tumbled down on the frosted grass and then had laid him down to rest under the fisherman's hut.

Rarely indeed hath a maiden gone to the cloister with a lighter heart than I, after I had heard these tidings, and albeit there was yet cause for fear and doubting, I could be as truly mirthful as the rest, and or ever I jumped into my saddle again I had many a kiss from bearded lips as a safe conduct to the Sisters. My good godfather in the overflowing joy of his heart rushed upon me to kiss me on both cheeks and on my brow, and I had gladly suffered it and smiled afterwards to perceive that he would allow the barrow-man to tarry no longer.

In the Convent there was fresh rejoicing. The mist had hidden us from their sight, and we found them all at breakfast: the gentlemen and Ann, the lady Abbess and a novice who was the youngest daughter of Uncle Endres Tucher of Nuremberg, and my dear cousin, well-known likewise to Ann. Albeit the Convent was closed to all other men, it was ever open to its lord protector. Hereupon was a right happy meeting and glad greeting, and at the sight of Ann for the second time this day, though it was yet young, the bright tears rolled over Uncle Christian's round twice-double chin.

Now wheresoever a well-to-do Nuremberg citizen is taking his ease with victuals and drink, if others join him they likewise must sit down and eat with him, yea, if it were in hell itself. But the Convent of Pillenreuth was a right comfortable shelter, and my lady the Abbess a woman of high degree and fine, hospitable manners; and the table was made longer in a winking, and laid with white napery and plates and all befitting. None failed of appetite and thirst after the ride in the sharp morning air, and how glad was my soul to have my Ann again safe and unharmed.

We were seated at table by the time our horses were tied up in the stables, and from the first minute there was a mirthful and lively exchange of talk. For my part I forthwith fell out with the Knight von Heideck, inasmuch as he was fain to sit betwixt Ann and me, and would have it that a gallant knight must ever be a more welcome neighbor to a damsel than her dearest woman-friend. And the loud cheer and merrymaking were ere long overmuch for me; and I would gladly have withdrawn with Ann to some lonely spot, there to think of our dear one.

At last we were released; Jorg Starch, the captain of the Lichtenau horsemen, a tall, lean soldier, with shrewd eyes, a little turned-up cock-nose, and thick full beard, now

came in and, lifting his hand to his helmet, said as sharply as though he were cutting each word short off with his white teeth: "Caught; trapped; all the rabble!"

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In a few minutes we were all standing on the rampart between the pools and the Convent, and there were the miserable knaves whom Jorg Starch and his men-at-arms had surrounded and carried off while they were making good cheer over their morning broth and sodden flesh. They had declared that they had been of Wichsenstein's fellowship, but had deserted Eber by reason of his over-hard rule, and betaken themselves to robbery on their own account. Howbeit Starch was of opinion that matters were otherwise. When he had been sent forth to seek them he had as yet no knowledge of the attack on Eppelein; now, so soon as he heard that they had stripped him of his clothes, he bid them stand in a row and examined each one; in truth they were a pitiable crew, and had they not so truly deserved our compassion their rags must have moved us to laughter. One had made his cloak of a woman's red petticoat, pulling it over his head and cutting slits in it for arm-holes, and another great fellow wore a friar's brown frock and on his head a good-wife's fur turban tied on with an infant's swaddling band. Jorg Starch's enquiries as to where were Eppelein's garments made one of them presently point to his decent and whole jerkin, another to his under coat, and the biggest man of them all to his hat with the cock's feather, which was all unmatched with his ragged weed. Starch searched each piece for the letter, and meanwhile Uhlwurm stooped his long body, groping on the ground in such wise that it might have seemed that he was seeking the four-leaved clover; and on a sudden he laid hands on the shoes of a lean, low fellow, with hollow cheeks and a thrifty beard on his sharp chin, who till now had looked about him, the boldest of them all; he felt round the top of the shoes, and looking him in the face, asked him in a threatening voice: "Where are the tops?"

"The tops?" said the man in affrighted tones. "I wear shoes, Master, and shoes are but boots which have no tops; and mine. . . ."

"And yours!" quoth Uhlwurm in scorn. "The rats have made shoes of your boots and have eaten the tops, unless it was the mice? Look here, Captain, if it please you....."

Starch did his bidding, and when he had made the lean knave put off his left shoe he looked at it on all sides, stroked his beard the wrong way, and said solemnly: "Well said, Master, this is matter for thought! All this gives the case a fresh face." And he likewise cried to the rogue: "Where are the tops?" The fellow had had time to collect himself, and answered boldly: "I am but a poor weak worm, my lord Captain; they were full heavy for me, so I cut them away and cast them into the pool, where by now the carps are feeding on them." And he glanced round at his fellows, as it were to read in their faces their praise of his quick wit. Howbeit they were in overmuch dread to pay him that he looked for; nay, and his bold spirit was quelled when Starch took him by the throat and asked him: "Do you see that bough there, my lad? If another lie passes your lips, I will load it with a longer and heavier pear than ever it bore yet? Sebald, bring forth the ropes.—Now my beauty; answer me three things: Did the messenger wear boots? How come you, who are one of the least of the gang, to be wearing sound shoes? And again, Where are the tops?"

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Whereupon the little man craved, sadly whimpering, that he might be asked one question at a time, inasmuch as he felt as it were a swarm of humble-bees in his brain, and when Starch did his will he looked at the others as though to say: "You did no justice to my ready wit," and then he told that he had in truth drawn off the boots from the messenger's feet and had been granted them to keep, by reason that they were too small for the others, while he was graced with a small and dainty foot. And he cast a glance at us ladies on whom he had long had an eye, a sort of fearful leer, and went on: "The tops—they. . . ." and again he stuck fast. Howbeit, as Starch once more pointed to the pear-tree, he confessed in desperate terror that another man had claimed the tops, one who had not been caught, inasmuch as they were so high and good. Hereupon Starch laughed so loud and clapped his hand with such a smack as made us maidens start, and he cried: "That's it, that is the way of it! Zounds, ye knaves! Then the Sow—[Eber, his name, means a boar. This is a sort of punning insult]—of Wichsenstein was himself your leader yesterday, and it was only by devilish ill-hap that the knave was not with you when I took you! You ragged ruffians would never have given over the tops in this marsh and moorland, to any but a rightful master, and I know where the Sow is lurking—for the murderer of a messenger is no more to be called a Boar. Now then, Sebald! In what hamlet hereabout dwells there a cobbler?"

"There is crooked Peter at Neufess, and Hackspann at Reichelstorf," was the answer.

"Good; that much we needed to know," said Starch. "And now, little one," and he gave the man another shaking, "Out with it. Did the Sow— or, that there may be no mistake—did Eber of Wichsenstein ride away to Neufess or to Reichelstorf? Who was to sew the tops to his shoes, Peter or Hackspann?"

The terrified creature clasped his slender hands in sheer amazement, and cried: "Was there ever such abounding wisdom born in the land since the time of chaste Joseph, who interpreted Pharaoh's dreams? The man who shall catch you asleep, my lord Captain, must rise earlier than such miserable hunted wretches as we are. He rode to Neufess, albeit Hackspann is the better cobbler. Reichelstorf lies hard by the highway by which you came, my lord; and if Eber does but hear the echo of your right glorious name, my lord Baron and potent Captain. . . ."

"And what is my name—your lord Baron and potent Captain?" Starch thundered out.

"Yours?" said the little man unabashed. "Yours? Merciful Heaven! Till this minute I swear I could have told you; but in such straits a poor little tailor such as I might forget his own father's honored name!" At this Starch laughed out and clapped the little rogue in all kindness behind the ears, and when his men-at-arms, whom he had commanded to make ready, had mounted their horses, he cried to Uhlwurm: "I may leave the rest to you, Master; you know where Barthel bestows the liquor!—Now, Sebald, bind this rabble and keep them safe.—And make a pig-sty ready. If I fail to bring the boar home this very night, may I be called Dick Dule to the end of my days instead of Jorg Starch!"

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And herewith he made his bow, sprang into his saddle, and rode away with his men.

“A nimble fellow, after God’s heart!” quoth Master Rummel to my Uncle Conrad as they looked after him. And that he was in truth; albeit we could scarce have looked for it, we learned on the morrow that he might bear his good name to the grave, inasmuch as he had taken Eber of Wichsenstein captive in the cobbler’s work-place, and carried him to Pillenreuth, whence he came to Nuremberg, and there to the gallows.

Starch had left a worthy man to fill his place; hardly had he departed when old Uhlwurm pulled off the tailor’s right shoe, and now it was made plain wherefor Eppelein had so anxiously pointed to his feet; the letter entrusted to him had indeed been hid in his boot. Under the lining leather of the sole it lay, but only one from Akusch addressed to me. Howbeit, when we had threatened the now barefoot knave with cruel torture, he confessed that, having been an honest tailor till of late, he had soft feet by reason that he had ever sat over his needle. And when he pulled on the stolen shoes somewhat therein hard hurt his sole, and when he made search under the leather, behold a large letter closely folded and sealed. This had been the cause and reason of his being ill at ease, and he had opened it, being of an enquiring mind, and, inasmuch as he was a schoolmaster’s son he could read with the best. Howbeit, at that time the gang were about to light a fire to make their supper, and whereas it would not burn by reason of the wet, they had taken the dry paper and used it to make the feeble flame blaze up.

Thus there was nought more to be hoped for, save that the tailor might by good hap remember certain parts of the letter; and in truth he was able to tell us that it was written to a maid named Ann, and in it there were such words of true love in great straits and bitter parting as moved him to tears, by reason that he likewise had once had a true love.

While he spoke thus he perceived that Ann was the maiden to whom the letter had been writ, and he forthwith poured forth a great flow of fiery love-vows such as he may have learned from his Amadis, but never, albeit he said it, from that letter.

One thing at least he could make known to us from Herdegen’s letter; and that was that the writer said much concerning slavery and a great ransom, and likewise of a malignant woman who was his foe, and of her husband, whose wiles could by no means be brought to nought unless it were by cunning and prudent craft. This, indeed, he could repeat well-nigh word for word, by reason that he had conceived the plan of urging Eber to set forth for the land of Egypt with his robber-band, and deliver that guiltless slave from the hands of the misbelieving heathen. Albeit he had made himself a highway thief, it was only by reason that he had been told that von Wichsenstein had no other end than to restore to the poor that of which the

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rich had robbed them, and to release the oppressed from the power of the mighty. All this had not suffered him to rest on his tailor's bench till he had laid down the needle and seized the cook's great roasting spit. Ere long he had discovered that, like master like man, each man cared for himself alone. He himself had been forced to do many cruel and knavish deeds, sorely against his will and all that was good in him. From his pious and gentle mother he had come by a soft and harmless soul, so that in the winter season he would strew sugar for the flies when they were starving, and it had even gone against him to stick his needle into a flesh-colored garment for sheer fear of hurting it. When the others had left the messenger-lad stripped on the road, he had gone back alone and had bound up the wound in his head with his own kerchief, and more by token that he spoke the truth the kerchief bore his Christian name in the corner of it, "Pignot," which his good mother, God rest her, had sewn there. He was but a poor orphan, and if Here his voice failed him for sobs. But ere long he recovered his good cheer; for Ann had indeed marked the letter P on the cloth about Eppelein's head, and the poor wight was of a truth none other than he had declared. Hereupon we made bold to speak for him, and it was to his own act of mercy and the letters set in his kerchief by that pious mother that he owed it. He afterwards came to be an honest and worthy master-tailor at Velden, and instead of taking up the cudgels for his oppressed fellow men, he suffered stern treatment in much humility at the hands of the great woman whom he chose to wife, notwithstanding he was so small a man.

CHAPTER XI.

Herdegen's letter was burnt with fire, and the letter from Akusch was to me, and contained little besides thanks and assurances of faithfulness due to me his "beloved mistress," with greetings to Cousin Maud, who had ever with just reproofs kept him in the right way, and to every member of the household. The Pastscriptum only contained tidings of great import; and it was as follows:

"Moreover I declare and swear to you, my gracious lady, that my kindred take as good care of my Lord Kunz as though he were at home in Nuremberg. His wounds are bad, yet by faithful care, and by the grace and help of God the all-merciful, they shall be healed. He lacks for nothing. In the matter of my lord Herdegen's ransom there are many obstacles.

"Had God the all-merciful but granted to my dear father to hold his high estate a few weeks longer, it would have been a small matter to him to release a slave; but now he is cast into a dungeon by the evil malice of his enemies. Oh! that the all-wise God should suffer such malignant men to live as his foes and as that shameless woman whom you have long known by the name of Ursula Tetzl! But you will have learnt by my lord Herdegen's letter all I could tell, and you will understand that your humble servant will

daily beseech the Most High God to prosper you, and cause you to send hither some wise and potent captain to the end that we may be delivered; inasmuch as the craft and fury of our foes are no less than their power. They are lions and likewise poisonous serpents.”

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These lines were signed with the name of Akusch, and the words, Ibn Tagri Verdi al-Mahmudi, which is to say: Akusch, Son of Tagri Verdi al-Mahmudi.

We were at home at the Forest-lodge or ever the sun had set; there we found Aunt Jacoba more calm than we had hoped for, inasmuch as that not only had her husband sent her brief tidings of us, but likewise she had heard more exactly all that had kept us away. Kubbeling, albeit the lady Abbess had bidden him to her table, had privily stolen forth to send a messenger to the grieving lady, whereas the thought of her gave him no peace among the feasters. Eppelein was neither better nor worse. But, in his stead, Master Windecke the Imperial Councillor, who was learned in the trading matters of all the world and who, in our absence, had wholly won the heart of the other women and, above all, of Cousin Maud by his good discourse, was able to interpret somewhat which had been dark to us in Akusch's letter. When I showed it to him he started to his feet in amazement and declared that my squire's father, Tagri Verdi al-Mahmudi, had been one of the most famous Captains of the host who had struck the great blow in Cyprus and carried off King Janus to the Sultan at Cairo. Nay, and he could likewise tell us what had led to the overthrow of this same Tagri Verdi, inasmuch as he had heard the tale from a certain noble gentleman of Cyprus, who had come to the court of Emperor Sigismund to entreat him to provide moneys for the ransom of King Janus, as follows: When Akusch's glorious father was raised to the dignity of a chief Mameluke, together with Burs Bey, now the Sultan of Egypt, they were both cast into prison during a certain war and lay in the same dungeon. There had Tagri Verdi dreamed one night that his fellow, Burs Bey, would in due time be placed on the throne, and had revealed this to him. Then, when this prophecy was fulfilled, and Burs Bey was Sultan, Tagri Verdi rose step by step to high honor, and had won many glorious fights as his Sovereign's chief Emir and Captain. The Sultan heaped him with honors and treasure, until he learned that his former companion had dreamed another dream, and this time that it was to be his fate to mount the throne. Hereupon Burs Bey was sore afraid; thus he had cast the victorious Captain into prison, and many feared for Tagri that his life would not be spared.

And Master Windecke could tell us yet more of the matter; and whereas from him we heard that our Emperor, by reason that his coffers were empty, could do nought to ransom King Janus, and that the Republic of Venice was fain to take it in hand, we were in greater fear than ever, inasmuch as this must need add yet more to the high respect already enjoyed by the Republic in the land of Egypt, and to that in which its Consul Giustiniani was held; and thereby his wife Ursula might, with the greater security, give vent to that malice she bore in her heart against Herdegen.

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Thus we went to our beds silent and downcast; and after we had lain there a long time and found no sleep the words would come, and I said: "My poor, dear Kunz! to be there in that hot Moorish land, wounded and alone! Oh, Ann, that must be full hard to bear."

"Hard indeed!" quoth she in a low voice. "But for a free man, and so proud a man as Herdegen, to be a slave to a misbelieving Heathen, far away from all he loves, and chidden and punished for every unduteous look; Oh, Margery! to think of that!" And her voice failed.

I spoke to her, and showed that we had much to make us thankful, inasmuch as we now at last knew that he we loved was yet alive.

Then was there silence in the chamber; but I minded me then of what Akusch had written, that he besought some wise and mighty gentleman to set forth from Nuremberg to overpower the foe, and now I racked my brain to think whom we might send to take my brothers' cause in hand—yet still in vain. None could I think of who might conveniently quit home for so long, or who was indeed fit for such an enterprise.

Which of us twain first fell asleep I wist not; when I woke in the morning Ann had already quitted the chamber; and while Susan braided my hair, all I had been planning in the night grew plainer to me, and I went forth and down stairs full of a great purpose which made my heart beat the faster. When I entered the hall, behold, I saw the same thing, albeit I was now awake, as I had seen yestermorn in my half-sleep. Yet was it not Uhlwurm, but Kubbeling, to whom Ann was paying court. As he stood facing her, she looked him trustfully in the eyes, and held his great hand in hers; nay, and when she saw me she did not let it go, but cried out in a clear and thankful voice: "Then so it is, Father Seyfried; and if you do as I beseech you, all will come to a good end and you will remember so good a deed with great joy all your life long."

"As to 'great joy' I know not," replied he. "For if I be not the veriest fool in all the land from Venice to Iceland, my name is not Kubbeling. I scarce know myself! Howbeit, let that pass: I stand by my word, albeit the pains I shall endure in the winter journey."

"The Saints will preserve you on so pious an errand," Ann declared. "And if they should nevertheless come upon you, dear Father, I will tend you as your own daughter would. And now again your hand, and a thousand, thousand thanks."

Whereupon Kubbeling, with a melancholy growl, and yet a smile on his face, held forth his hand, and Ann held it fast and cried to me: "You are witness, Margery, that he has promised to do my will. Oh, Margery, I could fly for gladness!"

And verily meseemed as though the wings had grown, and her eyes sparkled right joyfully and thankfully. And I had discerned from her very first words whereunto she had beguiled Kubbeling; and verily to me it was a marvel, inasmuch as I myself had

imagined the self-same thing in the watches of the night, and while my hair was doing: namely, to beseech Kubbeling to be my fellow and keeper on a voyage to Egypt. Who but he knew the way so well? Howbeit, Ann had prevented me, and now, whereas I heard the sound of voices on the stair, I yet found time to cry to her: "We go together, Ann; that is a settled matter!"

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Hereupon she looked at me, at first in amazement and then with a blissful consenting smile, and said "You had imagined the same thing, I know. Yes, Margery, we will go."

The others now trooped in, and I had no more time but hastily to clasp her hand. Howbeit, when most of our guests had gone into the refectory, where the morning meal was by this time steaming on the board, none were left with us save Cousin Maud and Uncle Conrad and Uncle Christian; and Uncle Conrad enquired of the Brunswicker whether he purposed indeed to set forth this day, and the man answered No, if so be that his lordship the grand-forester would grant him shelter yet awhile, and consent to a plan to which he had been just now beguiled.

And my uncle gave him his hand, and said the longer he might stay the better. And then he went on to ask with some curiosity what that plan might be. Howbeit, I took upon me to speak, and I told him in few words how that we had been thinking whom we might best send forth to help my brethren, and that, with the morning sun, light had dawned on our minds, and that whereas we had found a faithful and experienced companion, it was our firm intent....

Here Cousin Maud broke in, having come close to me with open ears, crying aloud in terror: "What?" Howbeit I looked her in the eyes and went on:

"When our mind is set, Cousin, the thing will be done, of that you and all may make certain—that stands as sure as the castle on the rock. And be it known to you all, with all due respect, that this time I will suffer none to cross my path. Once for all, I, Margery, and Ann with me, are going forth to the land of Egypt in Kubbeling's company, and to Cairo itself!"

The worthy old woman gave a scream, and while the Brunswicker shut the dining-hall door, that we might not be heard, she broke out, with glowing eyes, beside herself with wrath: "Verily and indeed! So that is your purpose! Thanks be to the Virgin, to say and to do are not one and the same, far from it. Do you conceive that you hold all love for those two youths yonder in sole fief or lease? As though others were not every whit as ready as you to give their best to save them. A head that runs at a wall cracks its skull! Maids should never touch matters which do not beseem them! What next for a skittle-witted fancy!—That it should have come into the brain of a Schopper is no marvel, but Ann, prudent Ann! Would any man have dreamed of such a thing in our young days, Master Cousin? There they stand, two well born Nuremberg damsels, who have never been suffered to go next door alone after Ave Maria! And they are fain to cross the seas to a dark outlandish place, into the very jaws of the dreadful Heathen who butcher Christian people!" Whereupon she clapped her hands and laughed aloud, albeit not from her heart, and then raved on: "At least is it a new thing, and the first time that the like hath ever been heard of in Nuremberg!"

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If the whole of the holy Roman Empire had risen up to make resistance and to mock us, it would have failed to move Ann or me, and I answered, loud and steadfast:

“Everything right and good that ever was done in Nuremberg, my heart’s beloved Cousin, was done there once for the first time; and it is right and good that we should go, and we mean to do it!” Whereupon Cousin Maud drew back in disgust and amazement, and gazed from one to the other of us with enquiring eyes, and as wondering a face as though she were striving to rede some dark riddle. Then her vast bosom began to heave up and down, and we, who knew her, could not fail to perceive that somewhat great and strange was moving her. And whereas she presently shook her heavy head to and fro, and set her fists hard on her hips, I looked for a sudden and dreadful storm, and my Uncle Conrad likewise gazed her in the face with expectant fear; yet it was long in breaking forth. What then was my feeling when, at last, she took her hands from her sides and struck her right hand in her left palm so that it rang again, and burst forth eagerly, albeit with roguish good humor and tearful eyes: “If indeed everything good and right that ever was done in Nuremberg must have once been done there for the first time, our good town shall now see that a grey-headed old woman with gout in her toes can sail over seas, from the Pegnitz even to the land of the barbarian Heathen and Cairo! Your hand on it, Young Kubbeling, and yours, Maidens. We will be fellow-travellers. Signed and sealed. Strew sand on it!”

Hereupon Ann, who was wont to be still, shrieked loudly and cast herself first on my cousin’s neck and then on mine and then on my uncle’s; he indeed stood as though deeply offended, as likewise did my good godfather Christian. Yet they would not speak, that they might not mar our joy, albeit Uncle Pfinzing growled forth that our plan was sheer youthful folly, wilfulness, and the like. “At any rate it is an unlaid egg, so long as my wife has not added mustard to the peppered broth,” Uncle Conrad declared, and he departed to carry tidings to my aunt of what mad folly these women’s heads had brewed.

Even Kubbeling shook his head, albeit he spoke not, inasmuch as he knew that it was hard to contend with the powers beyond seas.

He and Cousin Maud had ever been on terms of good-fellowship with Uncle Christian, but to-day my uncle was ill to please; neither look nor word had he for his heart’s darling, Ann; and when he presently recovered somewhat, he stormed around, with so red a face and such furious ire that we feared lest he should have another dizzy stroke, saying “that Kubbeling and Cousin Maud might be ashamed of themselves, inasmuch as they were old enough to know better and were acting like a pair of young madcaps.” And thus he went on, till it was overmuch for the Brunswicker’s endurance, and on a sudden he cried out in great wrath that that he had promised was in truth not wise, forasmuch as

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that he would gain nought but mischief thereby, yet that it concerned him alone and he took it all on himself, although Master Pfinzing might yet ask for why and to what end he should risk a hurt by it, whereas, to his knowledge, the ill-starred Junker Schopper could be little more to him than the man in the moon. He was wont, quoth he, to take good care not to risk his skin for other folks, but in this matter it seemed to him not too dear a bargain. Neither the stoutest will nor the strongest fist might avail against Mistress Ursula, the veriest witch in all the land of Egypt; a better head was needed for that, than the heavy brain-pan which God Almighty had set on his short neck, and yet he had sworn to bring her knavery to nought. Our faithful hearts and shrewd heads would be the aid he needed. He trusted to Cousin Maud to dare to dance with old Nick himself, if need should arise. And he was man enough to protect us all three. And now Master Pfinzing knew all about it and, if he yet craved to hear more, he would find him among the birds, whereas Uhlwurm was to depart on his way with them that very day, without him.

And he turned his back on my uncle, and quitted the chamber with a heavy tread; but he turned on the threshold and cried: "Yet keep your lips from telling what you have in your mind, Master, and in especial to those who are at their meal in there, as touching that Tetzl-adder; for the wind flies over seas faster than we can."

While he spoke thus Uncle Christian had recovered his temper, and he followed after Kubbeling with such a haste as his huge body would allow, nor was it to quarrel with him any more.

The rest, who had sat at breakfast, had by good hap heard nought of our disputing, by reason that Master Windecke had so much new matter for discourse that every ear hung on his words; and he, again, forgot to eat while he talked. In Cousin Maud, indeed, as she hearkened to my godfather's wrathful speech, certain doubts had arisen; yet even stronger resistance would never have turned her aside from anything she deemed truly good and right; howbeit she was more than willing to leave it to us to settle matters with Aunt Jacoba. We went up-stairs to her, and at her chamber door our courage failed us, inasmuch as we could hear through the door my uncle's angry speech, and that laugh which my aunt was wont to utter when aught came to her ears which she was not fain to hear.

"And if she were to say No?" said I to Ann. Hereupon a right sorrowful and painful cloud overspread her face, and it was in a dejected tone that she answered me that then indeed all must be at an end, and her fondest hopes nipped, by reason that she owed more to Mistress Waldstromer than ever she could repay, and whatsoever she might undertake against her will would of a certainty come to no good end. And we heard my aunt's laugh again; but then I took heart, and raised the latch, and Ann led the way into the chamber.

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Howbeit, if we had cherished the smallest hope without, within it failed us wholly. As we went in my uncle was standing close by my aunt; his back was towards us, and he saw us not; but his mien alone showed us that he was wroth and provoked: his voice quaked as he cried aloud with a shrug of his shoulders and his hand uplifted: "Such a purpose is sheer madness and most unseemly!"

Then, when for the third time I coughed to make our presence known to him, he turned his red face towards us, and cried out in great fury: "Here you are to answer for yourselves; and come what may, this at least shall be said: 'If mischief comes of it, I wash my hands in innocence!'"

Whereupon he went in all haste to the door and had lifted his hand to slam it to, when he minded him of his beloved wife's sick health and gently shut it and softly dropped the latch.

We stood in front of Aunt Jacoba, and could scarce believe our eyes and ears when she opened wide her arms and, with beaming eyes, cried in a voice of glad content: "Come, come to my heart, children! Oh, you good, dear, brave maids! Why, why am I so old, so fettered, so sick a creature? Why may I not go with you?"

At her first words we had fallen on our knees by her side, and she fervently clasped our heads to her bosom, kissed our lips and foreheads, and cried, with ever-streaming eyes: "Yes, children, yes! It is brave, and the right way; Courage and true love are not dead in the hearts of the women of Nuremberg. Ah, and how many a time have I imagined that I might myself rise and fly after my froward, dear, unduteous exile, my own Gotz, be he where he may, over mountains and seas to the ends of the earth!—I, a hapless, suffering skeleton! Yet what is denied to the old, the young may do, and the Virgin and all the Saints shall guard you! And Kubbeling, Young-Kubbeling, that bravest, truest Seyfried! Bring him up to speak with me. So rough and so good!—My old man, to be sure, must storm and rave, but then his feeble and sickly nobody of a little wife can wind him round her finger. Leave him to me, and be sure you shall win his blessing." After noon Uhlwurm and the waggon of birds set forth to Frankfort, where Kubbeling's eldest son was tarrying to meet his father with fresh falcons. Or ever the grim old grey-beard mounted his horse, he whispered to Ann: "Truest of maidens, find some device to move Seyfried to take me in your fellowship to the land of Egypt, and I will work a charm which shall of a surety give your lover back to you, if indeed he is not. . . ." and he was about to cry "gone" as was his wont; yet he refrained himself and spoke it not. Young Kubbeling tarried at the Forest-lodge; and as for my uncle, it was soon plain enough that my aunt had been in the right in the matter; nay, when we went home to the city, meseemed as though he and his wife had from the first been of one mind. Our purpose pleased him better as he learned to believe more surely that our little women's wits would peradventure be able to find his wandering son, and to tempt him to return to his father's forest home.

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CHAPTER XII.

We carefully obeyed Kubbeling's counsel that we should keep our purpose dark, and it remained hidden even from the guests at the lodge. On the other hand they had been told all that Herdegen's letter had contained, and that it was Ursula who was pursuing him with such malignant spite. Yet albeit we bound over each one to hold his peace on the matter in Nuremberg, no woman, nor perchance no man either, could keep such strange doings privy from near kith and kin; and whereas we might not tell what in truth it was which stood in the way of our brothers' homecoming, it was rumored among our cousins and gossips that some vast and unattainable sum was needed to ransom the two young Schoppers. And other marvellous reports got abroad, painting my brother's slavery in terrible colors.

At first this made me wroth, but presently it provoked me less, inasmuch as that great compassion was aroused; and those very citizens and dames who of old were wont to chide Herdegen as a limb of Satan, and would have gladly seen him led to the gallows, now remembered him otherwise. Yea, fellow-feeling hath kindly eyes, widely open to all that is good, and willing to be shut to all that is evil, and so it came to pass that the noble gifts of the poor slave now lost to the town, were lauded to the skies. Hereupon came a letter from my lord Cardinal with these tidings of good comfort: that he was willing to administer extreme unction to my grand-uncle Im Hoff, if his life should be in peril when his eminence returned from England. Our next letters were, by his order, to find him at Brussels, and when old Dame Pernhart had given her consent to our journeying to the land of Egypt—whereas Aunt Jacoba held her wisdom and shrewd wit in high honor,—and had moved her son and Dame Giovanna to do likewise, Ann wrote a long letter to my lord Cardinal, the venerable head of the Pernhart family, setting forth in touching words for what cause and to what end she had dared so bold a venture. She besought his aid and blessing, and declared that the inward voice, which he had taught her to obey, gave her assurance that the purpose she had in hand was pleasing in the eyes of God and the Virgin.

I, for my part, could never have writ so fair a letter; and how calmly would Ann now fulfil the duties of each day, while Cousin Maud, albeit her feet scarce might carry her, was here, there, and everywhere, like a Will-o'-the-Wisp.

Ann it was who first conceived the idea of going with Young Kubbeling to the Futterers' house and there making enquiries as to the roads to Genoa, and also concerning the merchants who might there be found ready and willing to ship his falcons for sale in Alexandria; inasmuch as that it was only by journeying in a galleon which sailed not from Venice that we could escape Ursula's spies; and that Kubbeling should suffer loss through us we could by no means

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allow. And whereas old Master Futterer himself was now in Nuremberg, he declared himself willing to buy the birds on account of his own house, at the same price as the traders in Venice; nor was the Brunswicker any whit loth, forasmuch as that he might presently get a better price on the Lido, when it should be known that he had other ways and means at his command. Also the journey by Genoa gave us this advantage: that we were bound to no time or season. Old Master Futterer pledged himself to find a ship at any time when Kubbeling should need it.

Whereas we purposed to set forth in the middle of December, we went to the forest-lodge early in that month, and as it was with me at that time, so, for sure, must it be with the swallows and the nightingales or ever they fly south over mountains and seas. Never had the pure air been sweeter, never had I looked forward to the future with greater hope and strength or higher purpose. And my feeble, sickly Aunt Jacoba, meseemed, was like-minded with me. In spirit, ever eager, she was with us already in that distant region, and albeit of old she ever had preferred Ann above me, now on a sudden the tables were turned; she could never see enough of me, and when at last Ann was fain to go home to town with Uncle Christian, she besought so pressingly that I would stay with her that I was bound to yield; and indeed I was well content to tarry there, the forest being now in all its glory.

The daintiest lace was hung over the frosted trees. They had been dipped, meseemed, in melted silver and crystal, and the whole forest was broidered over with shining enamel and thickly strewn with clear diamond sparks. And how brightly everything glittered when the sun rose up from the morning mist, and blazed down on all this glory from a blue sky! At night the moon lighted up the frosted forest with a softer and more loving ray, and till a late hour I would gaze forth at it, or up at the starry vault where the shooting stars came flying across from the dark blue deep. Now it is well-known to many who are still in their green youth that, whensoever it befalls that we are in the act of thinking of some heartfelt wish just as a star falls, it is sure of fulfilment; and behold, on the very next night, as I was gazing upwards and wondering in my heart whether indeed we might be able to rescue my brothers, and to find my Cousin Gotz as his sick mother so fervently hoped, a bright star fell, as it were right in front of me. Whereupon I went to bed in such good cheer and so sure of myself as I have rarely felt before or since that night.

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And next morning, as I went to my aunt in high spirits and happy mood, she perceived that some good hap had befallen me. Then, when I had told her what I had had in my mind as the star fell which, as little children believe, is dropped from the hand of an angel blinded by the glory of Almighty God, she looked me in the face with a sad smile and bid me sit down by her side. And she took my hand in hers and opened her heart so wide as she had never done till this hour. It was plain to see that she had long been biding her time for this full and free discourse, and she confessed that she had never shown me such love and care as were indeed my due. The mere sight of me had ever hurt the open wound, inasmuch as long ago, or ever I first went to school, her fondest hopes had been set on me. She had looked on me ever as her only son's future wife, and Gotz himself had been of the same mind, whereas in his boyhood, and even when his beard was coming, he loved nought better than little Margery in her red hood.

And she reminded me now of many a kind act her son had done me, and how that once on a time, when my lord the High Constable had bidden him with other lads to Kadolzburg, which she and my uncle took as a great honor, he had said, No, he would not go from home, by reason that Cousin Maud was to come that day and bring me with her.

[Kadolzburg—A country lodge belonging to the High Constables of the city of Nuremberg, and their favorite resort, even after they had become Electors of Brandenburg. It was at about three miles and a half west of the town]

Whereupon arose his first sharp dispute with his parents, and when my uncle threatened that he would carry him thither by force he had stolen away into the woods, and stayed all night with some bee-keeper folk, and not come home till midday on the morrow, when it was too late to ride to the Castle in good time. 'To punish him for this he was locked up; but hearing my voice below he had let himself down by the gutter-pipe, seized my hand, and ran away to the woods with me, nor did he come back till Ave Maria. And hereupon he was soundly thrashed, albeit he was even then a great lad and of good counsel in all matters.

My uncle's wrath at that time had dwelt in my mind, but my share in the matter was new to me and brought the color to my face. Howbeit, I deemed it might have been better if my aunt had never told me; for though it was indeed good to hear and gladdened my soul, yet it would hinder me from looking Gotz freely in the face if by good hap I should meet him.

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Then she went on to tell me in full all that had befallen my cousin until he had gone forth to wander. When they had parted in wrath, he had written to her from the town to say that if she were steadfast in her displeasure he should seek a new home for himself and his sweetheart in a far country; and she had sent him a letter to tell him that her arms were ever open to receive him, but that rather than suffer the only son and heir of the old and noble race of Waldstromer to throw himself away on a craftsman's daughter, she would never more set eyes on him whom she loved with all her heart. Never more, and she swore it by the Saviour's wounds with the crucifix in her hand, should his parents' doors be opened to him unless he gave up the coppersmith's daughter and besought his mother's pardon.

And now the sick old woman bewailed her stern hardness and her over-hasty oath with bitter tears; Gotz had been faithful to his Gertrude in despite of her letter, and when, three years later, the tidings reached him that his sweetheart had pined away for grief and longing, and departed this life with his name on her lips, he had written in the wild anguish of his young soul that, now Gertrude was dead, he had nought more to crave of his parents; and that whereas his mother had sworn with her hand on the image of the Saviour never to open her doors to him till he had renounced his sweet, pure love, he now made an oath not less solemn and binding, by the image of the Crucified Christ, that he would never turn homewards till she bid him thither of her own free will, and owned that she repented her of that innocent maid's early death, whereas there was not her like among all the noble maidens of Nuremberg, whatever their names might be.

This letter I read myself, and I plainly saw that these twain had sadly marred their best joy in life by over-hasty ire. Albeit, I knew full well how stubborn a spirit was Aunt Jacoba's, I nevertheless strove to move her to send a letter to her son bidding him home; yet she would not, though she bewailed herself sorely.

"Only one thing of those he requires of me can I in all truth grant him," quoth she. "If you find him, you may tell him that his mother sends her fondest blessing, and assure him of my heart's deepest devotion; nay, and let him understand that I am pining with longing for him, and that I obey his will inasmuch as that I truly mourn the death of his beloved; for that is verily the truth, the Virgin and the Saints be my witness. Yet I may not and I will not open my doors to him till he has craved my forgiveness, and if I did so he must think of his own mother as a perjured woman."

Hereupon I showed her—and my eyes overflowed—that his oath stood forth as against her oath, and that one was as weighty as the other in the sight of the Most High.

"Set aside that cruel vow, my dear aunt," cried I, "I will make any pilgrimage with you, and I know full well that no penance will seem overhard to you."

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"No, no, of a surety, Margery, no!" she replied with a groan. "And the Chaplain said the like to me long ago; and yet I feel in my heart that you and he are in the wrong. An oath sworn by Christ's wounds!—Moreover I am the elder and his mother, he is the younger and my son. It is his part to come to me, and if he then shall make a pilgrimage it shall be to Rome and the Holy Sepulchre. He has time before him in which to do any penance the Holy Church may require of him. I—I would lay me on the rack only to see him once more, I would fast and scourge myself till my dying day; but I am his mother, and he is my son, and it is his part to take the first step, not mine who bore him."

How warmly I urged her again and again, and how often was she on the point of yielding to her heart's loud outcry! Yet she ever came back to the same point: that it ill-beseemed her to be the first to put forth her hand, albeit her every feeling drove her to it.

The letters sent to Gotz had reached him through a merchant's house in Venice. This his parents knew, and they had long since charged Kunz to inquire where he dwelt. Yet had his pains been for nought, inasmuch as the banished youth had forbidden the traders to tell any one, whosoever might ask. Howbeit my uncle had implored his son in many a letter to mind him of his mother's sickness, and come home; and in his answers Gotz had many a time given his parents assurance of his true and loving devotion; yet had he kept his oath, and tarried beyond seas. These letters likewise did my aunt show me, and while I read them she charged me to make it my duty not to quit that merchant's house and to take no rest until I had learned where her son was dwelling: saying that what an Italian might deny to a man a fair young maiden might yet obtain of him.

It was not yet dusk when Master Ulsenius came and broke off our discourse. He had come forth in part to see Eppelein, and presently, when a lamp was brought, as we stood by the faithful lad he called me by name, and then Uncle Conrad, and said that albeit he was weary of limb he was easy and comfortable; that he felt a smart now and then, and in especial about his neck, yet that troubled him but little, inasmuch as that it plainly showed him that the thought which had haunted him, that he was really killed and in a darksome hell, was but a horrible dream.

Then when he had spoken thus much, with great pains, his pale face turned red on a sudden, and again he asked, as he had many times in his sickness, where was his master's letter. Hereupon I hastily told him that we had hunted down the robbers and rescued it, and it was a joy to see how much comfort and delight this was to him. And when he had swallowed a good cup of strong Malvoisie, he could sit up, and enquired if the Baron von Im Hoff were minded to satisfy the Sultan's over-great demand. And to this I replied, to give him easement, that we had good reason to hope so. And was his mind now clear enough to enable him to remember how great a sum was demanded for ransom?

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He smiled craftily, and said that even as a dead man he could scarce have forgotten that, by reason that he had muttered the words to himself on his way oftener than any old monk mumbles his Paternoster. And when Uncle Conrad laughed and bid him jestingly repeat it, he said, like a school boy who is sure of his task: "For Master Herdegen Schopper, slave of the said unbeliever Abou Sef—[Father of the scimitar]—in the armory of Sultan Burs Bey in the Castle of Cairo, a ransom is demanded of twenty-four thousand Venice sequins. George—Christina! Death and fire on the head of the misbelieving wretch!"

When we heard this we all believed that he had of a surety been wrong as to the sum or the coin, likewise we thought his last strange words were due to a wandering mind; howbeit, we were soon to learn that verily his tidings were the truth. He forthwith went on to say with some pains that his master had made him to use a means by which he might remember the number from all others in case, by ill-hap, the letter should be lost. And on this wise he gave us to know for certain that the vast sum demanded was not an error on his part. It was to this end that he had stamped on his memory the names of Saint George and Saint Christina, whose days in the calendar are on the 24th of April and the 24th of July, and the number of thousands named for the ransom was likewise four and twenty. Also Herdegen had bid him think of twice the twelve apostles, and of the twenty-four hours from midnight till midnight again. It would seem beyond belief to most folks, he said, yet it was indeed twenty-four thousand, and not hundred, sequins which that devilish Sultan has asked, as indeed we must know from the letter. Presently, when he had rested a while, we made him tell us more, and we learned that the Sultan had been minded to set Herdegen free without price, and he would have had him led forthwith to the imprisoned King Janus of Cyprus, to whom he thought he might thus do a pleasure, but that Ursula Tetzl, who was standing by with her husband, had whispered to the Sultan that she would not see him robbed of a great profit forasmuch as that yonder Christian slave—and she pointed to my brother—was of one of the richest families of her native town, who could pay a royal ransom for him and find it no great burthen; and that the same was true of Sir Franz, who was likewise to have been set free. Hereupon the Sultan, who at all times lacked moneys, notwithstanding the heavy tribute he levied on all merchandise, commanded that Herdegen and the Bohemian should be led away again and then he asked this overweening ransom. Then Ursula took upon herself of her own free will to send tidings of the Sultan's demands to the slaves' kith and kin, and of her deep malice had never done so.

That evening we might not hear how and on what authority Eppelein knew all this, for much talking had wearied him. All we could then learn was that it was Ursula, and none other, whom the lad would still speak of as the She-devil, who had plotted the snare which had well nigh cost my other brother his life. Yet had he left him so far amended that he, Eppelein, would be glad to be no worse.

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Albeit these tidings of Kunz were good to cheer us, our hopes of ransoming Herdegen were indeed far away, or rather in the realm of nevermore; even if my grand-uncle were possessed of so great a sum, it was a question whether he would be willing to pay it; and as for us, we could never have raised it at the cost of all our fortune. At that time the Venice sequin and Nuremberg gulden were not far asunder in value, and what the sum of twenty-four thousand gulden meant any man may imagine when I say that, no more than twelve years sooner, the liberty of coining for the whole city was granted by the Emperor Sigismund to Herdegen Valzner for four thousand Rhenish gulden; and that Master Ulman Stromer purchased his fine dwelling-house behind the chapel of Our Lady, with the houses pertaining thereto, and his share in the Rigler's house for two thousand eight hundred gulden. For such a sum as was demanded a whole street in Nuremberg might have been sold; nay, the great castle of Malmsbach on the Pegnitz would lately have been bought by the city for a thousand Rhenish gulden, but that Master Ulrich Rummel, whose it was, would not part with it. And we were now required to pay the price of two dozen such strongholds! It was indeed an unheard-of and devilish extortion; and when Kubbeling came to hear of it he turned his wild-cat-skin pocket inside out, and fell to raging and storming.

Aunt Jacoba turned pale when she heard the great sum named, and she likewise was of opinion that old Im Hoff, who had of late been spending much money in vows and foundations, would never give forth so vast a sum. The richest families in Nuremberg might be moved to pay fifty, and at the most a hundred gulden for the ransom of a Christian and a fellow-countryman, but if even twenty might be found so open-handed, which was not to be looked for, and if my godfather Christian Pfinzing, and the Waldstromers, and the Hallers should do their utmost, and we should give the greater part of all our possessions, we could scarce make it up to twenty-four thousand sequins if my grand-uncle did not help.

Thus after a day of hope came a first night of despairing, and many another must follow, and I was to know once more that misfortunes never come singly.

I had hoped of a surety to speak with Epplein once more or ever I departed at noon, and to ask him of many matters; howbeit, when I went up to his chamber Master Ulsenius met me with a face of care and told me that the poor fellow was again wandering in his wits. When I presently went forth from the house, a bee-keeper's waggon was slowly moving from the court-yard. The housewife waved her hand, and from beneath the tilt the face of Dame Henneleinlein looked at me with a scornful grin. Since her evil demeanor at the Pernbarts' they had closed their house on her, and when she had dared once to go to the Schopperhof, thence likewise had she been shut out, and thus she felt no good-will towards us.

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Now when I enquired of the housekeeper what might be the end and reason for this visit, the woman hid beneath her apron a jar of honey which the old dame had given her as a sweetmeat for the children; and she gave me to understand that the worthy lady had come forth to the forest to collect her widow's dues of honey, and had tarried on her way for a little friendly discourse. But methought that "little" must have had some strange meaning, inasmuch as the housewife's withered cheeks were of the color of a robin's breast. Hereupon I threatened her with my finger, and enquired of her whether she had not betrayed more to the evil-tongued old woman than she ought, but she eagerly denied the charge.

My ride home to the town after noon was not altogether a pleasant one, by reason that icy rain poured from heaven in streams, mingled with snow. The further we went the worse the roads were, and yet when my companions turned at the city-gate to ride homewards again, a strange, fierce confidence came upon me. Whether it were that the wet which ran off from me and my stout horse had singularly refreshed me, or whether it was the steadfast purpose I had set as I rode along, to risk my all to the end that I might redeem my brethren, I know not. But to this hour I mind me that, as I rode in through the dark streets, my heart beat high with contentment, and that had I been such another man as Herdegen I might have been ready enough to pick a quarrel with the first who should have said me nay.

Thus I fared on past my grand-uncle's house; there I beheld from afar a lighted lantern, as it were a glow-worm at midsummer, moving along the street, and when I perceived that it was none other than old Henneleinlein who carried it, I put my horse, which till now had been wading through the mire step by step, to a swift gallop, as fast as he might go, and the servingman behind me, passing close by her. And what simple glee was mine when our horses splashed the old woman from head to foot, inasmuch as I wist for certain that she could have stolen to my grand-uncle's house at that late hour to no end but to reveal whatsoever she might have picked up from her friend and gossip at the forest-lodge.

Thus I reached home in better cheer than I had hoped; and when Susan told me that Cousin Maud was in the kitchen ordering the supper, I crept up-stairs, hastily changed my wet raiment, sent forth my man to tell Ann that she was to come to me, and then, in the best chamber, I fetched forth the elecampane wine which I had ever found the best remedy when my cousin needed some strength. Nor was my care in vain; for when I had told her, little by little, as it were in small doses, all the tidings I had heard yesterday, and ended with the great and cruel price demanded by the Sultan, she shrieked aloud and clasped her hands to her heart in such wise that I was verily in great fear. Then the elecampane wine did good service; yet was it not till she had drunk of it many times that her tongue spoke plainly again. And presently, when she was able to wag it, it went on for a long time with no pause nor rest, in sheer impatience and godless railing.

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When she had thus relieved her mind, she began pacing up and down the floor on one and the same plank, like a lion in its cage, and to call to mind, one by one, all our earthly possessions, and to reckon at how we might attain to selling it for gold. The whole sum was not much to comfort us, for her worldly estate, like that of the Waldstromers, was in land, and in these days of peril from the Hussites it was hard enough to sell landed property, and her best portion was in meads and pasture and a few vineyards near Wurzburg.

It was from the first her fixed intent, as though it were a matter of course, to give everything she had, down to her jewels; and whereas she conceived, and rightly, that for Herdegen's sake I should be like-minded, she asked me no questions but added to it in her mind, the Schopper jewels which had come to me from my father and mother, and then began to count and reckon. It might perchance come to so much as eleven thousand sequins if we sold all we had to sell; yet our inheritance lay in Chancery, and, as she knew full well, not a farthing thereof might be given up but with the full and well-proven authority of Herdegen and Kunz. Nor might I even have that which was mine own, by reason that our inheritance had never been shared, and our houses and lands had not been valued at a price. Thus I must have long patience or ever I came by my own; all the more so whereas the gentlemen of the Chancery were required to answer for the wealth of orphans in their keeping with their own.

Hereupon we again thought of my grand-uncle, and Cousin Maud declared that he would of a certainty be ready to pay half the required ransom for a purpose so pleasing in the eyes of God, and that the other half might be raised by the help of our friends. Then she was fain to think of the future. And the longer she did so, even when Ann had come to us and had been told all our tidings, the better cheer she showed; nay, it might have been conceived that it would be a far more easy and delightful matter to live in narrow poverty than in superfluous riches, and thereupon she put me in mind how that many a time, when the men-folks were away from home, she and I had been content to make good cheer with some sweet porridge, and had very gladly dined without flesh-meat, which was so costly. We should be free from the vexation of so many serving-men and wenches; and whereas of late she had been forced to turn Brigitta out of the house, had she not herself scarce escaped a fever from sheer worry of mind. Susan would ever be true to us; she would be ready to share our poverty with us, and the unresting up-stairs and down had long been a torment to her old feet.

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The Magister was a well-disposed man, and if he found it an over-hard matter to depart from us we might very gladly let him board with us, if he could be content to live with us in her little house in the Grassmarket, in which Rosmuller now dwelt. There was no lack of good home-spun cloth in Nuremberg; nay, and if we should never again have new garments that would be all the better for our souls' health. As for me, I might perchance have fewer suitors, but if one should pay his court to me, he would have no thought but for Margery, and how she looked and moved. Nay, take it for all in all, we owed much thanks to Ursula and the reprobate heathen Sultan if we were by their means brought low from ill-starred wealth and ease to God-pleasing poverty.

Ann was far less horror-struck at the fearful sum of the ransom than we had been, by reason that she was ever possessed by the assurance that Heaven had created her and Herdegen for each other, and would bring them together at last.

Moreover she had good cause to build her hopes on my grand-uncle's help. In a letter from the Cardinal to her he said that now, as of old, he could only counsel her to follow the voice of her heart; that he would put no hindrance in the way of our departing, albeit he urgently prayed us to put it off till after his homecoming, which should now be in a short space. She was to let Baron Im Hoff know that he was ready to do his will, albeit he hoped at his coming to find him in mended health. She had forthwith carried these good tidings to my grand-uncle, and they had so uplifted and comforted his heart that verily it seemed as though my lord Cardinal's good hopes might find fulfilment. And this very morning she had seen him, and a right strange mind had come over him; he had enquired of her straitly, and as though it was to him a great matter, all that she could tell him of my lord Cardinal's way of life, of the duties of his office and the like; and whereas she answered him that of all these matters she knew but little, yet had she heard from his own mouth that his eminence was bound in thankfulness to his Holiness the Pope, by reason that he had made him to be high Almoner of the Papal treasury and thus put it into his power to do many good works; and this she deemed, had brought great easement to my granduncle. Then when she rose to depart from him, he had sent his serving-man to bid Master Holzschuher, the notary, to come to him, and to bring with him two trustworthy witnesses duly sworn to secrecy. As he bid her farewell he had laughed, and whispered to her that his Eminence the Cardinal would be well-content with old Im Hoff, yea, and she likewise, and her lover.

All this gave us matter for thought, and also gave us good heart; only it weighed upon our souls that our departing was not to be yet for some weeks.

CHAPTER XIII.

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Next morning Cousin Maud let me see in a right pleasant way how truly she was in earnest in the matter of thrift henceforth; she would take but one small pat of butter from the country wench who brought it, she sent away the butcher's man and would have no flesh meat, and at breakfast she abstained from butter on her bread, as she was wont to eat it. Likewise the chain and the great gold pin which she ever wore from morning till night, flashing on her bosom like a watchman's lantern, were now laid aside, and while I was eating my porridge she showed me the coffer wherein she had bestowed all she possessed of rings, pins, and the like, which she would presently take to the weigh-house to be weighed and then to a goldsmith to be valued. Howbeit, when I was fain to do likewise with my jewels she would not have it so, inasmuch as youth, quoth she, needed such bravery, and first we must learn how great a portion of the ransom my grand-uncle would take upon himself to pay.

Hereupon, in fulfilment of my purpose yestereve, I made it my hard duty to carry the evil tidings to the old baron, and humbly to remind him of his promise to take care for Herdegen's ransom. It was raining heavily, and a wet west wind whistled along the miry streets. It was weariful to wade through them, and when at last I reached the Im Hoff house Master Ulsenius called to me down the stairs: "Silence, Mistress Margery; there is worse weather in here than without doors!"

Thus as I went into the overheated chamber, I saw there was no good to be hoped for: yet were matters worse than I had looked to find them. So soon as my grand-uncle set eyes on me he frowned darkly, his hollow eyes had an angry glare and, without answering my good-day, he croaked at me: "You hoped that the old man might have passed away into eternity or ever you set forth on your wild adventure? Hah, hah But you are mistaken. I shall yet be granted time enough to show you whom you have to deal with, as it has likewise been enough to show me what you truly are! Whereas I trusted to have found a faithful and wise brain, what have I seen? Loveless and malignant privy, miserable folly, and such schemes as might have been dreamed of in a mad-house!"

"But, uncle, only hearken," I tried to say, and forthwith the idea fell into my mind, which I afterwards found to be a true one, that either Henneleinlein, had yestereve betrayed to him or to her gossip his housekeeper, all she had heard at the Forest Lodge. He would not suffer me to speak to the end, but went on to chide and complain, and broke in again and again, even when at last I found words and made it plain to him that we had kept our purpose privy from him to no end but to save him from grieving so long as we might; and albeit he might be wroth with us, yet he must grant that heretofore we had ever been modest and seemly maidens; but now, when it was a matter of life and freedom for those who were nearest and dearest to our hearts....

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Here he broke in with scornful laughter, and cried out that he, for his part, might not indeed hope to be numbered among those chosen few. He had ever known full well that when we did him any Samaritan service it had been to no end save to draw from his purse the money to ransom my brothers and Ann's lover. Every kind word had been pure lies and falseness; yea, and worse than either of us were that crafty witch out in the forest, and the old scarecrow who made boast of having been as a mother to me. Thus far had I suffered his railing in patience, but now it was too much for the hot blood of the Schoppers; I could refrain myself no longer, and broke out in great wrath and reproaches for so vile an accusation. If it were not that his age and infirmities claimed our compassion, I would, said I, after such evil treatment, desire of Ann that she should never more cross the threshold of a man who could so cruelly defame us, and those two good women to whom we owed so much.

I spoke right loudly, beside myself with rage, and my face aglow; nor was it till I marked that my uncle was staring at me as at some marvel that I recovered myself, and on a sudden held my peace, inasmuch as the thought flashed through my brain that I was denying my brother even as Peter denied the Lord, albeit not indeed through any fear of man, but by giving way to my angered pride. Howbeit I had not long ceased when the stern old man cried out in pitiful entreaty.

"Nay, Margery, in the name of the Saints I pray you! You will not make Ann my foe. How hardhearted you can be, and how wroth, and against an old man sick unto death on the edge of the grave!—what was it, in truth, that brought the bitter words to my tongue, but my care and fears for you, who are verily and indeed my only comfort and all I have to love on earth? And now when I say again: I will not suffer you to depart. I will sacrifice all, everything to keep you from running into certain death, will you even then threaten to leave me alone in my misery, and to beguile Ann to desert me likewise?"

Hereupon I spoke him fair and as lovingly as in truth I might, and pledged my word that Ann should not set foot without the city gates or ever my lord Cardinal had come into them, and had given him the comfort of his blessing. And then he was of better cheer, and of his own free will he minded me of his promise to pay certain moneys for Herdegen's ransom; and all this he spoke full lovingly and my heart overflowed with true and fervent thankfulness, so that I took his thin hand and kissed it. Howbeit, he knew not yet how great a sum was needed: and whereas I was about to prepare his mind for the worst, Ann came into the chamber, and as soon as my grand-uncle saw her he cried out in glad good cheer: "Thank God, sweet maid, all is peace between us again. You forego your mad purpose, and I—I will pay the ransom." At this Ann flew to his side and thanked him, with overflowing eyes, and little by little we led him on, till he cried out: "Well, well, children, they surely cannot set the price of a kingdom on that young scapegrace Schopper's head!"

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So Ann took courage, and told him that Ursula had, of her deep malice, declared that Herdegen was one of the richest youths of Germany, and that by reason of this the Sultan had demanded the great price of twenty-four thousand sequins.

The truth was out; I marvelled to mark that my grand-uncle was not dismayed as I had looked to see him; nay, but he laughed aloud and said: "That would indeed be somewhat new and strange! You children would ever rack your brains over the Italian poets rather than over matters of mine and thine, albeit that is the axis on which the world turns. There would, in truth, be no justice in so vast a sum, but that in the markets of Egypt they reckon in Venice sequins with none but the Franks; nigh upon thirteen of their dirhems go to the gold sequin, and thus we have-let me reckon—the old trader has not forgotten his skill on his sick-bed—we have one thousand eight hundred and forty and six sequins; and that is a vast ransom still such as is never paid but for lords of the highest degree. Four and twenty thousand sequins!" And again he laughed aloud. "It is easily spoken, children, but you cannot even guess what it would mean. Believe me when I tell you that many a well-to-do merchant in Nuremberg, who is at the head of a fine trade, would be at his wits' end if he were desired to pay down half of your four and twenty thousand sequins in hard coin!"

Then I took up my parable and told him how Eppelein had stamped the sum on his mind, and that he for certain was in the right, both as to the sum and as to the Venice sequins, forasmuch as that Herdegen, to the end that he might know it rightly, had told him that they should be ducats such as he had three in a red stuff wrapper, and Kunz and I likewise each two, in our money-boxes as christening-gifts.

Now while I thus spoke the old man was sorely troubled, and his wax-white face turned paler at each word. He raised himself up, leaning on the arms of the great chair, so high that we were filled with amazement, and he gazed about him with his glassy eyes and then said, still holding himself up: "That, that.... And yesterday, only yesterday.... The captive himself.... Four and twenty thousand sequins, do you say?.... and I—oh, what were my words?.... But what old Im Hoff promises that he will do.... And yet.... If you maids had but been duteous children, if you had but come to me first, as trustful daughters.... Only yesterday I might—Yes, perchance I might...." And then he stormed forth: "But who is there indeed to care for me? Who ever comes nigh me with true love and honest trustfulness? Not one, no, not one!.... Ursula—the lad whom from an infant—and you—both of you, what have you done?.... Yesterday, only yesterday!.... But to-day Four and twenty thousand sequins!" His arms on a sudden failed him, and he sank back in a deep swoon, his colorless face drooping on his shoulder. Now, while we did all in our power to revive him, and while one serving-man ran for the leech and another for the friar, meseemed that the old man's left side was strangely stiff and numb; yet the low flame of his feeble life was still burning.

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Howbeit, when Master Ulsenius had let blood the old man opened his right eye; and when presently he was able to say: “Book,” and then again “Book,” we perceived by sundry signs that what he craved was water, and that he spoke one word for another. And thus it was till his chief confessor, Master Leonard Derrer, the reverend Prior of the Dominicans, came in with the sacristan, to administer to him extreme unction. But now, when the reverend Father came toward the dying man with the Body of the Lord, there was so dreadful and sorrowful a sight to be seen as I may never forget to my latter day. Instead of receiving that Holy Sacrament in all thankful humility, my grand-uncle thrust away my lord Prior—a whitebearded old man, of a venerable and commanding presence—with great fury and ungoverned rage, storming at him in strangely-mingled words, which for sure, he meant for others, but in a voice and with a mien which plainly showed that he would have nought of that Messenger of Grace. And from time to time he turned that eye he could use on Ann, and albeit he spoke one word for another, he made shift many times to repeat the Cardinal’s name with impatient bidding, so that it was not hard to understand his meaning and his intent to receive the Viaticum from none other than that high prelate.

Howbeit, to us it seemed nothing less than treason to the dying man to interpret this to my lord Prior, in especial since my grand-uncle had, but now, shown us so much favor. Indeed we were moved to show him all loving kindness. Ann held his hand in hers, and whispered to him again and again that he should take patience, and that his Eminence was already on his way and would ere long be here. The reverend Prior showed indeed true Christian forbearance, thinking that the departing soul was more sorely troubled than was in truth the fact. He heeded not the old man’s threats and struggles, but stood in silence at his post, and when presently the old Baron’s hand dropped lifeless from Ann’s grasp he sent us from the chamber.

We could hear through the door the good priest’s voice in prayer and benediction, pronouncing absolution over the dying man, and at times my grand uncle’s wrathful tones, feeble indeed, but terrible to hear. Each time he broke in on the Prior’s pious words we shuddered, and when at last the priest rang his little bell a great terror fell upon us, whereas this ordinance is wont to bring comfort and edification to the soul.

We had been on our knees some long space, praying fervently for that hapless, imperilled soul, when the door was opened, and my lord Prior declared in a loud voice that the noble Baron and Knight Sebald Im Hoff had made a good end after receiving the most holy Sacrament.

Then thought I, a good end peradventure, by the grace of Christ and the Virgin, but a peaceful end alas! by no means. And this might be seen even in the dead man’s face. In later years, whensoever it has been my lot to gaze on the face of the dead, I have ever perceived that death hath lent them an aspect of peaceful calm so that the saying of common folk, that the Angel of Death hath kissed them is right fitting; but my grand-

uncle's face was as that of a man whose dignity is broken by a mightier than he, and who hath suffered it in silent, gloomy rebellion.

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With all our might and soul we prayed for him again and again; howbeit, as must ever befall, other cares came crowding in, to swallow up that one. As soon as the tidings of the old noble's death were rumored abroad, those who had known him in life came pouring in, and messengers from the town-council, notaries with sealing-wax and seals, priests for the burying, neighbors, and other good folk, and among them many friars and nuns. Lastly came Doctor Holzschuher of the council, my grand-uncle's notary, and one of our own father's most trusted friends, in all points a man of such worth and honesty that no words befit him so well as the Cardinal's saying: that he reminded him of an oak of the German forests.

When, now, this man, who in his youth had been one of the goodliest in all Nuremberg, and who was still of noble aspect with his long silver-grey hair lying on his shoulders—when he now greeted us maids well-nigh gloomily, and with no friendly beck or nod, we knew forthwith that he must have great and well-founded fears for our concerns. Yea, and so it was. Presently, when he had held grave discourse with the High Treasurer and the other chief men of the council, he called to him Cousin Maud and me, and told us that old Im Hoff's latest dealing was such, to all seeming, as to take from us all hope that our inheritance from him should help us to pay the ransom for Herdegen. And on the morrow his will would be opened and read and we should learn thereby in what way that old man had cared for those who were nearest and dearest to him.

Hereupon we had no choice but to bury many a fair hope in the grave; and notwithstanding this, we might owe no grudge to the departed; for albeit he had cared first and chiefly for the salvation of his own sinful soul, he nevertheless had taken thought to provide for my brothers and likewise for Ann and to keep the pledge he had given. Never in all his days—and this was confessed even by his enemies, of whom he had many—had he broken his word, and it was plain to be seen from all his instructions that the true cause of the deadly blow which had killed him was the sudden certainty that, by his own act, he had bereft himself of the power to redeem Herdegen by paying the ransom as he had promised.

And this was my uncle's will:

When he had heard from Ann that my lord Cardinal was minded to hasten his home-coming and give him extreme unction, and had likewise had tidings that that high Prelate took great joy in his liberty of dealing with the Papal treasury for alms, he had bidden to him, that very evening, Doctor Holzschuher, his notary, and certain sworn witnesses, and had in all due form cancelled his former will, and in a fine new one had devised his estate as follows:

Ursula Tetzl was to have the five thousand gulden which he had promised her when he had unwittingly killed young Tetzl.

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To Kunz he bequeathed the great trade both in Nuremberg and Venice, with all that pertained thereto and certain moneys in capital for carrying it on; likewise his fine dwelling-house, inasmuch as Herdegen would have our house for his own. And Kunz should be held bound to carry on the said trade in the same wise as my grand-uncle had done in his life-time, and pay out of it two-third parts of the profits to Herdegen and Ann; and that these two should wed was the dearest wish of his old age. Not a farthing was to be taken from the moneyed capital for twenty years to come, and this was expressly recorded; nor might the trade be sold, or cease to be carried on. If Kunz should die within that space, then he charged the head clerk of the house to conduct the business under the same pledge. And if and when Kunz should wed, then should he pay only half the profits to his brother instead of two-thirds.

The eldest son of Herdegen and Ann was to fall next heir to the business; but if this marriage came to nought, or they had no male issue, then Herdegen's son-in-law, or my son, or Kunz's.

Likewise he believed that he had made good provision for the maintenance of the young pair, inasmuch as though it could scarce be hoped that Herdegen would be able to take the lead of the trading house, yet his own fortune was not so great as to assure to Ann a life so free from burthens, and in all ways so easy as he desired for her, and as beseemed the mistress of so ancient a Nuremberg family.

His landed estates he had for the most part devised to the holy Church, and the remainder in equal halves to Herdegen and to me.

Three thousand gulden, which he had lent to the Convent of Vierzehnheiligen, and of which he might at any time require the repayment, he had set apart to ransom Herdegen and pay for his home-coming.

Of his possessions in hard coin, three thousand gulden were for Herdegen's share, and one thousand each for Ann and me as a bride-gift, and he had devised goodly sums of money to the hospitals and poor of the city, and the serving-folk and retainers of the household.

But then where was the great and well-nigh royal treasure of which old Im Hoff had, not so long since, been possessed; so that in the time of the Diet he had paid down in hard coin thirty thousand Hungarian ducats to buy himself a Baron's title? Master Holzschuher could tell us well enough. When that old man had once said to Ann that she could scarce believe how great profit might be gained in a few years by well-directed trading with Venice, he spoke not without book. After endowing many churches and convents in Franconia while he was yet living, with truly lordly generosity, and providing for masses for his soul and other pious offices, he had still a sum of forty and four thousand Hungarian ducats to dispose of. And these moneys, notwithstanding

Master Holzschuher's entreaties that he would devise at least half of these vast possessions to

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his own town and near of kin, he had bequeathed to the alms-coffers of his Holiness the Pope, to be dealt with at the pleasure of his Eminence Cardinal Bernliardi, with this sole condition: that every year, on his name-day, mass should be said by some high Prelate for his miserable soul, which sorely needed such grace. Moreover he had provided that the document, duly attested by the notary and witnesses, should be sent to Rome on the morrow by a specially appointed messenger; thus it was long since far away and out of reach when my grand-uncle had learnt that all his remaining possessions were not enough to release Herdegen. And this, as I have already said, had fallen heavy on his soul.

Verily there hath been no lack of fervent prayers for his soul on our part; and at a later time, when I came to know to how many hapless wretches his testament had brought a blessing, little by little I forgave this strange bestowal of his wealth, and could pronounce over his grave a clear "Requiescat in pace!" May he rest in peace!

When we had presently duly weighed and reckoned with Master Holzschuher what we had indeed inherited from our rich kinsman, and how much we might ere long hope to collect of our own and from Cousin Maud, we had it before our eyes in plain writing that a large portion of the ransom was yet lacking. The trade of the Im Hoffs' was to be sure of great money value; but by my grand-uncle's will we might not touch it for twenty years. Likewise Master Holzschuher pointed out to us by many an example how wrong it would be, and in especial at this very time, to sell landed estate at any price, that is to say at about one-third of its real worth. And finally he told us that the Chancery guardians were not at that present time suffered to pay down one farthing of our inheritance from our father. Thus we were heavy at heart, while Doctor Holzschuher was discoursing in a low voice with Uncle Christian and Master Pernhart, and noting certain matters on paper.

Then those gentlemen rose up; and whereas I looked in the face of the worthy notary meseemed it was as withered grass well bedewed with rain; and glad assurance beamed on me from his goodly and noble features. And I read the same promise in the looks of Uncle Christian and Master Pernhart, and where three such men led the fray methought the victory was certain.

And now we were told what was the matter of their discourse. If they might find a fitting envoy, they might perchance move the Sultan to forego some portion of the ransom; yet would they bear in mind what the whole sum was. Much of our possessions we were indeed not suffered to sell, yet might we borrow on them or pledge them, and the good feeling of our friends and fellow citizens would, for sure, help us to the remainder. Nay, and these gentlemen methought had some privy purpose; yet, inasmuch as they told us nought of their own free will, we were careful to put no questions. As we took leave

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they besought us yet to delay our departing and to suffer them to be free to do what they would. And we were fain to yield, albeit the blood of the Schoppers boiled at the thought that I must tarry here idle, and others go round as it were with the beggars' staff, in our name, and for the sake of a son of our house who had done no good to any man. Howbeit, I knew full well that pride and defiance were now out of place; and while I was walking homewards with Ann and Cousin Maud, on a sudden my cousin asked me: If Lorenz Stromer were in Herdegen's plight would I not gladly give of my estate; and when I said yes, quoth she: "Then all is well." And inasmuch as she was of the same mind she could, without a qualm, suffer the gentlemen to ask from door to door in Herdegen's name and in her own. It was our part only to show that we, as his nearest and dearest, were foremost in giving. And on that same day Ann brought all she possessed in gold and jewels, even to her christening coins which she had kept in her money-box, and among them likewise a costly cross of diamonds which my lord Cardinal had given her a few months ago.

That evening, again, as dusk was falling, Ann once more knocked at our door, and the reason of her coming was in truth a sad one: her grand-uncle, old Adam Heyden the organist, our friend of the tower, felt that his last hour was nigh, and bid us go to see him. Thus it came to pass that in two following days we had to stand by a death-bed. On each lay an old man departing to the other world, and meseemed their end had fallen so close together to yield warning and meditation to our young souls. Now, as I toiled up the steep turret-stair, after flying, yesterday, up the matted steps of the wealthy house of the Im Hoffs, meseemed that the two men's lives had been like to these staircases, and, young as I was, I nevertheless could say to myself that the humbler man's steep stair, which of late he could not mount without much panting, led up to a higher and brighter home than the wide steps of the rich merchant's palace.

Howbeit, when I had presently closed that good old man's eyes, I would not suffer myself to think thus of the twain, by reason that I could not endure to mar my remembrance of that other, to whom, after all, we owed much thanks.

The old organist had received the Holy Sacrament at mid-day from the hand of his old friend Nikolas Laister, the Vicar of Saint Sebald's. He would have no one to see him save ourselves and Hans Richter the churchwarden, a man after his own heart, and the Pernharts; and at first he marked not our coming, inasmuch as he was just then giving a toy to the deaf-mute boy, which he had carved with his own hand, and Dame Giovanna had much pains to carry away the child, who had cast himself on the old man with passionate love. Everything that moved the little one's soul he was forced, as it were, to express with unreasoning violence; and now, when the child was so boisterous as to disturb the peace of the others, his mother took him by the hand to lead him away into another chamber; but the dying man signed to him with a look which none may describe, and that moment the little fellow set his teeth hard and stood in silence by the

door. Whereupon the old man nodded to him as though the child had done him some kindness.

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Then he shut his eyes for a good while, and presently asked for some of the fine Bacharach wine which Cousin Maud had sent him; but his voice could scarce be heard. Ann reached him the glass, and at a sign from him she tasted of it; then he drank it with much comfort while Dame Giovanna held him sitting. The old, sweet smile was on his lips, and as he yet held the stem of the glass with a shaking hand, and suffered that I should help him, he cried in a clear voice: "Once more, Prosit, Elsie! You have waited long enough up there for your old man. And Prosit, likewise, to my dear old home, the fair city of Nuremberg." Then he took breath and added according to his wont: "Prosit, Adam! Thanks, Heyden!" And emptied the cup which I tilted up for him, to the very bottom. Then, when he fell back and gazed before him in silence, I found speech, and noted, albeit it struck me in truth as somewhat strange, that he bore our good town in mind then, in drinking his old pledge. Hereupon he nodded kindly and added, with an enquiring glance at the churchwarden: "It is rightly the duty of every true Christian man to pray for all mankind! Well, well; but they are so many, so infinitely many; and I, like every other man, have my own little world, inside the great world, as it were, and that is my dear old, staunch town of Nuremberg. Never have I been beyond its precincts, and it contains all on earth that is dear and precious to me. To me the citizens of Nuremberg are all mankind, and our city and so much as the eye can see from this tower all my world, small though it may be. I could ever find some good matter for thought in Nuremberg, something noble and well-compact, a fine whole. I have never sought the boundaries of the other, greater world."

Yet, that his world was in truth wider than he weened, was plain to us from the prayer he murmured wherein we could hear my brothers' names, albeit land and seas parted them from him. And after that, for a space all were silent, and he lay gazing at the bone crucifix on the wall; and at last he besought Dame Giovanna to lift him somewhat higher, and he drank again a little more, and said right softly as he cast a loving glance upon us each in turn: "I have looked into my own heart and gazed on Him on the Cross! That is our ensample! And I depart joyfully—and if you would know what maketh death so easy to me; it is that I have needed but little, and kept little for myself; and whereas I was wont to give away what other men save, I came to know of a certainty that all the good we do to others is the best we can do for ourselves. It is that, it is that!"

And he stretched forth his hand, and when we had all kissed it, he cried out: "My God, I now can say I thank Thee! What to-morrow may bring, Thou alone canst know! Margery, Ann, my poor children! May the bright day of meeting dawn for you! May Heaven in mercy protect the youths beyond seas! Here, close at hand is Mistress Kreutzer with her orphan children, you know them—you and Master Peter—they are in sore need of help—and the good we do to others. But come close to me, come all of you—and the little ones likewise."

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And we fell upon our knees by the bed, and he spread forth his hands and said in a clear voice: "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and be merciful unto you."

And then he sighed deeply, and his hands fell, and Dame Giovanna closed his eyes.

Yea! Death had come easy to this simple soul. Never knew I any man who gave so much out of a little, and never have I seen a happier or more peaceful face on a death-bed.

My grand-uncle's burial was grand and magnificent. All the town-council, and many of the nobles joined in the funeral-train. Bells tolling and priests chanting, crape, tapers, incense and the rest of it—we had more than enough of them all. Only one thing was lacking, namely, tears—not those of the hirelings who attended it, but such as fall in silence from a sorrowing eye.

In the Im Hoffs' great house all was silence till the burying was done; up in the tower, where old Adam Heyden lay asleep, the bells rang out as they did every day, for wedding and christening, for mass and mourning; yet by the low door which led to the narrow turret-stair I saw a crowd of little lads and maids with their mothers; and albeit the leaves were off the trees and the last flowers were frozen to death, many a child had found a green twig or carried a little bunch of everlasting flowers in its little hand to lay on the bier of that kind old friend. It was all the sacristan could do to keep away the multitudes who were fain to look on his face once more; and when he was borne to the grave-yard, not above two hours after my grand-uncle, there was indeed a wondrous great following. The snow was falling fast in the streets, and the fine folks who had attended him to the grave were soon warming themselves at home after the burying of old Im Hoff. But there came behind Adam Heyden's bier many right honest and respected folk, and a throng, reaching far away, of such as might feel the wind whistling cold through the holes in their sleeves and about their bare heads. And among these was there many a penniless woman who wiped her eyes with her kerchief or her hand, and many a widow's child, who tightened its little belt as it saw him who had so often given it a meal carried to the grave.

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