

Barbara Blomberg — Volume 09 eBook

Barbara Blomberg — Volume 09 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER X.

Three years passed.

Barbara occupied with her husband and the two sons she had given him a pretty little house in the modest quarter of Saint-Gery in Brussels.

Here the capital of wealthy, flourishing Brabant certainly looked very unlike what she had expected from Gombert's stories; and how little share she had had hitherto in the splendour which on the drive to Landshut she had expected to find in Brussels!

Since the musician had described the city, she had seen it distinctly before her in her vivid imagination. The lower portion, intersected by the river Senne and numerous canals, belonged to the rich, industrious citizens, the skilful artisans, and the common people; the upper, which occupied a hill, contained the great Brabant palace, the residence of the Emperor Charles. This edifice, which, though its exterior was almost wholly devoid of ornament, nevertheless presented a majestic aspect on account of its vast size, adjoined a splendid park, whose leafy groups of ancient trees merged into the forest of Soignies. Here also stood the palaces of the great nobles and, on the side of the hill which sloped to the lower city, the Cathedral of St. Gudule towered proudly aloft.

Much as Barbara had heard in praise of the magnificent market-place in the lower city, with its marvellous Town Hall, it was always the upper portion of Brussels she beheld when she thought of the capital. She had felt that she belonged to this quarter, where all who had any claim to aristocracy lived; here, near the palace and the beautiful leafy trees, her future home had been in her imagination.

The result was different, and now the longing for the brilliant Brussels on the hill was doubly strong. True, there dwelt also those who had the greatest power of attraction for her.

She was just returning home from the palace park, where stood a pleasant summer house in which Adrian Dubois lived with his wife and one child. It was this child especially that drew Barbara to the upper city as often as possible, and constantly forced her thoughts to linger there and still to follow the "higher" of the imperial motto, which everywhere else she was compelled to renounce.

True, a limit was fixed to these visits to the Dubois couple. For one whole year Frau Traut had successfully concealed the child from the mother; then Barbara had once met the boy outside the house, and the way in which he was hurried out of her sight led to the conviction that this was her child, and Frau Dubois had imprudently betrayed the secret.

From this time Barbara knew that her John had been confided to the care of the valet and his wife. At last Frau Traut had been unable to resist her entreaties, and allowed her to see her son and hold him a short time in her arms.

He was a strong, splendid child, with his mother's thick, curling locks and large blue eyes. Barbara thought that she had never seen a handsomer boy; and not only the Dubois, who had yielded their whole hearts to their nursling, but strangers also admired the magnificent development of this rare child. The young mother saw in him something grander, more perfect than the children of other human beings, even than the two boys whom she had given her husband, although little John usually repulsed her caresses.

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In granting Barbara permission to see her child often, Frau Traut transgressed an explicit command of the Emperor and, to prevent the evil consequences which her sympathy might entail, she allowed the mother to rejoice in the sight of her little son only once a month, and then always for a short time.

During these interviews she was strictly forbidden to bestow even the smallest gift upon the boy.

To-day John had voluntarily approached the stranger to whom he owed his life, but whose passionate caresses at their first meeting had frightened him, to show her the little wooden horse that Adrian had just given him. This had made her happy, and on the way home the memory of her hidden treasure more than once brought a joyous smile to her lips.

At home she first sought her children. Her husband, who had now been appointed mustering officer, was on one of the journeys required by the service, which rarely permitted him to remain long in his own house.

Barbara did not miss him; nay, she was happiest during his absence.

After glancing into the nursery, she retired to her quiet chamber, where her harp stood and the lutes hung which often for hours supplied the place of her lost voice, and sat down at her spinning wheel.

She turned it thoughtfully, but the thread broke, and her hands fell into her lap. Her mind had again found the way to the house in the park and to her John, her own, wonderful, imperial child, and lingered there until from the next room the cry of an infant was heard and a woman's voice singing it to sleep. Frau Lamperi, who had made herself a part of the little household, and beheld in its master the incarnation of every manly virtue, was lulling the baby to rest. Beside it slept another child, a boy two years old. Both were hers, yet, though the infant raised its voice still louder, she remained at the spinning wheel, dreaming on.

In this way, and while playing on the harp and the lutes, her solitude was best endured. Her husband's journeys often led him through the whole Netherlands and the valley of the Rhine as far as Strasbourg and Basle, and her father had returned to Ratisbon.

She had found no new friends in Brussels, and had not endeavoured to gain any.

Loneliness, which she had dreaded in the heyday of her early youth, no longer alarmed her, for quiet reveries and dreams led her back to the time when life had been beautiful, when she had enjoyed the love of the greatest of mortals, and art had given her existence an exquisite consecration.



With the loss of her voice—she was now aware of it—many of the best things in her life had also ceased to exist. Her singing might perhaps have lured back her inconstant lover, and had she come to Brussels possessing the mastery of her voice which was hers during that happy time in May, her life would have assumed a totally different form.

Gombert, who had induced her to move hither, had urged her with the best intentions during their drive to Landshut to change her residence. When he did so, however, Barbara was still connected with the Emperor, and he was animated by the hope that the trouble in her throat would be temporary.

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It would have been easy to throw wide to a singer of her ability the doors of the aristocratic houses which were open to him; for, except his professional comrades, he associated only with the wealthy nobles in the upper part of the city, who needed him for the brilliant entertainments which they understood how to arrange so superbly. The Oranges, Egmont, Aremborg, Brederode, Aerschot, and other heads of the highest nobility in Brabant would have vied with one another to present her to their guests, receive her at their country seats, and invite her to join their riding parties. Where, on the contrary, could he expect to find a friendly reception for the wife of a poor officer belonging to the lower nobility, who was said to have forfeited the Emperor's favour, who could offer nothing to the ear, and to the eye only a peculiar style of beauty, which she could enhance neither by magnificent attire nor by any other arts?

Had she been still the Emperor Charles's favourite, or had he bestowed titles and wealth upon her, more might have been done for her; but as it was, nothing was left of the favour bestowed by the monarch save the stain upon her fair name. Deeply as Gombert regretted it, he could therefore do nothing to make her residence in Brussels more agreeable. He was not even permitted to open his own house to her, since his wife, who was neither more jealous nor more scrupulous than most other wives of artists, positively refused to receive the voiceless singer with the tarnished reputation.

Worthy Appenzelder associated exclusively with men, and thus of her Ratisbon friends not one remained except Massi, the violinist, and the Maltese choir boy, Hannibal Melas.

The little fellow had lost his voice, but had remained in Brussels and, in fact, through Barbara's intercession; for she had ventured to recommend the clever, industrious lad to the Bishop of Arras in a letter which reminded him of his kindness in former days, and the latter had been gracious, and in a cordial reply thanked her for her friendly remembrance. Hannibal had remained in the minister's service and, as he understood several languages and proved trustworthy, was received among his private secretaries.

The violinist Massi remained faithful and, as he became her husband's friend also, he was always a welcome guest in her house.

Her father had returned to Ratisbon. After he had acted as godfather to the oldest boy, Conrad, he could be detained no longer. Homesickness had obtained too powerful a hold upon him.

True, Barbara and her husband did everything in their power to make life in their home pleasant; but he needed the tavern, and there either the carousing was so noisy that it became too much for him, or people often had very violent political discussions about liberty and faith, which he only half understood, though they used the Flemish tongue. And the Danube, the native air, the familiar faces! In short, he could not stay with his children, though he dearly loved his little godson Conrad; and it pleased him to see his

daughter more yielding and ready to render service than ever before, and to watch her husband, who, as the saying went at home, “was ready to let her walk over him.”

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The husband's intention of making the unbending iron pliant was wholly changed; the recruiting officer whom his companions and subordinates knew and feared as one of the sternest of their number, showed himself to Barbara the most yielding of men. The passionate tenderness with which he loved her had only increased with time, and the stern soldier's subjection to her will went so far that, even when he would gladly have expressed disapproval, he usually omitted to do so, because he dreaded to lessen the favour which she showed him in place of genuine love, and which he needed. Besides, she gave him little cause for displeasure; she did her duty, and strove to render his outward life a pleasant one.

Even after her father had left her she remained a wife who satisfied his heart. He had learned the coolness of her nature in his first attempts to woo her in Ratisbon and, as at that time, he whom the service frequently detained from her for long periods regarded it as a merit.

So he wrote her father letters expressing his gratification, and the replies which the captain sent to Brussels were in a similar tone.

Barbara had obtained for him his own house, for which he had longed. He felt comfortable there, and what he lacked in his home he found at the Red Cock or the Black Bear. An elderly Landshut widow, a relative, acted as his housekeeper and provided in the best possible manner for his comfort.

Whoever met the stately mustering officer alone or arm in arm with his beautiful young wife, whose golden hair had grown out again, must have believed him a happy man; and so he would have been had not some singular habits which Barbara possessed made him uneasy. At first the reveries into which she often sank, and which were so unlike her former self, had been still worse. He did not know that the improvement had taken place since she had discovered her John's abode and been permitted sometimes to see him. Barbara's husband and father supposed that the child which she had given to the Emperor was dead; both had placed this interpretation upon her brief statement that it had been taken from her, and afterward delicacy of feeling prevented any other allusion to this painful subject.

Besides this proneness to reverie, Barbara's husband was sometimes disturbed by the carelessness with which she neglected the most important domestic matters if there was an entertainment or exhibition which the Emperor Charles attended; and, finally, there was something in her manner to the children, whom Pyramus loved above all things, which disturbed, incensed, and wounded him, yet which he felt that neither threats nor stern interposition could change.

He possessed no defence against the reveries except a warning or a jesting word. Delight in brilliant spectacles was doubtless natural to her disposition, and as Pyramus not only loved but esteemed her, it was repugnant to his feelings to watch her. Yet

when, nevertheless, he once followed her steps, he had found her, according to her expressed intention, among other women in St. Gudule's Cathedral. Her eyes, which he watched intently, were constantly turned toward the great personages whose presence adorned the festival—the Emperor and Queen Mary of Hungary.

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These expeditions were evidently not to meet a lover, yet from that hour he cherished a conviction, mingled with a bitter sense of resentment, that she went to the festivals which his Majesty attended in order to see the man whom she had once loved, and whose image even now she could not wholly efface from her imagination, perhaps also from her heart.

For her manner to the children, on the contrary, he could find no plausible explanation. Her love for them was unmistakable. Yet what was the meaning of the compassionate manner with which she treated them, talked to them, spoke of them, until it nearly drove him frantic? She often treated the healthy, merry older boy as if he was ill and needed comfort, and the pretty infant in the cradle was addressed in the same way.

If he summoned up his courage and openly reproved her, she always answered in general terms, such as: "What do you mean? Are we not all born to suffer?" or, "Shall we envy them because they have entered life to endure pain and to die?"

Not until Pyramus, with sorrowful emotion, entreated her not to speak of the children as if they had been given to them for a punishment and not for a joy, she imposed a certain degree of constraint upon herself and changed her manner of speech; yet the expression of her eyes revealed that she felt no really glad, unconstrained joy in her sons.

Though she denied it, she knew how to explain this manner to herself; for, after her attention had been directed to it, she secretly admitted that the sight of the two dear children who were wholly hers always reminded her of the third who had been taken from her, whom she was permitted to see very rarely, and only in secret, yet who, beside the others, seemed like a young lion beside modest lambs.

She cherished no desire for a new love, though the lukewarm blending of gratitude and good will which she bestowed upon her husband did not even remotely deserve this lofty name.

There was no lack of gallants in Brussels who noticed and were attracted by her, but whoever knew or had heard of Pyramus Kogel avoided interfering with his rights; for he was numbered among the best swordsmen in Brussels, and the air with which the tender-hearted husband wore his long rapier was decidedly threatening.

Besides, Barbara herself also knew how to protect herself against any intrusiveness with haughty sharpness.

To-day she was especially glad that Pyramus was absent on an inspecting tour. She had gratefully enjoyed the meeting with her John. Never had the light of his blue eyes seemed so sunny, his head with its fair curls so angelic in its beauty. His voice, too, had enraptured her by its really bewitching melody. The maternal gift of song would

certainly descend to him, and perhaps it was allotted to the Emperor's son to amaze his generation by the presence of hero and singer in one person, like a second King David.

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Twilight had already shadowed the paths when she left the Dubois house, and on her way home she saw the Emperor approaching. She had slipped behind a statue as quickly as possible, and he could scarcely have recognised her, for the gloaming had already merged into partial darkness; but the mere thought of having been so near him quickened the pulsation of her heart.

The little gentleman at his side with the stiffly erect bearing and pompous walk was his son Philip, who was now visiting his father in Brussels, and expected to leave in a few days. How insignificant was the figure of the heir of so many crowns! How the brother whom she had given to his imperial father would some day tower above him!

She again imagined all these things in the quiet of her room. The thought of this child cheered her heart, but it contracted again as she remembered the series of bitter humiliations which she had experienced in Brussels. Among the courtiers whom she had known so well in Ratisbon not one vouchsafed her anything more than a passing greeting; and the Queen of Hungary, to whom she would gladly have poured out her heart, had refused her repeated entreaties for an audience.

CHAPTER XI.

After the short walk in the park of his palace, during which Barbara had met him in the dusk, the Emperor Charles had dined with his son Philip and the Queen of Hungary. Now he entered his spacious study.

His feet were refusing their support more and more, and the fingers of his right hand, which the gout was now crippling, found it hard to grasp his cane.

He sank back in his arm-chair exhausted, closed his eyes, and laid his hand upon the clever pointed head of the greyhound which lay at his feet.

The short walk and the fiery wine which he had again enjoyed in abundance at dinner had increased the pain from which he was now never free, day or night, and it was some time ere Adrian could succeed in propping his infirm body comfortably.

At last Charles passed his handkerchief across his perspiring brow, and called to the majordomo.

Quijada eagerly approached, and the valet was respectfully leaving the room, but the Emperor's summons stopped him.

"I have something," Charles began, no longer able to maintain complete control over his voice, which was sometimes interrupted by the shortness of breath that had recently attacked him, "to say to you also—"

Here he hesitated, pointed to the window which overlooked the park, then, with a keen glance at the valet's face, continued:

"A ghost wanders about there. I have already seen it several times under the trees. True, it avoided approaching me. What still remains useful in this miserable body! But my eyes are sharp yet, and I recognised the spectre—it is the Ratisbon singer."

"Your Majesty knows," replied Quijada, "what befell her after the birth of the child, and that she is now living here in Brussels; but I was strictly forbidden to mention her name in your Majesty's presence."

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"That command closed my lips also," said the valet.

"But what the hearing rejected forced itself upon the sight," remarked Charles, gazing fixedly into vacancy. "Wherever I appear in public I see this woman, always this woman! It is not only the basilisk's eye that has constraining power. I can not help perceiving her, yet I have as little desire to meet her gaze as to encounter vanity, worldly pleasure, folly, sin."

"Then," cried Quijada angrily, "it will be advisable to transfer her husband, who is in your Majesty's service, from here to Andalusia or to the New World."

"As if she would accompany him!" exclaimed the monarch with a scornful laugh. "No, my friend. This woman did not marry for her own pleasure, but to cause me sorrow or indignation. She succeeded, too, to a certain extent; but I do not war with women, least of all with one who is so unhappy. If we send her husband—who, moreover, is a useful fellow—across the ocean, she will stay here in Brussels, and we shall fare like the maid-servants who killed the cocks, and were then waked by the mistress of the house still earlier than before. Besides, one who earnestly seeks his true salvation will not remove from his path such a living memento, such a walking monitor of past sins and follies; and, finally, this woman is not wholly wrong in deeming herself an unusual person, cruelly as Heaven has destroyed her best gift. On no account—you hear me—shall she be wounded or injured for my sake so long as she reminds me only by her eyes that in happier days we were closely connected. But to-day the ghost ventured to draw nearer to me than is seemly, and I recognise the object. It entered the park, not on my account, but the boy's—and, Adrian, from your house. I demand the whole truth! Did she find the way to the boy, and was your wife, who is usually a prudent woman, unwise enough to allow her to feast her eyes upon him?"

"She is the child's mother," the valet answered gently, "and your Majesty knows—"

"I know," Charles interrupted the faithful attendant in a sterner tone than he commonly used to him, "that you were most positively forbidden to permit any one to approach the boy, least of all the person who gazes at him with greedy eyes, and from whom might proceed measureless perils. Your wife, Adrian, who is tenderly attached to the child, will now suffer the most painfully for the disobedience. It must go away from here, go at once, and to a distant country—to Spain. If politics and Heaven permit, I shall soon follow.—You, Luis, will now arrange with Adrian the best plan for the removal. The work must be accomplished in the utmost secrecy. The boy shall grow up in the wholesome air of the country. No one who surrounds him must be permitted even to suspect to whom he owes his life. This child shall be simple in his habits, devout, and modest, far from flattery and spoiling, among other lads of plain families, who

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know nothing of heresy and court follies. This innocent child's soul, at least, shall not be corrupted at its root. I consecrated him to the Saviour, and as a pure sacrifice he must receive him from his father's hand. I have given him a beautiful charge. In the monastery his prayers will remove the guilt of him who gave him life. The pardon for which the mother refused to strive, the son, consecrated to Jesus Christ our Lord, will struggle to obtain."

With uplifted gaze he interrupted himself. His eyes flashed with a fiery light, and his voice gained an imperious tone, which showed no trace of the asthmatic trouble that had just affected it as he added: "But the secret which even the reckless mother has hitherto known how to guard must be kept. Not even your wife, Luis, not even our sister, Queen Mary, must learn what is being accomplished."

Then he added more quietly: "The opportunity to take the boy to Spain is favourable. Our son, Don Philip, will return in three weeks to Valladolid. The child can be carried in his train. It will disappear among the throng, for an actual army forms the tail of the comet. I will hear your proposal to-morrow. Who is to take charge of him on the way? Where can a suitable shelter for the boy be found in Spain?"

This announcement fell upon the valet like a thunderbolt, for little John, who regarded him and his wife as his parents, had become as dear to the childless couple as if he was their own. To part from the beautiful, frank, merry boy would darken Frau Traut's whole life. He, Adrian, had warned her, but she had been unable to resist the entreaties of the sorely punished mother. Cautiously as Barbara's visits had been managed, the infirm monarch's eye had maintained its keenness of vision here also.

Now his wife must pay dearly for her weakness and disobedience. Frau Traut was threatened, too, with another loss. Massi, the most intimate friend of their house, also expected to return to Spain in the Infant Philip's train, to spend the remainder of his days there in peace. Permission to depart had been granted to him a few hours before.

Little John was fond of this frequent visitor of his foster-parents, who could whistle so beautifully and knew how to play for him upon a blade of grass or a comb; but this was not the only reason which made Adrian think of giving the Emperor's son to the musician's care for the journey to Spain, where Massi's wife and daughter were awaiting his return at Leganes, near Madrid. In this healthfully located village lived a pastor and a sacristan of whom the musician had spoken, and who perhaps later might take charge of the child's education.

Adrian informed Don Luis and then the monarch of all this, and as Quijada knew Massi to be a trustworthy man, and described him to his royal master, Charles entered into negotiations with him.

The result was that a formal compact was concluded between Dubois and the musician, which granted the violinist considerable emoluments, but bound him and his family by oath to maintain the most absolute secrecy concerning the child's origin. Moreover, Massi himself knew nothing about the boy's parents except that they belonged to the most aristocratic circles, and he was inclined to believe little John to be Quijada's son.

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The sovereign himself examined the agreement, and at its close made Frau Traut take a special oath to preserve the most absolute secrecy about everything concerning the boy to every one, even Barbara.

What Adrian had expected happened. The Emperor's command to take her darling from her affected his wife most painfully. With eyes reddened by weeping, and an aching heart, she awaited the day of departure.

On the evening before the journey she was sitting by the child's couch to enjoy the sight of him as much as possible. Wholly absorbed in gazing at his infantile grace and patrician beauty, she did not hear the door open, and started in terror at the sound of footsteps close behind her.

Her husband had ushered the Emperor and Quijada, on whose arm he was leaning, into the nursery without announcing his entrance. She involuntarily pressed her finger on her lips to intimate that the child must not be roused from its slumber; but the gesture was instantly followed by the profound bow due to the sovereign, and then, with tears in her eyes, she held the light so that it might fall upon the face of the lovely child.

A flush tinged the livid features of the invalid, prematurely aged monarch, and at a wave of his hand the foster-mother left him and his companion alone with the little one. Charles gazed suspiciously around the small, neat room.

Not until he had assured himself that he was alone did he look closely at the son who lay with flushed cheeks on the white pillows of his little bed in the sound slumber of childhood.

Rarely had he seen a more beautiful boy. How finely chiselled were these childish features, how thick and wavy the curls that clustered around his head! The golden lustre which shone from them had also brightened his mother's hair. And the smile on the cherry lips of the slightly open mouth. That, too, was familiar to him. The child had inherited it from Barbara. Memories which had long since paled in his soul, oppressed by suffering and disappointment, regained their vanished forms and colours, and for the first time in many months a smile hovered upon his lips.

What an exquisite image of the Creator was this child! and he might call it his own, and if, as he intended, it grew up an innocent, happy lad, it would also become a genuine man, with a warm heart and simple, upright nature, not a moving marble figure, inflated by pompous self-conceit, incapable of any deep feeling, any untrammelled emotion, like his son Philip. Then it might happen that from love, from a real living impulse of the heart, he would fall upon his neck; then——

He stretched both hands towards the little bed and, obeying a mighty impulse of paternal affection, bent toward the boy to kiss him. But ere his lips touched the child's

he again gazed around him like a thief who is afraid of being caught. At last he yielded to the longing which urged him, and kissed little John—his, yes, his own son—first on his high, open brow, and then on his red lips.

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How sweet it was! Yet while he confessed this a painful emotion blended with the pleasure.

He had again thought of Barbara, of her first kiss and the other joys of the fairest May-time of his life, and the anxious fear stole upon him that he might give sin a power over his soul which, after undergoing a heavy penance, he thought he had broken.

Nothing, nothing at all, he now said to himself, ought to bind him to the woman whom he had effaced from the book of his life as unworthy, rebellious, lost to salvation; and, in a totally different mood, he again gazed at the child. It already wore the semblance of an angel in the gracious Virgin's train, and it should be dedicated to her and her divine Son.

Then the boy drew his little arm from under his head.

How strong he was! how superbly the chest of this child not yet four years old already arched! This bud, when it had bloomed to manhood, might prove itself, as he himself had done in his youth, the stronger among the strong. He carefully examined the harmoniously developed little muscles. What a knight this child promised to become! Surely it was hardly created for quiet prayer and the inactive peace of the cloister! He was still free to dispose of the boy. If he should intrust his physical development to the reliable Quijada, skilled in every knightly art, and to Count Lanoi, famed as a rider and judge of horses; confide the training of his mind and soul to the Bishop of Arras, the learned Frieslander Viglius, or any other clever, strictly religious man, he might become a second Roland and Bayard—nay, if a crown fell to his lot, he might rival his great-grandfather, the Emperor Max, and—in many a line he, too, had done things worthy of imitation—him, his father. The possession of this child would fill his darkened life with sunshine, his heart, paralyzed by grief and disappointment, with fresh pleasure in existence throughout the brief remainder of his earthly pilgrimage. If he, the father, acknowledged him and aided him to become a happy, perhaps a great man, this lovely creature might some day be a brilliant star in the firmament of his age.

Here he paused. The question, "For how long?" forced itself upon him. He, too, during the short span of youth had been a hero and a victorious knight. With secure confidence he had undertaken to establish for himself and his family a sovereignty of the world which should include the state and the Church. "More, farther," had been his motto, and to what stupendous successes it had led him! Three years before he had routed at Muhlberg his most powerful rivals. As prisoners they still felt his avenging hand.

And now? At this hour?

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The hope of the sovereignty of the world lay shattered at his feet. The wish to obtain the German imperial crown for his heir and successor, Philip, had proved unattainable. It was destined for his brother, Ferdinand of Austria, and afterward for the latter's son, Maximilian. To lead the defeated German Protestants back to the bosom of the Holy Church appeared more and more untenable. Here in the Netherlands the heretics, in consequence of the Draconian severity of the regulations which he himself had issued, had been hung and burned by hundreds, and hitherto he had gained nothing but the hatred of the nation which he preferred to all others. His bodily health was destroyed, his mind had lost its buoyancy, and he was now fifty years old. What lay before him was a brief pilgrimage—perchance numbering only a few years—here on earth, and the limitless eternity which would never end. How small and trivial was the former in comparison with the latter, which had no termination! And would he desire to rear for the space of time that separates the grave from the cradle the child for whom he desired the best blessings, instead of securing for him salvation for the never-ceasing period of eternal life?

No! This beauty, this strength, should be consecrated to no vain secular struggle, but to Heaven. The boy when he matured to a correct judgment would thank him for this decision, which was really no easy one for his worldly vanity.

Then he reverted to the wish with which he had approached the child's couch. The son, from gratitude, should take upon himself for his father and, if he desired, also for his refractory mother, what both had neglected—the care for their eternal welfare—in prayer and penance.

By consecrating him to Heaven and rearing him for a peaceful existence in God, far from the vain pleasures of the world and the court he had done his best for his son and, as if he feared that the sight of his beautiful, strong boy might shake his resolution, he turned away from him and called Quijada.

While Charles in a fervent, silent prayer commended John to the favour of Heaven, the most faithful of his attendants was gazing at the sovereign's son. Hitherto Heaven had denied him the joy of possessing a child. How he would have clasped this lovely creature to his heart if it had been his! What a pleasure it would have been to transmit everything that was excellent and clever in himself to this child! To devote it to a monastic life was acting against the purpose of the Providence that had dowered it with such strength and beauty.

The Emperor could not, ought not to persist in this intention.

While he was supporting his royal master through the dark park he ventured to repeat what Adrian and his wife had told him of the strength and fearlessness of the little John, and then to remark what rare greatness this boy promised to attain as the son of such a father.

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“The highest of all!” replied Charles firmly. “He only is truly great who in his soul feels his own insignificance and deems trivial all the splendour and the highest honours which life can offer; and to this genuine greatness, Luis, I intend to rear this young human plant whose existence is due to weakness and sin.”

Quijada again summoned up his courage, and observed:

“Yet, as the son of my august ruler, this child may make claims which are of this world.”

“What claims?” cried the Emperor suspiciously. “His birth?—the law gives him none. What earthly possessions may perhaps come to him he will owe solely to my favour, and it would choose for him the only right way. Claims—mark this well, my friend—claims to the many things which will remain of my greatness and power when I have closed my pilgrimage beneath the sun, can be made by one person only—Don Philip, my oldest son and lawful heir.”

Not until after he had rested in his study did Charles resume the interrupted conversation, and say:

“It may be that this boy will grow up into a more brilliant personality than my son Philip; but you Castilians and faithful servants of the Holy Church ought to rejoice that Heaven has chosen my lawful son for your king, for he is a thorough Spaniard, and, moreover, cautious, deliberate, industrious, devout, and loyal to duty. True, he knows not how to win love easily, but he possesses other means of maintaining what is his and still awaits him in the future. My pious son will not let the gallows become empty in this land of heretical exaltation. Had the Germans put him in my place, he would have become a gravedigger in their evangelical countries. He never gave me what is called filial affection, not even just now in the parting hour; yet he is an obedient son who understands his father. Instead of a heart, I have found in him other qualities which will render him capable of keeping his heritage in these troubled times and preserving the Holy Church from further injury. If I were weaker than I am, and should rear yonder splendid boy, who charmed you also, Luis, under my own eyes with paternal affection, many an unexpected joy might grow for me; but I still have an immense amount of work to do, and therefore lack time to toy with a child. It is my duty to replace this boy's claims, which I can not recognise, with higher ones, and I will fulfill it.”

CHAPTER XII.

During this conversation the violinist Massi had been to take leave of Barbara. Pyramus, after a short stay at home, had been obliged to depart again to an inspection in Lowen, and the musician was sorry not to find his friend. He did not know to whom the child that had been intrusted to his care belonged, and, as he had bound himself by

a solemn oath to maintain secrecy toward every one, he did not utter a word to Barbara about the boy and the obligations which he had undertaken.

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The parting was a sad one to the young wife, for in Massi she lost not only a tried friend, but as it were a portion of her former life. He had been a witness of the fairest days which Fate had granted her; he had heard her sing when she had been justified in feeling proud of her art; and he had been intimate with Wolf Hartschwert, whom she remembered with affectionate interest, though he had only informed her once in a brief letter that he was prospering in Villagarcia and his new position. While with tearful eyes she bade Massi farewell, she gave him messages of remembrance to Wolf; and the violinist, no less agitated than herself, promised to deliver them. He was hopefully anticipating a cheerful evening of life in the midst of his family. Existence had promised Barbara higher things, but she seemed to have found the power to be content. At least he had heard no complaint from her lips, and her husband had often told him of the happiness which he had obtained through her in marriage. So he could leave her without anxiety; but she, even in the hour of parting, was too proud to offer him a glimpse of her desolate life, whose fairest ornaments were memories.

When he left her the young wife felt still poorer than before, and during the sleepless night which in imagination she had spent with her imperial child in the Dubois house, and in the days of splendour and misery at Ratisbon, she determined to clasp once more the hand of her departing friend when he set out with the Infant Philip's train.

Although it was to start early in the morning, she was in the square in ample time, partly because she hoped to see the Emperor in the distance.

The throng that followed Philip really did resemble an army.

Barbara had already often seen the short, slender 'Infant', with his well-formed, fair head and light, pointed beard, who held himself so stiffly erect, and carried his head as high as if he considered no one over whom his glance wandered worthy of so great an honour.

It seemed strange to her, too, how well this man, naturally so insignificant in person, succeeded in giving his small figure the appearance of majestic dignity. But how totally unlike him his father must have looked in his youth! There was something austere, repellent, chilling, in the gaze which, while talking with others, he usually fixed upon the ground, and, in fact, in the whole aspect of the son. How brightly and frankly, on the contrary, his father's eyes, in spite of all his suffering, could sparkle even now! How easy it would be for him to win hearts still!

If he would only come!

But this time he did not accompany his son. Philip was on horseback, but a magnificent empty coach in the procession would receive him as soon as he left Brussels.

He wished to present a gallant appearance in the saddle on his departure, and a more daintily, carefully clad cavalier could scarcely be imagined.

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His garments fitted like a glove, and were of faultless fineness. Queen Mary, the regent, rode at his side, and the Brabant nobles, the heads of the Brussels citizens, and his Spanish courtiers formed his retinue. The leaders of the Netherland nobility were figures very unlike in stature and size to Philip; but he could vie in haughty majesty with any of them. Not a limb, not an expression lacked his control a single instant. He desired to display to these very gentlemen in every inch of his person his superior power and grandeur, and especially not to be inferior to them in chivalrous bearing.

To a certain extent he succeeded in doing so; but his aunt, Queen Mary, seemed unwilling to admit it, for just when he showed his arrogant dignity most plainly a smile by no means expressive of reverence hovered around the mouth of the frank royal huntress.

Barbara had soon wearied of gazing at the magnificent garments and horses of these grandees. As Charles did not appear, the only person in the endless procession who attracted her attention was Massi, whom she soon discovered on his insignificant little horse; but he did not heed her eager signals, for he was talking earnestly to the occupant of the large litter borne by two mules that moved beside him.

Barbara tried to force her way to him, and when she succeeded her cheeks suddenly burned hotly, and a swift dread checked her progress; for from the great window of the litter a wonderfully beautiful little head, covered with fair curls, looked forth, and two little arms were extended toward the violinist.

How gleefully this child's eyes sparkled! how his whole little figure seemed instinct with joy and life while gazing at the horseman at the side of the street who was having a hard struggle with his refractory stallion!

No one knew this boy better than she, for it was her own son, the imperial child she had given to the Emperor. At the same time she thought of her other two boys, and her face again wore a compassionate expression. Not they, but this little prince from fairyland was her first-born, her dearest, her true child.

But where were they taking her John? What had Massi to do with him? Why should the boy be in Philip's train?

There was only one explanation. Her child was being conveyed to Spain.

Had the father heard that she had discovered his abode, and did he wish to remove it from the mother whom he hated?

Was it being taken there merely that it might grow up a Castilian?

Did Charles desire to rear it there to the grandeur and splendour for whose sake she had yielded him?

Yet whatever was in view for John, he would be beyond her reach as soon as the ship to which he was being conveyed weighed anchor.

But she would not, could not do without seeing him! The light of day would be darkened for her if she could no longer hope to gaze at least now and then into his blue eyes and to hear the sound of his clear, childish tones.

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"This too! this too!" she hissed, as if frantic; and as the guards forced her out of the procession she followed it farther and farther through the heat and dust, as though attracted by some magnetic power.

Her feet moved involuntarily while her gaze rested on the litter, and she caught a glimpse sometimes of a golden curl, sometimes of a little hand, sometimes of the whole marvellously beautiful fair head.

Not until the train stopped and the lords, ladies, and gentlemen who were escorting Philip turned their horses and left him did she recollect herself. To follow these horsemen, coaches, carts, litters, and pedestrians just as she was would have been madness. Her place was at home with her husband and children. Ten times she repeated this to herself and prepared to turn back; but the force which drew her to her child was stronger than the warning voice of reason.

At any rate, she must speak to Massi and learn where he was taking the boy. He had not yet seen her; but now, as the train stopped, she forced her way to him.

Amazed at meeting her, he returned her greeting, and granted her request to let her speak with him a few minutes,

Greatly perplexed, he swung himself from the saddle, flung his bridle to a groom, and followed her under a mountain-ash tree which stood by the roadside. Barbara had used the time of his dismounting to gaze at her child again, and to impress his image upon her soul. She dared not call to him, for she had sworn to keep the secret, and the boy, who so often repulsed her eager advances, would perhaps have turned from her if she had gone close to him and attempted to kiss him through the window.

This reserve was so hard for her that her eyes were full of tears when Massi approached to ask what she desired. She did not give him time for even a single question, but with frantic haste inquired who the boy in the litter was, and where he intended to take him.

But her friend, usually so obliging, curtly and positively refused to give her any information. Then forming a hasty resolve, Barbara besought him if it were possible to take her with him to his home. Life in her own house had become unendurable. If a nurse was wanted for this child, no matter to whom it might belong, let him give her the place. She would devote herself to the boy day and night, more faithfully than any mother, and ask no wages for it, only she would and must go to Spain.

Massi had listened to her rapid words in warm; nay, he was thoroughly startled. The fire that flashed from Barbara's blue eyes, the anguish which her quivering features expressed, suggested the thought that she had lost her reason, and with sympathizing kindness he entreated her to think of his friend her husband, and her splendid boys at

home. But when she persisted that she must go to Spain, he remembered that a bond of love had once united her to his friend Wolf Hartschwert, and in bewilderment he asked if it was the knight who attracted her there.

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"If you think so, yes," she exclaimed. "Only I must go to Spain, I must go to Spain!"

Again Massi was seized with the conviction that he was dealing with a madwoman, and as the procession started he only held out his hand to her once more, earnestly entreated her to calm herself, sent his remembrances to her husband and children, and then swung himself into the saddle.

Barbara remained standing by the side of the road as if turned to stone, gazing after the travellers until the dust which they raised concealed them from her gaze. Then she shook her head and slowly returned to Brussels.

Pyramus would come home at noon. Lamperi and the maid might provide the meal and attend to the rest of the household affairs. It was far past twelve, and it would still be a long time before she went home, for she must, yes, must go up to the palace park and to the Dubois house to inquire where her soul must seek her child in future.

Her feet could scarcely support her when she entered the dwelling.

Startled at her appearance, Frau Traut compelled the exhausted woman to sit down. How dishevelled, nay, wild, Barbara, who was usually so well dressed, looked! But she, too, that day did not present her usual dainty appearance, and her eyes and face were reddened by weeping. Barbara instantly noticed this, and it confirmed her conjecture. This woman, too, was bewailing the child which the cruel despot had torn from her.

"He is on the way to Spain!" she cried to the other. "There is nothing to conceal here."

Frau Traut started, and vehemently forbade Barbara to say even one word more about the boy if she did not wish her to show her the door and close it against her forever.

But this was too much for the haughty mother of the Emperor's son. The terrible agitation of her soul forced an utterance, and in wild rebellion she swore to the terrified woman that she would burden herself with the sin of perjury and break the silence to which she had bound herself if she did not confess to her where Massi was taking her boy. She would neither seek him nor strive to get possession of him, but if she could not imagine where and with what people he was living, she would die of longing. She would have allowed herself to be abused and trodden under foot in silence, but she would not suffer herself to be deprived of the last remnant of her maternal rights.

Here Adrian himself entered the room; but Barbara was by no means calmed by his appearance, and with a fresh outburst of wrath shrieked to his face that he might choose whether he would confide to her, the mother, where his master was taking the child or see her rush from here to the market place and call out to the people what she had promised, for the boy's sake, to hold secret.

The valet saw that she would keep her word and, to prevent greater mischief, he informed her that the violinist Massi was commissioned to take her son to Spain to rear him in his wife's native place until his Majesty should alter his plans concerning him.

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This news produced a great change in the tortured mother. With affectionate, repentant courtesy, she thanked the Dubois couple and, when Frau Traut saw that she was trying to rearrange her hair and dress, she helped her, and in doing so one woman confessed to the other what she had lost in the child.

Adrian's yielding had pleased Barbara. Besides, during the years of her intercourse with Massi she had heard many things about his residence—nay, every member of his household—and therefore she could now form a picture of his future life.

So she had grown quieter, though by no means perfectly calm.

Her husband, who must have already returned from his journey, and had not found her at home, would scarcely receive her pleasantly, but she cared little for that if only he had not been anxious about her, and in his joy at seeing her again did not clasp her tenderly in his arms. That would have been unbearable to-day. She would have liked it best if Massi would really have taken her with him as her child's nurse to Leganes, his residence. Thereby she would have reached the place where she thought she belonged—by the side of the child, in whom she beheld everything that still rendered her life worth living.

Nevertheless, on her way home she thought with maternal anxiety of her two boys; but the nearer she approached the unassuming quarter of the city where she lived the more vividly she felt that she did not belong there, but in the part of Brussels whence she came.

Her own home was far more richly and prettily furnished than her old one in Red Cock Street, but it did not yet satisfy her desires, and she did not feel content in it. To-day a slight feeling of aversion even came over her as she thought of it.

Perhaps the best plan would have been for her to put an end to this misery, and, instead of returning, make a pilgrimage to Compostella in Spain, and while doing so try to find her John in Leganes. But even while yielding to these thoughts Barbara felt how sinful they were. Did not her little house look attractive and pretty? It was certainly the prettiest and neatest in the neighbourhood, and as she drew nearer pleasure at the thought of seeing her children again awoke. An unkind reception from her husband would have been painful, after all.

But she was to receive no greeting at all from him. Pyramus had been detained on the way. Barbara felt this as a friendly dispensation of Providence. But something else spoiled her return home. Conrad, her oldest boy, two-year-old Conrad, who was already walking about, beginning to prattle prettily, and who could show the affection of his little heart with such coaxing tenderness, came toward her crying, and when she took him up rested his little burning head against her cheek.

The little fellow's forehead and throat were aching.

Some illness was coming on.

The child himself asked to be put in his little bed, the physician was summoned, and the next morning the scarlet fever broke out.

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When the father returned, the youngest child had also been attacked by the same fell disease, and now a time came when Barbara, during many an anxious hour of the night, forgot that in distant Spain she possessed another child for whose sake she had been ready to rob these two dear little creatures, who so greatly needed her, of their mother. This purpose weighed upon her conscience like the heaviest of sins while she was fighting against Death, which seemed to be already stretching his hand toward the oldest boy.

When one evening the physician expressed the fear that the child would not survive the approaching night, she prayed with passionate fervour for his preservation, and meanwhile it seemed as though a secret voice cried: "Vow to the gracious Virgin not to give the Emperor's son a higher place in your heart than the children of the man to whom a holy sacrament unites you! Then you will first make yourself worthy of the dear imperilled life in yonder little bed."

Thrice, four times, and oftener still, Barbara raised her hands to utter this vow, but ere she did so she said to herself that never, never could she wholly fulfil it, and, to save herself from a fresh sin, she did not make it.

But with what anxiety she now gazed at the glowing face of the fevered boy whenever the warning voice again rose!

At midnight the little sufferer's eyes seemed to her to shine with a glassy look, and when, pleading for help, he raised them to her, her heart melted, and in fervent, silent prayer she cried to the Queen of Heaven, "Spare me this child, make it well, and I will not think of the Emperor's son more frequently nor, if I can compass it, with warmer love than this dear creature and his little brother in the cradle."

Scarcely had these words died on her lips than she again felt that she had promised more than she had the power to perform. Yet she repeated the vow several times.

During the whole terrible night her husband stood beside her, obeying every sign, eagerly and skilfully helping in many ways; and when in the morning the doctor appeared she was firmly convinced that her vow had saved the sick boy's life. The crisis was over.

Henceforth, whenever the yearning for the distant John seized upon her with special power, she thought of that night, and loaded the little sons near her with tokens of the tenderest love.

On that morning of commencing convalescence her husband's grateful kiss pleased her.

True, during the time that followed, Pyramus succeeded no better than before in warming his wife's cold heart, but Barbara omitted many things which had formerly clouded his happiness.

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The Emperor Charles had again gone to foreign countries, and therefore festivals and shows no longer attracted her. She rarely allowed herself a visit to Frau Dubois, but, above all, she talked with her boys and about them like every other mother. It even seemed to Pyramus as though her old affection for the Emperor Charles was wholly dead; for when, in November of the following year, agitated to the very depths of his being, he brought her the tidings that the Emperor had been surprised and almost captured at Innsbruck by Duke Maurice of Saxony, who owed him the Elector's hat, and had only escaped the misfortune by a hurried flight to Carinthia, he merely saw a smile, which he did not know how to interpret, on her lips. But little as Barbara said about this event, her mind was often occupied with it.

In the first place, it recalled to her memory the dance under the lindens at Prebrunn.

Did it not seem as if her ardent royal partner of those days had become her avenger?

Yet it grieved her that the man whose greatness and power it had grown a necessity for her to admire had suffered so deep a humiliation and, as at the time of the May festival under the Ratisbon lindens, the sympathy of her heart belonged to him to whom she had apparently preferred the treacherous Saxon duke.

The treaty of Passau, which soon followed his flight, was to impose upon the monarch things scarcely less hard to bear; for it compelled him to allow the Protestants in Germany the free exercise of their religion, and to release his prisoners, the Elector John Frederick of Saxony and the Landgrave Philip of Hesse.

Whatever befell the sovereign she brought into connection with herself. Charles's motto had now become unattainable for him, as since her loss of voice it had been for her. Her heart bled unseen, and his misfortune inflicted new wounds upon it. How he, toward whom the whole world looked, and whose sensitive soul endured with so much difficulty the slightest transgression of his will and his inclination, would recover from the destruction of the most earnest, nay, the most sacred aspirations of a whole life, was utterly incomprehensible to her. To restore the unity of religion had been as warm a desire of his heart as the cultivation of singing had been cherished by hers, and the treaty of Passau ceded to the millions of German Protestants the right to remain separated from the Catholic Church. This must utterly cloud, darken, poison his already joyless existence. Spite of the wrong he had done her, how gladly, had she not been lost to art, she would now have tried upon him its elevating, consoling power!

From her old confessor, her husband, and others she learned that Charles scarcely paid any further heed to the political affairs of the German nation, which had once been so important to him; and with intense indignation she heard the fellow-countrymen whom her husband brought to the house declare that, in her German native land, Charles was now as bitterly hated as he had formerly been loved and revered.

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The imperial crown would lapse to his brother; Ferdinand's son, Maximilian, now Charles's son-in-law, was destined to succeed his father, while the Infant Philip must in future be content with the sovereignty of Spain, the Netherlands, Charles's Italian possessions, and the New World.

For years Barbara had believed that she hated him, but now, when the bitterest envy could have desired nothing more cruel, with all the warmth of her passionate heart she made his suffering her own, and it filled her with shame and resentment against herself that she, too, had more than once desired to see her own downfall revenged on him.

Her soul was again drawn toward the sorely punished man more strongly than she would have deemed possible a short time before and, after his return to Brussels, she gazed with an aching heart at the ashen-gray face of the sufferer, marked by lines of deep sorrow.

Now he really did resemble a broken old man. Barbara rarely mingled with the people, but she sometimes went with her husband and several acquaintances outside the gate, or heard from the few intimate friends whom she had made, the neighbours, and the peddlers who came to her house, with what cruel harshness the heretics were treated.

When the monarch, it was often said, was no longer the Charles to whom the provinces owed great benefits and who had won many hearts, but his Spanish son, Philip, the chains would be broken, and this shameful bloodshed would be stopped; but her husband declared such predictions idle boasting, and Barbara willingly believed him because she wished that he might be right.

In the officer's eyes all heretics deserved death, and he agreed with Barbara that the Emperor Charles's wisdom took the right course in all cases.

His son Philip was obedient to his father, and would certainly continue to wield the sceptre according to his wishes.

The breath of liberty, which was beginning to stir faintly in the provinces through which he so often travelled, could not escape Pyramus's notice, but he saw in it only the mutinous efforts of shameless rebels and misguided men, who deserved punishment. The quiet seclusion in which Barbara lived rendered it easy to win her over to her husband's view of this noble movement; besides, it was directed against the unhappy man whom she would willingly have seen spared any fresh anxiety, and who had proved thousands of times how much he preferred the Netherlands to any other of his numerous kingdoms.

Hitherto Barbara had troubled herself very little about political affairs, and her interest in them died completely when a visitor called who threw them, as well as everything else, wholly into the shade.

CHAPTER XIII.

Wolf Hartschwert had come to Brussels and sought Barbara.

Her husband was attending to the duties of his office in the Rhine country when she received her former lover. Had Pyramus been present, he might perhaps have considered the knight a less dangerous opponent than seven years before, for a great change had taken place in his outer man. The boyish appearance which at that time still clung to him had vanished and, by constant intercourse with the Castilian nobility, he had acquired a manly, self-assured bearing perfectly in harmony with his age and birth.

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As he sat opposite to Barbara for the first time, she could not avert her eyes from him and, with both his hands clasped in hers, she let him tell her of his journey to Brussels and his efforts to find her in the great city. Meanwhile she scarcely heeded the purport of his words; it was enough to feel the influence exerted by the tone of his voice, and to be reminded by his features and his every gesture of something once dear to her.

He appeared like the living embodiment of the first beautiful days of her youth, and her whole soul was full of gratitude that he had sought her; while he, too, had the same experience, though his former passion had long since changed into a totally different feeling. He thought her beautiful, but her permitting their hands to remain clasped so long now agitated him no more than if she had been a dear, long-absent sister.

When Barbara was told who awaited her in the sitting room and, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, clad in a light morning gown which was very becoming to her, had hastened to greet him, his heart had indeed throbbed faster, and it seemed as though an unexpected Easter morning awaited the old buried love; but she had scarcely uttered his name and exchanged a few words of greeting in a voice which, though no longer hoarse, still lacked melody, than the flood of newly awakened emotions swiftly ebbed again.

She was still only half the Wawerl of former days, whose musical voice had helped to make her the queen of his heart. So he had soon regained the calmness which, in Spain and on the journey here, he had expected to test at their meeting. Even the last trace of a deeper emotion passed away when she told him of her husband, her children, and her gray-haired father in Ratisbon, for the hasty, almost reluctant manner with which this was done perplexed and displeased him. True, he could not know that from the first moment of their meeting her one desire had been to obtain news of her stolen son. Everything else appeared trivial in comparison. And what constraint she was forced to impose upon herself when, not hearing her cautious introductory question, he told her about Villagarcia, his peerless mistress, Doha Magdalena de Ulloa, and his musical success! Not until he said that during the winter he would be occupied in training the boy choir at Valladolid did she approach her goal by inquiring about the welfare of the violinist Massi.

Both he and his family were in excellent health, Wolf replied. Rest in his little house at Leganes seemed to have fairly rejuvenated him.

Now Barbara herself mentioned the boy whom Massi had taken to Spain in the train of the Infant Don Philip.

How this affected Wolf!

He started, not only in surprise, but in actual alarm, and eagerly demanded to know who had spoken to her about this child in connection with the violinist.

Barbara now said truthfully that she had seen Massi with her own eyes in the Infant's train. So beautiful a boy is not easily forgotten, and she would be glad to hear news of him.

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Wolf, however, seemed reluctant to talk of this child. True, he hastily remarked, he sometimes visited him at the request of his gracious mistress, but he had no more knowledge of his real origin than she or Dona Magdalena de Ulloa. The latter supposed the boy to be her husband's child, and in her generosity therefore interested herself doubly in the forsaken boy, though only at a distance and through his mediation; for his own part, he could never believe the fair-haired, pink-and-white Geronimo to be a son of the dark-skinned, black-eyed Don Luis. True, the stony silence which the major-domo maintained toward all questions concerning the lad would neither permit him to soothe his wife nor confirm her fear. At any rate, Geronimo must be the son of some great noble. This was perfectly apparent from his bearing, the symmetry of his limbs, his frank, imperious nature—nay, from every movement of this remarkable child.

At this assurance Barbara's soul glowed with proud maternal joy. Her blue eyes sparkled with a brighter light, and the sunny, radiant glance with which she thanked Wolf for his information exerted an unexpected influence upon him, for he shrank back as though the curtain which concealed a rare marvel had been lifted and, drawing a long breath, gazed into her beautiful, joyous face.

It seemed as if the luminous reflection of the proud, noble, and pure delight which shone upon him from her eyes had beamed in little Geronimo's a few weeks before when he rushed up to him to show his hunting spoils, a fitchet and several birds which he had killed with his pretty little cross-bow, a gift from Dona Magdalena. And Barbara's wavy golden hair, the little dimple in her cheek! Geronimo must be her child; this wonderful resemblance could not deceive.

"Barbara," he cried, pressing his hand to his brow with deep emotion, "Geronimo is—gracious Virgin!—the handsome, proud, deserted boy may be——"

But an imperious gesture from the young wife closed his lips; Frau Lamperi had just led her two boys, beautifully dressed as they always were when any distinguished visitor called upon their mother, into the room. The expression of radiant happiness which had just illumined her features vanished at the sight of the little ones, and she commanded the children to be taken away at once.

She looked so stern and resolute that her faithful maid lacked courage to make any sign of recognising the knight, whom she had known while she was in the regent's service.

When the door had closed behind the group, Barbara again turned to her friend, and in a low tone asked, "And suppose that you saw aright, and Geronimo were really my child?"

"Then—then," Wolf faltered in bewilderment "then Don Luis would—But surely it can not be! Then, after all, Quijada would be——"

Here a low laugh from Barbara broke the silence, and with dilated eyes he learned who Geronimo's parents were.

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Then the knight listened breathlessly to the young mother's account of the robbery of her child, and how, in spite of her own boys and the vow which she had made the Dubois couple not to follow the Emperor's son, she lived only in and through him.

"The Emperor Charles!" cried Wolf, as if he now understood for the first time what he might so easily have guessed if the fair-haired boy had not grown up amid such extremely plain surroundings. The belief that Geronimo owed his life to Quijada had been inspired by Massi himself.

But while the knight was striving to accustom himself to this wholly novel circle of ideas, Barbara, with passionate impetuosity, clasped his right hand and placed it on the crucifix which hung on her rosary.

Then she commanded her astonished friend to swear to guard this secret, which was not hers alone, from every living being.

Wolf yielded without resistance to her passionate entreaties, but scarcely had he lowered the hand uplifted to take the oath than he urged her at least to grant him permission to restore Dona Magdalena's peace of mind; but Barbara waved her hand with resolute denial, hastily exclaiming: "No, no, no! Don Luis was the tool in every blow which Charles, his master, dealt at my happiness and peace. Let the woman who is dear to him, and who is already winning by her gifts the child's love, which belongs to me, and to me alone, now feel how the heart of one who is deceived can ache."

Here, deeply wounded, Wolf burst into a complaint of the harshness and injustice of such vengeance; but Barbara insisted so defiantly upon her will that he urged her no further, and seized his hat to retire.

Deep resentment had taken possession of him. This misguided woman, embittered by misfortune, possessed the power of rendering the greatest benefit to one infinitely her superior in nobility of soul, and with cruel defiance she refused it.

His whole heart was full of gratitude and love for Dona Magdalena, who by her unvarying kindness and elevating example had healed his wounded soul, and no ignoble wish had sullied this great and deep affection. Although for years he had devoted to her all the ability and good will which he possessed, he still felt deeply in her debt and, now that the first opportunity of rendering her a great service presented itself, he was deprived of the possibility of doing it by the woman who had already destroyed the happiness of his youth.

So bitter was the resentment which filled his soul that he could not bring himself to seek her on the following day; but she awaited him with the sorrowful fear that she had saddened the return of her best and truest friend. Besides, she was now beginning to be tortured by the consciousness of having broken or badly fulfilled the vow by which

she had won from the Holy Virgin the life of her sick Conrad. Why had she sent her boys away the day before, instead

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of showing them to the friend of her youth with maternal joy? because her heart had been full of the image of the other, whose rare beauty and patrician bearing Wolf had so enthusiastically described. True, her pair of little boys would not have borne comparison with the Emperor's son, yet they were both good, well-formed children, and clung to her with filial affection. Why could she not even now, when Heaven itself forced her to be content, free herself from the fatal imperial "More, farther," which, both for the monarch and for her, had lost its power to command and to promise?

When, on the evening after Wolf's visit, she bent over the children sleeping in their little bed, she felt as a nurse may who comes from a patient who has succumbed to a contagious disease and now fears communicating it to her new charge. Suppose that the gracious intercessor should punish her broken vow by raising her hand against the children sleeping there? This dread seized the guilty mother with irresistible power, and she wondered that the cheeks of the little sleepers were not already glowing with fever.

She threw herself penitently on her knees before the priedieu, and the first atonement to be made for the broken vow was apparent. She must allow Wolf to restore peace to Dona Magdalena's troubled mind. This was not easy, for she had cherished her resentment against this woman's husband, through whom she had experienced bitter suffering, for many years. His much-lauded wife herself was a stranger to her, yet she could not think of her except with secret dislike; it seemed as if a woman who bore the separation from the man she loved so patiently, and yet won all hearts, must go through life—unless she was a hypocrite—with cold fish blood.

Besides——

What right had this lady to the boy to whom Barbara gave birth, whose love would now be hers had it not been wrested from her? What was denied to her would be lavished upon this favoured woman, and when she bestowed gifts upon the glorious child for whom every pulse of her being longed, and repaid his love with love, it was regarded as a fresh proof of her noble kindness of heart. To withhold from this woman something which would give her fresh happiness and relieve her of sorrow might have afforded her a certain satisfaction. To bless those who curse and despitefully use us was certainly the hardest command; but on the priedieu she vowed to the Virgin to fulfil it, and in a calmer mood than before she bent over the boys to kiss them.

The next day glided by in painful anxiety, for Wolf did not return. The following morning and afternoon also passed without bringing him. Not until the rays of the setting sun were forcing their way through the pinks and rose bushes with which Pyramus kept her window adorned throughout the year, because she loved flowers, and the vesper bells were chiming, did her friend return.

This time she had dressed her boys with her own hands, and when, through the door which separated her from the entry, she heard Wolf greet them with merry words, her heart grew lighter, and the swift thanksgiving which she uttered blended with the dying notes of the bells.

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Leading Conrad by the hand, and carrying the three-year-old youngest boy in his arms, Wolf entered the room.

The child of a former love easily wins its way to the heart of the man who has been obliged to resign her. Wolf's eyes showed that he was pleased with Barbara's merry lads, and she thanked him for it by the warmest reception.

Not until after he had said many a pleasant word to her about the little boys, and jested with them in the manner of one who loves children, did he resume his grave manner and confess that he could not make up his mind to leave Barbara without a farewell. He was glad to find her in the possession of such treasures, but his time was limited, and he must, unfortunately, content himself with this last brief meeting.

While speaking, he rose to leave her; but she stopped him, saying in a low tone: "Surely you know me, Wolf, and are aware that I do not always persist in the resolves to which my hasty temper urges me. It shall not be my fault if the peace of your Dona Magdalena's soul remains clouded longer, and so I release you from your vow so far as she is concerned."

Then, for the first time since their meeting, the familiar, pleasant "Wawerl" greeted her, and with tearful eyes she clasped his outstretched hands.

Wolf had just told her that his time was short; but now he willingly allowed himself to be persuaded to put down his sword and hat, and when Frau Lamperi brought in some refreshments, he recognised her, and asked her several pleasant questions.

It seemed as though Barbara's change of mood had overthrown the barrier which her stern refusal had raised between them. Calm and cheerful as in former days he sat before her, listening while, in obedience to his invitation, she told him, with many a palliation and evasion, about her married life and the children. She made her story short, in order at last to hear some further particulars concerning the welfare of her distant son.

What Wolf related of the outward appearance of her John, to whose new name, Geronimo, she gradually became accustomed, Barbara could complete from her vivid recollection of this rare child. He had remained strong and healthy, and the violinist Massi, his good wife, and their daughter loved the little fellow and cared for him as if he were their own son and brother.

The musician, it is true, lived plainly enough, but there was no want of anything in the modest country house with the gay little flower garden. Nor did the boy lack playmates, though they were only the children of the farmers and townspeople of Leganes. Clad but little better than they, he shared their merry, often rough games. Geronimo called the violinist and his wife father and mother.

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Then Barbara desired a more minute description of his dress, and when Wolf, laughing, confessed that he wore a cap only when he went to church, and on hot summer days he had even met him barefoot, she clasped her hands in astonishment and dismay. Not until her friend assured her that among the thin, dark-haired Spaniards, with their close-cropped heads and flashing black eyes, he, with his fluttering golden curls and free, graceful movements, looked like a white swan among dark-plumaged ducks, did she raise her head with a contented expression, and the sunny glance peculiar to her again reminded her friend of the Emperor's son.

His lofty brow, Wolf said, he had inherited from his father, and his mind was certainly bright; but what could be predicted with any certainty concerning the intellectual powers of a boy scarcely seven years old? The pastor Bautista Bela was training him to piety. The sacristan Francisco Fernandez ought to have begun to teach him to read a year ago; but until now Geronimo had always run away, and when he, Wolf, asked the worthy old man, at Dona Magdalena's request, whether he would undertake to instruct him in the rudiments of Latin, as well as in reading and writing, he shook his head doubtfully.

Here a smile hovered around the speaker's lips, and, as if some amusing recollection rose in his mind, he went on gaily: "He's a queer old fellow, and when I repeated my question, he put his finger against his nose, saying: 'Whoever supposes I could teach a young romper like that anything but keeping quiet, is mistaken. Why? Because I know nothing myself.' Then the old man reflected, and added, 'But—I shall not even succeed in keeping this one quiet, because he is so much swifter than I.'"

"And is the Emperor Charles satisfied with such a teacher for his son?" asked Barbara indignantly.

"Massi had described the sacristan to Don Luis as a learned man," replied Wolf. "But I have now told his Majesty of a better one."

"Then you have talked to the Emperor?" asked Barbara, blushing.

Her friend nodded assent, and said mournfully: "My heart still aches when I recall the meeting. O Wawerl! what a man he was when, like a fool, I persuaded him in Ratisbon to hear you sing, and how he looked yesterday!"

"Tell me," she here interrupted earnestly, raising her hands beseechingly.

"It can scarcely be described," Wolf answered, as if under the spell of a painful memory. "He could hardly hold himself up, even in the arm-chair in which he sat. The lower part of his face seems withered, and the upper—even the beautiful lofty brow—is furrowed by deep wrinkles. At every third word his breath fails. One of his diseases, Dr. Mathys says, would be enough to kill any other man, and he has more than there are fingers on

the hand. Besides, even now he will not take advice, but eats and drinks whatever suits his taste."

Barbara shook her head angrily; but Wolf, noticing it, said: "He is the sovereign, and who would venture to withhold anything on which his will is set? But his desires are shrivelling like his face and his body."

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"Is the man of the 'More, farther,' also learning to be content?" asked Barbara anxiously. Wolf rose, answering firmly: "No, certainly not! His eyes still sparkle as brightly in his haggard face as if he had by no means given up the old motto. True, Don Luis declares that rest is the one thing for which he longs, and you will see that he knows how to obtain it; but what he means by it only contains fresh conflicts and struggles. His 'Plus ultra' had rendered him the greatest of living men; now he desires to become the least of the least, because the Lord promises to make the last the first. I was received by the regent like a friend. She confided to me that he often repeats the Saviour's words, 'Go, sell all that thou halt, and follow me.' He is determined to cast aside throne, sceptre, and purple, power and splendour, and Don Luis believes that he will know how to gratify this desire, like every other. What a resolution! But there are special motives concealed beneath it. Nothing but death can bring repose to this restless spirit, and if he finds the quiet for which he longs, what tasks he will set himself! Don Philip promises, as an obedient son, to continue to wield the sceptre according to the policy of the father who intrusts it to him."

"And then?" asked Barbara eagerly.

"Then will begin the life in the imitation of Christ, which hovers before him."

"Here in the Brabant palace?" interposed Barbara incredulously. "Here, where his neighbours, the brilliant nobles, enjoy life in noisy magnificence; here, among the ambassadors, the thousand rumours from the Netherlands, Italy, and Spain; here, where the battle against the heretical and liberty-loving yearnings of the citizens never ceases —how can he hope to find peace and composure here?"

"He is far from it," Wolf eagerly interrupted. "'Farewell till we meet again at no distant day upon Spanish soil!' were the parting words of my gracious mistress. Will you promise secrecy?"

Barbara held out her hand with a significant glance; but Wolf, in a lower tone, continued: "He expects to find in Spain the peaceful spot for which he longs. There he will commend himself to the mercy of God, and prepare for the true life which death is to him. There he expects to be free from time-killing business, and to grant his mind that which he has long desired and a thousand duties forced him to withhold. There, in quiet leisure, he hopes to strive for knowledge and to penetrate deeply into all the new things which were discovered, invented, created, and improved during his reign, and of which he was permitted to learn far too little thoroughly. He will endeavour to gain a better understanding of what stirs, fires, angers, and divides the theologians. He desires to pursue in detail the vast new discoveries of the astronomers, which even amid the pressure of duties he had explained to him. His inquisitive mind seeks to know the new discoveries of navigation, the distant countries which it brought to view. He hopes to search into the plans and works of the architects of fortifications and makers of maps

and, by no means least, he is anxious to become thoroughly familiar with the inventions of mechanics, which have so long aroused his interest.”

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“He liked to talk to me about these things, and the power of the human intellect, which now shows the true course of the sun and stars,” Barbara interrupted with eager assent. “He often showed me the ingenious wheelwork of his Nuremberg clocks. Once—I still hear the words—he compared the most delicate with the thousandfold more sublime works of God, the vast, ceaseless machinery of the universe, where there is no misplaced spring, no inaccurately adjusted cog in the wheels. Oh, that glorious intellect! What hours were those when he condescended to point out to a poor girl like me the eternal chronometers above our heads, repeat their names, and show the connection between the planets and the course of earthly events and human lives! O Wolf! how glorious it was! How my modest mind increased in strength! And when I listened breathlessly, and he saw how I bowed in mute admiration before his greatness and called me his dear child, his attentive pupil, and pressed his lips to my burning brow, can I ever forget that?”

She sobbed aloud as she spoke and, overwhelmed by the grief which mastered her, covered her face with her hands.

Wolf said nothing. Another had robbed him of the woman he loved, and the greatest anguish of his life was not yet wholly conquered; but in this hour he felt that he had no right to be angry with Barbara, for it was to the greatest of great men that he had been forced to yield. He need not feel it a disgrace to have succumbed to him.

“Wawerl!” he again exclaimed, “in spite of the pleasant peace which I have found, I could envy you; for once, at least, the sun of love shone with full radiance into your soul. Your experience proves how bright and long is the afterglow if it is only real. This light, I believe, can never be extinguished, no matter how dense is the gloom which shadows life’s pathway.”

“Yes, indeed, Wolf,” she replied dully, with a sorrowful shake of the head. “The gloomy night of which you speak has come, and it will last on and on with unvarying darkness, from year to year, perhaps until the end. What you call light is the remembrance of a single brief month of May. Does it possess the power to render me happy? No, my friend, a thousand times no! It only saves me from despair. But, in spite of everything”—and here her eyes sparkled radiantly—“in spite of all this, I would not change places with any one on earth; for, however dark clouds may conceal the sun, when in quiet hours it once breaks through them, Wolf, how brilliant everything grows around me!”

While speaking, she passed her hand across her brow and, as though seized with shame for her frank confession, exclaimed: “But we will let this subject drop. Only you must know one thing more. I shall never be wholly impoverished. What the past gave me was too rich and great; what I expect from the future is too precious for that. It is growing up in distant Spain and, if Heaven accepted

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the great sacrifice which I once made for the boy whom you call Geronimo, if he receives what I besought for him at that time and on every returning day, then, Wolf, I shall bear the burden of my woe like a light garland of rose leaves. Nay, more. Charles will regain his youth sooner than—be it in love or hate—he will ever forget me. This child guarantees that. It is and will always remain a bridge between us. He, too, can not forget the son, and if he does——”

“No, Barbara, no,” interrupted Wolf, carried away by her passionate warmth. “The Emperor Charles is constantly thinking of his fair-haired boy. No one has told me so; but if he seeks in Spain the rest for which he longs, the thought of Geronimo—I am sure of that—is not the least powerful cause which draws him thither.”

“Do you really think so?” asked Barbara with feverish anxiety.

“Yes,” he answered firmly. “This very morning he commanded Don Luis to take the child from Leganes to Villagarcia and commit the education of Geronimo to his wife, that he may find him what he expects and desires.”

Here he paused, and Barbara inquired uneasily, “And did he say nothing of Geronimo’s mother—of me?”

Wolf shook his head with silent compassion, and then reluctantly admitted: “I ventured to mention you, but, with one of those looks which no one can resist—you know them—he ordered me to be silent.”

Barbara’s cheeks flamed with resentment and shame, but she only said, smiling bitterly: “Grief is grief, and this new sorrow does not change the old one. He knows best that I am something more than the poor officer’s wife in the Saint-Gory quarter; but I look down, with just pride, on all the others who believe me to be nothing else. Now and always, even long after I am dead, the world will be obliged to recognise the claim which elevates me far above the throng: I am the mother of an Emperor’s son!”

She had uttered these words with uplifted head; but Wolf gazed in wondering admiration into the beautiful face, radiant with proud self-satisfaction.

He wished to leave her with this image before his soul, and therefore hurriedly extended his hand and said farewell, after promising to fulfil her entreaty never to come to Brussels without showing by a visit that he remembered her.

CHAPTER XIV.

Pyramus Kogel, on his return, saw nothing of the deep impression which Wolf's visit had made upon Barbara. She merely mentioned it, and carelessly said that the friend of her youth had been delighted with the children.

The news that reached her ears about what was happening in the world awakened her interest, it is true, but she took no trouble to ask for tidings. When, the following year, her husband informed her that the Emperor's only son was about to conclude a second marriage, with Mary Tudor, of England, and Charles was to commit to Philip the sovereignty of the Netherlands, Spain, Naples, and Milan, she received it as if she had already known it.

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What she learned through the neighbours of the increasing number of executions of obdurate heretics she deemed the wise measures of a devout and conscientious government.

To the children Barbara was a careful mother. She rarely went to visit the Dubois couple. Frau Traut either could not or was not allowed to tell her anything about her child, except that he was thriving under the maternal care of Dona Magdalena, to whom he had been confided.

The next winter, during which Charles reached his fifty-fourth year, his health failed so noticeably that the physicians despaired of his recovery. The Brabant palace was constantly besieged by people of all classes inquiring about the condition of the still honoured and by many deeply beloved monarch, and Barbara almost daily asked for news of him. She usually entered the palace clad in black and closely veiled, for she had many acquaintances among the attendants.

Adrian was inaccessible, because his master could not spare him a single hour, but she saw his substitute, Ogier Bodart, who had served the Emperor in Ratisbon. From him she learned how the sufferer passed the night, how the day promised, and whether the physician's opinion awakened hope or fear. He even told her that his Majesty was occupying himself with his last will, the payment of his debts, the arrangement of the succession, and the choice of his burial place.

All this occupied Barbara's mind so deeply, and the long waiting to see Bodart often robbed her of so much time, that her housewifely and maternal duties suffered, yet her patient husband endured it a long while indulgently. But once, when he summoned up courage and cautiously blamed her, she quietly admitted that he was right, but added that she had never concealed from him the tie which bound her to the Emperor Charles, and now that Death was stretching his hand toward him, she must be permitted to obtain news of his welfare.

The strong man silenced his dissatisfaction, and placed no obstacles in her way. He was grateful for the maternal solicitude which she showed the children.

His kindly nature secretly approved of her spending a longer time in the Cathedral of St. Gudule than usual, praying for the royal sufferer who was so seriously ill. The man whom she could not forget was dying and, moreover, was his sovereign.

Spring at last brought an improvement in the monarch's health, and with it Barbara's return to her household duties.

A great change took place in the Dubois home during the spring after Charles's convalescence. The exhausting care of the Emperor had made Adrian seriously ill and, in spite of the objections and bitter complaints of his beloved and honoured master and

his own desire to continue in his service, he was forced to resign his office, which was committed to his assistant Bodart.

One day Barbara met Dr. Mathys at the ex-valet's sick-bed. The kindly leech was amazed at her youthful appearance, and also at the obstinacy of her throat ailment; but he encouraged her, for he had recently seen marvellous effects produced by the old Roman baths at Ems, which were not difficult to reach, and advised her to use them as soon as possible. She must inform him of the result, if he was permitted to visit the Netherlands again.

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Then Barbara asked if he intended to leave the master whose life was preserved by his skill; but he only shook his big head, smiling, and said that the Emperor and he belonged together, like the soul and the body, but whether his Majesty would remain in Brabant much longer was an open question.

Barbara now remembered Wolf's communication, and when the rumour spread that the Emperor Charles was inclined to give up his rulership and commit the sceptre and crown to his son Philip, she knew that this time also Charles would execute the plan which he had matured after years of consideration.

Through her friend she knew the motives which urged him to renounce power and grandeur and retire to solitude; but to her it seemed certain that, above all other reasons, longing for the fair, curly-headed boy, his son and hers, had induced him to take this great and admirable step.

Gradually her maternal heart attributed to her John alone the desire of the world-weary earthly pilgrim to lay aside the purple and return to Spain.

Though Barbara at this time rarely left her own fireside, her husband might often have wished that she would return to the conduct of the previous winter, for he perceived the torturing anxiety which was consuming her.

She could gaze for hours into vacancy, absorbed in profound meditation and reveries, or play on the harp and lute, softly humming old songs to herself. If at such times Pyramus asked, lovingly and modestly, that he might not expose himself to an angry rebuff, what was burdening her soul, his wife gave evasive answers or told him about the physician's advice, and described how different the lives of both would be if she could regain the lost melody of her voice. But when he, who did not grudge the woman he loved the very best of everything, joyfully offered from his savings the sum necessary to send her and Frau Lamperi to Ems, in order, if possible, to commence the cure at once, she asserted that, for many reasons, she could not begin this summer the treatment which promised so much. True, the bare thought that if might once again be allotted to her to raise her heart in song filled her with the same blissful hope as ever; but if the report, which constantly grew more definite, did not deceive, the Emperor's formal abdication was close at hand, and to attend this great event seemed to her a duty of the heart, a necessity which she could not avoid. In many a quiet hour she told herself that Charles, when he had divested himself of all his honours and become a mere man like the rest of the world, would draw nearer to her boy, and through him to her. As an ordinary mortal, he would be able to love, like every other father, the child that attracted him to Spain. If in his life of meditation, far from the tumult of the world, the strife for knowledge should lead him to look back into the past, and in doing so he again recalled the days to which he owed his greatest happiness, could he help remembering her and her singing?

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How often she had heard that the knowledge of self was the highest goal of thought to the philosopher, and as such Charles would certainly retire into seclusion, and, as surely as she desired to be saved, he had wronged her and must then perceive it. Probably there were thousands of more important things in which he had to bury himself, but the boy would remind him of her and the injury which he had done.

Never had she more deeply admired the grandeur of her imperial lover, and with entire confidence she believed that this stupendous act of renunciation would mark the beginning of a new life for her and her child.

September and the first half of October passed like a fevered dream.

The abdication would certainly take place,

Charles had resolved to transfer all the crowns which adorned him to his son Philip, and retire to a Spanish monastery.

Barbara also learned when and where the solemn ceremony was to take place. Day after day she again mingled with the visitors to the palace, and on the twenty-first of October she saw the eleven Knights of the Golden Fleece, to whom he wished to restore the office of grand master, enter the palace chapel.

How magnificently these greatest of all dignitaries were attired! how all that she saw of this rare event in the palace chapel reminded her of the solemn ceremonial at the Trausnitzburg at Landshut, and her resolve to surrender her child, that it might possess the same splendour and honours as its sister's husband!

The wishes cherished at that time were still unfulfilled; but the father would soon meet the son again, and the greater affection this peerless boy aroused in Charles, the more surely he would know how to bestow on him honours as high or higher than he gave the daughter of Johanna Van der Gheynst.

Five days after the assembling of the Knights of the Golden Fleece, the solemn ceremony of the abdication would take place in the great hall which joined the palace chapel.

She must obtain admittance to it. Her husband did what he could to aid her and soothe her excitement by the gratification of so ardent a wish, but his efforts were vain.

Barbara herself, however, did not remain idle, and tried her fortune with those of high and low estate whom she had known in the past.

She could not trust to forcing her way in on the day of the ceremony of abdication, for every place in the limited space assigned to spectators had been carefully allotted, and no one would be permitted to enter the palace without a pass. When, after many a futile

errand, she had been refused also by the lord chamberlain, she turned her steps to Baron Malfalconnet's palace.

He had just swung himself into the saddle, and Barbara found him greatly changed. The handsome major-domo had grown gray, his bright face was wrinkled, and his smiling lips now wore a new, disagreeable, almost cruel expression of mockery. He probably recognised his visitor at once, but the meeting seemed scarcely to afford him pleasure. Nevertheless, he listened to her.

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But as soon as he heard what she desired, he straightened himself in the saddle, and cried: "When I wished to present you to his Majesty—do you remember?—at Ratisbon, you hastily wheeled your horse and vanished. Now, when you desire to bid farewell to our sovereign lord, I dutifully follow the example you then set me."

As he spoke he put spurs to his horse and, kissing his hand to her, dashed away. Barbara, wounded and disappointed, gazed after the pitiless scoffer.

She had knocked in vain where she might hope for consideration; only the young man of middle height who, carrying a portfolio under his arm, now approached her and raised his black secretary's cap, had been omitted, though he, too, was one of the old Ratisbon friends, and his position with the Bishop of Arras gave him a certain influence.

It was the little Maltese choir boy, Hannibal Melas, who owed so much to her recommendation.

He asked sympathizingly what troubled her and, after Barbara had confided to him what she had hitherto vainly desired, he referred her unasked to his omnipotent master, who was to enter King Philip's service, and proposed that she should come to his office early the next morning. Thence he would try to take her to the minister, who had by no means forgotten her superb singing. His Eminence had mentioned her kindly very recently in a conversation with the leech.

The following morning Barbara went to the great statesman's business offices. Hannibal was waiting for her.

It was on Saint Raphael's day, which had attracted his fellow-clerks to a festival in the country. Granvelle had given the others leave of absence, but wished to keep within call the industrious Maltese, on whose zeal he could always rely.

Without stopping his diligent work at the writing-desk, the secretary begged Barbara to wait a short time. He would soon finish the draught of the new edict for which his Eminence and the Councillor Viglius were waiting in the adjoining chamber. The pictures on the walls of the fourth room were worth looking at.

Barbara followed his advice, but she paused in the third room, for through the partly open door she heard Granvelle's familiar voice.

Curious to see what changes time had wrought, she peered through the by no means narrow crack and overlooked the minister's spacious office, where he was now entirely alone with the Councillor Viglius.

The Bishop of Arras had scarcely altered since their last meeting, only his appearance had become somewhat more stately, and his clever, handsome face was fuller.

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The Councillor Viglius, whom Barbara looked directly in the face, did not exactly profit by the contrast with Granvelle, for the small figure of the Frieslander barely reached to the chin of the distinguished native of tipper Burgundy, but his head presented a singular and remarkably vivid colouring. The perfectly smooth hair and thick beard of this no longer young man were saffron yellow, and his plump face was still red and white as milk and blood. It was easy to perceive by his whole extremely striking appearance that he was rightly numbered among the Emperor's shrewdest councillors. Barbara had heard marvellous tales of his learning, and it was really magnificent in compass and far more important than his keen but narrow mind. This time the loquacious man was allowing the Bishop of Arras to speak, and Barbara listened to his words and the councillor's answers with eager attention.

They were talking about the approaching abdication, and who knew the Emperor Charles better than these far-seeing men, who were so near his person?

If only she had not been obliged to believe this, for what she heard from them showed in sombre lines what her heart had clothed with golden radiance.

Everything Wolf had told her concerning the motives which induced Charles to devote himself for the remainder of his life to quiet contemplation seemed to her as credible as to the knight himself. But he had received what he knew from Queen Mary of Hungary, who interpreted her royal brother's conduct like an affectionate sister, or thought it advisable to represent it in the most favourable light.

It had not occurred to the warm-hearted, straightforward Wolf to doubt the royal lady's statement; but Barbara had regarded her friend's explanation of the Emperor's wonderful act of renunciation as she would have gazed at a citadel founded on a rock with towers rising to the clouds, and in imagination had followed to his solitude the world-weary philosopher, the father yearning for the child he had missed so long. But how pitilessly what she heard here overthrew the proud edifice! how cruelly it destroyed what she had deemed worthy of the greatest admiration, what had rendered her happy and reanimated her wishes and her hopes!

The wise Granvelle foresaw how the world would judge his master's abdication, and described it to the Frieslander. It bore a fateful resemblance to the regent's interpretation, her friend's opinion, and her own, and the shrewd Viglius accompanied this narrative with so scornful a laugh that it made her heart ache.

"This is what will be said," concluded the Bishop of Arras, summing up his previous statements, "of the wise scorner of the world upon the throne, who cast aside sceptre and crown in order, as a pious recluse, to secure the salvation of his soul and, like a second Diogenes, to listen to the wealth of his thoughts and investigate the nature of things."

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"If only the pure spring from which the Greek dipped water in the hollow of his hand was not changed to a cellar full of fiery wine, his hermit fare to highly seasoned pasties, stuffed partridges, frozen fruit juices, truffled pheasants, and such things! But everybody to his taste! The world will be deceived. Unless you wish to blind yourself, your Eminence, you will admit that I have seen correctly the most powerful motives for this unequalled act."

Barbara saw the bishop shake his head in dissent and, while she was listening with strained ears to his explanation, Viglius, as if singing bass to Granvelle's tenor, repeated again and again at brief intervals, in a low tone, the one word, "Debts," while his green eyes sparkled, sometimes as if asking assent, sometimes combatively.

He believed that the weight of financial cares was causing the Emperor Charles's abdication. Like a wise man, he said, he would place his own burden of debt upon his son's shoulders. His Majesty usually uttered exactly the opposite of his real opinions, and therefore, in the outline of his abdication speech, he twice emphasized how great a debt of gratitude Don Philip owed him for the Heritage which while still alive he bequeathed to him. True, besides the debts, crowns and kingdoms in plenty passed to Charles's successor; but the father, so long as he drew breath, would not give up the decision of the most important questions of government, and therefore this abdication, after all, was merely an excellent means of divesting himself of burdensome obligations, embellished with a certain amount of humbug.

The Bishop of Arras made no weighty protest against this severe speech; nay, he even said, in a tone of assent, that the Emperor Charles's tireless intellect would continue to direct political events. Besides, he could safely commit the execution of his conclusions and commands to his obedient and dutiful heir.

"The world," he added, "will not fare badly by this arrangement; but you, Viglius, can not forget the religious liberty which his Majesty promised to the Germans."

"Not until the end of my life!" cried the Frieslander, his green eyes flashing angrily.

Granvelle protested that this act of indulgence weighed heavily upon him also; but at that time a refusal would have occasioned a new war, which, according to human judgment, would have resulted in loss and the establishment of heresy in the Netherlands. Maurice of Saxony, he reminded the councillor, did not fall until a year later, and then as a conqueror, on the battlefield.

His Majesty's abdication, he went on with calm deliberation, was, however, not exactly as Viglius supposed. The desire to rid himself of troublesome debts had only hastened the Emperor's resolution. The principal motive for this momentous act he could state most positively to be the increasing burden of his physical sufferings. To this was added the feeling, usually found most frequently among gamblers, that the time to win or, in his

Majesty's case, to succeed was past. Lastly, Charles really did long for less disturbance from the regular course of business, the reception of ambassadors, the granting of audiences.

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"In short," he concluded, "he wants to have an easier life, and, besides, if the despatches and orders leave him time for it, to occupy himself with his favourite amusements—his clocks and pieces of mechanism. Finally, his sufferings remind him often enough of the approach of death, and he hopes by religious exercises to secure his place in the kingdom of heaven."

"So far as politics and the table give him leisure for it," interposed the Frieslander. "He doesn't seem inclined to make his penance too severe. Quijada is now preparing the penitential cell, and it is neither in the burning Thebais nor in the arid sands of the desert, but in one of the most delightful and charming places in Spain. May our sovereign find there what he seeks! You are aware of the paternal joys which await him through the boy Geronimo?"

"Where did you learn that?" Granvelle interrupted in a startled tone, and Barbara held her breath and listened with twofold attention.

"From his Majesty himself," was the reply. "He intended his son for the monastery. He longs to see him again, because he is said to be developing magnificently; but he wished to know whether it would not be safer to remove him from the world before his arrival, for, if necessary, he could give up meeting him. If he should discover his father's identity, it might easily fill him with vanity, and in Villagarcia he was learning to prize knightly achievements above the service of the Most High. It would not do to leave him in the world; unpleasant things might come from it. As King Philip's sole heir was the sickly Don Carlos——"

"His son Geronimo might aspire to the crown," interrupted Granvelle. "He expressed the same doubts to me also. What I heard of the child induced me to plead that he might be allowed to grow up in the world untrammelled. If any one understands how to defend himself against unauthorized demands, it is Don Philip."

"So I, too, think, and advised," replied Viglius. "Poor boy! His father of late holds on to thalers more than anxiously and, if I am correctly informed, the education of his son has hitherto cost his Majesty no more expense than the maintenance of the mother. Wise economy, your Eminence! Or what shall it be called?"

"As you choose," replied the bishop in an irritated tone. "What do you know about the boy's mother?"

"Nothing," replied the Frieslander, "except what my friend Mathys told me lately. He said that before she lost her voice she was a perfect nightingale. She might recover it at Ems, and so the leech proposed to the Emperor to give her a sum of money for this purpose."

"And his Majesty?" asked Granvelle.

“Remained faithful to his habit of not sullyng his reputation by extravagance,” replied the Frieslander, laughing.

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"Suffering, misfortune!" sighed Granvelle. "As a long period of rain produces fungi in the woods, so this terrible pair calls to life one pettiness after another in the rare man in whom once every trait of character was great and glorious. I knew the boy's mother. Many things might be said of her, among them good, nay, the best ones. As to the boy, his Majesty informed Don Philip of his existence. It was in Augsburg. He does not seem at all suited for the monastic life, and therefore I shall continue to strive to preserve him from it."

"And if his Majesty decides otherwise?"

"Then, of course—" answered Granvelle, shrugging his shoulders. "But the draught must be composed, and there are more important matters for us to discuss."

As he spoke he rang the bell on the table at his side, and Hannibal obeyed his master's summons. In doing so he passed Barbara, who started as if bewildered when she heard him approach.

He went up to her in great surprise, but ere he could utter the first words she clutched his arm, whispering: "I am going, Hannibal. His Eminence did not entirely forget me. If he can receive me, send word to my house."

Scarcely able to control herself, Barbara set out on her way home. The words she had heard had shaken the depths of her soul like an earthquake.

The news that Charles intended to confine in a monastery the boy whom she had given up to him that he might bestow upon him whatever lay within his imperial power poisoned her joy in the future. How often this man had inflicted bleeding wounds upon her heart! Now he trampled it under his cruel feet. Two convictions had lent her the strength not to despair: she felt sure that his love for her could never have been extinguished had the power of her art aided her to warm Charles's heart, and she was still more positive that the father would raise to splendour and magnificence the boy whom she had given him.

And now?

He had refused the leech's request to help her regain the divine gift to which, according to his own confession, he owed the purest joys; and her strong, merry child he, its own father, condemned to disappear and wither in the imprisonment of a cloister. This must not be, and on her way home she formed plan after plan to prevent it.

Pyramus attributed her sometimes depressed, sometimes irritable manner to the disappointment of her wish.

What she had just learned and had had inflicted upon her filled her with hatred of life.

Her two boys scarcely dared to approach their mother, who, unlike her usual self, harshly rebuffed them.

At twilight Hannibal Melas appeared, full of joyous excitement. Granvelle sent Barbara word that the doorkeeper Mangin would show her a good seat. His Eminence desired to be remembered to her, and said that only those who had been closely associated with his Majesty would be admitted to this ceremony, and he knew that she ranked among the first of these.

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Barbara's features brightened and, as she saw how happy it made the Maltese to be the bearer of so pleasant a message, she forced herself to give a joyous expression to her gratitude. In the evening, and during a sleepless night, she considered whether she should make use of the invitation. What she had expected for herself and her child from Charles's abdication had been mere chimeras of the brain, and what could this spectacle offer her? She would only behold with her eyes what she had often enough imagined with the utmost distinctness—the great monarch divested of his grandeur and all his dignities.

But Granville's message that she was one of those who stood nearest to the abdicating sovereign constantly echoed in her ears, and her absence from this ceremony would have seemed to her unnatural—nay, an offence against something necessary.

Her husband was pleased with the great minister's kindness to his wife. He had nothing to do in the palace, but he intended to look for the children, who had gone there before noon with Frau Lamperi, that they might get the best possible view of the approach of the princes and dignitaries.

Barbara herself was to use a litter. The ex-'garde-robier' had helped her put on her gala attire, and Pyramus assured his wife that every one would consider her the handsomest and most elegant lady in the galleries. She knew that he was right, and listened with pleasure, deeply as resentment and disappointment burdened her soul.

Then the knocker on the door rapped. The litter-bearers had probably come. But no! The Flemish maid, who had opened the door, announced that a messenger was waiting outside with a letter which he could deliver only to the master or the mistress.

Pyramus went into the entry, and his long absence was already making Barbara uneasy, when he returned with bowed head and, after many words of preparation, informed her that her father was very ill and, finally, that apoplexy had put a swift and easy end to his life.

Then a great and genuine grief seized upon her with all its power. Everything that the simple-hearted, lovable man, who had guarded her childhood so tenderly and her girlhood with such solicitude and devotion, had been to her, returned to her memory in all its vividness. In him she had lost the last person whose right to judge her conduct she acknowledged, the only one whom she had good reason to be sure cared for her welfare as much as, nay, perhaps more than, his own.

The litter, Granville's message, the Emperor's abdication ceremony, everything that had just wounded, angered, and disturbed her, was forgotten.

She gently refused the consolation of her husband, who in the captain had lost a dear friend and sincerely mourned his death, and entreated him to leave her alone; but when

her sons returned and joyously described the magnificent spectacle on which they had feasted their eyes outside of the palace, she drew them toward her with special tenderness, and tried to make them understand that they would never again see the good grandfather who had loved them all so dearly.

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But the older boy, Conrad, only gazed at her wonderingly, and asked why she was weeping; and the younger one did not understand her at all, and went on talking about the big soldier who wanted to lift him on his piebald horse. To the child death is only slumber, and life being awake to new games and pleasures.

Barbara said this to her husband when he wished to check the merry laughter of the little ones, and then went to her chamber.

There she strove to think of the dead man, and she succeeded, but with the memory of the sturdy old hero constantly blended the image of the feeble man who to-day was voluntarily surrendering all the gifts of fortune which she—oh, how willingly! would have received for the son whom he desired to withdraw from the world.

The next morning Hannibal Melas came to ask what had kept her from the ceremony. He learned it in the entry from Frau Lamperi, and Barbara's tearful eyes showed him what deep sorrow this loss had caused her. Her whole manner expressed quiet melancholy. This great, pure grief had come just at the right time, flowing, like oil upon the storm-lashed waves, over hatred, resentment, and all the passionate emotions by which she had previously been driven to the verge of despair.

She did not repulse the witness of her lost happiness, and listened attentively while Hannibal told her about the memorable ceremony which he had attended.

True, his description of the lofty hall in the Brabant palace where it took place, the chapel adjoining it, and the magnificent decorations of flowers and banners that adorned it, told nothing new to Barbara. She was familiar with both, and had seen them garlanded, adorned with flags and coats of arms, and even witnessed the erection of the stage in the hall and the stretching of the canopy above it.

The Emperor had appeared upon the platform at the stroke of three, leaning upon his crutch and the shoulder of William of Orange. His son Philip and the Queen of Hungary followed, and all took their seats upon the gilded thrones awaiting them. The blithe, pleasant Archduke Maximilian of Austria, the Duke of Savoy, who was expecting a great winning card in the game of luck of his changeful life, the Knights of the Golden Fleece, and the highest of the Netherland nobles, the councillors, the governor, and the principal military officers also had places upon the stage.

Barbara knew every name that Hannibal mentioned. It seemed as if she saw the broken-down Emperor, his son Philip with his head haughtily thrown back, his favourite, the omnipotent minister, Ruy Gomez, the Prince of Eboli, who with his coal-black hair and beard would have resembled Quijada if, instead of the soldierly frankness of the major-domo, an uneasy, questioning expression had not lurked in his dark eyes, the brilliant Bishop of Arras, who had again so kindly placed her under obligation to him, and the Frieslander

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Viglius, who had dropped into her soul the wormwood whose bitterness she still tasted, and whose motto, "The life of mortals is a watch in the night," seemed to flash from his green eyes. Not a single woman had been admitted to the distinguished assembly of the States-General, the city magistrates, and illustrious invited guests, who as spectators sat on benches and chairs opposite to the stage, and this placed the kindness of Granvelle, whom the Netherland dignitaries were said to detest, in a still brighter light.

The ceremony had been opened by the great speech of Philibert of Brussels, which the young Maltese described as a masterpiece of the finest rhetorical art. At the close of this address a solemn silence pervaded the hall, for the Emperor Charles had risen to take leave of his faithful subjects.

One might have heard a leaf fall, a spicier walk, as, supported by the arm of William of Orange, he raised the notes of his address and began to read.

At this information Barbara remembered how Maurice of Saxony had supported the Emperor at the May festival at Prebrunn. William of Orange, too, was still young. She had often seen him, and what deep earnestness rested on his noble brow! how open and pure was the glance of his clear eyes, yet how penetrating and inexorably keen it could also be! She had noticed this at the assembly of the Knights of the Golden Fleece, when he looked at King Philip with bitter hate or certainly with dislike and scorn. Was this man chosen to avenge Charles's sins upon his son and heir? Could the Prince of Orange be destined to deal with the new king as Maurice of Saxony had treated his imperial father? Would the resentment which, since the day before, had again filled her soul have permitted her to prevent it had she possessed the power?

The Emperor's speech had treated of his broken health and the necessity of living in a milder climate. Then Don Philip had been described by his father as a successor whose wisdom equalled his experience. This called a smile to Barbara's lips.

Philip was said to be an industrious, devout man, fond of letter-writing, and full of intrigue, but only his father would venture to compare him with himself, with Charles V.

He, the son, probably knew how vacant and lustreless his eyes were, for he usually fixed them on the ground; and what fulness of life, what a fiery soul had sparkled only a short time ago, when she saw him in the distance, from those of the man whom she certainly was not disposed to flatter!

Then the Emperor had reviewed his whole reign, mentioned how many wars he had waged, how many victories he had won and, finally, had reminded his son of the gratitude he owed a father who during his lifetime bestowed all his possessions upon

him and, as it were, descended into the grave in order to make him earlier the heir of all his power and wealth.

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Now Barbara fancied that again—she knew not for what hundredth time—the Frieslander's exclamation, "Debts! debts!" rang in her ears, and at the same time she thought of the boy in Spain who had here been disinherited, and must be hidden in a monastery that the other son of the same father, the diminutive upstart Philip, puffed up with arrogance, might sleep more quietly. For one son the unjust man whom she loved was ready to die before his last hour came, in order to give him all that he possessed; for the other he could find nothing save a monk's cowl. Instead of the yearning for John, of which Wolf had spoken and she, blind fool, believed, he thought of him with petty fears of the claims by which he might injure his favoured brother. No warm impulse of paternal tenderness stirred the breast of the man whose heart was hardened, who understood how to divest himself of the warmest love as he now cast aside the crown and the purple of royalty.

These torturing thoughts so powerfully affected Barbara that she only half heard what Hannibal was saying about the Emperor's admonition to his son to hold fast to justice, law, and the Catholic Church. But when Granvelle's faithful follower, in an agitated tone, went on to relate how Charles had besought the forgiveness of Providence for all the sins and errors which he had committed, and added that he would remember all who had rendered him happy by their love and obedience in every prayer which he addressed to the Being to whom the remnant of his life should be devoted, the ex-singer's breath came quicker, her small hands clinched, and the question whether she had failed in love and obedience before he basely cast her off forced itself upon her mind, and with it the other, whether he would also include in his prayers her whom he had ill-treated and mortally insulted.

These thoughts lent her features so gloomy an expression that it would have offended the Emperor Charles's ardent admirer if he had noticed it. But the scene which, with tears in his eyes, he now described absorbed his attention so completely that he forgot everything around him and, as it were, gazed into his own soul while picturing to himself and his listener how the monarch, with a pallid, ashen countenance, had sunk back upon his throne and wept like a child.

At this spectacle the whole assembly, even the sternest old general, had been overwhelmed by deep emotion, and the spacious hall echoed with the sobs and groans of graybeards, middle-aged men and youths, warriors and statesmen.

Here the young man's voice failed and, weeping, with unfeigned emotion he covered his agitated face with his handkerchief.

When he regained his composure he saw, with a shade of disappointment, that Barbara's eyes had remained dry during the description of an event in which he himself and so many stronger men had shed burning tears.

Yet, when Barbara was again alone she could not drive from her mind the image of her broken-down, weeping lover. Doubtless she often felt moved to think of him with deep pity; but she soon remembered the conversation to which she had listened in the apartments of the Bishop of Arras, and her belief in the genuineness of those tears vanished.

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CHAPTER XV.

The winter came and passed. Instead of leaving the Netherlands, the Emperor Charles remained nearly a year in Brussels. He lived in a modest house in Lion Street and, although he had resigned the sovereignty, nothing was done in the domain of politics to which he had not given his assent.

Barbara, more domestic than ever before, was leading a dream life, in which she dwelt more with her beloved dead and her child in Spain than with her family at home. She thought of the boy's father sometimes with bitter resentment, sometimes with quiet pity. Outward circumstances rendered it easier for her to conceal these feelings, for Pyramus attributed the melancholy mood which sometimes overpowered her to grief for her father.

Her husband left the settlement of the business connected with her inheritance solely to her. There were many letters to be written and, as she had become unfamiliar with this art, Hannibal faithfully aided her.

Dr. Hiltner, of Ratisbon, to whom, in spite of his heretical belief, she intrusted the legal business of the estate, acted wisely and promptly in her behalf. Thus the sale of the house which she had purchased for the dead man, and the disposal of her father's share in the Blomberg business, brought her far more money than she had expected.

It seemed as though Fate desired to compensate her by outward prosperity for the secret sorrow which, in spite of her husband's affectionate solicitude and the thriving growth of her two boys, she could not shake off.

In one respect she regarded the money which this winter brought her as a genuine blessing, for it seemed to invite her to go to Ems and do all in her power for the restoration of her voice. The hoarseness was now barely perceptible in her speech, and Dr. Mathys, whom she visited in April, encouraged her, and told her of really marvellous cures wrought by the famous old springs.

When May came and the trees and shrubs in leafy Brussels adorned themselves with new buds, she could not help thinking more frequently, as usual in this month, of her wasted love and of the man for whom it had bloomed and who had destroyed it. So she liked to pass through Lion Street in her walks, for it led her by his house. She might easily meet him again there, and she longed to see his face once more before the departure for Spain, which would remove him from her sight forever.

And behold! One sunny noon he was borne toward her in a litter. She stopped as though spellbound, bowing profoundly; her glance as he passed met his, and he waved his emaciated hand—yes, she was not mistaken—he waved it to her.

For an instant it seemed as if a crimson rose had bloomed in the midst of winter snows. She had been as sure that he had not forgotten her as that she herself had not ceased to think of him.

Now her confidence was, as it were, confirmed by letter and seal, and this made her happy.

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The man in the litter had been only the wreck of the Charles whom she loved; even the fiery light in his eyes, though not extinguished, had appeared subdued and veiled. Other women would probably have thought him repulsively plain, but what did she care for his looks? Each of them was still a part of the other, for her image lived in his soul, as his dwelt in hers.

Barbara did not take as long a walk as usual; but when she was again approaching the house occupied by the abdicated sovereign, Dr. Mathys came toward her. The expression of his broad, dignified face suited the bright May morning; nay, she imagined that his step was lighter and less sedate than usual.

During the whole decade which they had known each other he had never flattered her, but to-day, after the first greeting, he began his conversation with the question:

“Do you know, Frau Barbara, that you were never more beautiful and charming than just at this very time? Perhaps it is the mourning which is so becoming to your pink-and-white complexion and the somewhat subdued lustre of your golden hair. But why do I feed your vanity with such speeches? Because I think that our gracious lord, who for many a long day has not bestowed even the least side glance upon any of your bewitching sex, noticed the same thing. And now you will presently be obliged to admit that the old messenger of bad news in Ratisbon, whom you requited so ill for his unpleasant errand, can also bring good tidings; for the Emperor Charles—in spite of the abdication, he will always be that until he, too, succumbs to the power which makes us all equal—his Majesty sends you his greetings, and the message that he desires to do what he can to restore to you the art in which you attained such rare mastery. He places at your disposal—this time, at least, he was not economical—a sum which will take you to the healing springs four or five times, nay, oftener still.”

Barbara had listened thus far, speechless with joyful surprise. If it was Charles to whom she owed her recovery, the gift of song which it restored would possess tenfold value for her, if that was conceivable. She was already beginning to charge the leech to be the bearer of her gratitude and joy, but he did not let her finish, and went on to mention the condition which his Majesty attached to this gift.

Barbara must never mention it to any one, and must promise the physician to refrain from all attempts to thank him either in person or by letter in short, to avoid approaching him in any way.

The old physician had communicated this stipulation—which his royal patient had strictly associated with the gift—to Barbara in the emphatic manner peculiar to him, but she had listened, at first in surprise, then with increasing indignation. The donation which, as a token of remembrance and kind feeling, had just rendered her so happy, now appeared like mere alms. Nay, the gift would make her inferior to the poorest beggar, for who forbids the mendicant to utter his “May God reward you”?

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Charles kept her aloof as if she were plague-stricken. Perhaps it was because he feared that if he saw her once he might desire a second and a third meeting. But no matter. She would accept no aid at the cost of so severe an offence to her pride, least of all when it came from the man who had already wounded her soul often and painfully enough.

The startled physician perceived what was passing in her mind, and when, not passionately as in her youth, but with cool composure, she requested Dr. Mathys to tell his master that it would be as impossible for her to accept a gift for which she could not express her thanks as to give alms without wishing well to the recipient, the leech eagerly endeavoured to persuade her to use the sum bestowed according to the donor's wish. But Barbara firmly persisted in her refusal, and when she parted from the old man he could not be angry with her, for, as in the garden of the little Prebrunn castle, he could not help saying to himself that the wrong was not wholly on the side of the independent young woman.

The result in this case was the usual one when the weaker party succeeds in maintaining itself against the superior power of the stronger. Barbara set out on her way home with her head proudly erect, but she soon asked herself whether this victory was not too dearly purchased. In a few months John was to meet his father, and then might there not be cause to fear that the opposition which she, his mother, had offered to the Emperor, in order to escape an offence to her own pride, would prove an injury to the son? She stopped, hesitating; but after a brief period of reflection, she continued her walk. What she had done might vex the monarch, but it must rather enhance than lower her value in his eyes, and everything depended upon that. Charles would open the path to high honours and royal splendour to the son of a haughty mother rather than to the child of a narrow-minded woman, who would receive a gift without being suffered to express her thanks.

She had done right, and rejoiced that this time she had obeyed the voice of her imperious soul. She no longer desired to meet again the man whom she loved. Her wish to look into his eyes once more before his death or hers was fulfilled, and his glance, which had certainly been the last that he could give her, had expressed the kind feeling and forgiveness for which she had secretly yearned. So what he had done was surely not intended to wound her. She understood his desire to obtain peace of mind and his fear of entering into communication with her again, and from this time it once more became a necessity to her to include him in her prayers.

She left her home with a lighter heart, better satisfied with herself than she had been for years. The Emperor Charles could not help thinking of her now as she desired. The love which she had never wholly withdrawn was again his, and the feeling of belonging to him exalted her pride and brightened her clouded soul.

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Frau Lamperi accompanied her, and marvelled at her mistress's happy mood. Besides, the Ems waters and the excellent advice of the physician to whose care she intrusted herself exerted a beneficial influence upon her ailment.

Her mourning garb prevented her from taking any part in the gay life of the watering-place, but she found pleasure in watching it.

When she returned to Brussels, Pyramus thought she looked as young as in her girlhood, and every wish that her husband fancied he could read in her eyes was gratified with loving eagerness.

But the preparations for war against France allowed him only a short time to remain in Brussels, and during his absence Barbara enjoyed unlimited freedom.

The Emperor had sailed for Spain, Queen Mary had retired from the regency, and Duke Emanuel Philibert of Savoy had taken it in her place. King Philip remained in the Netherlands, and it was said in his praise that he showed the boundless arrogance characteristic of him in a less offensive way, and had acquired more affable manners.

Barbara often longed to seek an audience with him.

But what would it avail?

Philip was perhaps the very person who would be glad to have his half-brother disappear in a monastery.

Yet the yearning to hear some news of her child would not be silenced. Of the distant Emperor, who was said to be near his end, and spent his days and sleepless nights in the monastery of San Yuste in prayer and severe mortification, as the most pious of monks, she thought with sympathizing affection.

The following year Barbara went to Ems again, this time no longer in mourning robes, but scarcely less magnificently attired than many a Rhenish noble's wife, who was also seeking health and amusement there. The property she had inherited, and which the conscientious Pyramus would not touch, and Frau Lamperi's skilful fingers had accomplished this. Though the materials which she selected were not the most costly, her aristocratic bearing made them appear valuable. She still possessed the pearl necklace and other ornaments of more prosperous days, and on festal occasions they did not remain in a chest.

She by no means lacked notice, partly on her own account, partly in consequence of the conversations with which Granvelle, who visited the springs for a short time, honoured her, while he kept entirely aloof from all the other guests. This favour on the part of so famous and powerful a statesman induced many of the most aristocratic ladies and nobles to seek her, and many who had been attracted solely by curiosity were charmed

with the entertaining sprightliness of the beautiful woman, and admitted her to their very exclusive circle.

This time the springs proved still more beneficial than when she first used them, and the hope of soon being able to exercise her beloved art again gained new and solid foundation.

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This occupied a large share of her thoughts, but a still greater one was filled with the yearning for her John, of whom, in spite of many inquiries, she could hear nothing.

When, in her quiet home life, the monotony of her days oppressed her more heavily, she often remembered Ems, and the pleasures and attention which the next summer there would bring her. Now that the great, passionate emotions which had been devoted to others were at rest, she began to think more of her own person. It seemed desirable to show herself to advantage, and though she longed for her recovery above all for the sake of her art and the pleasure which its exercise afforded her, she was already secretly thinking how she could use it to restore and obtain satisfaction for her paralyzed self-esteem.

In consequence of the victory of St. Quentin, Brussels was filled with festal joy; but Barbara took very little part in the numerous festivities which followed one another, and again went to Ems.

When she returned, much benefited, her first visit was to the Dubois house in the park. Unfortunately, it was futile; but when, a few weeks before the battle of Gravelines, she repeated it for the second time, she met the couple, now advancing in years, out of doors, and saw that some good fortune had come to them.

Usually she had always been received here with a certain shade of embarrassment, but to-day her coming seemed to please Herr Adrian. From the great arm-chair, which he now never left, he held out his hand to her, and Frau Traut's merry eyes looked a glad welcome.

After the first greetings, they eagerly expressed their joyful amazement at the clear tones of her voice. Then Frau Dubois exchanged a significant glance with her husband, and now Barbara learned that a letter had arrived from San Yuste that very morning, which contained little except pleasant news of his Majesty and John.

While speaking, Adrian drew from his doublet the precious missive, showed it to the young wife as cautiously as a fragile ornament which we are reluctant to let pass out of our hands, and said in an agitated voice:

"The writer is no less a personage than Dona Magdalena de Ulloa. May Heaven reward her for it!"

Barbara gazed beseechingly into his wrinkled face, and from the inmost depths of her heart rose the cry: "Oh, let me see it, for I—you know it—I am his mother!"

"So she is," said the old man in a tone of assent, nodded his long head, whose hair was now snow-white, and glanced questioningly at his wife. The answer was an assent.

Adrian clasped his chin—during the period of his service he had always worn it smooth-shaven, but the white stubble of a full beard was now growing on it—in his emaciated hand, and asked Barbara if she understood Spanish.

Her knowledge of it was very slight; but Frau Traut, who, like her husband, had mastered it during the long years of intercourse with the Castilian court, now undertook to put the contents of the letter into German.

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This was not difficult, for she had already been obliged to read it aloud three times to Adrian, who could no longer decipher written characters.

The address was not omitted; it had pleased them both. It ran as follows:

“To his Majesty’s good and faithful servant, Adrian Dubois, from his affectionate friend of former days, Dona Magdalena de Ulloa, wife of Don Luis Mendez Quijada, Lady of Villagarcia.”

Frau Trout read these noble names aloud to Barbara proudly, as if they were her own; but before she went on Adrian interrupted—

“As to friendship, you may think, Frau Barbara, that Dona Magdalena is showing me far too much honour in using those words; but I would still give my right hand for that lovely creature with her kindly soul. When, just after Don Luis married her, his Majesty took her young husband away, she entreated me most earnestly to look after him, and I could sometimes be of assistance. To be sure, we broke many a piece of bread together in war and peace in the same service. Ah, Frau Barbara! I am far better off here than I deserve to be; but sometimes my heart is ready to break when I think of my Emperor, and that I must leave the care of him to others.”

“But it is hard enough for the major-domo and his Majesty to do without you,” said Frau Traut importantly. “Don Luis, the letter says, would gladly have written with his own hand, but he had not a single leisure moment; for, since Adrian had gone, he was obliged to be at hand to serve his Majesty by day as well as by night. My husband’s successor, Bodart, whom he trained for the service, is skilful and makes every effort, but he can not replace Adrian to his suffering master.”

Then Frau Traut looked more closely at the letter, and began to translate its contents.

“Of course,” she began, “San Yuste is not like Brussels; but if they think there that his Majesty lives like a monk and submits to the rules of the monastery, they are misinformed.”

Here she lowered the sheet; but Barbara’s cheeks were glowing with impatient interest, and she exclaimed with urgent warmth: “Oh, please, read on! But where—it is probably in the letter—where is our child?”

“One thing after the other, as the letter communicates it,” replied the translator in a reproving tone; but her husband nodded soothingly to Barbara, and said:

“Only this first: Our John is near his father, and there is something especially good about him toward the end. Dona Magdalena is a true Castilian—first the King, then her husband, then the others according to their rank. It is different here and in your

country. Patience and you, Frau Barbara, have been bad friends ever since I knew you."

Barbara's sorrowful smile confirmed this statement, and when Frau Traut at last went on, the tone of her voice betrayed how little she liked interruptions just now.

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“You were informed of his Majesty’s safe landing at Quiposcoa. It was pitiful to see how the people in his train who did not belong to the number of those who were to accompany him to Jarandilla behaved at the parting from their beloved master. The body-guards flung their halberds on the pavement, and there were plenty of tears and lamentations. On St. Blasius’s day—[February 3, 1557]—his Majesty at last entered San Yuste. Don Luis, as you know, had gone before to get the house in readiness for his master. One could scarcely imagine a pleasanter spot, for there is no greener valley than that of San Yuste in the whole range of the Carpetano Mountains, nay, perhaps in all Spain. It is difficult to describe how everything is growing and blossoming here now, in the month of May. The little garden of the house is well kept and full of beautiful orange trees. While blossoming, they exhale the most exquisite perfume, and his Majesty enjoys the delicious fragrance which the wind bears to him.

“In your noisy Brussels it is hard to imagine how quiet it can be here, dear Senor Adrian. Nothing is to be heard save the carol of a bird, the rippling of a clear stream flowing swiftly through the valley, and at intervals the distinct notes of the little bells and cymbals upon the clocks which his Majesty brought with him. Even their ticking is often audible. At certain hours the ringing of the monastery bells blends solemnly and softly with the silence. The Hieronymites in the monastery are pious monks. His Majesty sometimes listens to their choir. Its music is very fine since Sir Wolf Hartschwert, whom you also know, has taken charge of it.

“From all this, you will perceive that the master, with whom your faithful soul doubtless often dwells, is supplied—restricted by no monastic discipline—with whatever suits his taste. He frequently devotes himself for hours to religious exercises, and also retires to the black-draped room with the coffin, which you know; but the old industry and secular cares pursued him here. Mounted messengers come and go continually, but they are not allowed to remain near the house.

“Even in Brussels he can scarcely have written and answered more letters than he does here.

“If only the body would prosper as well as the mind. That is as active and alert as ever. But the body—the body! O Senor Adrian! I fear that the end is not far distant, although our royal sufferer looks better than at his arrival.

“‘The eating!’ Dr. Mathys complains; but you know well enough how that is.

“Three days have passed since I began this letter. You are aware of most of what concerns your beloved master; now for my husband.

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“He has never had service so arduous as here, for the grand prior, Don Luis de Avila, is nothing to his Majesty except a dear old brother in arms, with whom he is fond of talking about the past. Everything rests on my poor husband. He said, a short time ago, that he would no longer endure playing the host to everybody who comes to San Yuste, being agent for everybody in Spain who desires anything from the Emperor Charles, and at the same time constantly caring for the person of the sick sovereign. This life, he thinks, may suit a person who has taken leave of his property and the world, but he still clings to both, and especially to me, the poor wife who has been parted from him so long. He has served the Emperor twenty-five years, and during this time he lost all his brothers in the war. The estates came to him, and how long they have already been deprived of the master’s eye!

“Don Luis told the Emperor Charles all this, yet he refused him leave of absence to go to Villagarcia. Instead, I was obliged to move near my husband, and am now living with Geronimo, in the wretched village of Cuacos, which is easily reached from San Yuste. There I finally arrived with the boy whom the Virgin, in her inexhaustible mercy, gave to me, a poor, childless woman, to make me happy, although on his account I wronged my lord and husband by a sinful suspicion.

“Here I must begin my letter for the third time.

“It was fortunate that Geronimo left Massi and Leganes, for he was allowed to grow up there like a little savage. Before learning to obey, he was permitted to command.—No one opposed him, so in Villagarcia the first thing necessary was to accustom him to discipline, obedience, and the manners of the nobles. The trouble was not great, and how richly the boy rewarded it! He is now in his twelfth year, and how your good wife would stare, Adrian, if she could see her nursling again! Do not suppose that it is blind partiality when I say that few handsomer lads could be found in all King Philip’s dominions. His figure is slender and only slightly above middle height; but how erect and noble is his bearing, how symmetrically his pliant form is developing! His delicately cut features and large blue eyes glow with the bold courage which fills his soul, and which he displays in riding, hunting, and fencing. He still has his wealth of fair, waving locks. Among a thousand other boys no one will overlook him. Don Luis, too, admits that he was born to dignity and honour. Every chivalrous and royal virtue is in his blood. Even his mother could not sully it.”

Here Frau Traut paused to look at Barbara, who had listened, panting for breath.

She was sorry that she had not omitted the last sentence, but in the zeal of translating it had unconsciously escaped her lips, and, as she found no softening word, she went on:

“Geronimo has become a dear child to me. He thinks that I am his own mother, and clings to me with filial affection. To lead such a son to this august father was the greatest joy that Heaven has bestowed upon me.

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"Dressed as my page, he rode with me to Jarandilla to meet his Majesty. He was to present to the imperial master, of whose near relationship he had no idea, a little basket filled with beautiful oranges from our garden in Villagarcia, which you know.

"The young horseman, who understands how to wheel his steed, swung himself from the saddle close beside his Majesty, bent the knee with noble grace, raised his little plumed hat, and, pressing his left hand upon his heart, presented the little gift to his sovereign and master. As the weather was mild, the latter sat in an open sedan chair, and when he saw Geronimo he scanned him with the keen glance of the ruler, and then looked inquiringly at my husband. Don Luis nodded the answer which he desired to receive, and a bright smile flitted over his emaciated, corpselike features. Then he accepted the oranges, stroked his son's curls, addressed a few questions to him, which he answered modestly but aptly, and then called to my husband, 'This boy must remain near me.'

"Oh, what pleasure all this gave me! Now Geronimo goes in and out of his Majesty's apartments freely, and my reason for writing this letter is an incident I happened to witness, and which will please you, Adrian, and your good wife, as it filled my heart with fervent gratitude. So listen: When the Emperor meets Geronimo in the presence of strangers, he seems to take neither more nor less notice of him than of the other pages who come to San Yuste. Only he often calls him, asks a question, or gives him some trivial commission. Others would scarcely notice it, but I see the brightening of his eyes as he does so.

"Recently I looked through the open door which leads from his Majesty's work-room into the garden, and what did the Virgin permit me to behold?— Geronimo, who was alone with the Emperor, picked up a sheet of paper that had fluttered to the ground and handed it to him. Then the Emperor Charles suddenly raised his poor hands oh, how they are disfigured by the gout!—laid them on the boy's temples, drew his head nearer, and kissed his brow and eyes! Charles V, the fugitive from the world, the man crushed by sorrow and disappointment, did that! This kiss—Don Luis believes it also—sealed the son's acceptance into his father's heart."

Here Frau Traut let the sheet fall. Her voice had failed during the last sentences; now she exclaimed amid her tears, "The Emperor's kiss!" and her husband, no less deeply stirred by emotion, cried, "The Emperor Charles—no one knows as well as I what that means—the Emperor Charles, whose heart compels him to kiss some one."

Here Barbara rose with flushed cheeks, panting for breath.

She felt as if she must cry aloud to these good people: "What do you know about my lover's kiss? I, I alone, not you, you poor, good man, could tell you. Insignificant and wretched as I may be, no woman on earth can boast of prouder memories, and now that he has also kissed his child and mine, everything is forgiven him."

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Silently, with hurrying breath, she stood before the agitated couple, who were waiting for some remark, some outburst of gratitude and delight; but there was only a quivering of the lips, and her blue eyes flashed with a fiery light.

What was the matter with her?

Frau Train turned anxiously to her husband to ask, in a whisper, whether joy had turned the poor young mother's brain; but Barbara had already recovered her composure, and, passing her hand quickly across her brow, murmured softly, "It came over me too strongly."

Then she thanked them with earnest warmth; yet when Frau Traut praised Dona Magdalena's heavenly goodness, she nodded assent, it is true; but she soon took her leave—she felt paralyzed and dazzled.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Before learning to obey, he was permitted to command
Grief is grief, and this new sorrow does not change the old one
To the child death is only slumber

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