

Barbara Blomberg, Volume 2.

Georg Ebers

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BARBARA BLOMBERG

By Georg Ebers

Volume 2.

CHAPTER VI.

The old captain blew the dust from the wine flagon and carefully removed the seal. His presence prevented Wolf from renewing the interrupted conversation.

Reflection doubtless warned him that it would be a dangerous venture to enter the same life-boat with this woman, yet how bewitchingly beautiful she had seemed to him in her proud superiority, in the agitation of soul aroused by the yearning for a fairer fate! Have her he must, even though he was permitted to call her his own but for a year, a month, an hour.

Many of her words had been harsh and apparently unfeeling, yet how noble must be the soul of this young creature who, for the sake of being loyal to truth, the pure source of everything grand and lofty, paid no heed to much that is usually sacred to human beings!

But Barbara's conduct during the next hour appeared to belie this opinion of the man who loved her, for scarcely had her father sat down with the knight before the venerable wine flagon than she flung down the smoothing iron, hastily piled the finished articles one above another, and then, without heeding the parchment on which Wolf's verses were written, rolled up the ruby velvet. Directly after, with the package under her arm, she wished the men a merry drinking bout, and added that poor Ursel might need her. Besides, she wanted to show her the beautiful material, which would please the faithful soul.

Then, without even pausing at the rooms in the second story, she hurried swiftly down the stairs into the street.

She was carrying Wolf's gift to Frau Lerch, her dressmaker.

The Grieb, where the latter lived as wife of the keeper of the house, was only a few steps distant. If the skilful woman, who was indebted to her for many a customer, began the work of cutting at once, her cousins, the Wollers, could help her the next day with the sewing. True, these were the very girls who would "turn yellow with rage" at the sight of the velvet, but precisely because these rich girls had so many things of which she was deprived she felt that, in asking their aid, she was compelling Fate to atone for an injustice.

Haste was necessary for, at the first glance at the velvet, she had

determined to wear it at the next dance in the New Scales, and she also saw distinctly in imagination the person whose attention she desired to attract.

True, the recruiting officer sent to Ratisbon, of whom she was thinking, was by no means a more acceptable suitor, but a handsome fellow, a scion of a noble family, and, above all, an excellent dancer.

She did not love him--nay, she was not even captivated by him like so many others. But, if his heart throbbed faster for any one, it was Barbara. Yet perhaps his glances strayed almost as frequently to one other maiden. The velvet gown should now decide whether he gave the preference to her or to pretty Elspet Zohrer--of course, only in the dance--for she would never have accepted him as a serious suitor.

Besides, the young noble, Pyramus Kogel, himself probably thought of no such folly.

It was very different with Wolf Hartschwert. She had been told the small amount of his inheritance long before, and on that account she would have been obliged to refuse him positively at once, yet the affectionate relations existing between them must not be clouded. He might still become very useful to her and, besides, the modest companion of her childhood was dear to her. She would have sincerely regretted an irreparable breach with him.

Her father indulged her in every respect, only he strictly forbade his beautiful child to leave the house alone after sunset. Therefore Barbara had not told him the real object of her visit. She now had no occasion to fear his following her.

Yet she made all possible haste, and, as she found Frau Lerch at home, and the skilful little woman was instantly at her service, she crowded into the space of an hour the many points about the cutting which were to be discussed.

Then she set out on her way home, expecting to traverse the short distance swiftly and without delay; but, when she had gone only a few paces from the Grieb, a tall man came toward her.

To avoid him she crossed nimbly to the other side of the dark little street, but just where it turned into Red Cock Street he suddenly barred her way. She was startled, but the oft-proved courage of the Blomberg race, to which she had just alluded, really did animate her, and, with stern decision, she ordered her persecutor to stand aside.

He, however, was not to be intimidated, but exclaimed as joyously as though some great piece of good fortune had befallen him:

"Thanks for accosting me, Jungfrau Barbara, for, though the words are harsh, they prove that, in spite of the darkness here, my eyes did not deceive me. Heaven be praised!"

Then the girl recognised the recruiting officer and excellent dancer of whom she had just been thinking in connection with the velvet upper robe, and answered sharply:

"Certainly it is I; but if you are really a nobleman, Sir Pyramus, take care that I am not exposed by your fault to evil gossip, and can not

continue to hold my head erect as I now do."

"Who will see us in this little dark street?" he asked in low, persuasive tones. "May all the saints guard me from assailing the honour of a modest maiden, fairest Barbara; yet, if you fear that I might prevent your remaining in the future what the favour of the Most High permits you to be, I shall rather accuse you of having inflicted upon me what you fear may befall you; for, since the last dance, I am really no longer myself, and can never become so until I have received from your beautiful lips the modest consolation for which this poor, tortured, loyal soul is yearning. May I not linger at your side long enough to ask you one question, you severe yet ardently beloved maiden?"

"Certainly not," replied Barbara with repellent harshness. "I never gave you a right to speak to me of love; but, above all, I shall not seek the sharer of a game of question and answer in the street."

"Then name a place," he whispered with passionate ardour, trying meanwhile to clasp her hand, "where I may be permitted, in broad sunlight and before the eyes of the whole world, to say to you what robs me of rest by day and sleep by night. Drop the cruel harshness which so strangely and painfully contradicts the language of your glances the evening of the last dance. Your eyes have kindled these flames, and this poor heart will consume in their glow if I am not suffered to confess to you that I love you with more ardour than was ever bestowed on any maiden. This place--I will admit that it is ill-chosen--but what other was open to me? After all, here, too, a bit of the sky with its many stars is looking down upon us. But, if you still unkindly refuse me, or the dread of crossing the barrier of strict decorum forbids you to listen to me here, you can mercifully name another spot. Allow me to go to your father and beg him for the clear hand which, in a happier hour, by not resisting the pressure of mine, awakened the fairest hopes in my heart."

"This is too much," Barbara indignantly broke in. "Make way for me at once, and, if you are well advised, you will spare yourself the visit to my father; for, even if you were in earnest with your love and came as an honest suitor to our modest house, it might easily happen that you would descend the staircase, which is very steep and narrow, in as sorrowful a mood as you climbed it secure of victory."

Then Pyramus Kogel changed his tone, and said bitterly:

"So your victorious eyes were only carrying on an idle game with my unsuspecting heart? You laugh! But I expected to find in my German native land only girls whose chaste reserve and simple honesty could be trusted. It would be a great sorrow if I should learn through you, Jungfrau Barbara, that here, too, it would have been advisable to arm myself against wanton deception. True, the French chansons you sing sound unlike our sincere German songs. And then you, the fairest of the fair, can choose at will among men; but the Emperor's service carries me from one country to another. I am only a poor nobleman--"

"I care not," she interrupted him here with icy coldness; "you might be just good enough for the daughter of another nobleman, who has little more to call his own than you, Sir Knight, but nevertheless far too little for me to grant you permission to load me with unjust reproaches. Besides, you wholly lack the one advantage which the man to whom I am willing to betroth myself must possess."

"And what is that?" he asked eagerly.

"Neither gold nor lands, rank nor splendour," she answered proudly, "but changeless fidelity of the heart. Remember your fluttering from lovely Elspet Zohrer to me, and from me to Elspet, Sir Pyramus, and ask yourself what reason you would give me to expect the fulfilment of such a demand. Your fine figure and gay manner please us girls very well at a dance, but, though you should possess the wealth of the Fuggers and the power of the Sultan, it would be useless trouble to seek my consent. Stand out of my path at once! There come the Emperor's body guards, and, if you do not obey me, as surely as I hope for salvation I will call them!"

The last words had escaped her lips in a raised voice, and vibrated with such honest indignation that the recruiting officer yielded; but a triumphant smile flitted over her beautiful face.

Had she known before how complete a victory he had already won over pretty Elspet Zohrer, her most dangerous rival, this late errand would have been unnecessary.

Yet she did not regret it; true, she cared no more for Pyramus Kogel than for any one else--the certainty that he, too, had succumbed to the spell of her beauty was associated with a feeling of pleasure whose charm she knew and valued.

CHAPTER VII.

Every one in Ratisbon or at the court who spoke of Sir Wolf Hartschwert called him an excellent fellow. In fact, he had so few defects and faults that perhaps it might have been better for his advancement in life and his estimation in the circle of society to which he belonged if more of them had clung to him.

Hitherto the vice of avarice was the last with which he could have been reproached. But, when his old friend filled his glass with wine, the desire that the property left to him might prove larger than he had expected overpowered every other feeling.

Formerly it had been welcome mainly as a testimonial of his old friend's affection. He did not need it for his own wants; his position at court yielded him a far larger income than he required for the modest life to which he was accustomed. For Barbara's sake alone he eagerly hoped that he had greatly underestimated his foster parents' possessions.

Ought he to blame her because she desired to change the life of poverty with her father for one which better harmonized with her worth and tastes? He himself, who had lived years in a Roman palace, surrounded by exquisite works of the gloriously developed Italian art, and then in the one at Brussels, furnished with imperial splendour, did not feel perfectly content in the more than simple room which Blomberg called his "artist workshop."

A few rude wooden chairs, a square table with clumsy feet, and an open cupboard in which stood a few tin cups, were, the sole furniture of the narrow, disproportionately long room, whose walls were washed with gray. The ceiling, with its exposed beams, was blackened by the pine torches

which were often used for lights. Pieces of board were nailed over the defective spots in the floor, and the lines where the walls met rarely showed a right angle.

The window disappeared in the darkness. It was in the back of the niche formed by the unusually thick walls. During the day its small, round panes gave the old gentleman light while he guided his graving tool. A wooden tripod supported the board on which his tools lay. The stool, which usually stood on a wooden trestle opposite to it, now occupied a place before the table bearing the flagon of wine, and was intended for Barbara.

After the torches had ceased to burn, a single tallow candle in a wrought-iron candlestick afforded the two men light, and threatened to go out when, in the eagerness of their conversation, they forgot to use the snuffers.

Neither curtain, carpet, nor noteworthy work of art pleased the eye in this bare, strangely narrow room. The weapons and pieces of armour of the aged champion of the faith, which hung high above the window, made no pretension to beauty. Besides, the rays of the dim candle did not extend to them any more than to the valueless pictures of saints and virgins on the wall.

The door of Barbara's little bow-window room stood open. Nothing but a small oil lamp was burning there. But the articles it contained, though dainty in themselves, were standing and lying about in such confusion that it also presented an unpleasant aspect.

Yet Barbara's beauty had shed such radiance upon this hideous environment that the scene of her industry had seemed to Wolf like an Eden.

Now he could scarcely understand this; but he found it so much the easier to comprehend that these wretched surroundings no longer suited such a pearl, and that it behooved him to procure it a worthier setting.

Still, it was by no means easy to ask the captain what he desired to know, for during the young knight's absence a great many important things had happened which Blomberg was longing to tell.

He was in such haste to do this that he detained Wolf, who wanted to speak to old Ursel before he began to drink the wine, by the statement that she suffered from wakefulness, and he would disturb her just as she was falling asleep.

The account of the property bequeathed to the young knight was only too quickly completed, for, though the precentor's will made his foster son the sole heir, the legacy consisted only of the house, some portable property, and scarcely more than a thousand florins.

Yet perhaps something else was coming to Wolf; early yesterday Dr. Hiltner, the syndic of the city, had asked his place of residence, and added that he had some news for him which promised good fortune.

After these communications Blomberg hoped to be able to mention the important events which had occurred in Ratisbon during his young friend's absence; but Wolf desired with such eager curiosity to hear the syndic's news first that it vexed the captain, and he angrily told him that he would bite off his tongue before he would even say "How are you?" to that

man, and to play eavesdropper to any one was not at all in his line.

Here his companion interrupted with the query, What had caused the learned scholar, whom every one, as well as the precentor, had highly esteemed, to forfeit his friend's good opinion?

Blomberg had waited for such a question.

He had been like a loaded culverin, and Wolf had now touched the burning match to the powder. To understand why he, Blomberg, who wished only the best fortune to every good Christian, would fain have this thorough scoundrel suffer all the torments of hell, the young knight must first learn what had happened in Ratisbon since the last Reichstag.

Until then the good city had resisted the accursed new religious doctrines which had gained a victory in Nuremberg and the other cities of the empire.

Here also, as Wolf himself had probably experienced, there had been no lack of inclination toward the Lutheran doctrine. It was certainly natural, since it suited the stomach better to fill itself, even during Lent, than to renounce meat; since there were shameless priests who would rather embrace a woman than to remain unmarried; since the Church property bestowed by pious souls was a welcome morsel to princes and to cities, and, finally, because licentiousness was more relished than wholesome discipline. The wicked desires inspired by all the evil spirits and their tool, the Antichrist Luther, had gained the upper hand here also, and Dr. Hiltner, above all others, had prepared the way for them in Ratisbon. Even at the last Reichstag his Majesty the Emperor had earnestly, but with almost too much gracious forbearance, endeavoured to effect a union between the contending parties, but directly after his departure from the city rebellion raised its head with boundless insolence. The very next year the Council formally introduced the evil which they called ecclesiastical reformation. The blinded people flocked to the new parish church to attend the first service, which they called "Protestant." Then the mischief hastened forward with gigantic strides.

"Last year," cried the old gentleman, hoarse with indignation, striking the table with his clenched fist as if he were in camp, "I saw them with my own eyes throw down and drag away, I know not where, the pillar with the beautiful image of Mary, the masterpiece of Erhard Heydenreich, the architect of the cathedral, which stood in front of the new parish church. Songs had been composed in her honour, and she was dear and precious to you from early childhood, as well as to every native of Ratisbon; the precentor--God rest his soul!--read to me from your letter from Rome what exquisite works of art you saw there every day, but that you still remembered with pleasure the beautiful Virgin at home.

"But what do these impious wretches care about beautiful and sacred things? The temple desecrators removed and destroyed one venerable, holy image after another. True, they did not venture into the cathedral, probably from fear of his Majesty the Emperor, and whoever had undertaken to lay hands upon the altar painting and the Madonna in our chapel would have paid for it--I am not boasting--with his life. Though 'the beautiful Mary,' in her superabundant mercy, quietly endured the affront offered, our Lord himself punished it, for he inspired the illustrious Duke of Bavaria to issue an edict which forbids his subjects to trade with Ratisbon. Whoever even enters the city must pay a heavy fine. This set many people thinking. Ursel will tell you what sinful prices we have

paid since for butter and meat. Even the innocent are obliged to buckle their belts tighter. Those who wished to escape fasting are now compelled by poverty to practise abstinence. It is said the Roman King Ferdinand is urging the revocation of the order. If I were in his place, I would advise making it more stringent till the rebels sweat blood and crept to the cross."

Then Blomberg bewailed the untimely leniency of the Emperor, for there was not even any rumour of a serious assault upon the Turks. And yet, if only he, Blomberg, was commissioned to raise an army of the cross, Christianity would soon have rest from its mortal foe! But if it should come to fighting--no matter whether against the infidels or the heretics --in spite of Wawerl and his lame leg, he would take the field again. No death could be more glorious than in battle against the destroyer of souls. The scoundrels were flourishing like tares among the wheat. At the last Reichstag the Electors of Brandenburg and Saxony, as well as the Landgrave Philip of Hesse, brought their own preachers, whose sermons turned many heads, even the pastor of St. Emmeran's, Zollern, who was a child of Ratisbon. At Staufferhof Baron von Stauff, formerly a man worthy of all honour, had opened his chapel of St. Ann to all the citizens to permit them to participate in the Lutheran idolatry. Two Protestant ministers, one of whom, Dr. Forster, Luther himself had brought to Ratisbon, were liberally paid by the Council. Whether Wolf believed it or not, Father Hamberger, whom he surely remembered as Prior of the Minorites, and who at that time enjoyed universal esteem, had taken a wife, and the rest of the monks had followed the iniquitous example. Many other priests had married if it suited them, and, instead of the cowl, wore secular garments. The instruction given in the school of poets was perfectly abominable, as he heard from Councillor Steuerer, who was faithful to the Catholic Church, and strove to induce the Duke of Bavaria to adopt still sterner measures against all this disorder.

Very recently men hitherto blameless, like Andreas Weinzierl and Georg Seidl, had sent their eighteen-year-old sons to the University of Wittenberg, where the Lutheran heresies were flourishing most luxuriantly.

But the worst of all was that even faithful sons and daughters of Holy Church could not keep themselves wholly untouched by such mischief. Among these, alas! were he and his Wawerl, for he had been obliged to allow the girl to join the choristers who sang in the Convivium Musicum, which the Council had established in the summer three years before. Two councillors were assigned to each Convivium, and thus these arrangements were in Protestant hands.

"Of course," he added dejectedly, "I wished to forbid her taking part in them, but, though with me it is usually bend or break, what can a man do when a woman is pestering him day and night, sometimes begging with tears, sometimes with caresses?"

"Besides, many a good Catholic entreated me to give up my opposition. They do not grudge the girl her progress, and how much she already owes to the music teacher who now directs the Collegium Musicuin! Singing is everything to her, and what else can I give the poor child? At any rate, the Netherlander whom the Council brought here three years ago--so connoisseurs say--scarcely has his equal anywhere in knowledge and ability. The man came to me and frankly said that he needed the girl's voice for the Convivium, and, if I refused to let Wawerl take part, he would stop teaching her. As he is a just man of quiet temperament and

advanced in years."

"Where is he from, and what is his name?" Wolf eagerly interrupted.

"Damian Feys," replied the captain, "and he is a native of Ghent in the Netherlands. Although he is in the pay of the city, he has remained--he told me so himself--a good Catholic. There was nothing to be feared for the child on the score of religion. The anxieties which are troubling me on her account come from another source."

Then, with a mischievous mirthfulness usually foreign to his nature, Wolf raised his goblet, exclaiming:

"Cast them upon me, Father Blomberg! I will gladly help you bear them as your loyal son-in-law."

"So that's the way of it," was the captain's answer, his honest eyes betraying more surprise than pleasure.

Yet he pledged Wolf, and, touching his glass to his, said:

"I've often thought that this might happen if you should see how she has grown up. If she consents, nothing could please me better; but how many lovers she has already encouraged, and then, before matters became serious, dismissed! I have experienced it. If you succeed in putting an end to such trifling, may this hour be blessed! But do you know the huge maggots she keeps under her golden hair?"

"Both large and small ones," cried Wolf, with glowing cheeks. "Truthful as she is, she did not conceal from the playmate of her youth a single impulse of her ambitious soul."

"And did she give you hope?" asked the captain, thrusting his head eagerly forward.

"Yes," replied the youth firmly; but he quickly corrected himself, and, in a less confident tone, added, "That is, if I could offer her a care-free life."

"There it is," sighed the old man. "She knows what she wants, and holds firmly to it. You are the son of a knight, and on account of the music which you can pursue together--With her everything is possible and little is impossible. In any case, you will have no easy life with her, and, ere you order the wedding ring----" Here he suddenly stopped, for a bird-song, high, clear, and yet as insinuatingly sweet as though, on this evening in late April, the merriest and most skilful feathered songsters which had recently found their way home to the fresh green leafage on the shore of the Danube had made an appointment on the steps of the gloomy house in Red Cock Street, rose nearer and nearer to the two men who were sitting over their wine.

It was difficult to believe that this whistling and chirping, trilling and cuckoo calling, came from the same throat; but when the bird notes ceased just outside the door, and Barbara, with bright mirthfulness and the airiest grace, sang the refrain of the *Chant des Oiseaux*, 'Car la saison est bonne', bowing gracefully meanwhile, the old enemy of the Turks fairly beamed with delight.

His eyes, wet with tears of grateful joy, sought the young man's, and,

though he had just warned him plainly enough against courting his daughter, his sparkling gaze now asked whether he had ever met an equally bewitching marvel.

"The deuce!" he cried out to his daughter when she at last paused and extended her hand to him. He leaned comfortably farther back in his arm-chair as he spoke, but she kissed him lightly on the forehead, while her large blue eyes shone with cheerful content.

She had gained her object.

When she sang this song she was safe from any troublesome questions. Besides, Gombert, of Bruges, the director of the imperial orchestra, who had arrived in Ratisbon that very day, was the composer of the charming bird-song, and she knew from her singing master that, though her voice was best adapted to solemn hymns, nothing in the whole range of secular music suited it better than this "Car la saison est bonne." She longed for the praise of such a musician, and Wolf must accompany her to him.

The young knight had not only been joyfully surprised, but most deeply delighted by the bewitching execution of this most charmingly arranged refrain.

Maestro Gombert and his colleague Appenzelder, the conductor of the boy choir, must hear it on the morrow. And how gladly Barbara consented to fulfil this wish!

She had received the greatest praise, she said, in the motet of the Blessed Virgin, by Josquin de Pres, in the noble song 'Ecce tu pulchra es'. Her teacher specially valued this master and his countryman Gombert, and his exquisite compositions were frequently and gladly sung at the Convivium.

This pleased Wolf, for he had a right to call himself, not only the pupil, but the friend of the director of the orchestra. As, seizing the lute, he began Gombert's Shepherd and Shepherdess, Barbara, unasked, commenced the song.

When, after Barbara's bell-like, well-trained voice had sung many other melodies, the young knight at last took leave of his old friends, he whispered that he had not expected to find home so delightful.

She, too, went to rest in a joyous, happy mood, and, as she lay in her narrow bed, asked herself whether she could not renounce her ardent longing for wealth and splendour and be content with a modest life at Wolf's side.

She liked him, he would cherish her, and lovingly devote the great skill which he had gained in Italy and the Netherlands to the final cultivation of her voice. Her house would become a home of art, her life would be pervaded and ennobled by song and music. What grander existence could earth offer?

Before she found an answer to this question, sleep closed her weary eyes. But when, the next morning, the cobbler's one-eyed daughter, who, since old Ursel's illness, had done the rough work in the chambers and kitchen, waked her, she speedily changed her mind. It was hard to rise early after the day's ironing and the late hour at which she had retired, and, besides, when Barbara returned from mass, the maid reported that Frau

Lerch had been there and left the message that Fran Itzenweck wanted the laces which had been promised to her early that day.

So Barbara was obliged to go to work again immediately after the early breakfast. But, while she was loosening the laces from the pins and stirring her slender white fingers busily for the wretched pittance, her soul was overflowing with thoughts of the most sublime works of music, and the desire for success, homage, and a future filled with happiness and splendour.

Vehement repugnance to the humble labour to which necessity forced her was like a bitter taste in her mouth, and, ere she had folded the last strips of lace, she turned her back to the work-table and pressed both hands upon her bosom, while from the inmost depths of her tortured soul came the cry: "I will never bear it! In one way or another I will put an end to this life of beggary."

Thanks to old Ursel's care, Wolf had found his bed made and everything he needed at hand in his foster parents' deserted lodging. To avoid disturbing the sick woman, he removed his shoes in the entry, and then glided into his former little room. Weariness had soon closed his eyes also, but only for a few hours. His fevered blood, fear, and hope drove him from his couch at the first dawn of morning.

Ere returning to the two men the evening before, Barbara had hastily spoken to Ursula, and brought her whatever she preferred to receive from her hands rather than those of the one-eyed maid who spent the night with her--her Sunday cap and a little sealed package which she kept in her chest. When Wolf tapped at her door early the next morning, she was already up, and had had her cap put on. This was intended to give her a holiday appearance, but the expression of her faithful eyes and the smile upon her sunken mouth showed her darling that his return was a festival to her.

The stroke of apoplexy which had attacked the woman of seventy had been slight, and merely affected her speech a little. But she found plenty of words to show Wolf how happy it made her to see him again, and to tell him about his foster parents' last illness and death.

The precentor and organist, aided by Bishop Pangraz Sinzenhofer and Blasius, the captain of the city guard, had endeavoured to collect the papers which proved Wolf's noble birth. The package that Barbara handed to her the evening before contained the patent of nobility newly authorized by King Frederick at Vienna and the certificate of baptism which proved him to be the only son of the Frank Knight Ullmann Hartschwert and the Baroness Wendula Sandhof.

His mother's family died with her; on his father's side, as the precentor had learned, he still had an uncle, his father's older brother, but his castle had been destroyed during the Peasant War. He himself had commanded for several years a large troop of mercenaries in the service of the Queen of England, and his three children, a son and two daughters, had entered monastic and conventual life.

The contents of the package confirmed all these statements. Moreover, the very Dr. Hiltner, of whom Barbara's father had spoken so disagreeably, had paid a visit the day before to Ursel, who had won the esteem of the preceptor's old friend, and told her that he wished to talk with Wolf about an important matter.

It afforded the young man genuine pleasure to wait upon the faithful old woman and give her her medicine and barley-gruel. His mother had brought him to Ratisbon when he was a little boy four years old, and Ursel at that time had been his nurse. She had clung more closely to him than the woman to whom he owed his life, for his mother had deserted him to take the veil in the convent of the Sisters of St. Clare, but her maid-servant Ursel would not part from him. So she was received by his foster parents when they adopted him, and had served them faithfully until their deaths.

The wrinkled countenance of the old woman, who, even on her sick-bed, retained her neat appearance, expressed shrewdness and energy.

Wolf's services were a pleasure and an honour. A grateful, affectionate glance acknowledged each, and meanwhile he became clearly aware of the treasure which he, the orphaned youth, possessed in this faithful old friend.

If he saw aright, she might yet live a long time, and this gave him heartfelt joy. With her he would lose the last witness of his childhood, the chronicle, as it were, of his earliest youth. He could not understand why he had never before induced her to tell him her recollections.

During his boyhood, which was crowded with work, he had been content when she told him in general outlines that, during the Peasant War, fierce bands had attacked his father's castle, that one of his own bondmen had slain him with an axe, and that his mother had fled with Wolf to Ratisbon, where her brother lived as provost of the cathedral. He had invited her, at the outbreak of the peasant insurrection, to place herself under his protection.

The old woman had also described to him how, amid great hardships, they had reached the city in midwinter, and finally that his mother found Baron Sandhof, her brother, at the point of death, and, after her hope of having a home with the provost of the cathedral was baffled, she had taken the veil in the convent of the Dominicans, called here the Black Penitents. Wolf's foster father, the organist Stenzel, who was closely connected with his uncle, had rendered this step easier for the deserted widow by receiving the little boy in his childless home.

Ursel must give him more minute particulars concerning all these things.

His mother, who knew that he was well cared for, had troubled herself very little about him, and devoted her life to the care of her own salvation and that of her murdered husband, who had died without the benefit of the holy sacrament.

When he was fifteen, she closed her eyes on the world, and the hour when, on her death bed, she had asked of him a vow to be faithful to the Catholic Church and shut his heart against heresy, was as vividly before his memory as if she had just passed away.

He did not allude to these things now, for his heart urged him to confide to the faithful old woman what he thought of Barbara, and the beautiful hopes with which he had left her.

Ursel closed her eyes for a while and twirled the thumb of the hand she could use around the other for some time; but at last she gently nodded

the little head framed in her big cap, and said carelessly:

"So you would like to seek a wife, child? Well, well! It comes once to every one. And you are thinking of Wawerl? It would certainly be fortunate for the girl. Marriages are made in heaven, and God's mills grind slowly. If the result is not what you expect, you must not murmur, and, above all things, don't act rashly. But now I can use my heavy tongue no longer. Remember Dr. Hiltner. When duty will permit, you'll find time for another little chat with old Ursel."

Casting a loving farewell glance at Wolf as she spoke, she turned over on the other side.

As his footsteps receded from her bedside, she pressed her lips more firmly together, thinking: "Why should I spoil his beautiful dream of happiness? What Wawerl offers to the eyes and ears of men is certainly most beautiful. But her heart! It is lacking! Unselfish love would be precisely what the early orphaned youth needs, and that Wawerl will never give him. Yet I wish no heavier anxieties oppressed me! One thing is certain--the husband of the girl upstairs must wear a different look from my darling, with his modest worth. The Danube will flow uphill before she goes to the altar with him! So, thank Heaven, I can console myself with that!"

But, soon after, she remembered many things which she had formerly believed impossible, yet which, through unexpected influence, had happened.

Then torturing uneasiness seized her. She anxiously clasped her emaciated hands, and from her troubled bosom rose the prayer that the Lord would preserve her darling from the fulfilment of the most ardent desire of his heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

Wolf's first walk took him to the Golden Cross, the lodgings of the Emperor Charles and his court. The sky had clouded again, and a keen northwest wind was blowing across the Haidplatz and waving the banner on the lofty square battlemented tower at the right of the stately old edifice.

It had originally belonged to the Weltenburg family as a strong offensive and defensive building, then frequently changed hands.

The double escutcheon on the bow-window was that of the Thun and Fugger von Reh families, who had owned it in Wolf's childhood.

Now he glanced up to see whether young Herr Crafft, to whom the building now belonged, had not also added an ornament to it. But when Wolf's gaze wandered so intently from the tower to the bow-window, and from the bow-window to the great entrance door, it was by no means from pleasure or interest in the exterior of the Golden Cross, but because Barbara had confessed that the nineteen-year-old owner of the edifice, who was still a minor, was also wooing her.

What was the probable value of this stately structure, this aristocratic

imperial abode? How rich its owner was! yet she, the brilliant young beauty who had grown up in poverty, disdained young Crafft because her heart did not attract her to him.

So, in this case, faithful Ursel must deceive herself and misjudge the girl, for the old woman's strangely evasive words had revealed plainly enough that she did not consider Barbara the right wife for him.

The good people of Ratisbon could not understand this rare creature! Her artist nature gave her peculiar, unusual traits of character, which were distasteful to the ways of German burghers. Whatever did not fit the usual forms, whatever surpassed ordinary models, was regarded with distrust. He himself had scarcely been able to understand how a girl so free and independent in her feelings, and probably also in her actions, such a mistress of the art of singing, whose performances fulfilled the highest demands, could have bloomed and matured in this environment.

Old Ursel's evasion had wounded and troubled him; the thoughts associated with the double escutcheon on the bow-window, however, revived the clouded feeling of happiness, and, with head erect, he passed the guards at the entrance and went into the corridor, which was again crowded with lords and ladies of the court, priests of all ranks, knights, pages, and servants.

His position gave him access to the Queen of Hungary's apartments without delay--nay, he might hope to be received by her Majesty sooner than many of the knights, lords and ladies, ecclesiastical and secular dignitaries who were waiting there; the stewards, chamberlains and heralds, the ladies of the court, pages, and lackeys knew that the royal lady not only summoned Sir Wolf Hartschwert frequently, but welcomed his presence.

Nearly all were Spaniards or natives of the Netherlands, and it was fortunate for Wolf, on the one hand, that he had learned their language quickly and well in Italy and Brussels, and, on the other, that his birth entitled him to a place with nobles who had the rank of knights.

How formal and stiffly precise everything was here! How many backs bowed low, how softly bombastic, high-sounding words were murmured! It seemed as if every free, warm impulse would lapse into stiffness and coldness; moreover, those assembled here were not the poor petitioners of other antechambers, but lords and ladies who belonged to the most illustrious and aristocratic families, while among the waiting ecclesiastics there was many a prelate with the dignified bearing of a bishop.

Some of the Netherlanders alone frequently threw off the constraint which fettered all, and one even turned with the gayest ease from one person to another. This was Baron Malfalconnet, one of the Emperor's major-domos. He was permitted to do what no one else ventured, for his cheerfulness and wit, his gift of story-telling, and sharp tongue often succeeded in dispelling the clouds of melancholy from the brow of his imperial master.

At Wolf's entrance the baron greeted him with merry banter, and then whispered to him that the regent was expecting him in her private room, where the leaders of the newly arrived musicians had already gone. As Wolf belonged to the "elect," he would conduct him to her Majesty before "the called" who were here in the waiting room.

As he spoke he delivered him to the Emperor's confidential secretary, Gastelu, whom Wolf had often aided in the translation of German letters,

and the latter ushered him into the Queen's reception room.

It was the royal lady's sleeping apartment, a moderately wide, unusually deep chamber, looking out upon the Haidplatz. The walls were hung with Flanders Gobelin tapestry, whose coloured pictures represented woodland landscapes and hunters. The Queen's bed stood halfway down the long wall at the right.

Little could be seen of her person, for heavy gold-embroidered damask curtains hung around the wide, lofty bedstead, falling from the canopy projecting, rootlike, above the top, where gilded child genii bore a royal crown. On the side toward the room the curtains were drawn back far enough to allow those who were permitted to approach the regent to see her head and the upper portion of her body, which was wrapped in an ermine cape.

She leaned in a sitting posture against a pile of white satin pillows, and her thick locks, interwoven with strings of pearls, bore witness to the skill of the maid who had combed and curled them so artistically and adorned them with a heron's plume. Two beautiful English pointers and a slender hound were moving about and sometimes disturbed the repose of the two Wachtersbach badger dogs, who were trained to keep side by side everywhere--in the room as well as in hunting. When the door opened they only raised their sagacious little heads with a low growl.

The other living beings who had obtained admittance to the Queen's chamber at so early an hour were constrained by etiquette to formal, silent quiescence. Only the ladies in waiting and the chamberlains moved to and fro unasked, but they also stepped lightly and graduated the depth of the bow with which they greeted each individual to suit his or her rank, while the pages used their nimble feet, whose tread silken shoes rendered noiseless, lightly and carelessly.

The features of most of the persons present expressed reverence and expectation. But although, on account of the clouded sky and the small window panes, the rear of the deep apartment especially was only dimly lighted, the impression produced was neither gloomy nor depressing. This was prevented by the swift movements of the pages, the shrill screams of the gay parrots at the window, the paraphernalia of the chase hung on the wall, and especially by the regent herself, whose clear voice broke the silence with gay unconcern, and exerted a redeeming influence upon the constraint of the listeners.

She had just received the Bishop of Hildesheim, the Prince of Savoy, and the Countess Tassis, but gave each only a brief audience, for the entrance of the conductor of the orchestra had not escaped her attention.

Several other personages of the highest rank were still among the waiting group, and her chamberlain, Count Hochstraaten, asked in a low tone whether she would deign to receive the Count Palatine von Simmern; but she was determined to close the audience, for Wolf Hartschwert had entered the room, and the subjects which she desired to discuss with him and the musicians would permit no witnesses.

So, without answering Hochstraaten's question, she turned her face toward the chamber, and said, loudly enough to be heard by all present:

"This reception must suffice for to-day! Whoever does not know that I used last night in his Majesty's service for a better purpose than sleep

will deem me a lazy sluggard. Would to Heaven I had no worse fault! The rising sun sees me more frequently at my station in the hunting grounds than it does many of you, my honoured friends, at the breakfast table. So, Hochstraaten, be kind enough to tell the ladies and gentlemen who have given me the pleasure of their visits, that their patience shall be less severely tried this evening before vespers."

While speaking, she beckoned to the Marquise de Leria, her oldest lady in waiting, and, as the latter bent her aged back to adjust the pillows, the Queen whispered to her to detain the conductor of the orchestra and Sir Wolf Hartschwert.

The order was instantly obeyed, but some time elapsed ere the last of those who had sought an audience left the room, for, although the regent vouchsafed no one a glance, but turned the pages of a note-book which had been lying on the little table at the head of her bed, each person, before crossing the threshold, bowed toward the couch in the slow, formal manner which etiquette dictated.

As soon as Queen Mary found herself alone with the musicians and the marquise, she beckoned graciously to the former, but with familiar kindness to Wolf, and asked for a brief account of his journey. Then she confessed that the Emperor's sufferings and melancholy mood had induced her to subject them to the discomforts of the trip to Ratisbon. His Majesty was ignorant of their presence, but she anticipated the most favourable result upon her royal brother, who so warmly loved and keenly appreciated music, if he could hear unexpectedly the finest melodies, sometimes inspiring, sometimes cheering in tone.

Her inquiry whether his Majesty's orchestra and her own boys would be able to give a performance that evening was eagerly answered in the affirmative by Maestro Gombert, the conductor of the orchestra, and Benedictus Appenzelder, conductor of the boy choir, who was in her personal service. She expressed her pleasure in the knowledge, and then proposed to surprise the Emperor at the principal meal, about midnight, with Jacob Hobrecht's *Missa Graecorum*, whose magnificent profundity his Majesty especially admired.

Gombert forced himself to keep silence, but the significant smile on his delicate, beardless lips betrayed what he thought of this selection. The conductor of the boy choir was franker. He slightly shook his ponderous head, whose long, gray hair was parted in the middle, and then honestly admitted, in his deep tones, that the *Missa Graecorum* seemed to him too majestic and gloomy for this purpose. Wolf, too, disapproved of the Queen's suggestion for the same reason, and, though she pointed out that she had chosen this composition precisely on account of its deep religious earnestness, the former persisted in his opposition, and modestly mentioned the melody which would probably be best suited for a surprise at his imperial Majesty's repast.

Maestro Gombert had recently composed a *Benedictio Mensae* for four voices, and, as it was one of his most effective creations, had never been executed, and therefore would be entirely new to the Emperor, it was specially adapted to introduce the concert with which the monarch was to be surprised at table.

The Queen would have preferred that a religious piece should commence the musical performance, but assented to Wolf's proposal. Gombert himself dispelled her fear that his composition would be purely secular in

character, and Wolf upheld him by singing to the musical princess, to the accompaniment of the lute, snatches of the principal theme of the Benedictio, which had impressed itself upon his faithful memory.

Gombert assisted him, but Appenzelder stroked his long beard, signifying his approval by nods and brief exclamations of satisfaction. The Queen was now sincerely glad that this piece of music had been brought to her notice; certainly nothing more suitable for the purpose could have been found. Besides, her kindly nature and feminine tact made her grateful to Wolf for his hint of distinguishing, by the first performance of one of his works, the able conductor and fine composer upon whom she had imposed so fatiguing a journey.

She would gladly have given Appenzelder also some token of her favour, but she could not have used any of his compositions--the most famous of which was a dirge--upon this occasion, and the blunt long-beard frankly admitted this, and declared unasked that he desired nothing better than to offer his Majesty, with the Benedictio, the first greeting of Netherland music.

Gombert's bearing was that of an aristocrat, his lofty brow that of a thinker, and his mobile mouth rendered it easy to perceive what a wealth of joyous mirth dwelt within the soul of this artist, who was equally distinguished in grave and gay moods.

Queen Mary was by no means blind to these merits, and lamented the impossibility of being on more familiar terms of intercourse with him and his colleague of the boy choir. But both were of humble birth, and from childhood custom had prohibited her, as well as the other female members of her family, from associating with persons who did not belong to the nobility. So there was no place for either in her household.

Rough Appenzelder regarded this as fortunate; Gombert thought it a matter of course because custom so ordained.

The stimulus which the Queen could expect from Wolf Hartschwert was certainly far less deep and varied; yet to him who, as a knight, belonged to her train, she granted many favours which she denied the famous Gombert. Besides, Wolf's musical knowledge was as remarkable as his usefulness as a secretary. Lastly, his equable disposition, his unerring sense of propriety, and his well-proved fidelity had gained the full confidence of the royal lady.

By the side of the two composers and leaders of the musicians he looked almost boyish, yet, as the regent was overburdened with affairs of state, she confided to him alone the care of the further success of the surprise.

He was familiar with the rooms of the Golden Cross, and before midnight would have posted the singers and musicians so that his Majesty would first learn through his ears the pleasure which they intended to bestow upon him.

CHAPTER IX.

The Queen's commission imposed upon Wolf a long series of inspections,

inquiries, orders, and preparations, the most important of which detained him a long time at the Golden Cross.

After he had done what was necessary there, he hastily took a lunch, and then went to the house of the Golden Stag. The steward of the Schiltl family, to whom the house belonged, but who were now in the country, had given the boy choir shelter there, and Wolf was obliged to inform the leader of his arrangements. Appenzelder had intended to practise exercises with his young pupils in the chapel belonging to this old house, familiar to all the inhabitants of Ratisbon, but Wolf found it empty. On the other hand, young, clear voices echoed from a room in the lower story.

The door stood half open, and, before he crossed the threshold, he had heard with surprise the members of the boy choir, lads ranging from twelve to fifteen, discussing how they should spend the leisure time awaiting them.

The ringleader, Giacomo Bianchi, from Bologna, was asserting that "the old bear"--he meant Appenzelder--"would never permit the incomplete choir to sing before the Emperor and his royal sister."

"So we shall have the afternoon," he exclaimed. "The grooms will give me a horse, and after dinner I, and whoever cares to go with me, will ride back to the village where we last stopped. What do I want there? I'll get the kiss which the tavernkeeper's charming little daughter owes me. Her sweet mouth and fair braids with the bows of blue ribbon--I saw nothing prettier anywhere!"

"Yes, these blondes!" cried Angelo Negri, a Neapolitan boy of thirteen, rolling his black eyes upward enthusiastically, and kissing, for lack of warm lips, the empty air.

"Sweet, sweet, sweet," sighed Giacoma Bianchi.

"Sweet enough," remarked little thick-set Cornelius Groen from Breda, in broken Italian. "Yet you surely are not thinking of that silly girl, with her flaxen braids, but of the nice honey and the light white pastry she brought us. If we can get that again, I'll ride there with you."

"I won't," protested Wilhelm Haldema, from Leuwarden in Friesland. "I shall go down to the river with my pole. It's swarming with fish."

Wolf had remained concealed until this moment. Now he entered the huge apartment.

The boys rushed toward him with joyous ease, and, as they crowded around him, asking all sorts of questions, it was evident that he possessed their affection and confidence.

He kindly motioned to them to keep silence, and asked what induced them to expect leisure time on that day, when, by the exertion of all their powers, they were to display their skill in the presence of their mistress and the Emperor.

The answer was not delayed--nay, it sprang from many young lips at the same time. Unfortunately, its character was such that Wolf scarcely ventured to hope for the full success of the surprise.

Johann of Cologne and Benevenuto Bosco of Catania, in Sicily, the two leaders and ornaments of the choir, were so very ill that their recovery could scarcely be expected even within the next few days. The native of Cologne had been attacked on the way by a hoarseness which made the fifteen-year-old lad uneasy, because signs of the approaching change of voice had already appeared.

The break meant to the extremely musical youth, who had been distinguished by the bell-like purity of his tones, the loss of his well-paid position in the boy choir, which, for his poor mother's sake, he must retain as long as possible. So, with mingled grief and hope, he dipped deeply into his slender purse when, at Neumarkt, where the travelling musicians spent the night just at the time the annual fair was held, he met a quack who promised to help him.

This extremely talkative old man, who styled himself "Body physician to many distinguished princes and courts," boasted of possessing a secret remedy of the famous Bartliolomaeus Anglicus, which, besides other merits, also had the power of bestowing upon a harsh voice the melody of David's harp.

Still, the young native of Cologne delayed some time before using the nostrum. Not until the hoarseness increased alarmingly did he in his need take the leech's prescription, and Benevenuto Bosco, whom he had admitted to his confidence, and who also felt a certain rawness in his throat, since beyond Nuremberg one shower of rain after another had drenched the travellers, asked him to let him use the medicine also.

At first both thought that they felt a beneficial result; but soon their condition changed for the worse, and their illness constantly increased.

On reaching Ratisbon they were obliged to go to bed, and a terrible night was followed by an equally bad morning.

When Appenzelder returned from the audience at the Golden Cross, he found his two best singers in so pitiable a condition that he was obliged to summon the Emperor's leech, Dr. Mathys, to the sufferers.

The famous physician was really under obligations to remain near the sovereign at this time of day. Yet he had gone at once to the Stag, and pronounced the patients there to be the victims of severe poisoning.

A Ratisbon colleague, whom he found with the sufferers, was to superintend the treatment which he prescribed.

He had left the house a short time before. Master Appenzelder, Wolf heard from the choir boys, was now with the invalids, and the knight set off to inquire about them at once.

He had forbidden the idle young singers who wanted to go with him to follow, but one had secretly slipped after, and, in one of the dark corridors of the big house, full of nooks and corners, he suddenly heard a voice call his name. Ere he was aware of it, little Hannibal Melas, a young Maltese in the boy choir, whose silent, reserved nature had obtained for him from the others the nickname Tartaruga, the tortoise, seized his right hand in both his own.

It was done with evident excitement, and his voice sounded eagerly urgent as he exclaimed:

"I fix my last hope on you, Sir Knight, for you see there is scarcely one of the others who would not have an intercessor. But I! Who would trouble himself about me? Yet, if you would only put in a good word, my time would surely come now."

"Your time?" asked Wolf in astonishment; but the little fellow eagerly continued:

"Yes, indeed! What Johann of Cologne or at least what Benevenuto can do, I can trust myself to do too. The master need only try it with me, and, now that both are ill, put me in place of one or the other."

Wolf, who knew what each individual chorister could do, shook his head, and began to tell the boy from Malta for what good reason the master preferred the two sick youths; but little Hannibal interrupted by exclaiming, in tones of passionate lamentation:

"So you are the same? The master having begun it, all misjudge and crush me! Instead of giving me an opportunity to show what I can do in a solo part, I am forced back into the crowd. My best work disappears in the chorus. And yet, Sir Wolf, in spite of all, I heard the master's own lips say in Brussels--I wasn't listening--that he had never heard what lends a woman's voice its greatest charm come so softly and tenderly from the throat of a boy. Those are his own words. He will not deny them, for at least he is honest. What is to become of the singing without Johann and Benevenuto? But if they would try me, and at least trust a part of Bosco's music to me--"

Here he stopped, for Master Appenzelder was just coming from the door of the sick-room into the corridor; but Wolf, with a playful gesture, thrust his fingers through the lad's bushy coal-black hair, turned him in the direction from which he came, and called after him, "Your cause is in good hands, you little fellow with the big name."

Then, laying his hand on the arm of the deeply troubled musician, and pointing to the boy who was trotting, full of hope, down the corridor, he said: "'Hannibal ante portas!' A cry of distress that is full of terror; but the Maltese Hannibal who is vanishing yonder gave me an idea which will put an end to your trouble, my dear Maestro. The sooner the two poisoned lads recover the better, of course; yet the *Benedictio Mensae* need not remain unsung on account of their heedlessness, for little Hannibal showed me the best substitute."

This promise flowed from Wolf's lips with such joyous confidence that the grave musician's sombre face brightened; but it swiftly darkened again, and he exclaimed, "We don't give such hasty work!" When the knight tried to tell him what he had in mind, the other brusquely interrupted with the request that he would first aid him in a more important matter. Wolf was acquainted with the city, and perhaps would spare him a walk by informing him where the sick lads would find the best shelter. The Stag was overcrowded, and he was reluctant to leave the poor fellows in the little sleeping room which they shared with their companions. The Ratisbon physician had ordered them to be sent to the hospital; but the boy from Cologne opposed it so impetuously that he, Appenzelder, thought it his duty to seek another shelter for the sufferers.

When Wolf with the older man entered the low, close chamber, he found the lad, a handsome, vigorous boy, with his fair, curling hair tossed in

disorder around his fevered face, standing erect in his bed. While the doctor was trying to compel him to obey and enter the litter which stood waiting for him, he beat him back with his strong young fists. He would rather jump into the open grave or into the rushing river, he shrieked to the corpulent leech, than be dragged into the hospital, which was the plague, death, hell.

He emphasized his resistance with heavy blows, while his Italian companion in suffering, livid, ashen-gray, with bowed head and closed lids, permitted himself to be placed in the litter without moving.

At Wolf's entrance the German youth, like a drowning man who sees a friend on the shore, shrieked an entreaty to save him from the murderers who wanted to drag him to death. The young knight gazed compassionately at the lad's flushed face, and, after a brief pause of reflection, proposed committing the sufferers to the care of the Knights Hospitallers.

This removed the burden from the young Rhinelander's tortured soul, yet he insisted, with passionate impetuosity, upon having his master and the nobleman accompany him, that the physician whom, in his fevered fancy, he regarded as his mortal foe, should not drag him to the pest-house after all.

Both musicians yielded to his wish. On the way Appenzelder held the lad's burning hand in his own, and never wearied of talking affectionately to him. Not until after he had seen his charges, with the physician's assistance, comfortably lodged, and had left the house of the Hospitallers, did he permit himself to test the almost incredible news which Sir Wolf Hartschwert had brought him.

With what fiery zeal Wolf persuaded him, how convincing was his assurance that a substitute for Johann of Cologne, and a most admirable one, was actually to be found here in Ratisbon!

He had no need to seek for fitting words in the description of Barbara Blomberg, the melody of her voice, and her admirable training. The fact that she was a woman, he protested, need not be considered, nay, it might be kept secret. The Church, it is true, prohibited the assistance of women, but the matter here was simply the execution of songs in a private house.

At first Appenzelder listened grumbling, and shaking his head in dissent, but soon the proposal seemed worth heeding; nay, when he heard that the singer, whose talent and skill the quiet, intelligent German praised so highly, owed her training to his countryman, Damian Feys, whom he knew, he began to ask questions with, increasing interest. But, ere Wolf had answered the first queries, some one else made his appearance on the Haid, and the very person who was best fitted to give information about Barbara--her teacher, Feys, who had sought Gombert, his famous Brussels companion in art, and was just taking him to a rehearsal of the Convivium musicum. At this meeting the leader of the boy choir, in spite of his pleasure at seeing his valued countryman and companion in art, showed far less patience than before, for, after the first greeting, he at once asked Feys what he thought of his pupil Barbara. The answer was so favourable that Appenzelder eagerly accepted the invitation to attend the rehearsal also. So the four fellow-artists crossed the Haidplatz together, and Maestro Gombert was obliged to remind his colleague of the boy choir that people who occupied the conductor's desk forgot to run on

a wager.

Wolf's legs were by no means so long as those of the tall, broad musician, yet, in his joyous excitement, it was an easy matter to keep pace with him. In the happy consciousness of meriting the gratitude of the woman whom he loved, he gazed toward the New Scales, the large building beneath whose roof she whose image filled his heart and mind must already have found shelter.

Did she see him coming? Did she suspect who his companions were, and what awaited her through them?

Yet, sharply as he watched for her, he could discover no sign of her fair head behind any of the windows.

Yet Barbara, from the little room where the singers laid aside their cloaks and wraps, had seen Wolf, with her singing master Feys and two other gentlemen, coming toward the New Scales, and correctly guessed the names of the slender, shorter stranger in the sable-trimmed mantle and the big, broad-shouldered, bearded one who accompanied her friend. Wolf had described them both, and a presentiment told her that something great awaited her through them.

Gombert was the composer of the bird-song, and, as she remembered how the refrain of this composition had affected Wolf the day before, she heard the door close behind the group.

Then the desire to please, which had never left her since she earned the first applause, seized upon her more fiercely than ever.

Of what consequence were the listeners before whom she had hitherto sung compared with those whose footsteps were now echoing on the lowest stairs? And, half animated by an overpowering secret impulse, she sang the refrain "Car la saison est bonne" aloud while passing the stairs on her way into the dancing hall, where the rehearsal was to take place.

What an artless delight in the fairest, most pleasing thing in Nature to a sensitive young human soul this simple sentence voiced to the Netherland musicians! It seemed to them as if the song filled the dim, cold corridor with warmth and sunlight. Thus Gombert had heard within his mind the praise of spring when he set it to music, but had never before had it thus understood by any singer, reproduced by any human voice.

The excitable man stood as if spellbound; only a curt "My God! my God!" gave expression to his emotion. The blunter Appenzelder, on the contrary, when the singer suddenly paused and a door closed behind her, exclaimed: "The deuce, that's fine!--If that were your helper in need, Sir Wolf, all would be well!"

"It is," replied Wolf proudly, with sparkling eyes; but the honest old fellow rushed after Barbara, held out both hands to her in his frank, cordial way, and cried:

"Thanks, heartfelt thanks, my dear, beautiful young lady! But if you imagine that this drop of nectar will suffice, you are mistaken. You have awakened thirst! Now see--and Gombert will thank you too--that it is quenched with a fuller gift of this drink of the gods."

The Netherlanders found the table spread, and this rehearsal of the Convivium musicum brought Barbara Blomberg the happiest hours which life had ever bestowed.

She saw with a throbbing heart that her singing not only pleased, but deeply stirred the heart of the greatest composer of his time, whose name had filled her with timid reverence, and that, while listening to her voice, the eyes of the sturdy Appenzelder, who looked as if his broad breast was steeled against every soft emotion, glittered with tears.

This had happened during the execution of Josquin de Pres's "Ecce tu pulchra es'."

Barbara's voice had lent a special charm to this magnificent motet, and, when she concluded the "Quia amore languet"--"Because I yearn for love"--to which she had long given the preference when she felt impelled to relieve her heart from unsatisfied yearning, she had seen Gombert look at the choir leader, and understood the "inimitable" which was not intended for her, but for his fellow-artist.

Hitherto she had done little without pursuing a fixed purpose, but this time Art, and the lofty desire to serve her well, filled her whole being. In the presence of the most famous judges she imposed the severest demands upon herself. Doubtless she was also glad to show Wolf what she could do, yet his absence would not have diminished an iota of what she gave the Netherlanders. She felt proud and grateful that she belonged to the chosen few who are permitted to express, by means of a noble art, the loftiest and deepest feelings in the human breast. Had not Appenzelder been compelled to interrupt the rehearsal, she would gladly have sung on and on to exhaustion.

She did not yet suspect what awaited her when, in well-chosen yet cordial words, Gombert expressed his appreciation.

She neither saw nor heard the fellow-singers who surrounded her; nay, when Dr. Hiltner, the syndic's daughter, seventeen years old, who had long looked up to her with girlish enthusiasm, pressed forward to her side, and her charming mother, sincerely pleased, followed more quietly, when others imitated their example and expressed genuine gratification or made pretty speeches, Barbara scarcely distinguished the one from the other, honest good will from bitter envy.

She did not fully recover her composure until Appenzelder came up to her and held out his large hand.

Clasping it with a smile, she permitted the old musician to hold her little right hand, while in a low tone, pointing to Wolf, who had followed him, he said firmly:

"May I believe the knight? Would you be induced to bestow your magnificent art upon an ardent old admirer like myself, though to-day only as leader of the voices in the boy choir--"

Here Wolf, who had noticed an expression of refusal upon Barbara's lips, interrupted him by completing the sentence with the words, addressed to her, "In order to let his Majesty the Emperor enjoy what delights us here?"

The blood receded from Barbara's cheeks, and, as she clung to the window-

sill for support, it seemed as though some magic spell had conveyed her to the summit of the highest steeple. Below her yawned the dizzy gulf of space, and the air was filled with a rain of sceptres, crowns, and golden chains of honour falling upon ermine and purple robes on the ground below.

But after a few seconds this illusion vanished, and, ere Wolf could spring to the assistance of the pallid girl, she was already passing her kerchief across her brow.

Then, drawing a long breath, she gave the companion of her childhood a grateful glance, and said to Appenzelder:

"Dispose of my powers as you deem best," adding, after a brief pause, "Of course, with my father's consent."

Appenzelder, as if rescued, shook her hand again, this time with so strong a pressure that it hurt her. Yet her blue eyes sparkled as brightly as if her soul no longer had room for pain or sorrow. After Barbara had made various arrangements with the choir leader, it seemed to her as though the sunny, blissful spring, which her song had just celebrated so exquisitely, had also made its joyous entry into the narrow domain of her life.

On the way home she thanked the friend who accompanied her with the affectionate warmth of the days of her childhood, nay, even more eagerly and tenderly; and when, on reaching the second story of the cantor house, he took leave of her, she kissed his cheek, unasked, calling down the stairs as she ran up:

"There is your reward! But, in return, you will accompany me first to the rehearsal with the singing boys, and then--if you had not arranged it yourself you would never believe it--go to the Golden Cross, to the Emperor Charles."

CHAPTER X.

The Emperor's table was laid in one of the lower rooms of the Golden Cross. The orchestra and the boy choir had been stationed in Saint Leonhard's chapel. A wide door led from the consecrated chamber, spanned by a vaulted roof, into the dining-room. When it was opened, the music and singing would pour in a full flood to those seated around the board.

Shortly before midnight everything in kitchen and cellar was ready for the royal couple. The wax candles and lamps were already lighted when Queen Mary prepared to bring her imperial brother to the surprise which she had planned, and whose influence she eagerly anticipated.

The Emperor had received the last report half an hour before, and then commissioned his physician, who had again warned him against the excess of work, to protect him from interruption--he desired to have an hour alone.

Dr. Mathys had fulfilled this order with the utmost strictness. Even the English ambassador was dismissed. The members of the royal household and the nobles who during their stay in Ratisbon crowded around the royal

brother and sister, and even at this late hour filled the rooms and corridors of the spacious building with busy life, had been commanded to step lightly and keep silent.

The lord chamberlain, Count Heinrich of Nassau, saw that nothing was stirring near the apartment of his imperial master, and the stewards, Quijada and Malfalconnet, aided him. But they could not prevent the barking of Queen Mary's hunting dogs, and when their royal mistress followed them to accompany her illustrious brother to the dining-hall, Malfalconnet ventured to remark that the lion, when he retires to solitude, sometimes values rest more than the presence of even the most beloved and adorable member of his noble race; but the regent quickly retorted that she had not yet reached lion hunting, but she knew that even the king of beasts possessed a stomach, and would be glad to have rest seasoned with dainty food.

"The banquet is ready," added Count Buren, and Malfalconnet, with a low bow, said:

"And a portion of it is the covered chiming dish with which your Majesty's love and wisdom intends to surprise the illustrious epicure."

While speaking, he cautiously opened the door of the royal apartment, but the dogs were held back by the pages who had carried the train of the festal robe. Two others zealously aided her to throw the trailing brocade across her arm, and in this manner she entered her distinguished brother's chamber.

This was so deep that a short walk was necessary to reach the window near which the Emperor sat. The office of lighting the vast room was assigned to a dozen wax candles in a silver candelabrum, but they were so inadequate to the task that neither the mythological scenes on the Brabant Gobelin curtains with which the walls were hung, nor the very scanty furniture of the remainder of the long chamber could be seen from the door.

Thus the prevailing dusk concealed the surroundings of the great monarch who was resting there, and the only object visible to the entering Queen was his figure illumined by the light. In her soul everything else receded far behind the person, welfare, and pleasure of this mighty sovereign. Yet she had already crossed half the room, and her entrance still remained unnoticed.

The Emperor Charles, with his forehead resting on his hand, sat absorbed in thought before the papers which had occupied his attention. How mournful he looked, what sorrowful thoughts were doubtless again burdening that anxious brain! Never before had he seemed to his sister so old.

Perhaps it was the ceaseless planning and pondering of the statesman and general which, during the last few years, had thinned the light-brown hair at the corners of the brow.

The resting ruler now seemed to have brought his mind to repose also, for every emotion had vanished from his pallid face. Even the sharply cut nostrils of the long nose, which usually moved swiftly, were perfectly still. The heavy chin, framed by a thin, closely clipped beard, had sunk upon the high ruff as if for support, and the thick, loosely hanging lower lip appeared to have lost its elasticity.

In this hour of rest and relaxation this tireless and successful sovereign, utterly exhausted, had even relinquished seeming what he was; his brown hair framed his brow and temples in a tangled, disordered mass; the lacings of his velvet doublet were loosened; a shabby woollen coverlet of anything but imperial appearance was wound around his lower limbs, and the foot in which the gout throbbed and ached rested on his sleeping hound, and was wrapped in the cloths which his valet Adrian found at hand after the Venetian ambassador, the confessor, and the leech had left his master.

It pierced his sister to the heart to see her mighty brother, upon whose dominions, it was said, the sun never set, in this guise.

Her glance rested sorrowfully upon him a long time, but even when she moved several paces nearer he retained the same motionless rigidity which had seized upon him and even communicated itself to the dog. The animal knew the regent, and did not let her disturb its repose.

Then a terrible fear assailed her, and the image of the Cid Campeador who, mounted on horseback, went swaying on his steed to meet the foe, rose before her.

"Your Majesty," then again "Your Majesty," she called in a low tone, that she might not startle him; but the answer for which she waited in breathless suspense did not come, and now the anxious dread that filled her sisterly heart forced from her lips the cry, "Carlos!" and once more "Carlos!"

The dog stirred, and at the same time the Emperor raised his bowed head and turned toward his sister.

Drawing a long breath, as if relieved from a heavy burden, she hastened to his side, and, clasping his delicately formed hand, kissed it with passionate tenderness; but the Emperor withdrew it, saying with a mournful smile, which gave his rigid countenance a new and more winning expression, in the Castilian language in which he always addressed her:

"Why are you so agitated, Querida? Did the sight of the silent brother alarm the sister? Ay, darling, there are some things more terrible than the wild boar at which the brave huntress hurls her spear. Our mother's bequest----"

Queen Mary, with hands outstretched beseechingly, bowed the knee before him; but he raised her with more strength than would have been expected from him just before, and, sighing faintly, continued:

"There are hours, Mary, when the demon that overpowered the mother stretches his talons toward the son also. But, in spite of his satanic origin, he is a cowardly wight, and a loving face, a tender word, drives him away."

"Then may my coming be blessed!" she answered warmly. "Yet it can scarcely be a demon or any being of mortal mould that is spoiling the life happiness of my beloved brother and sovereign lord. After all, they are tolerably alike in the main point, and what semblance would the son of hell wear that dares to assail the most powerful and vigorous mind of all the ages, and yet is seized with panic terror at the glance of a feeble woman? Whoever knows the anxieties which have recently burdened

your Majesty, and the wide range of the decision to which the course of events is urging you, can not wonder if, as just now, your cheerful spirits desert you. No demons or evil creatures of that sort, Heaven knows, are needed to accomplish it."

"Certainly not," replied the Emperor. "Yet it does not matter what name is borne by the unconquerable power which poisons with horrible images the few hours of repose allotted to the solitary man who is bereft of love and joy. But let us drop the subject! When you appear and raise your voice, it seems as though all gloomy thoughts heard the view halo which drives your stags and roes back into their coverts, Mary. I suppose you have come to summon me to the table?"

The Queen assented, and now he could not prevent her kissing his hand. Then she seized the dainty little bell on the table to ring for the valet Adrian; but the Emperor Charles stopped her with the exclamation:

"Never mind him. I will go with you as I am, if you do not object to sharing your meal with such a scarecrow of a man. Only permit me to lock up these papers."

"From Rome?" asked the regent eagerly.

"That is easily discerned," replied the Emperor. "New and amazingly favourable promises. Nothing is required of me except the trifling obligation to allow the Protestants nothing in religious affairs which the Pope or the Council do not approve. If I agree to accept the promises, every one will think that I have the advantage, and yet, if the contract is made, it is tearing from the sky the political polestar of many a lustrum, and burying one of my clearest, ripest, most sacred hopes."

Here the startled Queen interrupted him: "That would surely, inevitably be the evil fruit which would grow from such a treaty. It would deliver to the Pope, with fettered hands, this very Council which your Majesty so confidently expected would remove or diminish, in orderly methods, the abuses which are urging so many Christians to abandon the Catholic Church. How often I have heard even her most faithful sons acknowledge that such abuses exist! But if you make the alliance, the self-interest of the hierarchy will know how to prevent the introduction of even a single vigorous amendment, and, instead of the conqueror of the hydra of abuse, your Majesty will render yourself its guardian."

"And," added the Emperor affectionately--he still retained his seat at the writing table--"this alliance, moreover, would force me to the painful necessity of opposing the earnest wish of the dearest, fairest, and wisest of my sisters."

"Because it would render war with the evangelical princes inevitable," cried the Queen excitedly. "Oh, your Majesty, you know that the heretical movement, which is making life a burden to me in my provinces, is going much too far for me, as well as for you here in Germany; nay, that it is hateful to me, because I value nothing more than our holy Church, her greatness and unity. But would it really redound to her welfare if the schism now existing, and which you yourself expected to heal through the Council, should by this very Council be embittered and even perhaps perpetuated? For a long time nothing has seemed to me more execrable than this war. Your Majesty knows that, and therefore my lord and brother can not be vexed with me if I remind him of the hour when, a

few months ago, he promised to avoid it and do all in his power to bring what relates to religious matters in these German countries to a peaceful conclusion."

The Emperor looked his sister full in the face, and, while struggling to his feet, said with majestic dignity:

"And I have never given your Highness occasion to doubt my word." Then, changing his tone, he continued kindly: "No means--I repeat it--shall remain untried to preserve peace. I am in earnest, child, though there are now many reasons for breaking the promise. I put them together on the long list yonder, and the Spaniards at the court add new ones every hour. If you care to know them----"

Here he hesitated, because the gout in his foot gave him a sharper twinge; but the Queen availed herself of the pause to exclaim: "I think I am aware of them. It is especially hard just now for the statesman and soldier to keep the sword in the sheath, because Rome offers more than ever, because at the present time no serious opposition is to be feared from the most important states, and because the princes of the empire have neglected nothing which could rouse the resentment of my imperial brother. I know all this, and yet it is as firmly established as Alpine mountains----"

Here a low laugh escaped the Emperor's lips.

"The political course which could be thus firmly established is to be found, you experienced regent, only in one place--the strong imagination of a high hearted woman, who desires to accomplish what she deems right. I, too, you may believe me, am opposed to this war, and, as matters stand now, the German renegades, rather than we, may expect a glorious result. But, nevertheless, it may happen that I shall be compelled to ask you to give me back my promise."

"I should like to see the person who could compel my august brother to undertake anything against his imperial will," the Queen passionately interrupted.

"We will hope that this superior being may not appear only too soon," replied the Emperor, smiling bitterly. "The invincible oppressor bears the name of unexpected circumstances; I encountered one of his harbingers to-day. There lie the documents. Do you know to what those miserable papers force me, the Emperor?--ay, force, I repeat it. To nothing less, Mary, than consciously to deal a blow in the face of justice, whose defender I ought and desire to be. I am not exaggerating, for I am withdrawing a fratricide from the courts, nay, am paving the way for him to evade punishment."

"You mean Alfonso Diaz, who had his brother murdered by a hired assassin because he abandoned the holy Church and accepted the Lutheran religion," said the Queen sorrowfully. "Malvenda was just telling me----"

"He was the instigator of the crime," interrupted the Emperor. "Now he rejoices in it as a deed well pleasing to God, and many thousands, I know, agree with him. And I? Had Juan Diaz been a German Johannes or Hans, the Emperor Charles would have made Alfonso expiate his crime upon the block this very day. But the brothers were Spaniards, and that alters the case."

With this sentence, which fell from his lips in firm, resolute tones, his bearing regained its old decision, and his eyes met his sister's with a flashing glance as he continued:

"The seed which here in the North, in carefully prepared soil and under the fostering care of men only too skilful and ready for conflict, took deep root in the domain of religion, which we were obliged to tolerate because it grew too rapidly and strongly for us to extirpate or crush it without depopulating a great empire and jeopardizing other very important matters, would mean ruin to our Spain. Whoever dared to transplant the heresy to her soil would be the most infamous of the corrupters of a nation, for the holy Church and the kingdom of Spain are one. The mere thought of a Juan Diaz, who had absorbed the heretical Lutheran doctrine here, returning home to infect the hearts of the Castilians with its venom, makes my blood boil also. Therefore, for the sake of Spain, a higher justice compels me to offend the secular one. The people beyond the Pyrenees shall learn that, even for the brother, it is no sin, but a duty, to shorten the life of the brother who abandoned the holy Church. Let Alfonso Diaz strive to obtain absolution. It will not be difficult. He can sleep calmly, so far as the judges are concerned who dispense justice in the name of Charles V."

As he spoke he waved his hand to repel the hound which, when he raised his voice, had pressed closer to him, and glanced at the artistically wrought Nuremberg clocks on the writing table, two of which struck the hour at the same time. Then he himself seized the little bell, rang it, and permitted the valet Adrian to brush his hair and make the necessary changes in his dress.

Then he invited his sister to accompany him to the table.

Walking without a shoe was difficult, and, when he saw the Queen look down sorrowfully at the cloths which swathed the foot, he said while toiling on:

"Imagine that we have been hunting and the boot remained stuck in the mud. I am sure of indulgence from you. As to the others, even with only one shoe I am still the Emperor."

He opened the door as he spoke, and, while the valet held the hound back, the Emperor, with chivalrous courtesy, insisted that his sister should precede him, though she resisted until Baron Malfalconnet, with a low bow to the royal dame, said:

"The meal is served, your Majesty, and if you lead the way you will protect our Emperor and sovereign lord from the unworthy suspicion of wishing to be first at the trencher."

He motioned toward the threshold as he uttered the words, but Charles, who often had a ready answer for the baron's jests, followed his sister in silence with a clouded brow.

Leaning on her arm and the crutch which Quijada had mutely presented to him, Charles cautiously descended the stairs. He had indignantly rejected the leech's proposal to use a litter in the house also, if the gout tortured him.

CHAPTER XI.

Majesty, whose nature demands that people should look up to it, shuns the downward glance of compassion. Yet during this walk the Emperor Charles, even at the risk of presenting a pitiable spectacle, would gladly have availed himself of the litter.

He, who had cherished the proud feeling of uniting in himself, his own imperial power, the temporal and ecclesiastical sovereignty over all Christendom, would now willingly have changed places with the bronzed, sinewy halberdiers who were presenting arms to him along the sides of the staircase. Yet he waved back Luis Quijada with an angry glance and the sharp query, "Who summoned you?" when, in an attitude of humble entreaty, he ventured to offer him the support of his strong arm. Still, pain, compelled him to pause at every third step, and ever and anon to lean upon the strong hip of his royal sister.

Queen Mary gladly rendered him the service, and, as she gazed into his face, wan with anxiety and suffering, and thought of the beautiful surprise which she had in store, she waved back, unnoticed by her royal brother, the pages and courtiers who were following close behind. Then looking up at him, she murmured:

"How you must suffer, Carlos! But happiness will surely follow the martyrdom. Only a few steps, a few minutes more, and you will again look life in the face with joyous courage. You will not believe it? Yet it is true. I would even be inclined to wager my own salvation upon it."

The Emperor shook his head dejectedly, and answered bitterly:

"Such things should not be trifled with; besides, you would lose your wager. Joyous courage, Querida, was buried long ago, and too many cares insure its having no resurrection. The good gifts which Heaven formerly permitted me to enjoy have lost their zest; instead of bread, it now gives me stones. The best enjoyment it still grants me--I am honest and not ungrateful in saying so--is a well-prepared meal. Laugh, if you choose! If moralists and philosophers heard me, they would frown. But the consumption of good things affords them pleasure too. It's a pity that satiety so speedily ends it."

While speaking, he again descended a few steps, but the Queen, supporting him with the utmost solicitude, answered cheerily:

"The baser senses, with taste at their head, and the higher ones of sight and hearing, I know, are all placed by your Majesty in the same regiment, with equal rank; your obedient servant, on the contrary, bestows the commissions of officers only on the higher ones. That seems to me the correct way, and I don't relinquish the hope of winning for it the approval of the greatest general and most tasteful connoisseur of life."

"If the new cook keeps his promise, certainly not," replied Charles, entering into his sister's tone. "De Rye asserts that he is peerless. We shall see. As to the senses, they all have an equal share in enabling us to receive our impressions and form an opinion from them. Why should the tongue and the palate--But stay! Who the devil can philosophize with such twinges in the foot?"

"Besides, that can be done much better," replied the Queen, patting the

sufferer's arm affectionately, "while the five unequal brothers are performing the duties of their offices. The saints be praised! Here we are at the bottom. No, Carlos, no! Not through the chapel! The stone flags there are so hard and cold."

As she spoke she guided him around it into the dining-room, where a large table stood ready for the monarch's personal suite and a smaller one for his sister and himself.

The tortured sovereign, still under the influence of the suffering which he had endured, crossed himself and sat down. Quijada and young Count Tassis, the Emperor's favourite page, placed the gouty foot in the most comfortable position, and Count Buren, the chamberlain, presented the menu. Charles instantly scanned the list of dishes, and his face clouded still more as he missed the highly seasoned game pasty which the culinary artist had proposed and he had approved. Queen Mary had ordered that it should be omitted, because Dr. Mathys had pronounced it poison for the gouty patient, and she confessed the offence.

This was done with the frank affection with which she treated her brother, but Charles, after the first few words, interrupted her, harshly forbidding any interference, even hers, in matters which concerned himself alone, and in the same breath commanded Count Buren to see that the dish should still be made. Then, as if to show his sister how little he cared for her opposition, he seized the crystal jug with his own hand, without waiting for the cup-bearer behind him, filled the goblet with fiery Xeres wine, and hurriedly drained it, though the leech had forbidden him, while suffering from the gout, to do more than moisten his lips with the heating liquor.

The eyes of the royal huntress, though she was by no means unduly soft-hearted, grew dim with tears. This was her brother's gratitude for the faithful care which she bestowed upon him! Who could tell whether her surprise, instead of pleasing him, might not rouse his anger? He was still frowning as though the greatest injury had been inflicted upon him, and his sister's tearful eyes led him to exclaim wrathfully, as if he wished to palliate his unchivalrous indignation to a lady:

"I am deprived of one pleasure after another, and the little enjoyment remaining is lessened wherever it can be. Who has heavier loads of anxiety to endure?--yet you spoil my recreation during the brief hours when I succeed in casting off the burden."

Here he paused and obstinately grasped the golden handle of the pitcher again. The Queen remained silent. Contradiction would have made the obdurate sovereign empty another goblet also. Even a look of entreaty would have been out of place on this occasion. So she fixed her eyes mutely and sadly upon her silver plate; but even her silence irritated the Emperor, and he was about to give fresh expression to his ill-humour, when the doors of the chapel opposite to him opened, and the surprise began.

The signal for the commencement of the singing had been the delivery of the first dish from the steward to one of the great nobles, who presented it to their Majesties.

The Queen's face brightened, and tears of heartfelt joy, instead of grief and disappointment, now moistened her eyes, for if ever a surprise had accomplished the purpose desired it was this one.

Charles was gazing, as if the gates of Paradise had opened before him, toward the chapel doors, whence Maestro Gombert's *Benedictio Mensae*, a melody entirely new to him, was pouring like a holy benediction, devout yet cheering, sometimes solemn, anon full of joy.

The lines of anxiety vanished from his brow as if at the spell of a magician. The dull eyes gained a brilliant, reverent light, the bent figure straightened itself. He seemed to his sister ten years younger. She saw in his every feature how deeply the music had affected him.

She knew her imperial brother. Had not his heart and soul been fully absorbed by the flood of pure and noble tones which so unexpectedly streamed toward him, his eyes would have been at least briefly attracted by the dish which Count Krockow more than once presented, for it contained an oyster ragout which a mounted messenger had brought that noon from the Baltic Sea to the city on the Danube.

Yet many long minutes elapsed ere he noticed the dish, though it was one of his favourite viands. Barbara's song stirred the imperial lover of music at the nocturnal banquet just as it had thrilled the great musicians a few hours before. He thought that he had never heard anything more exquisite, and when the *Benedictio Mensae* died away he clasped his sister's hand, raised it two or three times to his lips, and thanked her with such affectionate warmth that she blessed the accomplishment of her happy idea, and willingly forgot the unpleasant moments she had just undergone.

Now, as if completely transformed, he wished to be told who had had the lucky thought of summoning his orchestra and her boy choir, and how the plan had been executed; and when he had heard the story, he fervently praised the delicacy of feeling and true sportsmanlike energy of her strong and loving woman's heart.

The court orchestra gave its best work, and so did the new head cook. The pheasant stuffed with snails and the truffle sauce with it seemed delicious to the sovereign, who called the dish a triumph of the culinary art of the Netherlands. The burden of anxieties and the pangs inflicted by the gout seemed to be forgotten, and when the orchestra ceased he asked to hear the boy choir again.

This time it gave the most beautiful portion of Joscluin de Pres's hymn to the Virgin, "*Ecce tu pulchra es*"; and when Barbara's "*Quia amore langueo*" reached his ear and heart with its love-yearning melody, he nodded to his sister with wondering delight, and then listened, as if rapt from the world, until the last notes of the motet died away.

Where had Appenzelder discovered the marvellous boy who sang this "*Quia amore langueo*"? He sent Don Luis Quijada to assure the leader and the young singer of his warmest approbation, and then permitted the Queen also to seek the choir and its leader to ask whom the latter had succeeded in obtaining in the place of the lad from Cologne, whom he had often heard sing the "*tu pulchra es*," but with incomparably less depth of feeling.

When she returned she informed the Emperor of the misfortune which had befallen the two boys, and how successful Appenzelder had been in the choice of a substitute. Yet she still concealed the fact that a girl was now the leader of his choir, for, kindly as her brother nodded to her

when she took her place at the table again, no one could tell how he would regard this anomaly.

Besides, the next day would be the 1st of May, the anniversary of the death of his wife Isabella, who had passed away from earth seven years before, and the more she herself had been surprised by the rare and singular beauty of the fair-haired songstress, the less could she venture on that day or the morrow to blend with the memories of the departed Queen the image of another woman who possessed such unusual charms. The Emperor had already asked her a few questions about the young singers, and learned that the bell-like weaker voice, which harmonized so exquisitely with that of the invalid Johannes's substitute, belonged to the little Maltese lad Hannibal, whose darling wish, through Wolf's intercession, had been fulfilled. His inquiries, however, were interrupted by a fresh performance of the boy choir.

This again extorted enthusiastic applause from the sovereign, and when, while he was still shouting "Brava!" the highly seasoned game pasty which meanwhile, despite the regent's former prohibition, had been prepared, and now, beautifully browned, rose from a garland of the most tempting accessories, was offered, he waved it away. As he did so his eyes sought his sister's, and his expressive features told her that he was imposing this sacrifice upon himself for her sake.

It was long since he had bestowed a fairer gift. True, in this mood, it seemed impossible for him to refrain from the wine. It enlivened him and doubled the unexpected pleasure. Unfortunately, he was to atone only too speedily for this offence against medical advice, for his heated blood increased the twinges of the gout to such a degree that he was compelled to relinquish his desire to listen to the exquisite singing longer.

Groaning, he suffered himself--this time in a litter--to be carried back to his chamber, where, in spite of the pangs that tortured him, he asked for the letter in which Granvelle informed his royal master every evening what he thought of the political affairs to be settled the nextday. Master Adrian, the valet, had just brought it, but this time Charles glanced over the important expressions of opinion given by the young minister swiftly and without deeper examination. The saying that the Emperor could not dispense with him, but he might do without the Emperor, had originally applied to his father, whose position he filled to the monarch's satisfaction in every respect.

The confessor had reminded the sovereign of the anniversary which had already dawned, and which he was accustomed to celebrate in his own way.

Very early in the morning, after a few hours spent in suffering, he heard mass, and then remained for hours in the sable-draped room where he communed with himself alone.

The regent knew that on this memorable day he would not be seen even by her. The success of the surprise afforded a guarantee that music would supply her place to him on the morrow also, and ere she left him she requested a short leave of absence to enjoy the hunting for which she longed, and permission to take his major-domo Quijada with her.

An almost unintelligible murmur from the sufferer told her that he had granted the petition. It was done reluctantly, but the Queen departed at dawn with Don Luis and a small train of attendants, while the Emperor retired into the black-draped chamber.

The gout would really have prohibited him from kneeling before the altar, whence the agonized face of the crucified Redeemer, carved in ivory by a great Florentine master, gazed at him, but he took this torture upon himself.

Even in the period of health and happiness when, at the age of twenty-three, besides the great boon of health, besides fame, power, and woman's love, he had enjoyed in rich abundance all the gifts which Heaven bestows on mortals, his devout nature had led him to retreat into a gloomy, solitary apartment.

The feeling that constantly drew him thither again was akin to the dread which the ancients had of the envy of the gods, and, moreover, the admonition of his pious teacher who afterward became Pope Adrian, that the less man spares himself the more confidently he can rely upon the forbearance of God.

And, in truth, this mighty sovereign, racked by almost unendurable pain, dealt cruelly enough with himself when he compelled his aching knee to bend until consciousness threatened to fail under the excess of agony.

Nowhere did he find more complete calmness than here, in no spot could he pray more fervently, and the boon which he most ardently besought from Heaven was that it would spare him the fate of his insane mother, hold aloof the fiend which in many a gloomy hour he saw stretching a hand toward him.

Here, too, he sought to penetrate the nature of death. In this room, clothed with the sable hue of mourning, he felt that already, while on earth, he had fallen into its all-levelling power. Here his mind, like that of a dying man's, grasped for brief intervals what life had offered and what awaited him beyond the confines of this short earthly existence, in eternity.

While thus occupied, the sovereign, accustomed to speculation, encountered many a dangerous doubt, but he only needed to gaze at the crucified Saviour to find the way again to the promises of his Church.

The last years had deprived him of so large a portion of the most valuable possessions and the best ornaments of his life, and inflicted, both inwardly and outwardly, such keen suffering, that it was easy for him to perceive what a gain death would bring.

What it could take from him was easily lost; the relief it promised to afford no power, science, or art here on earth could procure for him--release from cruel suffering and oppressive cares.

While he was learning the German language the name "Friend Hein," which he heard applied to death, perplexed him; now he thought that he understood it, for the man with the scythe wore to him also the face of a friend, who when the time had come would not keep him waiting long. As he thought of his wife, of whose death this day was the anniversary, he felt inclined to envy her. What he had lost by her decease seemed very little to others who were aware of the long periods of time during which, separated from each other, they had gone their own ways; but he knew that it was more than they supposed, for with Isabella he had lost the certainty that the sincere, nay, perhaps affectionate interest of a being united to him by the sacrament of marriage accompanied his every step.

His pleasure in life had withered with the growth of the harsh conviction that he was no longer loved by any one for his own sake.

In this chamber, draped with sable hangings, his own heart seemed dead, like dry wood from which only a miracle could lure green leafage again. With the only real pity which was at his command, compassion on himself, he rose from the kneeling posture which had become unbearable.

With difficulty he sank into the arm-chair which stood ready for him, and, panting for breath, asked himself whether every joy had indeed vanished. No!

Music still stirred his benumbed heart to swifter throbbing. He thought of the pleasure which the previous evening had afforded, and suddenly it seemed as if he again heard the "Quia amore languet"--"Because I long for love"--that had touched his soul the day before.

Yes, he, too, still longed for love, for a different, a warmer feeling than the lukewarm blood of his royal mother had bestowed upon her children, or the devotion of the sister to whom the chase was dearer than aught else, certainly than his society.

But such thoughts did not befit this room, which was consecrated to serious reflections. The anniversary summoned him to far different feelings. Yet, powerfully as he resisted them, his awakened senses continued to demand their rights, and, while he closed his eyes and pressed his brow against the base of the altar covered with black cloth, changeful images of happier days rose before him. He, too, had rejoiced in a vigorous, strong, and pliant body. In the jousts he had been sure of victory over even dreaded opponents; as a bull-fighter he had excelled the matador; as a skilful participant in riding at the ring, as well as a tireless hunter, he had scarcely found his equal. In the prime of his youth the hearts of many fair women had throbbed warmly for him, but he had been fastidious. Yet where he had aimed at victory, he had rarely failed.

The sensuous, fair-haired Duchess of Aerschot, the dark-eyed Cornelia Annoni of Milan, the devout Dolores Gonzaga, with her large, calm, enthusiastic eyes, and again and again, crowding all the others into the background, the timid Johanna van der Gheynst, who under her delicate frame concealed a volcano of ardent passion. She had given him a daughter whose head was now adorned by a crown. In spite of the brief duration of their love bond, she had been clearer to him than all the rest--clearer even than the woman to whom the sacrament of marriage afterward united him. And she of whom seven years ago death had bereft him?

At this question a bitter smile hovered around his full lips. How much better love than hers he had known! And how easy Isabella had rendered it not to weary of her, for during his long journeys and frequent dangerous campaigns, instead of accompanying him, she had led in some carefully guarded castle a life that suited her quiet tastes.

A sorrowful smile curled his lips as he recalled the agreement which they had made just before a separation. At that time both were young, yet how willingly she had accepted his proposal that, when age approached, they should separate forever, that she in one cloister and he in another might prepare for the end of life!

What reply would a woman with true love in her heart have made to such a demand?

No, no, Isabella had felt as little genuine love for him as he for her! Her death had been a sorrow to him, but he had shed no tears over it.

He could not weep. He no longer knew whether he was able to do so when a child. Since his beard had grown, at any rate, his eyes had remained dry. The words of the Roman satirist, that tears were the best portion of all human life, returned to his memory. Would he himself ever experience the relief which they were said to afford the human heart?

But who among the living would he have deemed worthy of them? When his insane mother died, he could not help considering the poor Queen fortunate because Heaven had at last released her from such a condition. Of the children whom his wife Isabella and Johanna van der Gheynst had given him, he did not even think. An icy atmosphere emanated from his son Philip which froze every warm feeling that encountered it. He remembered his daughter with pleasure, but how rarely he was permitted to enjoy her society! Besides, he had done enough for his posterity, more than enough. To increase the grandeur of his family and render it the most powerful reigning house in the world, he had become prematurely old; had undertaken superhuman tasks of toil and care; even now he would permit himself no repose. The consciousness of having fulfilled his duty to his family and the Church might have comforted him in this hour, but the plus ultra--more, farther--which had so often led him into the conflict for the dream of a world sovereignty, the grandeur of his own race, and against the foes of his holy faith, now met the barrier of a more powerful fate. Instead of advancing, he had seemed, since the defeat at Algiers, to go backward.

Besides, how often the leech threatened him with a speedy death if he indulged himself at table with the viands which suited his taste! Yet the other things that remained for him to enjoy scarcely seemed worth mentioning. To restore unity to the Church, to make the crowns which he wore the hereditary possessions of his house, were two aims worthy of the hardest struggles, but, unless he deceived himself, he could not hope to attain them. Thus life, until its end--perhaps wholly unexpectedly--arrived within a brief season, offered him nothing save suffering and sacrifice, disappointment, toil, and anxieties.

With little cheer or elevation of soul, he looked up and rang the bell. Two chamberlains and Master Adrian appeared, and while Baron Malfalconnet, who did not venture to jest in this spot, offered him his arm and the valet the crutch, his confessor, Pedro de Soto, also entered the black-draped room.

A single glance showed him that this time the quiet sojourn in the gloomy apartment, instead of exerting an elevating and brightening influence, had had a depressing and saddening effect upon the already clouded spirit of his imperial penitent. In spite of the most zealous effort, he had not succeeded in finding his way into the soul-life of this sovereign, equally great in intellect and energy, but neither frank nor truthful, yet, on the other hand, his penetration often succeeded in fathoming the causes of the Emperor's moods.

With the quiet firmness which harmonized so perfectly with a personal appearance that inspired confidence, the priest now frankly but

respectfully expressed what he thought he had observed.

True, he attributed the Emperor's deep despondency to totally different causes, but he openly deplored the sorrowful agitation which the memories of the beloved dead had awakened in his Majesty.

In natural, simple words, the learned man, skilled in the art of language, represented to the imperial widower how little reason he had to mourn his devout wife. He was rather justified in regarding her death hour as the first of a happy birthday. For the sleeper whose dream here on earth he, Charles, had beautified in so many ways, a happy waking had long since followed in the land for which she had never ceased to yearn. For him, the Emperor, Heaven still had great tasks in this world, and many a victory awaited him. If his prayer was heard, and his Majesty should decide to battle for the holiest cause, sorrowful anxieties would vanish from his pathway as the mists of dawn scatter before the rising sun. He well knew the gravity of the demands which every day imposed upon his Majesty, but he could give him the assurance that nothing could be more pleasing to Heaven than that he, who was chosen as its champion, should, by mastering them, enjoy the gifts with which Eternal Love set its board as abundantly for the poorest carter as for the mightiest ruler.

Then he spoke of the surprise of the night before, and how gratefully he had heard that music had once more exerted its former magic power. Its effect would be permanent, even though physical suffering and sorrowful memories might interrupt it for a few brief hours.

"That," he concluded, "Nature herself just at this season teaches us to hope. This day of fasting and sadness will be followed by a series of the brightest weeks--the time of leafage, blossom, and bird songs, which is so dear to the merciful mother of God. May the month of May, called by the Germans the joy month, and which dawns to-day with bright sunshine and a clear, blue sky, be indeed a season of joy to your Majesty!"

"God grant it!" replied the Emperor dully, and then, with a shrug of the shoulders, added: "Besides, I can not imagine whence such joy should come to me. A boy's bell-like voice sang to me yesterday, 'Quia amore langueo.' This heart, too, longs for love, but it will never find it on earth."

"Why not, if your Majesty sends forth to seek it?" replied the confessor eagerly. "The Gospel itself gives a guarantee of success. 'Seek, and ye shall find,' it promises. To the heart which longs for love the all-bountiful Father sends that for which it longs to meet it halfway."

"When it is young," added the Emperor, shrugging his shoulders impatiently. "But when the soul's power of flight has failed, who will bestow the ability to traverse the half of the way allotted to it?"

"The omnipotence which works greater miracles," replied the priest in a tone of the most ardent conviction, pointing upward.

Charles nodded a mournful assent, and, after a sign which indicated to the confessor that he desired the interview to end, he continued his painful walk.

He had waved aside the litter which the lord chamberlain, Count Heinrich of Nassau, had placed ready for him, and limped, amid severe suffering,

to his room.

There the Bishop of Arras awaited him with arduous work, and the Emperor did not allow himself a moment's rest while his sister was using the beautiful first of May to ride and hunt. Charles missed her, and still more the faithful man who had served him as a page, and whom he had been accustomed since to have in close attendance upon him.

To gratify his sister's passion for the chase he had given Quijada leave of absence, and now he regretted it. True, he told no one that he missed Don Luis, but those who surrounded him were made to feel his ill-humour plainly enough. Only he admitted to the Bishop of Arras that the radiant light which was shining into his window was disagreeable. It made too strong a contrast to his gloomy soul, and it even seemed as though the course of the sun, in its beaming, unattainably lofty path, mocked the hapless, painful obstruction to his own motion.

At noon he enjoyed very little of the meal, prepared for a fast day, which the new cook had made tempting enough.

In reply to the Count of Nassau's inquiry whether he wished to hear any music, he had answered rudely that the musicians and the boy choir could play and sing in the chapel for aught he cared. Whether he would listen to the performance was doubtful.

Single tones had reached his ears, but he did not feel in the mood to descend the stairs.

He went to rest earlier than usual. The next morning, after mass, he himself asked for Josquin's "Ecce tu pulchra es." It was to be sung during the noonday meal. But when, instead of the Queen and Quijada, a little note came from his sister, requesting, in a jesting tone, an extension of the leave of absence because she trusted to the healing power of the sun and the medicine "music" upon her distinguished brother, and the chase bound her by a really magic spell to the green May woods, he flung the sheet indignantly away, and, just before the beginning of the meal, ordered the singing to be omitted.

Either in consequence of the fasting or the warm sunshine, the pangs of the gout began to lessen; but, nevertheless, his mood grew still more melancholy, for he had believed in the sincere affection of two human beings, and Queen Mary left him alone in his misery, while his faithful Luis, to please the female Nimrod, did the same.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Dread which the ancients had of the envy of the gods
Shuns the downward glance of compassion
That tears were the best portion of all human life

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