

Barbara Blomberg, Volume 3.

Georg Ebers

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BARBARA BLOMBERG

By Georg Ebers

Volume 3.

CHAPTER XII.

During the singing in the chapel on the fast day Barbara had waited vainly for a word of appreciation from the Emperor. The Queen of Hungary had gone to the chase, and the monarch had remained in his apartments, while she had done her best below. A few lords and ladies of the court, several priests, knights, and pages had been the only listeners.

This had sorely irritated her easily wounded sensitiveness, but she had appeared at the rehearsal in the New Scales on the following morning. Again she reaped lavish praise, but several times she met Appenzelder's well-founded criticisms with opposition.

The radiant cheerfulness which, the day before yesterday, had invested her nature with an irresistible charm had vanished.

When the tablatures were at last laid aside, and the invitation to sing in the Golden Cross did not yet arrive, her features and her whole manner became so sullen that even some of the choir boys noticed it.

Since the day before a profound anxiety had filled her whole soul, and she herself wondered that it had been possible for her to conquer it just now during the singing.

How totally different an effect she had expected her voice--which even the greatest connoisseurs deemed worthy of admiration--to produce upon the music-loving Emperor!

What did she care if the evening of the day before yesterday the Queen of Hungary had paid her fine compliments and assured her of the high approval of her imperial brother, since Appenzelder had informed her yesterday that it was necessary to conceal from his Majesty the fact that a woman was occupying the place of the lad from Cologne, Johannes. The awkward giant had been unfriendly to women ever since, many years before, his young wife had abandoned him for a Neapolitan officer, and his bad opinion of the fairer sex had been by no means lessened when Barbara, at this communication, showed with pitiless frankness the anger and mortification which it aroused in her mind. A foul fiend, he assured Gombert, was hidden in that golden-haired delight of the eyes with the siren voice; but the leader of the orchestra had interceded for her, and thought that her complaint was just. So great an artist was too good to fill the place of substitute for a sick boy who sang for low wages. She had obliged him merely to win the applause of the Emperor and his

illustrious sister, and to have the regent turn her back upon Ratisbon just at this time, and without having informed his Majesty whose voice had with reason aroused his delight, would be felt even by a gentler woman as an injury.

Appenzelder could not help admitting this, and then dejectedly promised Barbara to make amends as soon as possible for the wrong which the regent, much against his will, had committed.

He was compelled to use all the power of persuasion at his command to keep her in the boy choir, at least until the poisoned members could be employed again, for she threatened seriously to withdraw her aid in future.

Wolf, too, had a difficult position with the girl whom his persuasion had induced to enter the choir. What Appenzelder ascribed to the devil himself, he attributed merely to the fervour of her fiery artist temperament. Yet her vehement outburst of wrath had startled him also, and a doubt arose in his mind as to what matrimonial life might be with a companion who, in spite of her youth, ventured to oppose elderly, dignified men so irritably and sharply. But at the very next song which had greeted him from her rosy lips this scruple was forgotten. With sparkling eyes he assented to Gombert's protestation that, in her wrath, she had resembled the goddess Nemesis, and looked more beautiful than ever.

In spite of his gray hair, she seemed to have bewitched the great musician, like so many other men, and this only enhanced her value in Wolf's sight.

Urgently, nay, almost humbly, he at last entreated her to have patience, for, if not at noon, his Majesty would surely desire to hear the boy choir in the evening. Besides, he added, she must consider it a great compliment that his Majesty had summoned the singers to the Glen Cross the evening before at all, for on such days of fasting and commemoration the Emperor was in the habit of devoting himself to silent reflection, and shunned every amusement.

But honest Appenzelder, who frankly contradicted everything opposed to the truth, would not let this statement pass. Nay, he interrupted Wolf with the assurance that, on the contrary, the Emperor on such days frequently relied upon solemn hymns to transport him into a fitting mood. Besides, the anniversary was past, and if his Majesty did not desire to hear them to-day, business, or the gout, or indigestion, or a thousand other reasons might be the cause. They must simply submit to the pleasure of royalty. They was entirely in accordance with custom that his Majesty did not leave his apartments the day before. He never did so on such anniversaries unless he or Gombert had something unusual to offer.

Barbara bit her lips, and, while the May sun shone brilliantly into the hall, exclaimed:

"So, since this time you could offer him nothing 'unusual,' Master, I will beg you to grant me leave of absence." Then turning swiftly upon her heel and calling to Wolf, by way of explanation, "The Schlumpergers and others are going to Prufening to-day, and they invited me to the May excursion too. It will be delightful, and I shall be glad if you'll come with us."

The leader of the choir saw his error, and with earnest warmth entreated her not to make his foolish old head suffer for it. "If, after all, his Majesty should desire to hear the choir that noon, it would only be because----"

Here he hesitated, and then reluctantly made the admission--"Because you yourself, you fair one, who turns everybody's head, are the 'unusual' something which our sovereign lord would fain hear once more, if the gout does not----"

Then Barbara laughed gaily in her clear, bell like tones, seized the clumsy Goliath's long, pointed beard, and played all sorts of pranks upon him with such joyous mirth that, when she at last released him, he ran after her like a young lover to catch her; but she had nimbler feet, and he was far enough behind when she called from the threshold:

"I won't let myself be caught, but since your pretty white goat's beard bewitches me, I'll be obliging to-day."

She laughingly kissed her hand to him from the doorway as she spoke, and it seemed as though her yielding was to be instantly rewarded, for before she left the house Chamberlain de Praet appeared to summon the choir to the Golden Cross at one o'clock.

Barbara's head was proudly erect as she crossed the square. Wolf followed her, and, on reaching home, found her engaged in a little dispute with her father.

The latter had been much disgusted with himself for his complaisance the day before. Although Wolf had come to escort Barbara to the Emperor's lodgings, he had accompanied his child to the Golden Cross, where she was received by Maestro Appenzelder. Then, since he could only have heard the singing under conditions which seemed unendurable to his pride, he sullenly retired to drink his beer in the tap-room of the New Scales.

As, on account of the late hour, he found no other guest, he did not remain there long, but returned to the Haidplatz to go home with Barbara.

This he considered his paternal duty, for already he saw in imagination the counts and knights who, after the Emperor and the Queen had loaded her with praise and honour, would wish to escort her home. Dainty pages certainly would not be deprived of the favour of carrying her train and lighting her way with torches. But he knew courtiers and these saucy scions of the noblest houses, and hoped that her father's presence would hold their insolence in check. Therefore he had endeavoured to give to his outer man an appearance which would command respect, for he wore his helmet, his coat of mail, and over it the red scarf which his dead wife had embroidered with gold flowers and mountains-his coat-of-arms.

In spite of the indispensable cane in his right hand, he wore his long battle sword, but he would have been wiser to leave it at home.

While pacing up and down before the Golden Cross in the silent night to wait for his daughter, the halberdiers at the entrance noticed him.

What was the big man doing here at this late hour? How dared he venture to wear a sword in the precincts of the Emperor's residence, contrary to the law, and, moreover, a weapon of such unusual length and width, which

had not been carried for a long while?

After the guards were relieved they had suddenly surrounded him, and, in spite of his vigorous resistance, would have taken him prisoner. But fortunately the musicians, among them Barbara and Wolf, had just come out into the street, and the latter had told the sergeant of the guards, whom he knew, how mistaken he had been concerning the suspicious pedestrian, and obtained his release. Thus the careful father's hopes had been frustrated. But when he learned that his daughter had not seen the Emperor at all, and had neither been seen nor spoken to by him, he gave --notwithstanding his reverence for the sacred person of his mighty commander--full expression to his indignation.

Fool that he had been to permit Barbara to present herself at court with a troop of ordinary singing boys! Even on the following day he persisted in the declaration that it was his duty, as a father and a nobleman, to protect his daughter from further humiliations of this sort.

Yet when, on the day of fasting, the invitation to sing came, he permitted Barbara to accept it, because it was the Emperor who summoned her. He had called for her again, and on the way home learned that neither his Majesty nor the regent had been among the listeners, and he had gone to rest like a knight who has been hurled upon the sand.

The next morning, after mass, Barbara went to the rehearsal, and returned in a very joyous mood with the tidings that the Emperor wished to hear her about noon. But this time her father wanted to forbid her taking part in the performance, and Wolf had not found it easy to make him understand that this would insult and offend his Majesty.

The dispute was by no means ended when the little Maltese summoned her to the New Scales. Wolf accompanied her only to the Haidplatz, for he had been called to the Town Hall on business connected with his inheritance; but Barbara learned in the room assigned to the musicians that the noon performance had just been countermanded, and no special reason had been given for the change.

The leader of the orchestra had been accustomed to submit to the sovereign's arrangements as unresistingly as to the will of higher powers, and Barbara also restrained herself.

True, wrath boiled and seethed in her breast, but before retiring she only said briefly, with a seriousness which revealed the contempt concealed beneath:

"You were quite right, Maestro Appenzelder. The Emperor considered my voice nothing unusual, and nothing else is fit for the august ears of his Majesty. Now I will go to the green woods."

The leader of the boy choir again did his best to detain her, for what the noon denied the evening would bring, and Gombert aided him with courteous flatteries; but Barbara listened only a short time, then, interrupting both with the exclamation, "I force myself upon no one, not even the highest!" she left the room, holding her head haughtily erect.

Appenzelder fixed his eyes helplessly upon the ground.

"I'd rather put a hoarse sailor or a croaking owl into my choir henceforward than such a trilling fair one, who has more whims in her

head than hairs on it."

Then he went out to look for Wolf, for he, as well as Gombert, had noticed that he possessed a certain degree of influence over Barbara. What should he say to their Majesties if they ordered the choir for the late meal and missed the voice about which the Queen had said so many complimentary things in the Emperor's name?

Wolf had told him that he was summoned to the Town Hall. The maestro followed him, and when he learned there that he had gone to the syndic, Dr. Hiltner, he inquired the way to this gentleman's house.

But the knight was no longer to be found there. For the third time the busy magistrate was not at home, but he had been informed that the syndic expected him that afternoon, as he wished to discuss a matter of importance. Dr. Hiltner's wife knew what it was, but silence had been enjoined upon her, and she was a woman who knew how to refrain from speech.

She and her daughter Martina--who during Wolf's absence had grown to maidenhood--were sincerely glad to see him; he had been the favourite schoolmate of her adopted son, Erasmus Eckhart, and a frequent guest in her household. Yet she only confirmed to the modest young man, who shrank from asking her more minute questions, that the matter concerned an offer whose acceptance promised to make him a prosperous man. She was expecting her Erasmus home from Wittenberg that evening or early the next morning, and to find Wolf here again would be a welcome boon to him.

What had the syndic in view? Evidently something good. Old Ursel should help counsel him. The doctor liked her, and, in spite of the severe illness, she had kept her clever brain.

He would take Barbara into his confidence, too, for what concerned him concerned her also.

But when he turned from the Haidplatz into Red Cock Street he saw three fine horses in front of the cantor house. A groom held their bridles. The large chestnut belonged to the servant. The other two--a big-boned bay and an unusually wellformed Andalusian gray, with a small head and long sweeping tail--had ladies' saddles.

The sister of rich old Peter Schlumperger, who was paying court to Barbara, had dismounted from the former. She wanted to persuade the young girl, in her brother's name, to join the party to the wood adjoining Prfifening Abbey.

At first she had opposed the marriage between the man of fifty and Barbara; but when she saw that her brother's affection had lasted two years, nay, had increased more and more, and afforded new joy to the childless widower, she had made herself his ally.

She, too, was widowed and had a large fortune of her own. Her husband, a member of the Kastenmayr family, had made her his heiress. Blithe young Barbara, whose voice and beauty she knew how to value, could bring new life and brightness into the great, far too silent house. The girl's poverty was no disadvantage; she and her brother had long found it difficult to know what to do with the vast wealth which, even in these hard times, was constantly increasing, and the Blomberg family was as aristocratic as their own.

The widow's effort to persuade the girl to ride had not been in vain, for Wolf met Frau Kastenmayr on the stairs, and Barbara followed in a plain dark riding habit, which had been her mother's.

So, in spite of Maestro Appenzelder, Miss Self-Will had really determined to leave the city.

Her hasty information that the Emperor did not wish to hear the choir at noon somewhat relieved his mind; but when, in answer to his no less hasty question about the singing at the late meal, the answer came, "What is that to me?" he perceived that the sensitiveness which yesterday had almost led her to a similar step had now urged her to an act that might cause Appenzelder great embarrassment, and rob her forever of the honour of singing before their Majesties.

While the very portly Frau Kastenmayr went panting down the narrow stairs, Wolf again stopped Barbara with the question why she so carelessly trifled with what might be the best piece of good fortune in her life, and shook his head doubtfully as, tossing hers higher, with self-important pride she answered low enough not to be heard by the widow, "Because a ride through the green woods in the month of May is pleasanter than to sing into vacancy at midnight unheeded."

Here the high, somewhat shrill voice of Frau Kastenmayr, who felt jealous in her brother's behalf at hearing Barbara whispering with the young knight, interrupted them.

Her warning, "Where are you, my darling?" made the girl, with the skirt of her riding habit thrown over her arm, follow her swiftly.

Wolf, offended and anxious, would have liked to make her feel his displeasure, but could not bring himself to let her go unattended, and, with some difficulty, first helped Frau Kastenmayr upon her strong steed, then, with very mingled feelings, aided Barbara to mount the noble Andalusian. While she placed her little foot in his hand to spring thence with graceful agility into the saddle, the widow, with forced courtesy, invited the young gentleman to accompany her and her brother to Prufening. There would be a merry meal, which she herself had provided, in the farmhouse on the abbey lands.

Without giving a positive answer, Wolf bowed, and his heart quivered as Barbara, from her beautiful gray horse, waved her riding whip to him as a queen might salute a vassal.

How erect she sat in her saddle! how slender and yet how well rounded her figure was! What rapture it would be to possess her charms!

That she would accept the elderly Schlumperger for the sake of his money was surely impossible. And yet! How could she, with laughing lips, cast to the wind the rare favour of fortune which permitted her to display her art to the Emperor, and so carelessly leave him, Wolf, who had built the bridge to their Majesties, in the lurch, unless she had some special purpose in view; and what could that be except the resolution to become the mistress of one of the richest houses in Ratisbon? The words "My darling," which Frau Kastenmayr had called to Barbara, again rang in his ears, and when the two ladies and the groom had vanished, he returned in a very thoughtful mood to the faithful old maid-servant.

Every one else who was in the street or at the window looked after Barbara, and pointed out to others the beautiful Jungfrau Blomberg and the proud security with which she governed the spirited gray. She had become a good rider, first upon her father's horses, and then at the Wollers in the country, and took risks which many a bold young noble would not have imitated.

Her aged suitor's gray Andalusian was dearer than the man himself, whom she regarded merely as a sheet-anchor which could be used if everything else failed.

The thought of what might happen when, after these days of working for her bread ended, still more terrible ones followed, had troubled her again and again the day before. Now she no longer recollected these miserable things. What a proud feeling it was to ride on horseback through the sweet May air, in the green woods, as her own mistress, and bid defiance to the ungrateful sovereign in the Golden Cross!

The frustration of the hope that her singing would make the Emperor desire to hear her again and again had wounded her to the depths of her soul and spoiled her night's rest. The annoyance of having vainly put forth her best efforts to please him had become unendurable after the fresh refusal which, as it were, set the seal upon her fears, and in the defiant flight to the forest she seemed to have found the right antidote. As she approached the monarch's residence, she felt glad and proud that he, who could force half the world to obey him, could not rule her.

To attract his notice by another performance would have been the most natural course, but Barbara had placed herself in a singular relation toward the Emperor Charles. To her he was the man, not the Emperor, and that he did not express a desire to hear her again seemed like an insult which the man offered to the woman, the artist, who was ready to obey his sign.

Her perverse spirit had rebelled against such lack of appreciation of her most precious gifts, and filled her with rankling hatred against the first person who had closed his heart to the victorious magic of her voice.

When she refused Appenzelder her aid in case the Emperor Charles desired to hear the choir that evening, and promised Frau Kastenmayr to accompany her to Prufening, she had been like a rebellious child filled with the desire to show the man who cared nothing for her that, against her will, he could not hear even a single note from her lips.

They were to meet the other members of the party at St. Oswald's Church on the Danube, so they were obliged to pass the Golden Cross.

This suited Barbara and, with triumphant selfconfidence, in which mingled a slight shade of defiance, she looked up to the Emperor's windows. She did not see him, it is true, but she made him a mute speech which ran: "When, foolish sovereign, who did not even think it worth while to grant me a single look, you hear the singing again to-night, and miss the voice which, I know full well, penetrated your heart, you will learn its value, and long for it as ardently as I desired your summons."

Here her cheeks glowed so hotly that Frau Kastenmayr noticed it, and with maternal solicitude asked, from her heavy, steady bay horse:

"Is the gray too gay for you, my darling?"

CHAPTER XIII.

Shortly after sunset Appenzelder received the order to have the boy choir sing before the Emperor.

During the noon hour, which the monarch had spent alone, thoughts so sad, bordering upon melancholy, had visited him, although for several hours he had been free from pain, that he relinquished his resentful intention of showing his undutiful sister how little he cared for her surprise and how slight was his desire to enjoy music.

In fact, he, too, regarded it as medicine, and hoped especially for a favourable effect from the exquisite soprano voice in the motet "Tu pulchra es."

He still had some things to look over with Granvelle, but the orchestra and the boy choir must be ready by ten o'clock.

Would it not have been foolish to bear this intolerable, alarming mood until the midnight meal? It must be dispelled, for he himself perceived how groundless it was. The pain had passed away, the despatches contained no bad news, and Dr. Mathys had permitted him to go out the next day. When Adrian already had his hand on the door knob, he called after him, "And Appenzelder must see that the exquisite new voice--he knows--is heard."

Soon after, when Granvelle had just left him, the steward, Malfalconnet, entered, and, in spite of the late hour--the Nuremberg clock on the writing table had struck nine some time before--asked an audience for Sir Wolf Hartschwert, one of her Highness the regent's household, to whom she committed the most noiseless and the most noisy affairs, namely, the secret correspondence and the music.

"The German?" asked Charles, and as the baron, with a low bow, assented, the Emperor continued: "Then it is scarcely an intrigue, at any rate a successful one, unless he is unlike the usual stamp. But no! I noticed the man. There is something visionary about him, like most of the Germans. But I have never seen him intoxicated."

"Although he is of knightly lineage, and, as I heard, at home in the neighbourhood of the Main, where good wine matures," remarked Malfalconnet, with another bow. "At this moment he looks more than sober, rather as though some great fright had roused him from a carouse. Poor knight!"

"Ay, poor knight!" the Emperor assented emphatically. "To serve my sister of Hungary in one position may be difficult for a man who is no sportsman, and now in two! God's death! These torments on earth will shorten his stay in purgatory."

The Emperor Charles had spoken of his sister in a very different tone the day before, but now she remained away from him and kept with her a friend whom he greatly needed, so he repaid her for it.

Therefore, with a shrug of the shoulders expressive of regret, he added, "However badly off we may be ourselves, there is always some one with whom we would not change places."

"Were I, the humblest of the humble, lucky enough to be in your Majesty's skin," cried the baron gaily, "I wouldn't either. But since I am only poor Malfalconnet, I know of nobody--and I'm well acquainted with Sir Wolf--who seems to me more enviable than your Majesty."

"Jest, or earnest?" asked the Emperor.

"Earnest, deep, well-founded earnest," replied the other with an upward glance whose solemn devotion showed the sovereign that mischief was concealed behind it. "Let your Majesty judge for yourself. He is a knight of good family, and looks like a plain burgher. His name is Wolf Hartschwert, and he is as gentle as a lamb and as pliant as a young willow. He appears like the meek, whom our Lord calls blessed, and yet he is one of the wisest of the wise, and, moreover, a master in his art. Wherever he shows himself, delusion follows delusion, and every one redounds to his advantage, for whoever took him for an insignificant man must doff his hat when he utters his name. If a shrewd fellow supposed that this sheep would not know A from B, he'll soon give him nuts to crack which are far too hard for many a learned master of arts. Nobody expects chivalric virtues and the accompanying expenditure from this simple fellow; yet he practises them, and, when he once opens his hand, people stare at him as they do at flying fish and the hen that lays a golden egg. Appreciative surprise gazes at him, beseeching forgiveness, wherever he is known, as surely as happy faces welcome your Majesty's entry into any Netherland city. Fortune, lavish when she once departs from her wonted niggardliness, guards this her favourite child from disappointment and misconstruction."

"The blessing of those who are more than they seem," replied the Emperor.

"That is his also," sighed Malfalconnet. "That man, your Majesty, and I the poorest of the poor! I was born a baron, and, as the greatest piece of good fortune, obtained the favour of my illustrious master. Now everybody expects from me magnificence worthy of my ancient name, and a style of living in keeping with the much-envied grace that renders me happy. But if your Majesty's divine goodness did not sometimes pay my debts, which are now a part of me as the tail belongs to the comet--"

"Oho!" cried the Emperor here. "If that is what is coming--"

"Do I look so stupid," interrupted the baron humbly, "as to repeat to-day things which yesterday did not wholly fail to make an impression upon your Majesty?"

"They would find deaf cars," Charles replied. "You are certainly less destitute of brains than of money, because you lack system. One proceeds in a contrary direction from the other. Besides, your ancient name, though worthy of all honour, does not inspire the most favourable impression. Malfalconnet! Mal is evil, and falconnet--or is it falconnelle?--is a cruel, greedy bird of prey. So whoever encounters no evil from you, whoever escapes you unplucked, also enjoys a pleasant surprise. As for not being plucked, I, at least, unfortunately have not experienced this. But we will not cloud by too long waiting the good fortune of the gentleman outside who was born under such lucky stars. What brings the Wolf in sheep's clothing to us?"

"One would almost suppose," replied the baron with a crafty smile, "that he was coming to-day on a useless errand, and meant to apply to your Majesty for the payment of his debts."

Here the Emperor interrupted him with an angry gesture; but Malfalconnet went on soothingly: "However, there is nothing to be feared from lambs in sheep's clothing. Just think, your Majesty, how warm they must be in their double dress! No; he comes from the musicians, and apparently brings an important message."

"Admit him, then," the Emperor commanded. A few minutes later Wolf stood before the sovereign, and, in Appenzelder's name, informed him in a tone of sincere regret, yet with a certain degree of reserve, that the performance of the choir boys that day would leave much to be desired, for two of the best singers had not yet recovered.

"But the substitute, the admirable substitute?" Charles impatiently interrupted.

"That is just what troubles us," Wolf replied uneasily. "The magnificent new voice wishes to desert the maestro to-night."

"Desert?" cried the Emperor angrily. "A choir boy in the service of her Majesty the Queen of Hungary! So there is still something new under the sun."

"Certainly," replied Wolf with a low bow, still striving, in obedience to the regent's strict command, not to reveal the sex of the new member of the choir. "And this case is especially unusual. This voice is not in her Majesty's service. It belongs to a volunteer, as it were, a native of this city, whose wonderful instrument and rare ability we discovered. But, begging your Majesty's pardon, the soul of such an artist is a strange thing, inflammable and enthusiastic, but just as easily wounded and disheartened."

"The soul of a boy!" cried Charles contemptuously. "Appenzelder does not look like a man who would permit such whims."

"Not in his choir, certainly," said the young nobleman. "But this voice--allow me to repeat it--is not at his disposal. It was no easy matter to obtain it at all, and, keenly as the maestro disapproves of the caprices of this beautiful power, he can not force it--the power, I mean--to the obedience which his boys----"

Here the Emperor laughed shrilly. "The power, the voice! The songstress, you should say. This whimsical volunteer with the voice of an angel, who is so tenderly treated by rough Appenzelder, is a woman, not a refractory choir boy. How you are blushing! You have proved a very inapt pupil in the art of dissimulation and disguise in my royal sister's service. Really and truly, I am right!"

Here another bow from Wolf confirmed the Emperor's conjecture; but the latter, highly pleased with his own penetration, laughed softly, exclaiming, to the baron: "Where were our ears? This masquerade is surely the work of the Queen, who so dearly loves the chase. And she forbade you too, Malfalconnet, to give me your confidence?" Again a silent bow assented.

The Emperor bent his eyes on the ground a short time, and then said, half in soliloquy: "It was not possible otherwise. Whence could a boy learn the ardent, yearning longing of which that 'Quia amore languet' was so full? And the second, less powerful voice, which accompanied her, was that a girl's too? No? Yet that also, I remember, had a suggestion of feminine tenderness. But only the marvellously beautiful melody of one haunted me. I can hear it still. The irresistible magic of this 'Amore languet' mingled even in my conversation with Granville."

Then he passed his hand across his lofty brow, and in a different tone asked Wolf, "So it is a girl, and a native of this city?"

"Yes, your Majesty," was the reply.

"And, in spite of the praise of the gracious mother of God, a Protestant, like the other fools in this country?"

"No, my lord," replied the nobleman firmly; "a pious Catholic Christian."

"Of what rank?"

"She belongs, through both parents, to a family of knightly lineage, entitled to bear a coat-of-arms and appear in the lists at tournaments. Her father has drawn his sword more than once in battle against the infidels--at the capture of Tunis, under your own eyes, your Majesty, and in doing so he unfortunately ruined the prosperity of his good, ancient house."

"What is his name?"

"Wolfgang Blomberg."

"A big, broad-shouldered German fighter, with a huge mustache and pointed beard. Shot in the leg and wounded in the shoulder. Pious, reckless, with the courage of a lion. Afterward honoured with the title of captain."

Full of honest amazement at such strength of memory, Wolf endeavoured to express his admiration; but the imperial general interrupted him with another question, "And the daughter? Does her appearance harmonize with her voice?"

"I think so," replied Wolf in an embarrassed tone.

"Wonderfully beautiful and very aristocratic," said the baron, completing the sentence, and raising the tips of his slender fingers to his lips.

But this gesture seemed to displease his master, for he turned from him, and, looking the young Ratisbon knight keenly in the face, asked suspiciously, "She is full of caprices--I am probably right there also --and consequently refuses to sing?"

"Pardon me, your Majesty," replied Wolf eagerly. "If I understand her feelings, she had hoped to earn your Majesty's approval, and when she received no other summons, nay, when your Majesty for the second time countermanded your wish to hear the boy choir, she feared that her art had found no favour in your Majesty's trained ears, and, wounded and disheartened--"

"Nonsense!" the Emperor broke in wrathfully. "The contrary is true. The Queen of Hungary was commissioned to assure the supposed boy of my approval. Tell her this, Sir Wolf Hartschwert, and do so at once. Tell her--"

"She rode to the forest with some friends," Wolf timidly ventured to interpose to save himself other orders impossible to execute. "If she has not returned home, it might be difficult--"

"Whether difficult or easy, you will find her," Charles interrupted. "Then, with a greeting from her warmest admirer, Charles, the music lover, announce that he does not command, but entreats her to let him hear again this evening the voice whose melody so powerfully moved his heart.--You, Baron, will accompany the gentleman, and not return without the young lady!--What is her name?"

"Barbara Blomberg."

"Barbara," repeated the sovereign, as if the name evoked an old memory; and, as though he saw before him the form of the woman he was describing, he added in a low tone: "She is blue-eyed, fairskinned and rosy, slender yet well-rounded. A haughty, almost repellent bearing. Thick, waving locks of golden hair."

"That is witchcraft!" the baron exclaimed. "Your Majesty is painting her portrait in words exactly, feature by feature. Her hair is like that of Titian's daughter."

"Apparently you have not failed to scrutinize her closely," remarked the Emperor sharply. "Has she already associated with the gentlemen of the court?"

Both promptly answered in the negative, but the Emperor continued impatiently: "Then hasten! As soon as she is here, inform me.--The meal, Malfalconnet, must be short-four courses, or five at the utmost, and no dessert. The boy choir is not to be stationed in the chapel, but in the dining hall, opposite to me.--We leave the arrangement to you, Sir Wolf. Of course, a chair must be placed for the lady.--Have the larger table set in another room, baron, and, for ought I care, serve with all twenty courses and a dessert. Old Marquise de Leria will remain here. She will occupy Queen Mary's seat at my side. On account of the singer, I mean. Besides, it will please the marquise's vanity."

His eyes sparkled with youthful fire as he gave these orders. When the ambassadors were already on the threshold, he called after them:

"Wherever she may be, however late it may become, you will bring her. And," he added eagerly, as the others with reverential bows were retiring, "and don't forget, I do not command--I entreat her."

When he was alone, Charles drew a long breath, and, resting his head on his hand, his thoughts returned to the past. Half-vanished pictures unconsciously blended with the present, which had so unexpectedly assumed a bright colouring.

"Barbara," he murmured, almost inaudibly. Then he continued in soliloquy: "The beautiful Jungfrau Groen in Brussels was also called Barbara, and she was the first. Another of this name, and perhaps the

last. How can this ardent yearning take root in my seared soul and grow so vigorously?"

Meanwhile he fancied that the "Quia amore langueo" again greeted him yearningly in the sweet melody of her voice.

"How powerfully the ear affects the heart!" he continued, pursuing the same train of thought. "Slender, well-rounded, golden-haired. If she should really resemble the Brussels Barbara! Malfalconnet is a connoisseur. Perhaps, after these gloomy days and years, a semblance of sunlight may return. It is long enough since politics and war have granted me even the slightest refreshment of the heart. And yet, methinks Heaven might feel under obligation to do something for the man who has made it his life-task to hold its enemies in check."

He rose quickly as he spoke, and, while moving forward to ring the little bell whose peal summoned the valet, not the slightest trace of the gouty pain in his foot was perceptible.

Adrian saw with joyful surprise that his master approached without a crutch the door through which he had come, and the faithful servant expressed his astonishment in terms as eager as his position permitted.

On reaching his sleeping-room, the Emperor interrupted him. He wished to be dressed for dinner.

Master Adrian would not believe his own ears. He was to bring one of the new reception robes, and yet to-day not even the Queen of Hungary was to share his Majesty's repast. One of the costliest new costumes! What had come over his lord, who for months, when no distinguished guests were present, had worn only the most comfortable and often very shabby clothes at table, saving the better new garments like an economical housekeeper?

But Charles was not satisfied even with these, for, when Adrian hung over the back of a chair a handsome black court dress, slashed with satin, his master signed to him to take it away, and asked for one of the newest works of art of his Brussels tailor, a violet velvet garment, with slashes of golden yellow silk: on the breast, in the puffed sleeves and short plush breeches. With this were silk stockings tightly incasing the feet and limbs, as well as a ruff and cuffs of Mechlin lace.

Shaking his head, the valet took these articles of dress from the chest; but before he put them on his master, the latter sat down to have his hair and beard carefully arranged.

For weeks he had performed this slight task himself, though with very ill success, for his hair and beard had seemed to his visitors rough and unkempt. This time, on the contrary, mirror in hand, he directed the work of the skilful servant with many an objection, showing as much vanity as in his youth.

After Adrian had put on the new costume, the Emperor shook off the large, warm boot, and held out his gouty foot to the valet.

The faithful fellow gazed beseechingly into his master's face, and modestly entreated him to remember the pain from which he had scarcely recovered; but the Emperor imperiously commanded, "The shoes!" and the servant brought them and cautiously, with grave anxiety, fitted the low-cut violet satin shoes on his feet.

Lastly, the sovereign ordered the Golden Fleece, which he usually wore on a hook below his neck, to be put on the gold chain which, as the head of the order, he had a right to wear with it, and took from the jewel case several especially handsome rings and a very costly star of diamonds and rubies, which he had fastened in the knot of the bow of his ruff. The state sword and sheath, which Adrian handed to him unasked, were rejected.

He needed no steel weapons to-day; the victory he sought must be won by his person.

When the servant held the Venetian mirror before him, he was satisfied. The elderly, half-broken-down man of the day before had become a tall, stately noble in the prime of life; nay, in spite of his forty-six years, his eyes sparkled far more brightly and proudly than many a young knight's in his train.

His features, even now, did not show beautiful symmetry, but they bore the stamp of a strong, energetic mind. The majestic dignity which he knew how to bestow upon it, made his figure, though it did not exceed middle height, appear taller; and the self-confident smile which rested on his full lips, as he was sure of a speedy triumph, well beseeemed a general whose sword and brain had gained the most brilliant victories.

Adrian had seen him thus more than once after battles had been won or when he had unhorsed some strong antagonist in the tournament, but it was many a long year ago. He felt as though a miracle was wrought before his eyes, and, deeply loved, kissed his master's sleeve.

Charles noticed it, and, as if in token of gratitude, patted him lightly on the shoulder. This was not much, but it made the faithful fellow happy. How long it was since the last time his imperial master had gladdened him by so friendly a sign of satisfaction!

Were the days to return when, in the Netherlands, Charles had condescended to treat even humble folk with blunt familiarity?

Adrian did not doubt that he should learn speedily enough what had caused this unexpected change; but the discovery of the real reason was now far from his alert mind, because he was still confident that the Emperor's heart had for years been closed against the charms of woman. Nevertheless, the experienced man told himself that some woman must be connected with this amazing rejuvenation. Otherwise it would surely have been one of the wonders which he knew only from legends.

And lo! Chamberlain de Praet was already announcing a lady--the Marquise de Leria.

If Master Adrian had ever permitted himself to laugh in his master's presence, it would certainly have happened this time, for the curtsying old woman in velvet, silk, and plumes, whose visit his Majesty did not refuse, was probably the last person for whose sake Charles endured the satin shoe on his sensitive foot.

How oddly her round, catlike head, with its prominent cheek bones, and the white wig combed high on the top, contrasted with the rouged, sunken cheeks and eyebrows dyed coal black!

Adrian hastily calculated that she was not far from seventy. But how tightly she laced, how erect was her bearing, how sweet the smile on her sunken mouth! And how did her aged limbs, which must have lost their flexibility long ago, accomplish with such faultless grace the low curtseys, in which she almost touched the floor?

But the valet, who had grown gray in Charles's service, had witnessed still more surprising things, and beheld the presence of royalty bestow strength for performances which even now seemed incomprehensible. The lame had leaped before his eyes, and feeble invalids had stood erect long hours when the duties of the court, etiquette, the command of royalty, compelled them to do so.

What a mistress in ruling herself the marquise had become during her long service at the French and Netherland courts! for not a feature betrayed her surprise at the Emperor's altered appearance while she was thanking him fervently for the favour of being permitted to share the meal with the august sovereign, which had bestowed so much happiness upon her.

Charles cut this speech short, and curtly requested her to take under her charge, in his royal sister's place, a young lady of a noble family.

The marquise cast a swift glance of understanding at the Emperor, and then, walking backward with a series of low bows, obeyed the sovereign's signal to leave him.

Without any attempt to conceal from the valet the strong excitement that mastered him, Charles at last impatiently approached the window and looked down into the Haidplatz.

When his master had turned his back upon him, Adrian allowed himself to smile contentedly. Now he knew all, and therefore thought, for the first time, that a genuine miracle had been wrought in the monarch. Yet it gave him pleasure; surely it was a piece of good fortune that this withering trunk was again putting forth such fresh buds.

CHAPTER XIV.

Wolf Hartschwert had asked the guards who were stationed at the end of Red Cock Street whether any riders had passed them.

Several horses always stood saddled for the service of the court. Malfalconnet mounted his noble stallion, and Count Lanoi, the equerry, gave his companion a good horse and furnished two mounted torch-bearers.

But the Emperor's envoys had not far to ride; halfway between the abbey of Prufening and Ratisbon, just outside the village of Dschbetten, they met the returning excursionists.

Barbara's voice reached Wolf from a considerable distance.

He knew the playmate of his childhood; her words never sounded so loud and sharp unless she was excited.

She had said little on the way out, and Herr Peter Schlumperger asked what had vexed her. Then she roused herself, and, to conquer the great

anxiety which again and again took possession of her, she drank Herr Peter's sweet Malmsey wine more recklessly than usual.

At last, more intoxicated by her own vivacity than by the juice of the grape, she talked so loudly and freely with the other ladies and gentlemen that it became too much even for Frau Kastenmayr, who had glanced several times with sincere anxiety from her golden-haired favourite to her brother, and then back to Barbara.

Such reckless forwardness ill beseemed a chaste Ratisbon maiden and the future wife of a Peter Schlumperger, and she would gladly have urged departure. But some of the city pipers had been sent to the forest, and when they began to play, and Herr Peter himself invited the young people to dance, her good humour wholly disappeared; for Barbara, whom the young gentlemen eagerly sought, had devoted herself to dancing with such passionate zest that at last her luxuriant hair became completely loosened, and for several measures fluttered wildly around her. True, she had instantly hastened deeper into the woods with Nandl Woller, her cousin, to fasten it again, but the incident had most unpleasantly wounded Frau Kastenmayr's strict sense of propriety.

Nothing unusual ought to happen to a girl of Barbara's age, and the careless manner in which she treated what had befallen her before the eyes of so many men angered the austere widow so deeply that she withdrew a large share of her favour. This was the result of the continual singing.

Any other girl would fasten her hair firmly and resist flying in the dance from one man's arm to another's, especially in the presence of a suitor who was in earnest, and who held aloof from these amusements of youth.

Doubtless it was her duty to keep her brother from marriage with a girl who, so long as her feet were moving in time to the violins and clarionets, did not even bestow a single side glance upon her estimable lover.

So her displeasure had caused the early departure.

Torch-bearers rode at the head of the tolerably long train of the residents of Ratisbon, and some of the guests carried cressets. So there was no lack of light, and as the lantern in her neighbour's hand permitted the baron to recognise Barbara, Malfalconnet, according to the agreement, rode up to the singer, while Wolf accosted Herr Peter Schlumperger, and informed him of the invitation which the steward, in the Emperor's name, was bringing his fair guest.

The Ratisbon councillor allowed him to finish his explanation, and then with quiet dignity remarked that his Majesty's summons did not concern him. It rested entirely with jungfrau Blomberg to decide whether she would accept it at so late an hour.

But Barbara had already determined.

The assent was swift and positive, but neither the light of the more distant torches nor of the lantern close at hand was brilliant enough to show the baron how the girl's face blanched at the message that the Emperor Charles did not command, but only humbly entreated her to do him a favour that evening.

She had with difficulty uttered a few words of thanks; but when the adroit baron, with flattering urgency, besought her to crown her kindness and remember the saying that whoever gives quickly gives doubly, she pressed her right hand on her throbbing heart, and rode to Frau Kastenmayr's side to explain briefly what compelled her to leave them, and say to her and her brother a few words of farewell and gratitude.

Herr Peter replied with sincere kindness; his sister with equally well-meant chilling displeasure. Then Barbara rode on with the two envoys, in advance of the procession, at the swiftest trot. Her tongue, just now so voluble, seemed paralyzed. The violent throbbing of her heart fairly stopped her breath. A throng of contradictory thoughts and feelings filled her soul and mind. She was conscious of one thing only. A great, decisive event was imminent, and the most ardent wish her heart had ever cherished was approaching its fulfilment.

It is difficult to talk while riding rapidly; but Malfalconnet was master of the power of speech under any circumstances, and the courtier, with ready presence of mind, meant to avail himself of the opportunity to win the favour of the woman whose good will might become a precious possession.

But he was not to accomplish this, for, when he addressed the first question to Barbara, she curtly replied that she did not like to talk while her horse was trotting.

Wolf thought of the loud voice which had reached him a short time before from the midst of the Ratisbon party, but he said nothing, and the baron henceforward contented himself with occasionally uttering a few words.

The whole ride probably occupied only a quarter of an hour, but what a flood of thoughts and feelings swept in this short time through Barbara's soul!

She had just been enraged with herself for her defiance and the reckless haste which perhaps had forever deprived her of the opportunity to show the Emperor Charles her skill as a singer. The cruel anxiety which tortured her on this account had urged her at Prufening to the loud forwardness which hitherto she had always shunned. She had undoubtedly noticed how deeply this had lowered her in Frau Kastenmayr's esteem, and the discovery had been painful and wounded her vanity; but what did she care now for her, for her brother, for all Ratisbon? She was riding toward the great man who longed to see her, and to whom--she herself scarcely knew whence she gained the courage--she felt that she belonged.

She had looked up to him as to a mountain peak whose jagged summit touched the sky when her father and others had related his knightly deeds, his victories over the most powerful foes, and his peerless statesmanship. Only the day before yesterday she had listened to Wolf with silent amazement when he told her of the countries and nations over which this mightiest of monarchs reigned, and described the magnificence of his palaces in the Netherlands, in Spain, and in Italy. Of the extent of his wealth, and the silver fleets which constantly brought to him from the New World treasures of the noble metal of unprecedented value, Barbara had already heard many incredible things.

Yet, during this ride through the silent night, she did not even bestow the lightest thought upon the riches of the man who was summoning her to

his side. The gold, the purple, the ermine, the gems, and all the other splendours which she had seen, as if in a dream, hovering before her at the first tidings that she was invited to sing before the Emperor Charles, had vanished from her imagination.

She only longed to display her art before the greatest of men, whose "entreaty" had intoxicated her with very different power from the Malmsey at Herr Peter's table, and show herself worthy of his approval. That the mightiest of the mighty could not escape pain seemed to her like a mockery and a spiteful cruelty of Fate, and at the early mass that day she had prayed fervently that Heaven might grant him recovery.

Now she believed that it was in her own hands to bring it to him.

How often had she been told that her singing possessed the power to cheer saddened souls! Surely the magic of her art must exert a totally different influence upon the man to whom her whole being attracted her than upon the worthy folk here, for whom she cared nothing. She, ay, she, was to free his troubled spirit from every care, and if she succeeded, and he confessed to her that he, too, found in her something unusual, something great in its way, then the earnest diligence which Master Feys had often praised in her would be richly rewarded; then she would be justified in the pride which, notwithstanding her poverty, was a part of her, like her eyes and her lips, and for which she had so often been blamed.

She had always rejected coldly and unfeelingly the young men who sought her favour, but with what passionate yearning her heart throbbed for the first person whom she deemed worthy of it, yet from whom she expected nothing save warm sympathy for the musical talents which she held in readiness for him, earnest appreciation which raised her courage, and also, perhaps, the blissful gift of admiration!

Never had she rejoiced so gleefully, so proudly, and so hopefully in the magic of her voice, and she also felt it as a piece of good fortune that she was beautiful and pure as the art with which she expected to elevate and cheer his soul.

Transported out of herself, she did not heed the starry heavens above her head, at which she usually gazed with so much pleasure--Wolf had taught her to recognise the most beautiful planets and fixed stars--nor at the night birds which, attracted by the torches of the horsemen riding in advance, often darted close by her, nor the flattering words to which she was wont to listen willingly, and which few understood how to choose better than the well-trained breaker of hearts at her side.

The envoys had taken care that the city gate should be kept open for them. Not until the hoofs of her gray horse rang upon the pavement did Barbara awake from the dream of longing which had held her captive. She started in alarm, raised her little plumed cap, and drew a long breath. The ancient, well-known houses along the sides of the streets brought her back to reality and its demands.

She could not appear before the Emperor just as she was, in her riding habit, with disordered hair. Besides, her head was burning after the dancing and the wine which she had drunk. She must calm herself ere entering the presence of the royal connoisseur whose approval could render her so happy, whose dissatisfaction or indifference would make her wretched.

Quickly forming her resolution, she turned to Malfalconnet and explained that she could not appear before his Majesty until after she had allowed herself a short period of rest; but the baron, who probably feared that some feminine caprice would spoil, even at the twelfth hour, the successful issue of his mission, thought that he must deny this wish, though in the most courteous manner and with the assurance that he would procure her an opportunity to collect her thoughts quietly in the Golden Cross.

Barbara unexpectedly wheeled her horse, struck him a blow with the whip, and called to the astonished gentlemen, "In front of the Golden Cross in a quarter of an hour. You, Wolf, can wait for me at the Grieb."

The last words were already dying away as she clashed swiftly up the street and across the Haidplatz. Bright sparks flashed from the paving stones struck by her horse's hoofs.

"Confounded witch!" cried Malfalconnet. "And how the unruly girl wheels her horse and sits erect in her wild career over the flagstones! If the gray falls, it will do her no harm. Such rising stars may drop from the skies, but they will leap up again like the cats which I threw from the roof when a boy. His Majesty will get something to trouble him if he continues his admiration. Sacre Dieu! What a temperament!--and a German!"

Hitherto both had ridden on at a walk, gazing after Barbara, although she had already vanished in the darkness, which was illumined only by the stars in the cloudless sky. Now the clock struck half-past ten, and Malfalconnet exclaimed, half to the young knight, half to himself, "If only the wild bird does not yet escape our snare!"

"Have no fear," replied Wolf. "She will keep her promise, for she is truthfulness itself. But you would oblige me, Herr Baron, if in future you use a tone less light in speaking of this young lady, who is worthy of every honour. Her reputation is as faultless as the purity of her voice, and, obstinate as she may be----"

"So this masterpiece of the Creator finds much favour in your eyes and your keen ears, Sir Knight," Malfalconnet gaily interrupted. "From any one else, my young friend, I should not suffer such a warning to pass; but we are now riding in the Emperor's precincts, so it would cause me sore embarrassment if my steel pierced you, for my neck, which is very precious to me, would then probably fall under the rude axe of the executioner. Besides, I wish you well, as you know, and I understand you German pedants. Henceforward--I swear it by all the saints!--I will utter no disrespectful word of your lovely countrywoman until you yourself release my tongue."

"That will never be done!" Wolf eagerly protested, "and the mere supposition would force me to bare my sword, if it were not you----"

"If it were not sheer madness for your thumb-long parade dagger to cross blades with my good sword," laughed Malfalconnet. "Ere you drew your rapier, I think your lust for murder would have fled. So let us leave our blades in their sheaths and permit my curiosity, to ask just one more question: What consideration induces you, Sir Knight, to constrain yourself to discreet peaceableness toward me, who, Heaven knows, excited your ire with no evil intent?"

"The same which restrains you from the duel with me," replied Wolf quietly; and then, in a warmer tone, continued: "You are dear to me because you have shown me kindness ever since I came to the court. But you are the last person who would admit that gratitude should fetter the hand which desires to defend itself. In comparison with you, Baron, I am but an insignificant man, but noble blood flows in my veins as well as in yours, and I, too, am no coward. Perhaps you suspect it because I have accepted many things from you which I would overlook from no one else. But I know that, however your jesting tongue sins against me, it has nothing to do with your disposition, whose kindness has ever been proved when the occasion offered. But you are now denying respect to a lady--"

"From that, too, my heart is as far removed as the starry sky above our heads from the wretched pavement of this square," Malfalconnet interrupted.

"Yes, Sir Knight, you judged me aright, and God save me from thinking or speaking evil of a lady who is so dear to the heart of a friend!"

As he spoke he held out his right hand to his companion with gay yet stately cordiality.

Wolf eagerly clasped it, and directly after both swung themselves from their horses in the courtyard of the Golden Cross, Malfalconnet to inform the Emperor of the successful result of his ride, the Ratisbon knight to arrange for the proper stationing of the boy choir, and then, obedient to Barbarbara's injunction, to go to the Grieb.

He knew the baron, and was aware that any one whom this chivalrous gentleman assured of his friendship might rely upon it, but that he did not spare even the most sacred things if he might hope thereby to win the approval and arouse the mirth of his imperial master.

In the glad conviction that he had done his best for the woman he loved, and yet had not forfeited the favour of the influential man to whom he owed a debt of gratitude, whose active mind he admired, and who had, moreover, won his affection, he went to the neighbouring Grieb.

The favour which the Emperor showed Barbara seemed to him not only a piece of great good fortune for her, but also for himself. He knew Charles's delicate appreciation of music, and could confidently anticipate that her voice would satisfy him and win his interest. But if this occurred, and the sovereign learned that Wolf wished to marry the singer to whom their Majesties owed such great pleasure, it would be an easy matter for the Emperor to place him in a position which could not fail to content the just desire of the girl whom he loved for an existence free from want. The interview with the monarch, to which he was to lead Barbara at once, therefore seemed to him like a bridge to her consent, and when he met at the Ark the court musician, Massi, followed by a servant carrying his violin case, he called to him: "Just look at the shining stars up above us, Massi! They are friendly to me, and, if they keep their promise, the journey here will be blessed."

"Amen!" replied the other as he pressed his hand cordially and asked for further particulars; but Wolf put him off until the next day, exclaiming: "Jungfrau Blomberg, whose voice and execution bewitched you also, is now to sing before his Majesty. Wish her the best luck, for on her success depend many things for her, and perhaps for your friend also."

Once more, uphold us!"

He turned toward the Grieb as he spoke, and the longing for Barbara quickened his pace.

The fear that the gouty monarch could cherish any other wishes concerning the young girl than to enjoy her singing was farthest from his thoughts.

Who would ever have seen an aspirant for woman's favour in the suffering Emperor, bowed during the last few years by the heaviest political cares, and whose comparative youthfulness was easily overlooked?

At the main entrance of the Grieb Wolf was accosted by the master of the house.

The wife of this obedient husband, Frau Lerch, known throughout all Ratisbon as "Lerch, the mantuamaker," had told him to keep watch, and impressed it upon him to let no one, no matter who it might be, enter her rooms on the ground floor except the cantor knight, as she called Wolf.

Barbara had had little time for reflection as she fled from the Emperor's envoys, but a clever woman's brain thinks quickly when an important decision is to be made, and while turning the gray she had decided that it would be better for her purpose, and the haste connected with it, to go to Frau Lerch than to her own home.

In the Grieb she was sure of finding admittance at once if she knocked at Frau Lerch's window, while the cantor house was closed early, and a long time might pass before the door opened to her. Besides, she did not know how her father, who could never be depended upon in such matters, would regard the honour that awaited her; thirdly--and this alone was decisive--the white dress, which she meant to wear instead of the riding habit, was at Frau Lerch's, and what good service the skilful, nimble fingers of her mother's ex-maid could render in this hurried change of garb.

Besides, it had also darted into her mind that the baron might accompany her to her shabby abode, and that would have seemed like a humiliation. Why should the court know what indigent circumstances had been the portion of the artist to whom the Emperor, through no less a personage than Baron Malfalconnet, sent an "entreaty" for her appearance?

All this had been clear to her in the course of a few seconds, and her choice had proved fortunate, for the gate of the Grieb was still unlocked, and the old hostler Kunz, who had been in the service of the Gravenreuths, the former owners of the Grieb, and had known "Wawerl" from childhood, was just coming out of the tavern, and willingly agreed to take the gray back to Peter Schlumperger's stable.

When Barbara entered the huge building a ray of light shone from the private chapel at the left, dedicated to Saint Dorothea.

This seemed to her like a sign from heaven, and, before knocking at Frau Lerch's door, she glided into the sanctuary, threw herself upon her knees before the image of the saint, and besought her to bestow the most melting sweetness and the deepest influence upon her voice while singing before his Majesty.

Then it seemed as though the face of the kindly saint smiled assent, and in hurried words Barbara added that the great monarch was also the most

thorough connoisseur, and the altar here should lack neither candles nor flowers if she would bestow upon her the power to win his approval. While speaking, she raised her clasped hands toward the Virgin's image, and concluded her fervent prayer with the passionate exclamation: "Oh, hear me, hear me, thou inexhaustible fountain of mercy, for if I do not fulfil what he expected when he entreated me to sing before him, and I see that he lets me go disappointed, the peace of this heart will be destroyed! Hear, oh, hear me, august Queen of Heaven!"

Relieved and strengthened, she at last sprang up, and a few minutes after Frau Lerch, with loud exclamations of admiration, was combing her long, thick, waving locks of fair hair.

Overflowing with delight at such beauty, the thin little woman then helped her "darling Wawerl," her "wonderfully sweet nightingale," to change her dress.

Wolf's gift, the velvet robe with the marten border, would have been too heavy and oppressive for singing, and, besides, was not yet finished. Barbara, she declared, had done right to choose the white one, which was intended for the next dance at the New Scales. Nothing could be more becoming to her enchanting little princess, and Barbara yielded herself entirely to the experienced assistant, who had all the laces and ribbons she needed close at hand. She could even supply her with new and dainty satin shoes.

While Frau Lerch was working with wonderful dexterity, she also permitted her nimble tongue no rest. In the tenderest accents of faithful maternal solicitude she counselled her how to conduct herself in his Majesty's presence. Hurriedly showing Barbara how the stiff Spanish ladies of the court curtsied, she exclaimed: "And another thing, my darling pet: It is important for all ladies, even those of royal blood, to try to win the favour of so great a monarch when they meet him for the first time. You can use your eyes, too, and how effectually! I saw you a short time ago, and, if I had been a young gentleman, how gladly I would have changed places with the handsome recruiting officer Pyramus at the New Scales! That was a flaming fire! Now, isn't it true, darling--now we no longer have even a single glance for such insignificant fellows! Consider that settled! But things of that sort have no effect upon his august Majesty. You must cast down your sparkling blue eyes in modest embarrassment, as if you still wore the confirmation wreath. All the fashionable sons of the burghers complain of your repellent coldness. Let his Majesty feel it too. That will pour oil on the flames, and they must blaze up high; I'd stake both my hands on it, much as I need them. But if it results as I expect, my darling, don't forget old Lerch, who loves you even more than your own mother did. How beautiful and stately she was! But she forgot her little Wawerl only too often. I have a faithful nature, child, and understand life. If, sooner or later, you need the advice of a true, helpful friend, you know where to find little old Lerch."

These warnings had sounded impressive enough, but Barbara had by no means listened attentively. Instead, she had been anticipating, with torturing impatience, her appearance before the great man for whom she was adorned and the songs which she would have to sing. If she was permitted to choose herself, he would also hear the bird-song, with the "Car la saison est bonne," which had extorted such enthusiastic applause from the Netherland maestro.

But no!

She must choose something grander, more solemn, for she wished to make a deeper, stronger, more lasting impression upon the man who was now to listen to her voice.

Mere lukewarm satisfaction would not content her in the case of the Emperor Charles; she wished to arouse his enthusiasm, his rapture. What bliss it would be if she was permitted to penetrate deeply into his soul, if it were allotted to her to make the ruler's grave eyes sparkle with radiant delight!

In increasing excitement, she saw herself, in imagination, lowering the sheet of music, and the sovereign, deeply moved, holding out both hands to her.

But that would have been too much happiness! What if the violent throbbing of her heart should silence her voice? What if the oppressive timidity, which conquers every one who for the first time is permitted to stand in the presence of majesty, should cause her to lose her memory and be unable to find the mood which she required in order to execute her task with the perfection that hovered before her mind?

Yes, that would happen! With cruel self-torture she dwelt upon the terrible dread, for she thought she had noticed that the best success often followed when she had expected the worst result. Fran Lerch perceived what was passing in her mind, and instilled courage until she had finished her work and held up the mirror before Barbara.

The girl, whether she desired to do so or not, could not help looking in. She did it reluctantly, and, after hastily assuring herself that she was presentable, she turned the glittering disk away and would not glance at it again.

She feared that the contemplation of her own image might disturb her; she wished to think only of the worthy execution of her task, and the shorter time she kept the Emperor waiting the less she need fear having an ill-humoured listener.

So she hurriedly ejaculated a few words of gratitude to the old attendant and seized the kerchief for her head, which she had taken to Prufening with her; but the dressmaker wound around her hair a costly lace veil which she had ready for a customer.

"The valuable article may be lost," she thought. "But if, sooner or later, something happens which my lambkin, who thinks only of her sweet babble, does not dream, it will return to me with interest. Besides, she must see what maternal affection I feel for her." Then, with tender caution, she kissed the girl's glowing cheeks, and the blessing with which she at last dismissed her sounded devout and loving enough.

Wolf had not waited long; it was just striking eleven when Barbara met him at the door talking with Herr Lerch, the owner of the house.

Before leaving the Grieb, she again glanced into the chapel in the courtyard dedicated to Saint Dorothea, and uttered a swift though silent prayer for good success, and that her singing might have a deep influence upon the august hearer.

Meanwhile she scarcely heeded what her friend was saying, and, while

walking at his side the short distance through a part of Red Cock Street and across the Haidplatz, he had no words from her lips except the request that he would tell her father of the great honour awaiting her.

Wolf, too, had imposed silence upon himself; it was necessary for the singer, on the eve of this important performance, to refrain from talking in the night air.

CHAPTER XV.

Baron Malfalconnet possessed the gift of lending Time wings and using the simplest incident as the foundation for an entertaining story.

He knew that his Majesty did not like waiting, and the quarter of an hour which Barbara had mentioned might easily become a longer period. So he adorned the description of his ride as an envoy most generously with many partially invented details. Wolf, Herr Peter Schlumperger, Frau Kastenmayr, his estimable sister, and the party of Ratisbon excursionists, upon whom he had scarcely bestowed a passing glance, all played a large and by no means enviable part.

But he gained his object, for the impatient monarch listened gladly, and all the more willingly in proportion to the more brilliant eloquence with which the clever connoisseur of mankind placed Barbara in contrast to all the obscure, insignificant, and ridiculous personages whom he pretended to have met. The peculiar charm which her individuality thus obtained corresponded with the idea which the monarch himself had formed of the expected guest, and it flattered him to hear his conjecture so remarkably confirmed.

A few questions from the monarch followed the baron's report. While the latter was still answering the last one, Chamberlain de Praet announced the singer's arrival, and Count Bueren escorted the aged Marquise de Leria to the monarch.

The Emperor went at once to the table, and as he descended the stairs, leaning lightly on Malfalconnet's arm, it was scarcely perceptible that he used the left foot less firmly than the other.

According to his command, only the small table at which he was to sit with the marquise had been laid in the dining-room. The boy choir had taken a position opposite to it.

At his entrance Barbara rose quickly from the chair, into which she had sunk by no means from weariness.

With a throbbing heart, and still heavily oppressed by anxiety, she awaited the next moments and what they would bring.

The *Benedictio Mensae* was again to open the concert. She needed no notes for this familiar music. Yet she looked toward Appenzelder, who had thanked her for her appearance as if she had done him a great favour.

Now the orchestra behind her was silent. Now she saw the lackeys and attendants bow profoundly. Now Appenzelder raised his arm.

She saw it, but he had not yet touched the desk with the little ebony staff, and she availed herself of the pause to glance toward the anxiously expected sovereign, whose presence she felt.

There he stood.

Barbara scarcely noticed the old lady at his left; he, he alone captivated her eyes, her heart, her senses, her whole being.

What a happy surprise!

How Wolf, Maestro Gombert, and others had described the Emperor, and how he stood before her!

This chivalrous, superb, almost youthful gentleman and hero, whose haughty, self-assured bearing so admirably suited the magnificence of his rich-hued garments, was said to be a gouty old man, bowed by the weight of care! Had it not been so abominable, it would have tempted her to laugh.

How petty men were, how cruel was the fate of the great, to whom envy clings like their own shadow, and whose image was basely distorted even by those who knew the grandeur of their intellect and their deeds, and who owed to them their best success in life!

Her heart beat for this man, not only with the artist's desire to satisfy the connoisseur, no, but with stormy passion--she felt it now; yet, though the god of love was called a blind boy, she had retained the full, clear strength of vision and the absolute power of discernment.

No one, not even the handsomest young knight, could compare in her eyes with the mature, powerful guide of the destiny of many millions, whose lofty brow was illumined by the grandeur of his intellect, and with whose name the memory of glorious victories was associated. The pride justified by his birth had led him from one lofty deed to another, and he could not help carrying his head so high, for how far all the rest of mankind lay beneath him! There was no living mortal to whom the Emperor Charles would have been obliged to look up, or before whom he need bow his head at all.

She would fain have been able to stamp his image deeply, ineffaceably upon her soul. But, alas!

Just at that moment a short, imperious sound reached her ear. Appenzelder had struck the desk with his baton. The Benedictio must begin at once, and now her breath was really coming so quickly that it seemed impossible for her to sing in this condition.

Deeply troubled, she pressed her hand upon her bosom.

Then the cruel, tyrannical baton struck the wood a second time, and----

But what did this mean?

The Emperor had left his elderly companion after she was seated at the table, and was advancing--her eyes, clouded by anxious expectation, did not deceive her--and was walking with stately dignity toward the boy choir; no, not to it, but directly toward herself.--Now it seemed as though her heart stood still.

At no price could she have produced even a single note.

But it was not required, for the wave of the imperial hand which she saw was to Appenzelder, and commanded him to silence his choir.

The unexpected movement concerned her alone, and ere Barbara found time to ask herself what brought him to her, he already stood before her.

How friendly and yet how chivalrously stately as the slight bow which the monarch bestowed upon her; and he had scarcely done so when, in peculiar German, whose strange accent seemed to her extremely charming and musical, he exclaimed: "we welcome you to the Golden Cross, fairest of maidens. You now behold what man can accomplish when he strives for anything with genuine zeal. The wisest among the wise declare that even gods fail in the conflict against the obstinacy of beautiful women, and yet our longing desire succeeded in capturing you, lovely fugitive."

Barbara alternately flushed and paled as she listened to these words.

She had not heard Frau Lerch's counsel, and yet, obedient to a secret impulse, she timidly lowered her blue eyes. But not a word of the sovereign had escaped her, and, though she still lacked the power of speech, she found courage to smile and shake her head in denial.

The Emperor did not miss a single change of feature, and, swiftly understanding her mute contradiction, went on gaily: "Look! look! So, fairest of the fair, you refuse to acknowledge our glorious victory? That bears witness to a specially independent comprehension of things. But we, how are we to explain such a denial of an accomplished fact?"

Then Barbara summoned up courage and answered, still with downcast eyes, "But, your Majesty, how can I regard myself as conquered and captured when I voluntarily yielded to your Majesty's wish?"

"And may I perhaps also hope that it gives you pleasure to grant my entreaty?" asked the sovereign in a subdued tone, gazing as he spoke deep into the eyes which the young girl had just raised to his.

Barbara did not instantly find the reply she sought, and only bent her head in assent, but the Emperor was not satisfied with this mute answer, and eagerly desired to learn whether it was so difficult for her to admit what he so ardently wished to hear.

Meanwhile her quick intellect had found the fitting response, and, with a look which told the questioner more than she intended to betray, she answered softly: "Why should I not have fulfilled your Majesty's request gladly and proudly? But what followed the walk here, what befell me here, is so much more beautiful and greater--"

"And may we know," interrupted the Emperor urgently, "what you find here that affords your heart so much pleasure?"

"You and your favour," she answered quickly, and the flush which suddenly crimsoned her cheeks showed him how deeply she was moved.

Then Charles went close to her and whispered: "And do you wish to know, most bewitching woman, how he, in whose presence you confess that you are glad to remain, looked forward to your coming? As he would greet

happiness, spring. And note that I look you in the face, it seems as though Easter bells were pealing the resurrection of a love long buried in this breast. And you, maiden, you will not belie this hope?"

Barbara clung to the back of the chair for support, while from her deeply agitated soul struggled the exclamation: "This poor heart, my lord, belongs to you--to you alone! How it mastered me, who can describe? But here, my lord, now----"

Then the monarch whispered warmly: "You are right. What we have to say to each other requires a more fitting time and a different place, and we will find them."

Then he stepped back, drew himself up to his full height, waved his hand to her with gracious condescension, and in a loud, imperious tone commanded Appenzelder to begin the Benedictio.

"It rests with the lovely artist yonder," he added, glancing kindly at Barbara, "whether she will now ennoble with her wonderful voice the singing of the boy choir. Later she will probably allow us to hear the closing melody of the 'Ecce tu pulchra es', which, with such good reason, delighted the Queen of Hungary, and myself no less."

He seated himself at the table as he spoke, and devoted himself to the dishes offered him so eagerly that it was difficult to believe in the deep, yearning emotion that ruled him. Only the marquise at his side and Malfalconnet, who had joined the attendant nobles, perceived that he ate more rapidly than usual, and paid no attention to the preparation of the viands.

The aged eyes, of the Emperor's watchful companion, to whom up to the close of the repast he addressed only a few scattered words, also detected something else. Rarely, but nevertheless several times, the Emperor glanced at the boy choir, and when, in doing so, his Majesty's eyes met the singer's, it was done in a way which proved to the marquise, who had acquired profound experience at the French court, that an understanding existed between the sovereign and the artist which could scarcely date from that day. This circumstance must be considered, and behind the narrow, wrinkled brow of the old woman, whose cradle had stood in a ducal palace, thronged a succession of thoughts and plans precisely similar to those which had filled the inind of the dressmaker and ex-maid ere she gave Barbara her farewell kiss.

What the marquise at first had merely conjectured and put together from various signs, became, by constant assiduous observation, complete certainty when the singer, after a tolerably long pause, joined in Josquin's hymn to the Virgin.

In the Benedictio Mensae she remained silent, but at the first effective passage joined in the singing of the boys.

Not until the 'Tu pulchra es' did she display the full power of her art.

From the commencement she took part in the execution of this magnificent composition eagerly and with deep feeling, and when the closing bars began and the magic of her singing developed all its heart-thrilling power, the watchful lady in waiting perceived that his Majesty forgot the food and hung on Barbara's lips as though spellbound.

This was something unprecedented. But when the monarch continued for some time to display an abstemiousness so unlike him, the marquise cast a hasty glance of inquiry at Malfalconnet. But the affirmative answer which she expected did not come. Had the baron's keen eye failed to notice so important a matter, or had his Majesty taken him into his confidence and commanded him to keep the secret?

That Malfalconnet was merely avoiding making common cause with the old intriguer, was a suspicion which vanity led her to reject the more positively the more frequently her countryman sought her to learn what he desired to know.

Besides, she soon required no further confirmation, for what now happened put an end to every doubt.

Barbara had to sing the "Quia amore languero" again, and how it sounded this time to the listening hearer!

No voice which the Emperor Charles had ever heard had put such pure, bewitching melody into this expression of the deepest yearning. It seemed as though the longing of the whole world was flowing to him from those fresh, young, beautifully formed red lips.

A heart which was not itself languishing for love could not pour forth to another with such convincing truth, overwhelming power, and glowing fervour the ardent longing of a soul seized by the omnipotence of love.

The mighty pressure of rising surges of yearning dashed against the monarch's heart, and with tremendous impetuosity roused on all sides the tender desires which for a long time had been gathering in his soul. It seemed as though this "Because I long for love" was blending with the long-repressed and now uncontrollable yearning that filled his own breast, and he was obliged to restrain himself in order not to rush toward this gifted singer, this marvellously lovely woman, whose heart was his, and, before the eyes of all, clasp her in his embrace.

The master of dissimulation forgot himself, and--what a delight to the eyes of the marquise!--the Emperor Charles, the great epicure and thirsty drinker, left the pasty and the wine, to listen standing, with hands resting on the table and outstretched head, to Barbara's voice.

It seemed as though he feared his ear might miss a note of this song, his eye a movement of this source of melody.

But when the song ceased, and Barbara, panting for breath, returned the ardent look of gratitude and delight which beamed upon her from his eyes, the Emperor left the table, and, without noticing Count Krockow, who was just lifting the silver cover from the roast capon, the last of the five dishes ordered, went up to Barbara.

Would he really end the meal now? The old marquise thought it impossible, but if the incredible event occurred, then things were to be expected, things----

But ere she had imagined how this unprecedented event could take place, the Emperor himself informed her, for, half addressing Barbara, half the lady in waiting, he exclaimed in a slightly muffled tone: "Thanks, cordial thanks for this great pleasure, my dear Jungfrau! But we wish to add to words another token of appreciation, a token of more lasting

duration.--Do us the favour, Marquise de Leria, to conduct this noble artist to the upper rooms, that she may receive what we intended for her."

He left the hall as he spoke; but the marquise beckoned to Barbara, detained her with words of sweet flattery a short time and then, with the young girl, ascended the stairs up which the Emperor had preceded them.

Meanwhile the old noblewoman continued to talk with her; but Barbara did not listen. While following her guide, it seemed as though the steps her light foot trod were a heavenly ladder, and at their end the gates of Paradise would open.

She felt with inexpressible delight that she had never before succeeded so well in expressing a strong feeling in music, and what her song endeavoured to tell the Emperor--no, the man whom she loved--had been understood, and found an echo in his soul.

Could there be a greater happiness?

And yet, while she was approaching him, he must be awaiting her.

She had wished to arouse his attention, his approval, his delight in her singing. All three had become hers, and now new wishes had mastered her, and probably him also. She desired his love, he hers, and, fearing herself, she felt the great peril into which her aged companion was conducting her.

The Emperor was indeed the greatest and noblest of men! The mere consciousness that he desired not only her singing, but her heart, inspired the deepest bliss. Yet it seemed as if she ought not to cross the threshold of the room which opened before her; as if she ought to rush down the stairs and fly from him, as she had dashed away when his messengers wished to lead her to his presence.

But he was already advancing from the end of the large apartment, and the mere sight of him put an end to every further consideration and crushed her will.

Obedient to a glance from the Emperor's eyes, the marquise, bowing reverently, retreated into the corridor whence they had come and closed the door.

The clang against the jambs told Barbara that she was alone with the ruler of half the world, whom she dared to love.

But she was not granted a moment to collect her thoughts; the Emperor Charles already stood before her, and with the exclamation, "Quia amore langueo!" opened his arms.

She, too, was longing for love, and, as if intoxicated by the lofty feeling of being deemed worthy of the heart of this mighty sovereign, she yielded to his kisses; and as she herself threw her arm around his neck and felt--that she had a right to do so, it seemed as though an invisible hand was placing a royal crown upon her brow.

The joy which filled her little heart appeared too rich and great for it when, repeating the "Amore langueo" with her head upon his breast, he whispered sweet love phrases and confessed that those words, since she

had sung them for the first time, had echoed through his hours of reflection, through the cares of business, through the brief hours of repose which he allowed himself, and so it must continue, and her love, her voice, and her beauty render the downward path of life the fairest portion which he had traversed.

Then Barbara, with the low exclamation, "Because I, too, long for love," again offered him her lips, and he accepted the sweet invitation with impetuous passion.

Already, for the second time since her entrance, the clock on Charles's writing-table struck the quarter of an hour, and, as if startled from a deep slumber, she withdrew from his embrace and gazed, as if bewildered, toward the door. Directly after it opened, and Don Luis Quijada with firm step entered the room.

The trusted favourite of the Emperor was always free to seek his presence. He had returned to Ratisbon in advance of the Queen of Hungary, who would not arrive until the following morning, and, after a brief conversation with Malfalconnet and Master Adrian, the loyal nobleman had gone without delay, and at the risk of angering him, to his imperial master. Without even rising from the divan, and still clasping the hand which Barbara attempted to withdraw as Don Luis advanced, Charles asked with stern rebuke what had caused his entrance at so late an hour. Quijada requested a brief audience, but Charles replied that he had nothing to conceal from this companion.

A low bow followed this remark; then, with quiet dignity, the major-domo reported that the leaders of the orchestra and the boy choir had been waiting below--and with them Sir Wolf Hartschwert and an old gentleman, the father of this lady--a considerable time for her return. So it seemed to him advisable, unless his majesty wished to reveal this sweet secret to the world, to part from his beautiful friend, at least for a short space.

The Emperor Charles did not permit such suggestions even from those who were nearest and dearest to him, and he was already starting up indignantly to thrust Don Luis back behind the barriers through which he had broken, when Barbara with tender persuasion entreated her lover, for her sake, to exercise caution. Charles at last consented to part from her for a time. He was sure of her; for he read in the dewy brightness of her eyes how hard it was for her also to release herself from his embrace.

Then, removing the diamond and ruby star from the lace at his neck, he pinned it on Barbara's bosom, with the exclamation, "In memory of this hour!"

He afterward added, as if in explanation, that the star might show to those below what had detained her here, and asked earnestly whether he might hope to see her again in an hour, if a faithful man--here he motioned to Quijada--accompanied her hither, and later escorted her home again?

A silent nod promised the fulfilment of this request.

The Emperor then carried on a short conversation with Quijada, which was unintelligible to Barbara; and after he had retired to summon the marquise, Charles profited, like an impetuous youth, by the brief period

in which he was again alone with his love, and entreated her to consider that, if she remained absent long, the "amore languero" would rob him of his reason.

"Your great intellect," she replied, with a faint sigh. "My small wits --Holy Virgin!--flew far away at the first word of love from the lips of my royal master."

Then, drawing herself up to her full height, she passed her hand across her brow and defiantly exclaimed: "And why should I think and ponder? I will be happy, and make you happy also, my only love!"

As she spoke she again threw herself upon his breast, but only for a few brief moments. Don Luis Quijada reappeared with the marquise, and conducted both ladies out of the imperial apartment.

Outside the door the major-domo detained Barbara, and had a tolerably long conversation with her, of which the marquise vainly endeavoured to catch even a few words.

At last he committed the girl to the old nobleman's charge and returned to the Emperor.

The marquise received Barbara with the assurance that she had found in her a warm, nay, a maternal friend.

If this beautiful creature was not already the object of the Emperor's love, the experienced old woman told herself, she must very soon become so.

Yet there had never been a favourite at this monarch's court, and she was curious to learn what position would be assigned to her.

After accompanying the girl intrusted to her care down the stairs with flattering kindness, she committed her to the musicians and Wolf, who, with old Blomberg, were awaiting her in the chapel with increasing impatience. The captain had obtained admittance through Wolf.

At her first glance at Barbara the eyes of the old marquise had rested on the glittering star which the Emperor had fastened on the lady of his love.

The men did not notice it until after they had congratulated the singer upon her exquisite performance and the effect which it had produced upon his Majesty.

Maestro Gombert perceived it before the others, and Captain Blomberg and Wolf rejoiced with him and Appenzelder over this tangible proof of the imperial favour.

A conversation about the Emperor's judgment and the rarity with which he bestowed such costly tokens of his regard was commencing in the chapel, but Barbara speedily brought it to a close by the assurance that she was utterly exhausted and needed rest.

On the way home she said very little, but when Wolf, in the second story of the house, held out his hand in farewell, she pressed it warmly, and thanked him with such evident emotion that the young man entered his rooms full of hope and deep secret satisfaction.

After Barbara had crossed the threshold of hers, she said good-night to her father, who wished to learn all sorts of details, alleging that she could scarcely speak from weariness.

The old gentleman went to rest grumbling over the weakness of women in these days, to which even his sturdy lass now succumbed; but Barbara threw herself on her knees beside the bed in her room, buried her face in the pillows, and sobbed aloud. Another feeling, however, soon silenced her desire to weep. Her lover's image and the memory of the happy moments which she had just experienced returned to her mind. Besides, she must hasten to arrange her hair again, and--this time with her own hands--change her clothing.

While she was loosening her golden tresses and gazing into the mirror, her eyes again sparkled with joy. The greatest, the loftiest of mortals loved her. She belonged to him, body and soul, and she had been permitted to call him "her own."

At this thought she drew herself up still more haughtily in proud self-consciousness, but, as her glance fell upon the image of the Virgin above the priedieu, she again bowed her head.

Doubtless she desired to pray, but she could not.

She need confess nothing to the august Queen of Heaven. She knew that she had neither sought nor desired what now burdened her heart so heavily, and yet rendered her so infinitely happy. She had obeyed the Emperor's summons in order to win approval and applause for her art, and to afford the monarch a little pleasure and cheer, and, instead, the love of the greatest of all men had flamed ardently from the earth, she had left her whole heart with him, and given herself and all that was in her into his power. Now he summoned her--the Holy Virgin knew this, too--and she must obey, though the pure face yonder looked so grave and threatening.

And for what boon could she beseech the Queen of Heaven?

What more had the woman, to whom the Emperor's heart belonged, to desire?

The calmness of her soul was at an end, and not for all the kingdoms Charles possessed would she have exchanged the tumult and turmoil in her breast for the peace which she had enjoyed yesterday.

Obeying a defiant impulse, she turned from the benign face, and her hands fairly flew as, still more violently agitated, she completed the changes in her dress.

In unfastening the star, her lover's gift, she saw upon the gold at the back Charles's motto, "Plus ultra!"

Barbara had known it before, but had not thought of it for a long time, and a slight tremor ran through her frame as she said to herself that, from early childhood, though unconsciously, it had been hers also. Heaven--she knew it now--Fate destined them for each other.

Sighing heavily, she went at last, in a street dress, to open the bow-window which looked upon Red Cock Street.

Barbara felt as if she had outgrown herself. The pathos which she had often expressed in singing solemn church music took possession of her, and left no room in her soul for any frivolous emotion. Proud of the lofty passion which drew her with such mighty power to her lover's arms, she cast aside the remorse, the anxiety, the deep sense of wrong which had overpowered her on her return home.

What was greater than the certainty of being beloved by the greatest of men? It raised her far above all other women, and, since she loved him in return, this certainty could not fail to make her happy also, when she had once fully recovered her composure and ventured to look the wonderful event which had happened freely in the face.

The stars themselves, following their appointed course in yonder blue firmament--his device taught that--made her belong to him. If she could have forced herself to silence the desire of her heart, it would have been futile. Whoever divides two trees which have grown from a single root, she said to herself, destroys at least one; but she would live, would be happy on the highest summit of existence. She could not help obeying his summons, for as soon as she listened to the warning voice within, the "Because I long for love" with which he had clasped her in his arms, urged her with irresistible power toward the lover who awaited her coming.

The clock now struck two, and a tall figure in a Spanish cloak stood outside the door of the house. It was Don Luis Quijada, the Emperor's majordomo.

It would not do to keep him waiting, and, as she turned back into the room to take the little lamp, her glance again fell upon the Virgin's image above the priedieu and rested upon her head.

Then the figure of her imperial lover stood in tangible distinctness before her mind, and she imagined that she again heard the first cry of longing with which he clasped her in his arms, and without further thought or consideration she kissed her hand to the image, extinguished the little lamp, and hurried as fast as the darkness permitted into the entry and down the stairs.

Outside the house Wolf returned to her memory a moment.

How faithfully he loved her!

Yet was it not difficult to understand how she could even think of the poor fellow at all while hastening to the illustrious sovereign whose heart was hers, and who had taught her with what impetuous power true love seizes upon the soul. Barbara threw her head back proudly, and, drawing a long breath, opened the door of the house. Outside she was received by Quijada with a silent bend of the head; but she remembered the far more profound bows with which he greeted the monarch, and, to show him of how lofty a nature was also the woman whom the Emperor Charles deemed worthy of his love, she walked with queenly dignity through the darkness at her aristocratic companion's side without vouchsafing him a single glance.

Two hours later old Ursula was sitting sleepless in her bed in the second story of the cantor house. A slight noise was heard on the stairs, and the one-eyed maid-servant who was watching beside her exclaimed: "There it is again! just as it was striking two I said that the rats were coming

up from the cellar into the house."

"The rats," repeated the old woman incredulously; and then, without moving her lips, thought: "Rats that shut the door behind them? My poor Wolf!"

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The blessing of those who are more than they seem

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