

Yolanda: Maid of Burgundy eBook

Yolanda: Maid of Burgundy by Charles Major

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Page 1

CHAPTER I

A CASTLE AMONG THE CRAGS

Like the Israelites of old, mankind is prone to worship false gods, and persistently sets up the brazen image of a sham hero, as its idol. I should like to write the history of the world, if for no other reason than to assist several well-established heroes down from their pedestals. Great Charlemagne might come to earth's level, his patriarchal, flowing beard might drop from his face, and we might see him as he really was—a plucked and toothless old savage, with no more Christianity than Jacob, and with all of Jacob's greed. Richard of England, styled by hero-worshippers "The Lion-hearted," might be re-christened "The Wolf-hearted," and the famous Du Guesclin might seem to us a half-brutish vagabond. But Charles of Burgundy, dubbed by this prone world "The Bold" and "The Rash," would take the greatest fall. Of him and his fair daughter I shall speak in this history.

At the time of which I write Louis XI reigned over France, Edward IV ruled in England, and his sister, the beautiful Margaret of York, was the unhappy wife of this Charles the Rash, and stepmother to his gentle daughter Mary. Charles, though only a duke in name, reigned as a most potent and despotic king over the fair rich land of Burgundy. Frederick of Styria was head of the great house of Hapsburg, and Count Maximilian, my young friend and pupil, was his heir.

Of the other rulers of Europe I need not speak, since they will not enter this narrative. They were all bad enough,—and may God have mercy on their souls.

* * * * *

Most of the really tragic parts in the great drama of history have been played by women. This truth I had always dimly known, yet one does not really know a fact until he feels it. I did not realize the extent to which these poor women of history have suffered in the matter of enforced marriages, until the truth was brought home to me in the person of Mary, Princess of Burgundy, to whose castle, Peronne La Pucelle, my pupil, Maximilian of Hapsburg, and I made a journey in the year 1476.

My knowledge of this fair lady began in far-off Styria, and there I shall begin my story.

* * * * *

In times of peace, life in Hapsburg Castle was dull; in times of war it was doleful. War is always grievous, but my good mistress, the Duchess of Styria, was ever in such painful dread lest evil should befall her only child, Maximilian, that the pains of war-time were rendered doubly keen to those who loved Her Grace.



After Maximilian had reached the fighting age there was too little war to suit him. Up to his eighteenth year he had thrice gone out to war, and these expeditions were heart-breaking trials for his mother. Although tied to his mother's apron strings by bonds of mutual love, he burned with the fire and ambition of youth; while I, reaching well toward my threescore years, had almost outlived the lust for strife. Max longed to spread his wings, but the conditions of his birth held him chained to the rocks of Styria, on the pinnacle of his family's empty greatness.

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Perched among the mountain crags, our castle was almost impregnable; but that was its only virtue as a dwelling-place. Bare walls, stone floors, sour wine, coarse boar's meat, brown bread, and poor beds constituted our meagre portion.

Duke Frederick was poor because his people were poor. They lived among the rocks and crags, raised their goats, ploughed their tiny patches of thin earth, and gave to the duke and to each man his due. They were simple, bigoted, and honest to the heart's core.

Though of mean fortune, Duke Frederick was the head of the great House of Hapsburg, whose founders lived in the morning mists of European history and dwelt proudly amid the peaks of their mountain home. Our castle in Styria was not the original Castle Hapsburg. That was built centuries before the time of this story, among the hawks' crags of Aargau in Switzerland. It was lost by the House of Hapsburg many years before Max was born. The castle in Styria was its namesake.

To leaven the poor loaf of life in Castle Hapsburg, its inmates enjoyed the companionship of the kindest man and woman that ever graced a high estate—the Duke and Duchess of Styria. Though in their little court, life was rigid with the starch of ceremony, it was softened by the tenderness of love. All that Duke Frederick asked from his subjects was a bare livelihood and a strict observance of ceremonious conventions. Those who approached him and his son did so with uncovered head and bended knee. An act of personal familiarity would have been looked on as high treason. Taxes might remain unpaid, laws might be broken, and there was mercy in the ducal heart; but a flaw in ceremony was unpardonable.

The boar's meat and the brown bread were eaten in state; the sour wine was drunk solemnly; and going to bed each night was an act of national importance. Such had been the life of this house for generations, and good Duke Frederick neither would nor could break away from it.

Of all these painful conditions young Max was a suffering victim. Did he sally forth to stick a wild boar or to kill a bear, the Master of the Hunt rode beside him in a gaudy, faded uniform. Fore-riders preceded him, and after-riders followed. He was almost compelled to hunt by proxy, and he considered himself lucky to be in at the death. The bear, of course, was officially killed by Maximilian, Count of Hapsburg, no matter what hand dealt the blow. Maximilian, being the heir of Hapsburg, must always move with a slow dignity becoming his exalted station. He must, if possible, always act through an officer; I verily believe that Duke Frederick, his father, regretted the humiliating necessity of eating his own dinner.

Poor Max did not really live; he was an automaton.



Once every year Duke Frederick gave a tournament, the cost of which, in entertainments and prizes, consumed fully two-thirds of his annual income. On these occasions punctilious ceremony took the place of rich wine, and a stiff, kindly welcome did service as a feast. These tournaments were rare events for Max; they gave him a day of partial rest from his strait-jacket life at the little court among the crags.

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I shall give you here ten lines concerning myself. I am Italian by birth—a younger son of the noble House of Pitti. I left home when but little more than a boy. Journeying to the East, I became Sir Karl de Pitti, Knight of the Holy Order of St. John, and in consequence I am half priest, half soldier. My order and my type are rapidly passing away. I fought and prayed in many lands during twenty years. To be frank, I fought a great deal more than I prayed. Six years out of the twenty I spent in Burgundy, fighting under the banner of Duke Philip the Good, father to Charles the Rash. My mother was a Burgundian—a Walloon—and to her love for things German I owe my name, Karl. During my service under Duke Philip I met my Lord d'Hymberecourt, and won that most valuable of all prizes, a trusted friend.

Fifteen years before the opening of this story I grew tired of fighting. How I drifted, a sort of human flotsam, against the crags of Styria would be a long, uninteresting story. By a curious combination of events I assumed the duties of tutor to the small count, Maximilian of Hapsburg, then a flaxen-haired little beauty of three summers. I taught him all that was needful from books, and grounded him fairly well in church lore, but gave my best efforts to his education in arms.

Aside from my duties as instructor to the young count, I was useful in many ways about the castle. By reason of the half of me that was priestly, I could, upon occasion, hear confession, administer the holy sacrament, and shrive a sinner as effectively as the laziest priest in Christendom. I could also set a broken bone, and could mix as bitter a draught as any Jew out of Judea. So, you will see, I was a useful member of a household wherein ancestry took the place of wealth, and pride was made to stand for ready cash.

The good duke might have filled his coffers by pillaging travellers, as many of his neighbors did; but he scorned to thrive by robbery, and lived in grandiose but honest penury.

Max took readily to the use of arms, and by the time he was eighteen, which was three years before our now famous journey to Burgundy, a strong, time-hardened man might well beware of him. When the boy was fourteen or fifteen, I began to see in him great possibilities. In personal beauty and strength he was beyond compare. His eyes were as blue as an Italian sky, and his hair fell in a mass of tawny curls to his shoulders. His mother likened him to a young lion. Mentally he was slow, but his judgment was clear and accurate. Above all, he was honest, and knew not fear of man, beast, or devil. His life in Styria, hedged about by ceremonious conventions, had given him an undue portion of dignity and reticence, but that could easily be polished down by friction with the rougher side of the world. Except myself and his mother, he had never known a real friend.



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To Max the people of the world were of two conditions: a very small class to whom he must kneel, and a very large number who must kneel to him. Even his mother addressed him publicly as "My Lord Count." On rare occasions, in the deep privacy of her closet, mother-love would get the better of her and break through the crust of ceremony. Then she indulged herself and him in the ravishing, though doubtful, luxury of calling him "Little Max." No one but I, and perhaps at rare intervals Duke Frederick, ever witnessed this lapse from dignity on the part of Her Grace, and we, of course, would not expose her weakness to the world.

This love-name clung to Max, and "Little Max," though somewhat incongruous, was pretty when applied to a strapping fellow six feet two and large of limb in proportion.

When the boy approached manhood, I grew troubled lest this strait-jacket existence in Styria should dwarf him mentally and morally. So I began to stir cautiously in the matter of sending him abroad into the world. My first advances met with a rebuff.

"It is not to be thought of," said the duke.

"Send the count out to the rude world to associate with underlings? Never!" cried the duchess, horrified and alarmed.

I had expected this, and I was not daunted. I renewed the attack from different points, and after many onslaughts, I captured the bailey of the parental fortresses; that is, I compelled them to listen to me. My chief point of attack was Max himself. He listened readily enough, but he could not see how the thing was to be done. When I spoke of the luxuries of Italy and Burgundy, and told him of deeds of prowess performed daily throughout the world by men vastly his inferior, his eyes brightened and his cheek flushed. When I talked of wealth to be won and glory to be achieved in those rich lands, and hinted at the barren poverty of Styria, he would sigh and answer:—

"Ah, Karl, it sounds glorious, but I was born to this life, and father and mother would not forgive me if I should seek another destiny. Fate has fixed my lot, and I must endure it."

I did not cease my lay; and especially was the fat land of Burgundy my theme, for I knew it well. Max would listen in enraptured silence. When he was eighteen, I wrote, with deep-seated purpose, several letters to my friend Lord d'Hymberecourt, who was at the time one of the councillors of Charles the Rash, Duke of Burgundy. In those letters I dwelt at length on the virtues, strength, and manly beauty of my pupil.

I knew that Charles often negotiated with other states the marriage of his only child and heiress, Princess Mary. This form of treaty appeared to be almost a mania with the rash Burgundian. I also knew that in no instance had he ever intended to fulfil the treaty. His purpose in each case was probably to create a temporary alliance with that one state while he was in trouble with another. His daughter would inherit a domain richer than

that of any king in Europe, and the duke certainly would be contented with nothing less than the hand of an heir to a crown. Suitors for the fair Mary came from every land. All were entertained; but the princess remained unbetrothed.



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A few broad hints in my letters to Hymbercourt produced the result I so much desired. One bright day our castle was stirred to its foundation-stones by the arrival of a messenger from Duke Charles of Burgundy, bearing the following missive:—

* * * * *

“To His Grace, Duke Frederick of Styria, Elector of the Holy Roman Empire, and Count of Austria; Charles, Duke of Burgundy and Count of Charolois, sends greeting:—

“The said Duke Charles recommends himself to the most puissant Duke Frederick, and bearing in mind the great antiquity and high nobility of the illustrious House of Hapsburg, begs to express his desire to bind the said noble House to Burgundy by ties of marriage.

“To that end, His Grace of Burgundy, knowing by fame the many virtues of the young and valiant Count of Hapsburg, son to His Grace, Duke Frederick, would, if it pleases the said illustrious Duke Frederick, suggest the appointment of commissioners by each of the high contracting parties for the purpose of drawing a treaty of marriage between the noble Count of Hapsburg and our daughter, Princess Mary of Burgundy. The said commissioners shall meet within six months after the date of these presents and shall formulate indentures of treaty that shall be submitted to His Grace of Styria and His Grace of Burgundy.

“The lady of Burgundy sends herewith a letter and a jewel which she hopes the noble Count of Hapsburg will accept as tokens of her esteem.

“May God and the Blessed Virgin keep His Grace of Styria in their especial care.”

Signed with a flourish. “*Charles.*”

* * * * *

This letter did not deceive me. I did not think for a moment that Charles meant to give his daughter to Max. But it answered my purpose by bringing Max to a realization of the nothingness of life in Styria, and opening his eyes to the glorious possibilities that lay in the great world beyond the mountain peaks.

Burgundy’s missive produced several effects in the household of Castle Hapsburg, though none were shown on the surface. I was glad, but, of course, I carefully concealed the reasons for my pleasure from His Grace. Duke Frederick was pleased to his toes and got himself very drunk on the strength of it. Otherwise he smothered his delight. He “was not sure”; “was not quite disposed to yield so great a favor to this far-away duke”; “the count is young; no need for haste,” and so on. The duke had no intention whatever of sending such messages to Burgundy; he simply wished to strut before his little court. Charles most certainly would receive a pompous and affirmative



answer. The poor duchess, torn by contending emotions of mother-love and family pride, was flattered by Burgundy's offer; but she was also grieved.

"We do not know the lady," she said. "Fame speaks well of her, but the report may be false. She may not be sufficiently endued with religious enthusiasm."

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“She will absorb that from Your Grace,” I answered.

Her Grace thought that she herself was religious and tried to impress that belief on others; but Max was her god. In truth she was jealous of any woman who looked on him twice, and she kept at the castle only the old and harmless of the dangerous sex. She would have refused Burgundy’s offer quickly enough if her heart had been permitted to reply.

The effect of the letter on Max was tremendous. He realized its political importance, knowing full well that if he could add the rich domain of Burgundy to the Hapsburg prestige, he might easily achieve the imperial throne. But that was his lesser motive. Hymbercourt’s letters to me had extolled Mary’s beauty and gentleness. Every page had sung her praises. These letters I had given to Max, and there had sprung up in his untouched heart a chivalric admiration for the lady of Burgundy. He loved an ideal. I suppose most men and every woman will understand his condition. It was truly an ardent love.

Max kept Hymbercourt’s letters, and would hide himself on the battlements by the hour reading them, dreaming the dreams of youth and worshipping at the feet of his ideal,—fair Mary of Burgundy, his unknown lady-love.

Before the arrival of the messenger from Duke Charles, Max spoke little of the Burgundian princess; but the message gave her a touch of reality, and he began to open his heart to me—his only confidant.

There seemed to have been a reciprocal idealization going on in the far-off land of Burgundy. My letters to Hymbercourt, in which you may be sure Max’s strength and virtues lost nothing, fell into the hands of Madame d’Hymbercourt, and thus came under the eyes of Princess Mary. That fair little lady also built in her heart an altar to an unknown god, if hints in Hymbercourt’s letters were to be trusted. Her maidenly emotions were probably far more passive than Max’s, though I have been told that a woman’s heart will go to great lengths for the sake of an ideal. Many a man, doubtless, would fall short in the estimation of his lady-love were it not for those qualities with which she herself endows him.

Whatever the lady’s sentiments may have been, my faith in Hymbercourt’s hints concerning them were strengthened by Mary’s kindly letter and the diamond ring for Max which came with her father’s message to Styria. They were palpable facts, and young Max built an altar in his holy of holies, and laid them tenderly upon it.

Duke Frederick, with my help, composed a letter in reply to Burgundy’s message. It required many days of work to bring it to a form sufficient in dignity, yet ample in assent. The missive must answer “yes” so emphatically as to leave no room for doubt in Burgundy’s mind, yet it must show no eagerness on the part of Styria. (Duke Frederick

always spoke of himself as Styria.) Burgundy must be made to appreciate the honor of this alliance; still, the fact must not be offensively thrust upon him.



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The letter was sent, and Charles of Burgundy probably laughed at it. Duke Frederick appointed commissioners and fixed Cannstadt as the place of meeting. Whatever Duke Charles's reasons for making the offer of marriage may have been, they probably ceased to exist soon afterward, for he never even replied to Duke Frederick's acceptance. For months Castle Hapsburg was in a ferment of expectancy. A watch stood from dawn till dusk on the battlements of the keep, that the duke might be informed of the approach of the Burgundian messenger—that never came. After a year of futile waiting the watch was abandoned. Anger, for a time, took the place of expectancy; Duke Frederick each day drowned his ill-humor in a gallon of sour wine, and remained silent on the subject of the Burgundian insult.

Max's attitude was that of a dignified man. He showed neither anger nor disappointment, but he kept the letter and the ring that Mary had sent him and mused upon his love for his ideal—the lady he had never seen.

A letter from Hymbercourt, that reached me nearly two years after this affair, spoke of a tender little maiden in Burgundy, whose heart throbbed with disappointment while it also clung to its ideal, as tender natures are apt to do. This hint in Hymbercourt's letter sank to the tenderest spot in Max's heart.

On Max's twenty-first birthday he was knighted by the emperor. A grand tournament, lasting five days, celebrated the event, and Max proved himself a man among men and a knight worthy of his spurs. I had trained him for months in preparation for this, his first great trial of strength and skill. He was not lacking in either, though they would mature only with his judgment. His strength was beyond compare. A man could hardly span his great arm with both hands.

Soon after Max was knighted, I brought up the subject of his journey into the world. I was again met by parental opposition; but Max was of age and his views had weight. If I could bring him to see the truth, the cause would be won. Unfortunately, it was not his desires I must overcome; it was his scruples. His head and his heart were full of false ideas and distorted motives absorbed from environment, inculcated by parental teaching, and inherited from twenty generations of fantastic forefathers. In-born motives in a conscientious person are stubborn tyrants, and Max was their slave. The time came when his false but honest standards cost him dearly, as you shall learn. But in Max's heart there lived another motive stronger than the will of man; it was love. Upon that string I chose to play.

One day while we were sunning ourselves on the battlements, I touched, as if by chance, on the theme dear to his heart—Mary of Burgundy. After a little time Max asked hesitatingly:—

“Have you written of late to my Lord d'Hymbercourt?”



“No,” I answered.

A long pause followed; then Max continued: “I hope you will soon do so. He might write of—of—” He did not finish the sentence. I allowed him to remain in thought while I formulated my reply. After a time I said:—



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“If you are still interested in the lady, why don’t you go to Burgundy and try to win her?”

“That would be impossible,” he answered.

“No, no, Max,” I returned, “not impossible— difficult, perhaps, but certainly not impossible.”

“Ah, Karl, you but raise false hopes,” he responded dolefully.

“You could at least see her,” I returned, ignoring his protest, “and that, I have been told, is much comfort to a lover!”

“Indeed, it would be,” said Max, frankly admitting the state of his heart.

“Or it might be that if you saw her, the illusion would be dispelled.”

“I have little fear of that,” he returned.

“It is true,” I continued, “her father’s domains are the richest on earth. He is proud and powerful, noble and arrogant; but you are just as proud and just as noble as he. You are penniless, and your estate will be of little value; your father is poor, and his mountain crags are a burden rather than a profit; but all Europe boasts no nobler blood than that of your house. Lift it from its penury. You are worthy of this lady, were her estates multiplied tenfold. Win the estates, Max, and win the lady. Many a man with half your capacity has climbed to the pinnacle of fame and fortune, though starting with none of your prestige. Why do you, born a mountain lion, stay mewed up in this castle like a purring cat in your mother’s lap? For shame, Max, to waste your life when love, fortune, and fame beckon you beyond these dreary hills and call to you in tones that should arouse ambition in the dullest breast.”

“Duke Charles has already insulted us,” he replied.

“But his daughter has not,” I answered quickly.

“That is true,” returned Max, with a sigh, “but the Duke of Burgundy would turn me from his gates.”

“Perhaps he would,” I replied, “if you should knock and demand surrender to Maximilian, Count of Hapsburg. Take another name; be for a time a soldier of fortune. Bury the Count of Hapsburg for a year or two; be plain Sir Max Anybody. You will, at least, see the world and learn what life really is. Here is naught but dry rot and mould. Taste for once the zest of living; then come back, if you can, to this tomb. Come, come, Max! Let us to Burgundy to win this fair lady who awaits us and doubtless holds us faint of heart because we dare not strike for her. I shall have one more sweet draught of life before I die. You will learn a lesson that will give you strength for all the years to come, and will



have, at least, a chance of winning the lady. It may be one chance in a million; but God favors the brave, and you have no chance if you remain perched owl-like upon this wilderness of rock. Max, you know not what awaits you. Rouse yourself from this sloth of a thousand years, and strike fire from the earth that shall illumine your name to the end of time!"

"But we have no money for our travels, and father has none to give me," he answered.



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“True,” I replied, “but I have a small sum in the hands of a merchant at Vienna that will support us for a time. When it is spent, we must make our bread or starve. That will be the best part of our experience. A struggle for existence sweetens it; and if we starve, we shall deserve the fate.”

After three days Max gave me his answer.

“I will go with you, Karl,” he said; “you have never led me wrong. If we starve, I shall not be much worse off than I am here in Styria. It hurts me to say that the love of my father and mother is my greatest danger; but it is true. They have lived here so long, feeding on the poor adulation of a poor people, that they do not see life truly. I have had none of the joys and pleasures which, my heart tells me, life holds. I have known nothing but this existence—hard and barren as the rocks that surround me. I must, in time, return to Styria and take up my burden, but, Karl, I will first live.”

After this great stand, Max and I attacked first the father fortress and then the mother stronghold. The latter required a long siege; but at last it surrendered unconditionally, and the day was appointed when Max and I should ride out in quest of fortune, and, perhaps, a-bridge-hunting. Neither of us mentioned Burgundy. I confess to telling—at least, to acting—a lie. We said that we wished to go to my people in Italy, and to visit Rome, Venice, and other cities. I said that I had a small sum of gold that I should be glad to use; but I did not say how small it was, and no hint was dropped that the heir to Styria might be compelled to soil his hands by earning his daily bread. We easily agreed among ourselves that Max and I, lacking funds to travel in state befitting a prince of the House of Hapsburg, should go incognito. I should keep my own name, it being little known. Max should take the name of his mother’s house, and should be known as Sir Maximilian du Guelph.

* * * * *

At last came the momentous day of our departure. The battlements of the gate were crowded with retainers, many of them in tears at losing “My young Lord, the Count.” Public opinion in Castle Hapsburg unanimously condemned the expedition, and I was roundly abused for what was held to be my part in the terrible mistake. Such an untoward thing had never before happened in the House of Hapsburg. Its annals nowhere revealed a journey of an heir into the contaminating world. The dignity of the house was impaired beyond remedy, and all by the advice of a foreigner. There was no lack of grumbling; but of course the duke’s will was law. If he wished to hang the count, he might do so; therefore the grumbling reached the duke’s ears only from a distance.

CHAPTER II

KNIGHTS-ERRANT



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The good mother had made a bundle for her son that would have brought a smile to my lips had it not brought tears to my eyes. There were her homely balsams to cure Max's ailments; true, he had never been ill, but he might be. There was a pillow of down for his head, and a lawn kerchief to keep the wind from his delicate throat. Last, but by no means least, was the dear old mother's greatest treasure, a tooth of St. Martin, which she firmly believed would keep her son's heart pure and free from sin. Of that amulet Max did not stand in need.

We followed the Save for many leagues, and left its beautiful banks only to journey toward Vienna. At that city I drew my slender stock of gold from the merchant that had been keeping it for me, and bought a beautiful chain coat for Max. He already had a good, though plain, suit of steel plate which his father had given him when he received the accolade. I owned a good plate armor and the most perfect chain coat I have ever seen. I took it from a Saracen lord one day in battle, and gave him his own life in payment. Max and I each bore a long sword, a short sword, and a mace. We carried no lance. That weapon is burdensome, and we could get one at any place along our journey.

I was proud of Max the morning we rode out of Vienna, true knights-errant, with the greatest princess in Europe as our objective prize. Truly, we were in no wise modest; but the God of heaven, the god of Luck, and the god of Love all favor the man that is bold enough to attempt the impossible.

My stock of gold might, with frugality, last us three months, but after that we should surely have to make our own way or starve. We hoped that Max would be successful in filling our purses with prize money and ransoms, should we fall in with a tournament now and then; but, lacking that good fortune, we expected to engage ourselves as escorts to merchant caravans. By this kind of employment we hoped to be housed and fed upon our travels and to receive at each journey's end a good round sum of gold for our services. But we might find neither tournament nor merchant caravan. Then there would be trouble and hardship for us, and perhaps, at times, an aching void under our belts. I had often suffered the like.

Ours, you see, was not to be a flower-strewn journey of tinselled prince to embowered princess. Before our return to Styria, Max would probably receive what he needed to make a man of him—hard knocks and rough blows in the real battle of life. Above all, he would learn to know the people of whom this great world is composed, and would return to Hapsburg Castle full of all sorts of noxious heresies, to the everlasting horror of the duke and the duchess. They probably would never forgive me for making a real live man of their son, but I should have my reward in Max.

To Max, of course, the future was rosy-hued. Caravans were waiting for our protection, and princes were preparing tournaments for our special behoof. *We want for food to eat or place to lay our heads? Absurd!* Our purses would soon be so heavy they would

burden us; we should soon need squires to carry them. If it were not for our desire to remain incognito, we might presently collect a retinue and travel with herald and banner. But at the end of all was sweet Mary of Burgundy waiting to be carried off by Maximilian, Count of Hapsburg.



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Just what the boy expected to do in Burgundy, I did not know. For the lady's wealth I believe he did not care a straw—he wanted herself. He hoped that Charles, for his own peace, would not be too uncivil and would not force a desperate person to take extreme measures; but should this rash duke be blind to his own interests—well, let him beware! Some one *might* carry off his daughter right from under the ducal nose. Then let the Burgundian follow at his peril. Castle Hapsburg would open his eyes. He would learn what an impregnable castle really is. If Duke Charles thought he could bring his soft-footed Walloons, used only to the mud roads of Burgundy, up the stony path to the hawk's crag, why, let him try! Harmless boasting is a boy's vent. Max did not really mean to boast, he was only wishing; and to a flushed, enthusiastic soul, the wish of to-day is apt to look like the fact of to-morrow.

We hoped to find a caravan ready to leave Linz, but we were disappointed, so we journeyed by the Danube to the mouth of the Inn, up which we went to Muhldorf. There we found a small caravan bound for Munich on the Iser. From Munich we travelled with a caravan to Augsburg, and thence to Ulm, where we were overjoyed to meet once more our old friend, the Danube. Max snatched up a handful of water, kissed it, and tossed it back to the river, saying:—"Sweet water, carry my kiss to the river Save; there give it to a nymph that you will find waiting, and tell her to take it to my dear old mother in far-off Styria."

Do not think that we met with no hard fortune in our journeying. My gold was exhausted before we reached Muhldorf, and we often travelled hungry, meeting with many lowly adventures. Max at first resented the familiarity of strangers, but hunger is one of the factors in man-building, and the scales soon began to fall from his eyes. Dignity is a good thing to stand on, but a poor thing to travel with, and Max soon found it the most cumbersome piece of luggage a knight-errant could carry.

Among our misfortunes was the loss of the bundle prepared by the duchess, and with it, alas! St. Martin's tooth. Max was so deeply troubled by the loss of the tooth that I could not help laughing.

"Karl, I am surprised that you laugh at the loss of my mother's sacred relic," said Max, sorrowfully.

I continued to laugh, and said: "We may get another tooth from the first barber we meet. It will answer all the purposes of the one you have lost."

"Truly, Karl?"

"Truly," I answered. "The tooth was a humbug."

"I have long thought as much," said Max, "but I valued it because my mother loved it."

“A good reason, Max,” I replied, and the tooth was never afterward mentioned.

From Ulm we guarded a caravan to Cannstadt. From that city we hoped to go to Strasburg, and thence through Lorraine to Burgundy, but we found no caravan bound in that direction. Our sojourn at Cannstadt exhausted the money we got for our journeys from Augsburg and Ulm, and we were compelled, much against our will, to accept an offer of service with one Master Franz, a silk merchant of Basel, who was about to journey homeward. His caravan would pass through the Black Forest; perhaps the most dangerous country in Europe for travellers.



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Knowing the perils ahead of us, I engaged two stout men-at-arms, and late in February we started for Basel as bodyguard to good Master Franz. Think of the heir of Hapsburg marching in the train of a Swiss merchant! Max dared not think of it; he was utterly humiliated!

Our first good fortune at Muhldorf he looked on as the deepest degradation a man might endure, but he could not starve, and he would not beg. Not once did he even think of returning to Styria, and, in truth, he could not have done so had he wished; our bridges were burned behind us; our money was spent.

By the time we had finished half our journey to Basel, Max liked the life we were leading, and learned to love personal liberty, of which he had known so little. Now he could actually do what he wished. He could even slap a man on the back and call him "comrade." Of course, if the process were reversed,—if any one slapped Max on the back,—well, dignity is tender and not to be slapped. On several occasions Max got himself into trouble by resenting familiarities, and his difficulties at times were ludicrous. Once a fist fight occurred. The heir of Hapsburg was actually compelled to fight with his fists. He thrashed the poor fellow most terribly, and I believe would have killed him had not I stayed his hand. Another time a pretty girl at Augsburg became familiar with him, and Max checked her peremptorily. When he grew angry, she laughed, and saucily held up her lips for a kiss. Max looked at me in half-amused wonder.

"Take it, Max; there is no harm in it," I suggested.

Max found it so, and immediately wanted more, but the girl said too many would not be good for him. She promised others later on, if he were very, very good. Thus Max was conquered by a kiss at the wayside.

The girl was very pretty, Max was very good, and she helped me wonderfully in reducing his superfluous dignity. Her name was Gertrude, and we spoke of her afterward as "Gertrude the Conqueror." She was a most enticing little individual, and Max learned that persons of low degree really may be interesting. That was his first great lesson. I had some trouble after leaving Augsburg to keep him from taking too many lessons of the same sort.

Our contract with Franz provided that we should receive no compensation until after his merchandise had safely reached Basel, but then our remuneration was to be large. Max had no doubt as to the safe arrival of the caravan at Basel, and he rejoiced at the prospect. I tried to reduce the rosy hue of his dreams, but failed. I suggested that we might have fighting ahead of us harder than any we had known, though we had given and taken some rough knocks on two of our expeditions. Max laughed and longed for the fray; he was beginning to live. The fray came quickly enough after we reached the Black Forest, and the fight was sufficiently warm to suit even enthusiastic Max. He and I were wounded; one of our men-at-arms was killed, and Franz's life was saved only by

an heroic feat of arms on Max's part. The robbers were driven off; we spent a fortnight in a near-by monastery, that our wounds might heal, and again started for Basel.



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During the last week in March we approached Basel. Max had saved the merchant's life; we had protected the caravan from robbery; and good Franz was grateful. Notwithstanding our sure reward, Max was gloomy. The future had lost its rosiness; his wound did not readily heal; Basel was half a hundred leagues off our road to Burgundy. Why did we ever come to Switzerland? Everything was wrong. But no man knows what good fortune may lurk in an evil chance.

At the close of a stormy day we sighted Basel from the top of a hill, and soon the lights, one by one, began to twinkle cosily through the gloaming. All day long drizzling rain and spitting snow had blown in our faces like lance points, driven down the wind straight from the icy Alps. We were chilled to the bone; in all my life I have never beheld a sight so comforting as the home lights of the quaint old Swiss city.

Franz soon found a wherry and, after crossing the Rhine, we marched slowly down the river street, ducking our heads to the blast. Within half an hour we passed under a stone archway and found ourselves snug in the haven of our merchant's courtyard. Even the sumpter mules rejoiced, and gave forth a chorus of brays that did one's heart good. Every tone of their voices spoke of the warm stalls, the double feed of oats, and the great manger of sweet hay that awaited them. Before going into the house Max gave to each mule a stroke of his hand in token of affection. Surely this proud automaton of Hapsburg was growing lowly in his tastes. In other words, nature had captured his heart and was driving out the inherited conventions of twenty generations. Five months of contact with the world had wrought a greater cure than I had hoped five years would work. I was making a man out of the flesh and blood of a Hapsburg. God only knows when the like had happened before.

Max and I were conducted by a demure little Swiss maid to a large room on the third floor of the house, overlooking the Rhine. There was no luxury, but there was every comfort. There were two beds, each with a soft feather mattress, pillows of down, and warm, stuffed coverlets of silk. These were not known even in the duke's apartments at Hapsburg Castle. There we had tarnished gold cloth and ancient tapestries in abundance, but we lacked the little comforts that make life worth living. Here Max learned another lesson concerning the people of this world. The lowly Swiss merchant's unknown guest slept more comfortably than did the Duke of Styria.

When we went down to supper, I could see the effort it cost Max to sit at table with these good people. But the struggle was not very great; five months before it would have been impossible. At Hapsburg he sat at table with his father and mother only; even I had never sat with him in the castle. At Basel he was sitting with a burgher and a burgher's frau. In Styria he ate boar's meat from battered silver plate and drank sour wine from superannuated golden goblets; in Switzerland he ate tender, juicy meats and toothsome pastries from stone dishes and drank rich Cannstadt beer from leathern mugs. His palate and his stomach jointly attacked his brain, and the horrors of life in Hapsburg appeared in their true colors.



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On the morning of our second day at Basel, Franz invited us to be his guests during our sojourn in the city. His house was large, having been built to entertain customers who came from great distances to buy his silks.

Max and I had expected to leave Basel when our wounds were entirely healed, but we changed our minds after I had talked with Franz. The conversation that brought about this change occurred one morning while the merchant and I were sitting in his shop. He handed me a purse filled with gold, saying:—

“Here is twice the sum I agreed to pay. I beg that you accept it since I shall still be in your debt.”

I knew by the weight of the gold that it was a larger sum than I had ever before possessed. I did not like to accept it, but I could not bring myself to refuse a thing so important to Max.

“We should not accept this from you, good Franz, but—but—”

“The boy saved my life and my fortune,” he interrupted, “and I am really ashamed to offer you so small a sum. You should have half of all my goods.”

I protested and thanked him heartily, not only for his gift, but also for his manner of giving. Then I told him of our intended journey to Burgundy—of course not mentioning the princess—and asked if he knew of any merchant who would soon be travelling that way.

“There are many going down the river from Basel to Strasburg,” he answered, “and you may easily fall in with one any day. But there will soon be an opportunity for you to travel all the way to Burgundy. I know the very man for your purpose. He is Master George Castleman of Peronne. He comes every spring, if there is peace along the road, to buy silks. We now have peace, though I fear it will be of short duration, and I am expecting Castleman early this season. He will probably be here before the first of May. He is a rich merchant, and was one of the councillors of Duke Philip the Good, father to the present Duke of Burgundy. Years ago Duke Philip built a house for him abutting the walls of Peronne Castle. It is called ‘The House under the Wall,’ and Castleman still lives in it. He refused a title of nobility offered him by Duke Philip. He is not out of favor with the present duke, but he loves peace too dearly to be of use to the hot-headed, tempestuous Charles. Duke Charles, as you know, is really King of Burgundy—the richest land on earth. His domain is the envy of every king, but he will bring all his grandeur tumbling about his head if he perseveres in his present course of violence and greed.”

At that moment Max joined us.



“I hear this Duke Charles has no son to inherit his rich domain?” I observed interrogatively.

“No,” answered Franz. “He has a daughter, the Princess Mary, who will inherit Burgundy. She is said to be as gentle as her father is violent. Castleman tells me that she is gracious and kind to those beneath her, and, in my opinion, that is the true stamp of greatness.”



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Those were healthful words for Max.

“The really great and good have no need to assert their qualities,” I answered.

“Castleman often speaks of the princess,” said Franz. “He tells me that his daughter Antoinette and the Princess Mary have been friends since childhood—that is, of course, so far as persons so widely separated by birth and station can be friends.”

I briefly told Max what Franz had said concerning Castleman, and the young fellow was delighted at the prospect of an early start for Peronne.

In Max’s awakening, the radiance of his ideal may have been dimmed, but if so, the words of Franz restored its lustre. If the boy’s fancy had wandered, it quickly returned to the lady of Burgundy.

I asked Franz if Duke Charles lived at Peronne.

“No, he lives at Ghent,” he answered; “but on rare occasions he visits Peronne, which is on the French border. Duke Philip once lived there, but Charles keeps Peronne only as his watch-tower to overlook his old enemy, France. The enmity, I hope, will cease, now that the Princess Mary is to marry the Dauphin.”

This confirmation of a rumor which I had already heard was anything but welcome. However, it sensitized the feeling Max entertained for his unknown lady-love, and strengthened his resolution to pursue his journey to Burgundy at whatever cost.

I led Franz to speak of Burgundian affairs and he continued:—

“The princess and her stepmother, the Duchess Margaret, live at Peronne. They doubtless found life at Ghent with the duke too violent. It is said that the duchess is unhappily wedded to the fierce duke, and that the unfortunate princess finds little favor in her father’s eyes because he cannot forgive her the grievous fault of being a girl.”

While Franz was talking I was dreaming. A kind providence had led us a half-hundred leagues out of our road, through wounds and hardships, to Basel; but that quiet city might after all prove to be the open doorway to Max’s fortune. My air-castle was of this architecture: Max would win old Castleman’s favor—an easy task. We would journey to Peronne, seek Castleman’s house, pay court to Antoinette—I prayed she might not be too pretty—and—you can easily find your way over the rest of my castle.

Within a fortnight Max and I had recovered entirely from our wounds, and were abroad each day in the growing warmth of the sunshine. We did not often speak of Castleman, but we waited, each day wishing for his speedy advent.



At last, one beautiful evening early in May, he arrived. Max and I were sitting at our window watching the river, when the little company rode up to the door of the merchant's shop. With Castleman were two young women hardly more than girls. One of them was a pink and white young beauty, rather tall and somewhat stout. Her face, complexion, and hair were exquisite, but there was little animation in her expression. The other girl had features less regular, perhaps, but she was infinitely more attractive. She was small, but beautiful in form; and she sprang from her horse with the grace of a kitten. Her face was not so white as her companion's, but its color was entrancing. Her expression was animated, and her great brown eyes danced like twinkling stars on a clear, moonless night.



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The young women entered the house, and we saw nothing more of them for several days.

When we met Castleman, he gladly engaged our services to Peronne, having heard from Franz of our adventures in the Black Forest. We left the terms to him, and he suggested a compensation far greater than we should have asked. The sum we received from Franz, together with that which we should get from Castleman, would place us beyond want for a year to come. Surely luck was with us.

After Castleman's arrival our meals were served in our room, and we saw little of him or of Franz for a week or more. Twice I saw Castleman ride out with the young women, and after that I haunted the front door of the house. One bright afternoon I met them as they were about to dismount. Castleman was an old man and quite stout, so I helped him from his horse. He then turned to the fair girl of pink and white, saying:—

“Antoinette, daughter, this is Sir Karl de Pitti, who will accompany us to Peronne.”

I made my bow and assisted Fraeulein Antoinette to the ground. The other young lady sprang nimbly from her saddle without assistance and waited, as I thought, to be presented. Castleman did not offer to present her, and she ran to the house, followed by serene Antoinette. I concluded that the smaller girl was Fraeulein Castleman's maid. I knew that great familiarity between mistress and servant was usual among the burgher class.

The smaller girl was certainly attractive, but I did not care for her acquaintance. Antoinette was the one in whose eyes I hoped to find favor, first for myself and then for Max. By her help I hoped Max might be brought to meet the Princess of Burgundy when we should reach Peronne. I had little doubt of Max's success in pleasing Antoinette; I was not at all anxious that he should please the smaller maid. There was a saucy glance in her dark eyes, and a tremulous little smile constantly playing about her red, bedimpled mouth, that boded trouble to a susceptible masculine heart. Max, with all his simplicity, though not susceptible, had about him an impetuosity when his interest was aroused of which I had learned to stand in wholesome dread. I was jealous of any woman who might disturb his dreams of Mary of Burgundy, and this little maid was surely attractive enough to turn any man's head her way if she so desired.

Later in the afternoon I saw Fraeulein Antoinette in the shop looking at silks and laces. Hoping to improve the opportunity, I approached her, and was received with a serene and gracious smile. Near Antoinette were the saucy brown eyes and the bedimpled mouth. Truly they were exquisitely beautiful in combination, and, old as I was, I could not keep my eyes from them. The eyes and dimples came quickly to Antoinette, who presented me to her “Cousin Fraeulein Yolanda Castleman.” Fraeulein Yolanda bowed with a grace one would not expect to find in a burgher girl, and said with the condescension of a princess:—



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“Sir Karl, you pleasure me.”

I was not prepared for her manner. She probably was *not* Antoinette’s maid. A pause followed my presentation which might have been meant by the brown-eyed maid as permission to withdraw. But I was for having further words with Antoinette. She, however, stepped back from her cousin, and, if I was to remain, I must speak to my lady Fraeulein Yolanda Castleman or remain silent, so I asked,—

“Do you reside in Basel, Fraeulein?”

“No, no,” she replied, with no touch of bourgeois confusion, “I am a Burgundian. Uncle Castleman, after promising Twonette” (I spell the name as she pronounced it) “and me for years, has brought us on this long journey into the world. I am enjoying it more than any one can know, but poor uncle lives in dread of the journey home. He upbraids himself for having brought us and declares that if he but had us home again, nothing could induce him to start out with such a cargo of merchandise.”

“Well he may be fearful,” I answered. “Where one’s greatest treasure is, there is his greatest fear, but peace reigns on the road to Burgundy, and I hope your good uncle’s fears are without ground save in his love.”

“I hear you are to accompany us, and of course we shall be safe,” she said, the shadow of a smile playing suspiciously about her mouth and dancing in her eyes.

“Yes, I am to have that great *honor*,” I replied, bowing very low. I, too, could be sarcastic.

“Does the—will the—the gentleman who is with you accompany us?” asked Fraeulein Yolanda. So! These maidens of Burgundy had already seen my handsome Max! This one would surely be tempting him with her eyes and her irresistible little smile.

“Yolanda!” exclaimed serene Twonette. Yolanda gave no heed.

“Yes, Fraeulein,” I responded. “He goes with us. Do you live in Peronne?”

“Y-e-s,” she replied hesitatingly. “Where is your home and your friend’s?”

“Yolanda!” again came in tones of mild remonstrance from Fraeulein Antoinette. The dimples again ignored the warning and waited for my answer.

“We have no home at present save the broad earth, Fraeulein,” I responded.

“You cannot occupy it all,” she retorted, looking roguishly up to me.



“No,” I responded, “we are occupying this part of the earth at present, but we hope soon to occupy Burgundy.”

“Please leave a small patch of that fair land for Twonette and me,” she answered, in mock entreaty. After a short pause she continued:—

“It seems easier for you to ask questions than to answer them.”

“Fraeulein,” I responded, “your question is not easily answered. I was born in Italy. I lived for many years in the East, and—”

“I did not ask for your biography,” she said, interrupting me. I did not notice the interruption, but continued:—

“I spent six years in your fair land of Burgundy. My mother was a Walloon. I dearly love her people, and hope that my home may soon be among them.”



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The girl's face had been slightly clouded, but when I spoke lovingly of the Walloons, the dimples again played around her mouth and a smile brightened her eyes.

"I also am a Walloon," she answered; "and your friend? He surely is not Italian: he is too fair."

"The Lombards are fair," I answered, "and the Guelphs, you know, are of Lombardy. You may have heard of the Houses of Guelph and of Pitti."

"I have often heard of them," she answered; then, after a short silence,— "I fear I have asked too many questions." A gentle, apologetic smile lighted her face and won me instantly. I liked her as much as I admired her. I knew that she wanted me to speak of Max, so to please her I continued, even against my inclination:—

"My young friend, Sir Maximilian du Guelph, wanted to see the world. We are very poor, Fraeulein, and if we would travel, we must make our way as we go. We have just come from Ulm and Cannstadt, passing through the Black Forest. Sir Max saved the life of our host, and in so doing was grievously wounded. Good Master Franz rewarded us far beyond our deserts, and for the time being we think we are rich."

"The name Maximilian is not Italian," observed Yolanda. "It has an Austrian sound."

"That is true," I responded. "My name, Karl, is German. Few names nowadays keep to their own country. Your name, Yolanda, for example, is Italian."

"Is that true?" she answered inquiringly, taking up a piece of lace. I saw that the interview was closing. After a moment's hesitation Yolanda turned quickly to me and said:—

"You and your friend may sup with us this evening in the dining room of our hostess. We take supper at five."

The invitation was given with all the condescension of a noble lady. Twonette ventured:
—

"What will father say, Yolanda?"

"I can guess what uncle will say, but we will give him his say and take our own way. Nonsense, Twonette, if we are to journey to Peronne with these gentlemen, our acquaintance with them cannot begin too soon. Come, Sir Karl, and—and bring your young friend, Sir Maximilian."

It was clear to my mind that, without my young friend, Sir Maximilian, I should not have had the invitation. Yolanda then turned to Franz and his silks, and I, who had always



thought myself of some importance, was dismissed by a burgher girl. I soothed my vanity with the thought that beauty has its own prerogatives.

Without being little, Yolanda was small; without nobility, she had the *haute mien*. But over and above all she had a sweet charm of manner, a saucy gentleness, and a kindly grace that made her irresistible. When she smiled, one felt like thanking God for the benediction.

That evening at five o'clock Max and I supped with Frau Franz. The good frau and her husband sat at either end of the table, Castleman, his daughter, and Yolanda occupied one side, while I sat by Max opposite them. If Castleman had offered objection to the arrangement, he had been silenced.



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I was especially anxious that Max should devote himself to Twonette, but, as I had expected, Yolanda's attractions were far too great to be resisted. There was a slight Walloon accent in her French and German (we all spoke both languages) that gave to her voice an exquisite cadence. I spoke to her in Walloonish, and she was so pleased that she seemed to nestle toward me. In the midst of an animated conversation she suddenly became silent, and I saw her watching Max's hand. I thought she was looking at his ring. It was the one that Mary of Burgundy had given him.

CHAPTER III

YOLANDA THE SORCERESS

Several days passed, during which we saw the Castlemans frequently. One evening after supper, when we were all sitting in the parlor, Yolanda enticed Max to an adjoining room, on the excuse of showing him an ancient piece of tapestry. When it had been examined, she seated herself on a window bench and indicated a chair for Max near by. Among much that was said I quote the following from memory, as Max told me afterward:—

“So you are from Italy, Sir Max?” queried Yolanda, stealing a glance at his ring.

“Yes,” returned Max.

“From what part, may I ask?” continued the girl, with a slight inclination of her head to one side and a flash from beneath the preposterously long lashes toward his hand.

“From—from Rome,” stammered Max, halting at even so small a lie.

“Ah, Sir Karl said you were from Lombardy,” answered the girl.

“Well—that is—originally, perhaps, I was,” he returned.

“Perhaps your family lives in both places?” she asked very seriously.

“Yes, that is the way of it,” he responded.

“Were you born in both places?” asked Yolanda, without the shadow of a smile. Max was thinking of the little lie he was telling and did not analyze her question.

“No,” he answered, in simple honesty, “you see I could not be born in two places. That would be impossible.”

“Perhaps it would be,” replied Yolanda, with perfect gravity. Max was five years her senior, but he was a boy, while she had the self-command of a quick-witted woman,



though she still retained the saucy impertinence of childhood. Slow-going, guileless Max began to suspect a lurking intention on Yolanda's part to quiz him.

"Did not Sir Karl say something about your having been born in Styria?" asked the girl, glancing slyly at the ring.

"No, he did not," answered Max, emphatically. "I suppose I was born in Rome—no, I mean Lombardy—but it cannot matter much to you, Fraeulein, where I was born if I do not wish to tell."

The direct course was as natural to Max as breathing. The girl was startled by his abruptness. After a pause she continued:—

"I am sure you are not ashamed of your birthplace, and—"

He interrupted her sharply:—



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“I also am sure I am not ashamed of it.”

“If you had permitted me to finish,” she said quietly, “you would have had no need to speak so sharply. I spoke seriously. I wanted to say that I am sure you have no reason to feel ashamed of your birthplace, and that perhaps I ought not to have asked a question that you evidently do not want to answer. Uncle says if my curiosity were taken from me, there would be nothing left but my toes.”

Her contrition melted Max at once, and he said:—

I will gladly tell you, Fraeulein, if you want to know. I was born—”

“No, no,” she interrupted, “you shall not tell me. I will leave you at once and see you no more if you do. Besides, there is no need to tell me; I already know. I am a sorceress, a witch. I regret to make the confession, but it is true; I am a witch.”

“I believe you are,” answered Max, looking at her admiringly and seating himself beside her on the window bench. He had learned from Gertrude of Augsburg and many other burgher girls that certain pleasantries were more objectionable to them in theory than in practice; but this burgher girl rose to her feet at his approach and seemed to grow a head taller in an instant. He quietly took his old place and she took hers. She continued as if unconscious of what had happened:—

“Yes, I am a sorceress.” Then she drew her face close to Max, and, gazing fixedly into his eyes, said solemnly:—

“I can look into a person’s eyes and know if they are telling me the truth. I can tell their fortunes—past, present, and future. I can tell them where they were born. I can tell them the history of anything of value they have. Their jewellery, their—”

“Tell me any one of those things concerning myself,” interrupted Max, suddenly alive with interest.

“No, it is too great a strain upon me,” answered the girl, with amusing gravity.

“I entreat you,” said Max, laughing, though deeply interested. “I believe you can do what you say. I beg you to show me your skill in only one instance.”

The girl gently refused, begging Max not to tempt her.

“No, no, I cannot,” she said, “good Father Brantome has told me it is sinful. I must not.”

Half in jest but all in earnest, Max begged her to try; and, after a great deal of coaxing, she reluctantly consented to give a very small exhibition of her powers. Covering her face with her hands, she remained for the space of a minute as if in deep thought.



Then, making a series of graceful and fantastic passes in the air with her hands, as if invoking a familiar spirit, she said in low, solemn tones:—

“You may now sit by me, Sir Max. My words must not be heard by any ears save yours.”

Max seated himself beside the girl.

“Give me your word that you will tell no one what I am about to do and say,” she said.

“I so promise,” answered Max, beginning to feel that the situation was almost uncanny.

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“Now, place in my hand some jewel or valued article of which I may speak,” she said.

Excepting his sword and dagger, Max owned but one article of value—the ring Mary of Burgundy had given him. He hesitatingly drew it from his finger and placed it in the girl’s hand. She examined it carefully, and said:—

“Now, give me your hand, Sir Max.” Her hand was not much larger than a big snowflake in early spring, Max thought, and it was completely lost to sight when his great fingers closed over it. The velvety softness of the little hand sent a thrill through his veins, and the firm, unyielding strength of his clasp was a new, delicious sensation to the girl. Startled by it, she made a feeble effort to withdraw her hand; but Max clasped it firmly, and she surrendered. After a short silence she placed the ring to her forehead, closed her eyes, and drew her face so near to Max that he felt her warm breath on his cheek. Max was learning a new lesson in life—the greatest of all. She spoke in soft whispers, slowly dropping her words one by one in sepulchral tones:—

“What—do—I see—surely I am wrong. No—I see clearly—a lady—a great lady—a princess. She smiles upon a man. He is tall and young. His face is fair; his hair falls in long, bright curls like yours. She gives him this ring; she asks him to be her husband—no—surely a modest maiden would not do that.” She stopped suddenly, snatched her hand from Max, returned the ring and cried, “No more, no more!”

She tossed her hands in the air, as if to drive off the spirits, and without another word ran to the parlor laughing, and threw herself on Uncle Castleman’s knee. Max slowly made the sign of the cross and followed the little enchantress. She had most effectually imposed on him. He was inclined to believe that she had seen the ring or had heard of it in Burgundy before the princess sent it; but Yolanda could have been little more than a child at that time—three years before. Perhaps she was hardly past fourteen, and one of her class would certainly not be apt to know of the ring that had been sent by the princess. She might have received her information from Twonette, who, Franz said, was acquainted with Mary of Burgundy; but even had Yolanda heard of the ring, the fact would not have helped her to know it.

After our first evening with the Castlemans we got on famously together. True, Max and I felt that we were making great concessions, and I do not doubt that we showed it in many unconscious words and acts. This certainly was true of Max; but Yolanda’s unfailing laughter, though at times it was provoking, soon brought him to see that too great a sense of dignity was at times ridiculous. He could not, however, always forget that he was a Hapsburg while she was a burgher girl, and his good memory got him many a keen little thrust from her saucy tongue. If Max resented her sauciness, she ran away from him with the full knowledge that he would miss her. She was much surer that she pleased and delighted him than he was that he pleased her, though of the latter fact she left, in truth, little room for doubt.



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Max was very happy. He had never before known a playmate. But here in Basel the good Franz and his frau, Yolanda, Twonette, fat old Castleman, and myself were all boys and girls together, snatching the joys of life fresh from the soil of mother earth, close to which we lived in rustic simplicity.

Since we had left Styria, our life, with all its hardships, had been a delight to Max, but it was also a series of constantly repeated shocks. If the shocks came too rapidly and too hard, he solaced his bruised dignity with the thought that those who were unduly familiar with him did not know that he was the heir of the House of Hapsburg. So day by day he grew to enjoy the nestling comfort of a near-by friend. This, I grieve to say, was too plainly seen in his relations with Yolanda, for she unquestionably nestled toward him. She made no effort to conceal her delight in his companionship, though she most adroitly kept him at a proper distance. If she observed a growing confidence in Max, she quickly nipped it by showing him that she enjoyed my companionship or that of old Franz just as much. On such occasions Max's dignity and vanity required balm.

"Oh, Karl," he said to me one evening while we were preparing for bed, "it seems to me I have just wakened to life, or have just got out of prison. No man can be happy on a pinnacle above the intimate friendships of his fellow-man and—and woman."

"Yes, 'and woman.' Well put, Max," said I.

Max did not notice my insinuation, but continued:—

"I have lived longer since knowing these lowly friends than in all the years of my life in Styria. Karl, you have spoiled a good, stiff-jointed Hapsburg, but you have made a man. If nothing more comes of this journey into the world than I have already had, I am your debtor for life. What would my dear old father and mother say if they should see me and know the life I am leading? In their eyes I should be disgraced—covered with shame."

"When you go back to Hapsburg," I said, "you can again take up your old, petrified existence and eat your husks of daily adulation. You will soon again find satisfaction in the bended knee, and will insist that those who approach you bow deferentially to your ancestors."

"I shall, of course, return to Hapsburg," he said. "It is my fate, and no man can change the destiny to which he was born. I must also endure the bowing and the adulation. Men shall honor my ancestors and respect in me their descendant, but I shall never again be without friends if it be in my power to possess them. As I have said, that is difficult for one placed above his fellow-man."

"There is the trouble with men of your degree," I answered. "Friends are not like castles, cities, and courtly servitors. Those, indeed, one may really own; but we

possess our friends only as they possess us. Like a mirror, a friend gives us only what we ourselves give. No king is great enough to produce his own image unless he stands before the glass.”



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“Teach me, Karl, to stand before the glass,” said Max, plaintively.

“You are before it now, my dear boy,” I answered. “These new friends are giving you only what you give them. With me, you have always been before the glass.”

“That has been true,” said Max, “ever since the first day you entered Hapsburg. Do you remember? I climbed on your knee and said, ‘You have a big, ugly nose!’ Mother admonished me, and I quickly made amends by saying, ‘But I like you.’”

“I well remember, Max,” I responded. “That day was one of mutual conquest. That is the prime condition of friendship: mutual conquest and mutual surrender. But you must have other friends than me. You see I am not jealous. You must have friends of your own age.”

“I now realize why I have hungered all my life,” said Max, “though I have never before known: I longed for friends. Is it not strange that I should find them among these low-born people? It surely cannot be wrong for me to live as I do, though father and mother would doubtless deem it criminal.”

“These good burgher folk are making you better and broader and stronger,” I answered. “But there is one thing I want to suggest: you are devoting too much of your time to the brown-eyed little maid. You must seek favor with Twonette. She is harmless, and through her you may, by some freak of fortune, reach the goal of your desires. With the prestige of your family and the riches of Burgundy, you may become the most powerful man in the world, save the Pope.”

“Perhaps Fraeulein Yolanda is also acquainted with the Princess Mary,” responded Max, half reluctantly speaking Mary’s name.

“No,” I answered, “she is not.” I asked her if she were. She laughed at the suggestion, and said: ‘Oh, no, no, the princess is a very proud person and very exclusive. She knows but one burgher girl in Peronne, I am told. That one is Twonette, and I believe she treats her most ungraciously at times. I would not endure her snubs and haughty ways as Twonette does. I seek the friendship of no princess. Girls of my own class are good enough for me. “Twonette, fetch me a cup of wine.” “Twonette, thread my needle.” “Twonette, you are fat and lazy and sleep too much.” “Twonette, stand up.” “Twonette, sit down.” Faugh! I tell you I want none of these princesses, no, not one of them. I hate princesses, and I tell you I doubly hate this—this—’ She did not say whom she doubly hated. She is a forward little witch, Max. She laughed merrily at my questions concerning the princess, and asked me if we were going to Burgundy to storm Mary’s heart. ‘Who is to win her?’ she asked. ‘You, Sir Karl, or Sir Max? It must be you. Sir Max is too slow and dignified even to think of scaling the walls of a maiden fortress. It must be you, Sir Karl.’ The saucy little elf rose from her chair, bowed low before me and said, ‘I do liege homage to the future Duke of Burgundy.’ Then she



danced across the room, laughing at my discomfiture. She is charming, Max, but remember Gertrude the Conqueror! Such trifling affairs are well enough to teach a man the a-b-c of life but one with your destiny ahead of him must not remain too long in his alphabet. Such affairs are for boys, Max, for boys.”



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“Do not fear for me, Karl,” answered Max, laughingly. “We are not apt to take hurt from dangers we see.”

“Do you clearly see the danger?” I suggested.

“I clearly see,” he responded. “I admire Fraeulein Yolanda as I have never admired any other woman. I respect her as if she were a princess; but one of the penalties of my birth is that I may not think of her nor of one of her class. She is not for me; she is a burgher maiden—out of my reach. For that reason I feel that I should respect her.”

The attitude of Max toward Yolanda was a real triumph of skill and adroitness over inherited convictions and false education. She had brought him from condescension to deference solely by the magic of her art. Or am I wrong? Was it her artlessness? Perhaps it was her artful artlessness, since every girl-baby is born with a modicum of that dangerous quality.

“Perhaps you are right, Karl,” added Max. “I may underrate the power of this girl. As you have said, she is a little witch. But beneath her laughter there is a rare show of tenderness and strength, which at times seems pathetic and almost elfin. You are right, Karl. I will devote myself to Twonette hereafter. She is like a feather-bed in that she cannot be injured by a blow, neither can she give one; but Yolanda—ah, Karl, she is like a priceless jewel that may be shattered by a blow and may blind one by its radiance.”

But Max’s devotion to Twonette was a failure. She was certainly willing, but Yolanda would have none of it, and with no equivocation gave every one to understand as much. Still, she held Max at a respectful distance. In fact, this Yolanda handled us all as a juggler tosses his balls. Max must not be too attentive to her, and he must not be at all attentive to Twonette. In this arrangement Twonette acquiesced. She would not dare to lift her eyes to one upon whom Yolanda was looking!

Here was illustrated the complete supremacy of mind over matter. Castleman, Twonette, Franz and his frau, Max and I, all danced when the tiny white hand of Yolanda pulled the strings. A kiss or a saucy nod for Castleman or Twonette, a smile or a frown for Max and me, were the instruments wherewith she worked. Deftly she turned each situation as she desired. Max made frequent efforts to obtain a private moment with her, that he might ask a few questions concerning her wonderful knowledge of his ring—they had been burning him since the night of her sorcery—but, though she knew quite well his desire to question her, she gave him no opportunity.

During the time that Castleman was buying his silks, the members of our little party grew rapidly in friendship. In culture, education, and refinement, the Castlemans were far above any burghers I had ever known. Franz and his wife, though good, simple people, were not at all in Castleman’s class. They felt their inferiority, and did not go abroad with us, though we supped daily with them. Each evening supper was a little

fete followed by a romp of amusement, songs, and childish games in the frau's great parlor.



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The Castlemans, Max, and I made several excursions into the mountains. Yolanda and Twonette were in ecstasy at the mountain views, which were so vividly in contrast with the lowlands of Burgundy.

“These mountains are beautiful,” said patriotic Yolanda, “but our lowlands raise bread to feed the hungry.”

On one occasion we rode to the Falls of Schaffhausen, and often we were out upon the river. During these expeditions Yolanda adroitly kept our little party together, and Max could have no private word with her.

I had never been so happy as I was during the fortnight at Basel while Castleman was buying silk. I was almost a child again; my fifty odd years seemed to fall from me as an eagle sheds his plumes in spring. We were all happy and merry as a May-day, and our joyousness was woven from the warp and woof of Yolanda's gentle, laughing nature. Without her, our life would have been comfortable but commonplace.

During all this time Max pondered in vain upon the remarkable manner in which Yolanda had divined the secret of his ring. He longed to question her, but she would not be questioned until she was ready to answer.

On a certain morning near the close of our sojourn in Basel, Max, after many elephantine manoeuvres, obtained Yolanda's promise to walk out with him to a near-by hill in the afternoon. It was a Sabbath day, and every burgher maiden in Basel that boasted a sweetheart would be abroad with him in the sunshine. Max could not help feeling that it was most condescending in him, a prince, to walk out with Yolanda, a burgher maiden. Should any one from Styria meet him, he would certainly sink into the ground, though in a certain way the girl's reluctance seemed to place the condescension with her.

After dinner, which we all took together that day, she put him off with excuses until drowsy Uncle Castleman had taken himself off for a nap. Then Yolanda quickly said:—

“Fetch me my hood, Twonette. I shall not need a cloak. I am going to walk out with Sir Max.”

Twonette instantly obeyed, as if she were a tire-woman to a princess, and soon returned wearing her own hood and carrying Yolanda's.

“Ah, but you are not to come with us,” said Yolanda. She was ready to give Max the opportunity he desired, and would give it generously.

“But—but what will father say?” asked Twonette, uneasily.



“We shall learn what he says when we return. No need to worry about that now,” answered Yolanda. Twonette took off her hood.

Max and Yolanda climbed the hill, and, after a little demurring on the girl’s part, sat down on a shelving rock at a point where the river view was beautiful. As usual, Yolanda managed the conversation to suit herself, but after a short time she permitted Max to introduce the subject on which he wished to talk.

“Will you tell me, Fraeulein,” he asked, “how you were enabled to know the history of my ring? I cannot believe you are what you said—a sorceress—a witch.”



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“No, no,” she answered laughingly, “I am not a sorceress.”

“You almost made me believe you were,” said Max, “but I am slow of wit, as you have doubtless observed. I told Sir Karl you said you were a sorceress, and he said—”

“You gave me your word you would not tell!” exclaimed Yolanda.

“Neither did I tell aught save that you said you were a sorceress. He laughed and said—”

“Yes, yes, what did he say?” eagerly queried the girl.

“He said—I am sure you will not take amiss what he said?” responded Max.

“No, no, indeed no! Tell me,” she demanded eagerly.

“He said you were a witch, if brown eyes, dimpling smiles, and girlish beauty could make one,” answered Max.

“Ah, did he say that of me?” asked the girl, musingly. After a pause she continued, “That was kind in Sir Karl and—and evidently sincere.” After another pause devoted to reverie she said: “Perhaps I shall be his friend sometime in a manner he little expects. Even the friendship of a helpless burgher girl is not to be despised. But he is wrong. I am not beautiful,” she poutingly continued. “Now let us examine my face.” She laughed, and settled herself contentedly upon the stone, as if to take up a serious discussion. “I often do so in the mirror. Vain? Of course I am!”

“I am only too willing to examine it,” said Max, laughingly.

“My mouth,” she said, pursing her lips and lifting her face temptingly for his inspection, “my mouth is—”

“Perfect,” interrupted Max.

She looked surprised and said, “Ah, that was nicely spoken, Little Max, and quickly, for you.”

“‘Little Max!’” exclaimed the young man. “Where heard you that name? No one save my mother has ever used it; no one but Karl and my father has ever heard her speak the words. Did Karl tell you of it?”

“Karl did not tell me,” she responded, “and I never heard any one speak the name. The name fits you so well—by contraries—that it came to me, perhaps, by inspiration.”



“That hardly seems possible,” returned Max, “and your knowledge of how I received the ring is more than remarkable.”

“Let us talk about my face,” said the girl, full of the spirit of mischief, and wishing to put off the discussion of the ring. “Now, my eyes, of which Sir Karl spoke so kindly, are—”

“The most wonderful in the world,” interrupted Max. “They are brilliant as priceless jewels, fathomless as deep water, gentle and tender as—”

“There, there, Little Max,” she cried, checking with a gesture his flow of unexpected eloquence. “I declare! you are not so slow as you seem. I will tell you just how much of a sorceress I am. I thought to flatter you by saying a great lady had given you the ring, and lo, I was right unless you are adroitly leading me to believe in my own sorcery. Is she a great lady? Come, tell me the story.”

She unconsciously moved nearer to him with an air of pleasant anticipation.



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“Yes, it was a great lady, a very great lady who gave me the ring,” he said most seriously.

“And was I right in my other divination?” she asked, looking down and flushing slightly. “Did—did she wish to marry you? But you need not answer that question.”

“I will gladly answer it,” returned Max, leaning forward, resting his elbow on his knees and looking at the ground between his feet. “I hoped she did. I—I longed for it.”

“Perhaps she possessed vast estates?” asked the girl, a slight frown gathering on her brow.

“Yes, she possessed vast estates,” said Max, “but I would gladly have taken her penniless save for the fact that I am very poor, and that she would suffer for the lack of luxuries she has always known.”

“But how could the lady have felt sure you were not seeking her for the sake of her estates?” asked Yolanda.

“She could not know,” answered Max. “But I sought her for her own sake and for no other reason.”

“What manner of person was she?” asked Yolanda. “Was she dark or light, short or tall, plain of feature or beautiful, amiable of temper or vixenish? Was she like any one you have ever seen?”

She spoke in deep earnest and looked eagerly up to his face.

“She was beautiful of feature,” answered Max. “Her eyes and her hair were dark as yours are. She was short of stature, I have been told.”

Yolanda laughed merrily: “I declare, Sir Max, you were in love with a lady you had never seen. It was her estate you loved.”

“No, no,” said Max, earnestly. “I ardently desired—”

“Perhaps if you were to see her, your enthusiasm would vanish,” said Yolanda, interrupting him almost sharply. “My magic tells me she is a squat little creature, with a wizened face; her eyes are sharp and black, and her nose is a-peak, not unlike mine. That, she is sour and peevish of temper, as I am, there can be no doubt. And, although she be great and rich as the Princess of Burgundy, I warrant you she is not one whit handsomer nor kinder in disposition than I.”

Max started on hearing Mary of Burgundy’s name, but quickly recovering himself said:



“I would not wish her better than you in any respect. You wrong both yourself and the lady to speak as you do. Those who know her say the lady has not her like in all the world.”

A soft light came to Yolanda’s face as he spoke, and she answered slowly:—

“Doubtless the lady had like news of you, and is curious to know what manner of man you are. She too may have dreamed of an ideal.”

“How do you know she has never seen me?” asked Max, who had not fully caught her reply when she spoke of the fact that he had never seen the lady of the ring. “I shall surely come to believe you are a sorceress.”

“No, I am not,” she answered emphatically. “You shall carry that jest no further. A moment since you said those who know her say so and so, and you believed she was short of stature. Had you ever seen the lady, you would know if she were tall or short. You would not be in doubt upon so important a matter as the stature of your lady-love.”



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The reasoning and the reasoner were so irresistible that Max was easily satisfied.

“But you have spoken of the lady as in the past. I hope she is not dead?” asked Yolanda.

“No,” answered Max, gravely, “our fathers did not agree. That is, her father was not satisfied, and it all came to nothing save a—a heartache for me.”

It was well that Max was looking at the ground when she turned the soft radiance of her eyes upon him, else he might have learned too much. His modesty and honesty in admitting frankly that the lady’s father was not satisfied with the match pleased her and she sat in silence, smiling contentedly. After a time she turned almost fiercely upon him:

—
“Do you know what I should do, Sir Max, were I in your place?”

“What would you do, Fraeulein?” queried Max.

“I would show the lady that I was worthy of her by winning her, even though she were on a throne, guarded by a thousand dragons. I am a woman, Sir Max, and I know a woman’s heart. The heart of a princess is first the heart of a woman. Be sure the lady will thank you and will reward you if you fight your way to her and carry her off against all the world.”

“But how is that to be done, Fraeulein?” asked Max, carelessly. In truth, Mary of Burgundy was not uppermost in his heart at that moment.

“That is for a man to say and for a man to do,” she responded. “A woman knows only how to wait and to long for one who, alas! may never come. She will wait for you, Sir Max, and when you come to her, she will place her hand in yours and go with you wherever you wish to take her. Of this, at least, my powers of sorcery are sufficient to assure you. Do not fear! do not fear!”

She spoke earnestly, as if from the depths of a personal experience. Her eyes glowed with the light of excitement and her face was radiant. Max turned to her and saw all this beauty. Then he gently took her hand and said huskily:—

“If I thought she were like you, Fraeulein, I would gladly go to the end of the world to win from her even one smile.”

“No, no, Sir Max,” said Yolanda, withdrawing her hand, “we must have no more such speeches from you. They are wrong coming from one of your degree to a burgher girl of Peronne, if she be an honest girl. Our stations are too far apart.”



“That is true, Fraeulein,” answered Max, sorrowfully, “but I mean no disrespect. I honor you as if you were a princess”—here his tones took energy and emphasis—“but I meant what I said, Fraeulein, I meant what I said, and though I shall never say it again, I know that I shall mean it all the days of my life.”

The expression in her eyes as she looked up at him was one of mingled pleasure and amusement. It seemed to say, “Do not be too sure that you will never say it again,” but she said nothing. After a moment she suggested:—

“Shall we return, Sir Max?” They rose, and as they started back to Basel he remarked:
—



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“The words ‘Little Max’ on your lips sounded sweet to me, Fraeulein. They bring home to me the voice of my mother, and though I should not care to hear another speak them, still, the words are very pretty on your lips, and I like them.”

Yolanda glanced quickly up to him with radiant eyes. He caught the glance, and the last vestige of his ideal, Mary of Burgundy, left his heart, driven out by the very real little enchantress that walked by his side.

CHAPTER IV

DOWN THE RHINE TO BURGUNDY

Notwithstanding the idle, happy life we were leading, I was anxious to begin our journey to Burgundy. Just what would—or could—happen when we should reach that land of promise—perhaps I should say of no promise—I did not know. I hoped that by some happy turn of fortune—perhaps through Twonette’s help—Max might be brought to meet Mary of Burgundy. I had all faith in his ability to please her, or any woman, but what advantage he could gain by winning her regard I could not guess. The lady’s personal preference would cut no figure in the choosing of a husband. Her father would do that for her, and she would be powerless against the will of a man whose chief impulses were those of a mad bull. This arrogant duke, without so much as a formal withdrawal, had ignored Duke Frederick’s acceptance and had contracted his daughter’s hand to the Dauphin of France, who was a puny, weak-minded boy of fourteen.

Should Max and I go to Burgundy and say to Charles, “This is Maximilian of Styria, to whom you offered your daughter in marriage,” his answer might be a sword thrust. Should the duke learn of our unbidden presence in his domain, his love for making enemies would probably bring us into trouble. Therefore, though I ardently wished to begin the journey, I had no real cause to hope for good results, though there were many reasons to fear the outcome of our adventures.

One may well ask why I continued in a course so dangerous. My answer is: A man travels the road of his destiny. The Fates sometimes hunt out a man for their purposes and snatch him from his hiding-place in the by-ways, but they usually choose from the scenes of great events their victims or their favorites. The man who fears to be their victim is seldom chosen for their favorite. I should rather be their victim than be overlooked; and what I should have chosen for myself I desired for Max. I had no future save in him; I had been overlooked in the by-ways.

At the time of our journeying all Europe turned on a Burgundian pivot, and the Fates were busy in that land. It was the stage of the world, on which the strong, the great, and the enterprising of mankind were playing; and I hoped that Max, who was strong and enterprising, would find his part in this Burgundian drama. I was willing to risk

sacrificing him, though he was dearer to me than the blood of my heart, if I might stand even a small chance to make him great.



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At strange variance with my philosophy, I had faith in Max's luck. It was more than faith; it was a fixed, intuitive conviction that he would win. For these reasons, all growing out of what I felt rather than what I reasoned, we continued our dangerous and apparently useless journey. When a man feels himself led by an unseen hand, he should gladly follow. There is an intuition that is better than reason.

* * * * *

One bright morning in May we began our journey down the Rhine. My fears had no place in Max's heart, and his self-confidence was to me a harbinger of good fortune. A man may do anything that he knows he can do; failure never disappoints him who expects it.

We left Basel by the west gate and took the road for Strasburg, leading down the west bank of the Rhine. That was not the most direct route to Peronne, but it was the safest because of the numerous river towns wherein we might lie safely by night. The robber barons whom we had to fear along the river were at least not pilfering vagabonds, such as we should meet across country. Against the open attack of a brave foe we felt that we could make a good defence. Our fighting force consisted of Max, myself, and two lusty squires. We had also a half-score of men who led the sumpter mules.

Castleman had purchased two beautiful chargers in Basel, pretending that he wished to take them to Peronne for sale. He asked Max to ride one and offered the other for my use. I was sure that his only reason for buying the horses was his desire to present them to us, which he afterward did. Max named his charger "Night," because of its spotless coat of black. Yolanda rode a beautiful white mare which we re-christened "Day." Castleman bestrode an ambling Flemish bay, almost as fat as its master and quite as good-natured, which, because of its slowness, Yolanda dubbed "Last Week."

We travelled slowly down the Rhine, enjoying the scenery and filling our hearts with the sunshine of the soft spring days. Our cautious merchant so arranged our lodging-places that we were never on the road after dark. His system caused much delay, as we often rested a half-day in a town that we might be able to lodge there over night. In this deliberate manner of proceeding, life was a sweet, lazy holiday, and our journey was like a May outing. We were all very happy—almost ominously so.

After the explanation between Max and Yolanda on the hill at Basel she made no effort to avoid him, and he certainly did not avoid her. They both evidently rested on his remark that he would never again speak upon a certain subject. They fully understood each other's position.

Max knew that between him and the burgher maiden there could be no thought of marriage. She, it seemed, was equally aware of that fact. All that he had been taught to value in life—father, mother, family and position, his father's subjects, who would one



day be his, his father's throne, on which he would one day sit—stood between him and Yolanda. They stood between him and the achievement of any desire purely personal to himself and not conducive to the welfare of his state. He felt that he did not belong to himself; that his own happiness was never to be considered. He belonged to his house, his people, and his ancestors.

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Max had not only been brought up with that idea as the chief element in his education, but he had also inherited it from two score generations of men and women that had learned, believed, and taught the same lesson. We may by effort efface the marks of our environment, but those we inherit are bred in the bone. Yolanda was not for Max. He could not control his heart; it took its inheritance of unbidden passion from a thousand scores of generations which had lived and died and learned their lesson centuries before the House of Hapsburg began; but he could control his lips and his acts.

With Max's growing love for Yolanda came a knightly reverence which was the very breath of the chivalry that he had sworn to uphold. This spirit of reverence the girl was quick to observe, and he lost nothing by it in her esteem. At times I could see that this reverential attitude of Max almost sobered her spirits; to do so completely would have been as impossible as to dam the current of a mountain stream.

On the evening of our first day out of Basel we were merrily eating our suppers in a village where we had halted for the night, when I remarked that I had met a man, while strolling near the river, who had said that war was imminent between Burgundy and Switzerland. My remark immediately caught Yolanda's sharp attention.

"Yes," said I, "we left Switzerland none too soon. This man tells me, on what authority I know not, that a herald will soon be sent by Duke Charles carrying defiance to the Swiss. What of value the duke expects to obtain from barren Switzerland outside of Basel, I do not know. Fighting for fighting's sake is poor sport."

"Forbear your wise saws, Sir Karl, and tell me what the man said," demanded Yolanda.

"He told me," I replied, "that he had heard the news at Metz, and that it was supposed Duke Rene would muster his forces in Lorraine and turn them against Burgundy in case of war with Switzerland."

"I predicted evil when Burgundy took Nancy from Lorraine," cried Yolanda, excitedly. "The hollow conventions made with Lorraine after the capture of that city were but the promises of a man under duress. The only ties that will bind a narrow man are those of immediate self-interest. There can be no lasting treaty between France and Burgundy so long as King Louis covets Flanders and is able to bribe our neighbors. These conventions between Burgundy, Lorraine, Bourbon, and St. Pol will hold only so long as Burgundy does not need them."

"That is surely true, Fraeulein," I said.

"Yes," she continued, "and should Burgundy suffer any great misfortune or be crippled for an hour, those small states would be upon his back like a pack of wolves, and he would be ruined. Lorraine, Bourbon, and St. Pol do not see that Burgundy alone stands



between them and the greedy maw of France. Should King Louis survive my—my Lord of Burgundy five years, these dukes and counts will lose their feudal rights and become servile vassals of France, not in name, as now they are, but in sorry fact.”



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I was so astonished at this tempestuous outburst from an unexpected quarter, and was so surprised at discovering an intimate knowledge of great affairs in a simple burgher maid, that I dropped the piece of meat I held in my fingers and stared in wonder across the table at Yolanda. I had known from the first hour of meeting her that the girl's mind was marvellously keen; but that a maid of seventeen or eighteen, in her position, should have so firm a grasp of international affairs and should possess so clear a conception of the troublous situation in western Europe, astounded me.

In eastern Europe, where we were not blinded by neighborly hatred and local jealousies, the truth of Yolanda's statement had long been apparent. We carried our prophecy further and predicted that the headlong passions of Charles the Rash would soon result in his death or overthrow.

My point in dragging in this heavy load of political lore is this: In case of the death of Charles of Burgundy, the future of western Europe would depend on the brains and the bravery of the man who should marry the Princess Mary. I felt that Max was chosen of God for that destiny. Should he succeed in defending Burgundy against France, he would become the most powerful man in Europe. No event save death could keep him from achieving the imperial crown.

If the existing treaty of marriage between Mary and the Dauphin of France were carried out, and if the Dauphin as king should possess one-half the wisdom of his father, Louis, all western Europe would soon be France. If this treaty were to fail and the Princess Mary espouse a man capable of defending her territory, Burgundy would still remain a wall of protection to the smaller states of the Rhine.

A long silence followed Yolanda's outburst, but her words had so astonished me that my supper for the evening was finished. Castleman plied his knife industriously; Yolanda nibbled at a piece of meat between her dainty fingers, and Twonette gazed serenely out of the open window.

Yolanda's words and Castleman's constraint filled me with wonder. There was to me a mystery about this little beauty that had not been touched on by my friend from Peronne. I hoped to gain information on the point by inducing Yolanda to talk. She was willing enough.

"Fraeulein," I said, "I quite agree with you. It is a matter of surprise to me that these noblemen you mention do not see the truth as you state it."

"They are fools, Sir Karl, sodden fools," exclaimed Yolanda. "You could buy their souls for a sou. King Louis buys them with an empty promise of one."

"Why does not Duke Charles buy them?" I asked. "'Tis said he has enormous quantities of ready gold in Luxembourg Castle."

“Because, Sir Karl,” she responded almost savagely, “bribery is the weapon of a coward. The Duke of Burgundy uses his money to pay soldiers.”



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“But, Fraeulein,” I answered, “the duke has for years—ever since before his father’s death—been wasting his money, sacrificing his soldiers, and despoiling his land by wars, prosecuted to no good end. He has conquered large territory, but he has paid for it with the blood of his people. Neither they nor he are the better because of those accessions, and the duke has made enemies who will one day surely wrest them from him. A brave prince should not fear to be called a coward because of an act that will bring peace and happiness to his subjects and save their lives, their liberties, and their estates. That great end will ennoble any means. The subjects of Burgundy are frugal and peace-loving. They should be protected from the cruel cost of useless war. I would not criticise Duke Charles, whose bravery is beyond compare, but for the sake of his people I could wish that his boldness were tempered with caution. Policy, not blows, appears to me the only way out of his present and imminent danger.”

“Perhaps you are right, Sir Karl,” answered Yolanda, “but I advise you to keep your views to yourself when you reach Burgundy. Should they come to the duke’s ears, you might lose yours.”

“Indeed, Fraeulein, your warning is unnecessary,” I responded laughingly. “I already know the disposition of the duke toward those who disagree with him. His ungovernable passions will surely lead him to a terrible end. Bravery, if wise, is one of the noblest attributes of men. The lack of wisdom makes it the most dangerous. Duke Charles ought to temper his courage with love for his people. He should fight, when he must, with wise bravery. If he should die, God pity the poor people of Burgundy unless their princess choose a husband both wise and brave.”

“But she will not be allowed to choose,” cried Yolanda, passionately. “Her freedom is less than that of any serf. She is bound hand and foot by the chains of her birth. She is more to be pitied than the poorest maiden in Burgundy. The saddest of all captives is she who is chained to a throne.”

“That surely is the bitterest draught fate offers to mortal man,” sighed Max.

“Yes,” whispered Yolanda, huskily. “One cannot rebel; one may not even kill one’s self when one is condemned to live. One can do nothing but endure and wait in haunting fear and, in rare moments, hope against a million chances.”

Evidently she meant us to know that she sorrowed for Max’s martyrdom, though how she had learned of his true station in life I could not guess.

“It is strange,” said I to Castleman, when Yolanda and Twonette had left us, “that Fraeulein Yolanda, who seems to be all laughter and thoughtlessness, should be so well informed upon the affairs of princes and princesses, and should take this public matter so much to heart.”

“Yes, she is a strange, unfortunate girl,” answered Castleman, “and truly loves her native land. She would, I believe, be another Joan of Arc, had she the opportunity. She and her father do not at all agree. He wholly fails to comprehend her.”



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“Is her father your brother?” I asked. I felt a sense of impertinence in putting the question, but my curiosity was irresistible.

“Yes,” answered Castleman, hesitatingly; then, as if hurrying from the subject, he continued, “Her mother is dead, and the girl lives chiefly under my roof.”

I wanted to ask other questions concerning Yolanda, but I kept silent. I had begun to suspect that she was not what she passed for—a burgher girl; but Castleman was a straightforward, truthful man, and his words satisfied me. I had, at any rate, to be content with them, since Yolanda’s affairs were none of mine. Had I not been sure that Max’s training and inheritance gave him a shield against her darts, she and her affairs would have given me deep concern. At that time I had all the match-making impulses of an old woman, and was determined that no woman should step between Max and the far-off, almost impossible Princess of Burgundy.

When we resumed our journey the next morning Yolanda was demure, grave, and serious; but the bright sun soon had its way with her, and within a half-hour after leaving the village she was riding beside Max, laughing, singing, and flashing her eyes upon him with a lustre that dimmed the sun—at least, so Max thought, and probably he was right. That evening Max told me much of Yolanda’s conversation.

The road we were travelling clung to the Rhine for several leagues. In many places it was cut from the bank at the water’s edge. At others it ran along the brink of beetling precipices. At one of these Max guided his horse close to the brink, and, leaning over in his saddle, looked down the dizzy heights to the river below.

“Please do not ride so near the brink, Sir Max,” pleaded Yolanda. “It frightens me.”

Max had little of the braggadocio spirit about him, but no rightly constituted young man is entirely devoid of the desire to “show off” in the presence of timid and interesting ladies. Without that spirit of “show-off,” what would induce our knights to meet in glorious tournaments? Without it, what would our chivalry amount to? Without it, why should a peacock spread its tail? I do not belittle it, since from this spirit of “show-off” arises one great good—respect for the opinion of our fellow-man. So Max, with a dash of “show-off” in his disposition, laughed at Yolanda’s fears and answered that he was in no danger.

“It is very brave in you, Sir Max, to go so near the brink,” said Yolanda, ironically, “but do you remember what Sir Karl said concerning ‘wise bravery’? There can be no need for your bravery, and therefore no wisdom in it. Were there good reason why you should go near the brink, I should despise you if you refused; but there is no reason and, since it frightens me, I wish you would remain in the road.”

“Gladly I will,” answered Max, reining his horse beside her.

“Do you know,” said Yolanda, with as much seriousness as she could easily command, “that your friend, Sir Karl, is a philosopher? His phrase, ‘wise bravery,’ clings to me. I certainly wish the Duke of Burgundy would learn it and take it to heart.”



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“I have heard many conflicting stories concerning this Duke Charles,” said Max. “Some persons say he is all that is brave and noble; others declare that he is fierce, passionate, and bad. I wonder which I shall find him to be?”

“Do you expect to take service with him?” asked Yolanda, half sadly. At the mention of the duke’s name all smiles and dimples fled incontinently.

“No,” answered Max, “I think I shall not take service with the duke. In truth, I don’t know what I shall do. For what purpose I am going to Burgundy I am sure I cannot say.”

A short silence ensued, which was broken by Yolanda, speaking archly:—

“Perhaps you are going to Burgundy or to France to win the lady who gave you the ring?” Max was surprised, and flushed as he answered:—

“That would be an impossible thought, Fraeulein. If you but knew who the lady is, you would understand that such a hope on my part were a phantasy. But I have no such hope or wish. I do not now want to win the lady of the ring.”

“No, no, Sir Max,” said Yolanda, protestingly, “you must not basely desert this lady-love whom you have never seen. If trouble should come to her, whoever she is, you must hasten to her rescue and carry her away. The best opportunity to rob, you know, comes in the midst of a melee. Take her, Sir Max. I wish you success.”

“Do you really wish me success, Fraeulein?” asked Max, looking straight ahead. He was not at all flattered by her good wishes concerning the lady of the ring.

“Indeed I do,” responded the girl, joyously; “I will pray to the Virgin and ask her to help you to win this fair lady who gave you the ring.”

“I thank you for your good wishes,” returned Max, “though I could easily be satisfied with less enthusiasm on the subject.”

“Indeed? Why, may I ask?”

“Because, Fraeulein—because I had hoped—” Max ceased speaking, and, leaning forward, smoothed his horse’s mane.

Yolanda waited for a moment and then, turning her face toward Max, asked:—

“You had hoped for what, Sir Max?”

“I had hoped for nothing, Fraeulein,” he answered. “I am satisfied as matters now stand between us. Your words at supper last evening rang in my ears all night, ‘Chained to a



throne; chained to a throne.’ I knew you referred to my unhappy lot when you spoke, though how you guessed the truth concerning my station I do not know.”

A surprised little smile spread over her face, but he did not see it. He was still smoothing his horse’s mane.

“You cannot know the terrible truth of your words,” continued Max. “I will tell you a part of my secret, Fraeulein. All my life I have been cut off—chained to a throne—from the fellowship of men and the love of friends. Karl is the only friend I have ever known save my mother until I met you and your good people. Only the good God can know how I have longed and hungered since



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childhood for friendship; even for companionship. I did not know what I yearned for until since my arrival at Basel. Truly it is not good for man to be alone, even though he be upon a throne. I am not upon a throne, Fraeulein, but I am near one—a small, barren throne, whose greatest attribute is its ancestry. My home is a sad, lonely place—how lonely even you, who have guessed so shrewdly and who speak so eloquently, cannot know. You should thank God for your lowly birth and your lowly friends.”

“I do,” the girl answered, with a queer, half-sad, half-amused expression upon her face which Max could not interpret.

“But we cannot break the chains that have been welded a thousand years—that have grown stronger and tighter with each generation,” said Max. “You truthfully said, ‘One may only endure.’”

“I also said that at rare moments one may hope,” she answered, with drooping head.

“Not I, Fraeulein. I may not even hope. I am doomed,” answered Max.

“No, no, Sir Max,” responded the drooping head.

After a prolonged silence Max said, “I am sure the secret of my station is safe with you.”

“You need not doubt, Sir Max,” she responded. “You cannot know how safe it is.” She turned brightly upon him and continued, “Let me invoke my spirits, Sir Max.” She raised her eyes, saint-fashion, toward heaven, and spoke under her breath: “I hear the word ‘hope,’ Sir Max, ‘hope.’ It is very faint, but better faint than not at all.”

“I tell you there is no hope for me, Fraeulein,” responded Max, desperately. “It is cruel in you to say there is. It is doubly cruel to speak jestingly.”

“I speak earnestly,” said Yolanda. “There is hope. If you win the lady who gave you the ring, you will be happy. I do not jest.”

“You do. You mock me,” cried Max. “I tell you, Yolanda, there is in all the world no woman for me save—save one upon whom I may not think.” Yolanda’s face grew radiant, though tears moistened her eyes. “Even though it were possible for me to defy my parents, to turn my face against my country, my people, and the sacred traditions of my house, by asking her to share my life, there could be only wretchedness ahead for her, and therefore unhappiness for me. The dove and the eagle may not mate. Consider the fate of sweet Agnes Bernauer, who married Duke Albert and perished in the Danube. I tell you, Fraeulein, I am hopeless. When I return to my people, I shall do so knowing that life thereafter will be something to endure, not a blessing to thank God for.”



“No, no, Sir Max,” murmured the girl, “you do not know.”

Max turned upon her almost angrily:—

“A man knows when he lives; a man knows when he is dying, and a man, if he be worthy of the name, knows when he loves a woman. I am not sure that the sun shines, Fraeulein, than I am that I shall not forget this woman nor cease to sorrow for her all the days of my life.”



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“You must not speak such words to me, Sir Max,” said Yolanda, reprovingly. “I, too, must live and be happy if—if I can.”

She turned her face away from Max and, touching her horse with her whip, passed a few feet ahead of him. If there were tears in her eyes, she did not wish Max to see them. After several minutes of silence he spurred his horse to her side.

“I did not intend to speak, Fraeulein. I once said I would never speak again. I should not have spoken now, though I have told you only what you already know. I ask no favor in return, not even a touch from your hand.”

“You shall have that at least, Sir Max,” she answered, impulsively reining her horse close to Max and placing her hand in his.

“Still, you wish me to win the lady who sent me the ring?” asked Max.

“Yes,” returned Yolanda, softly. “It will mean your happiness and mine—” Suddenly checking herself, she explained: “I shall be happy if you are. A man cannot know how happy a woman may be for another’s sake.”

I felt no desire to reprove Max when he told me of his day’s adventure with Yolanda, since I could in no way remedy the evil. In fact, Max was growing out of my jurisdiction. He had listened to my lectures and advice since childhood and had taken them kindly, because my authority grew out of my love for him and his love for me. He was a boy when we left Styria, but he was a man when we were journeying down the Rhine. Though the confidential relations between us had grown closer, my advice was gradually taking the form of consultation. I did not seek his confidences, and he gave them more freely, if that were possible, than ever before. I did not offer my advice so readily, but he sought it more frequently. Max told me the sorrowful little story of the day, and I did not comment on it. I simply led him in another direction.

“Fraeulein Yolanda’s words have given me food for thought,” I said. “So long as Duke Charles lives, there can be no union between Burgundy and Hapsburg; but at the pace he is travelling he will surely receive his *coup de grace* before long, and I hope you will meet and know the princess before the tragedy occurs. Then declare yourself and back your claim with the duke’s proposal, which has never been withdrawn. That the people of Burgundy hate France and this French marriage there can be no doubt. They are fools for so doing, but we may easily profit by their lack of wisdom. In the event of the duke’s death the inclinations of the princess will be half the battle. So long as he lives they are no part of it. If, by the help of Twonette, you should be so fortunate as to meet the princess, our dream may be realized, and our house may become the greatest in Europe.”



“I suppose you are right, Karl,” answered Max. “You are always right; but I have no heart in this matter, and I hope nothing will come of it. I have never known you to be so cold-blooded as in this affair.”



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“If you are to be hot-blooded, or even warm-blooded, you must turn your back on your house and cast from you the duties and privileges of your birth,” I observed.

“You are right,” he answered irritably. “But it will be difficult for me to please one woman while thinking of another. Ah, Karl, I am growing tired of this Burgundian dream. Dream? It is almost a nightmare.”

Max’s words did not alarm me; he was “chained to a throne.” He would not fail me if the hour of good fortune should come.

“Your thoughts of another woman will not stand in your way,” I said. “Experience is more necessary in dealing with women than in any other of life’s affairs, and this episode with Yolanda is what you need to prepare you for—for what I pray you may have to do.”

“Karl, please do not talk of this—this—my feeling for Yolanda as an episode,” he said, speaking almost angrily. “It is a part of my life, and will be my sorrow as long as I live.”

The boy’s anger warned me that if I would lead him, I must do it gently.

“I believe, Max, you speak truly,” I said; “but it will not be an unmixed evil. Good will come of it, since the image of a pure woman injures no man’s heart. It keeps him in the narrow way and guides his hand for righteousness.”

CHAPTER V

WHO IS YOLANDA?

Next morning Yolanda came to breakfast smiling, bedimpled, and sparkling as a sunlit mountain brook. Max, who was gloomy, took her sprightliness amiss, thinking, no doubt, that her life also ought to be darkened by the cloud that he thought was overshadowing him. There was no doubt in my mind that Yolanda had inspired a deep and lasting passion in Max, though he was, I hoped, mistaken in the belief that it would darken his life. But I would not give a kreutzer for a young fellow who does not feel that life is worthless without his lady-love.

Yolanda did not take kindly to clouds of any sort, and she soon scattered those that Max had conjured up. After we had resumed our journey Max fell back to ride with her.

“Sir Max,” she said, “if you allow yourself to become The Knight Doleful, I will not only cease having speech with you, but I will laugh at you.”

The latter she did then and there. This from a burgher girl of Peronne to a prince of the House of Hapsburg! The good duke and duchess would have swooned with horror had



they known of it. Max was inclined to be angry, but, unfortunately for his ill-humor, he caught a glimpse of her face, and he, too, laughed.

“I fear I am a great fool,” he said. Yolanda did not contradict him. She simply shrugged her shoulders as if to say, “That unfortunate condition is apt, at times, to overtake the best of men.”

Soon our little cavalcade came together, and we rode, laughing, and all talking at once, for a league or more.



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Our road had parted from the river at one of its great bends, and for an hour we had been slowly climbing a long hill. When we reached the top, we unsaddled for dinner in the shade of a tree by the wayside. A hundred yards from the road was a dense copse of undergrowth and bushes on the edge of the forest. Off to the east flowed the majestic Rhine, a league distant, and to the north ran the road like a white ribbon, stretching downhill to the valley and up again to the top of another hill, distant perhaps a half-league.

While we were eating dinner, a cloud of dust arose from the hilltop north of us, and immediately began descending in our direction. At intervals, in the midst of the dust-cloud, we caught glimpses of men on horseback riding at full gallop. This unwelcome sight brought our dinner to an end. I at once ordered the sumpter mules taken to the copse on the forest's edge, and directed every man to look to his arms and armor. I asked Twonette and Yolanda to go with the mules, and Yolanda became angry.

"I go with the mules? Sir Karl, you forget yourself," cried the young lady, drawing herself up with the dignity of a princess royal. Twonette ran as rapidly as her feet could take her to seek refuge with the mules, but Yolanda, with flashing eyes, declared:

"I will remain here."

I felt that an apology was due to this burgher girl.

"I will gladly apologize later, Fraeulein, but now I have only time to beg that you will conceal yourself. These men probably are robbers. If they see you, we shall be compelled to fight them, however great their numbers. If we find their force too large for us, we may easily ransom the mules and their packs, but we could make no terms for you. If they are Black Riders, they will prefer a little gold to a great deal of silk, but they will prefer you and Fraeulein Twonette to a great deal of gold."

"I would not pay them one piece of gold," cried Yolanda, defiantly. "Give me an arquebuse. I will help you fight."

The brave little heroine astonished me.

"Would you prefer that Max or your good uncle and perhaps some of our poor mule-leaders should be killed by these pigstickers," I asked, "or would you compound with them in some reasonable way? Shall we fight them?"

"No, no," she answered, "wise bravery is better. I suppose I shall learn the lesson some day."

While the troop of horsemen were under the crest of the hill, Yolanda ran across the open to a place of concealment beside Twonette. Hardly was she hidden when the



dust-cloud rose from the brink of the hill, and five men, well though roughly armed, galloped up to us and drew their horses back upon their haunches.

“What have we here?” demanded the captain, a huge German. Their grimy armor and bearded faces besmeared with black marked them as Black Riders. I was overjoyed to see that they numbered but five.



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“What is that to you?” I asked, putting on a bold front, though I feared our mule-leaders would make but a sorry fight should we come to blows.

“That depends on what you have,” responded our swart friend, coolly. “Whatever you have, so much it is to us.”

“What will you take in gold, my good man, and let us go our way in peace with our cargo of silks?” asked Castleman.

“By your leave, friend,” said I, interrupting the negotiations, “I am in command when fighting is to be done. Let me settle with this fellow.”

“Settle now, if you are so keen,” cried the big German, drawing his sword and spurring his horse upon me. I could not have withstood the unexpected onrush, and certainly would have met with hard blows or worse, had not Max come to my rescue. I hurriedly stepped back, and the German, in following me, rode near a large stone by the roadside. He had, doubtless, passed the stone many times in his travels up and down the road, but the thought probably had never occurred to him that it would be the cause of his death. The most potential facts in our lives are usually too insignificant to attract attention.

When the German charged me, Max sprang upon the stone and dealt the swart ruffian a blow such as no man may survive. Max’s great battle-axe crushed the Black Eider’s helmet as if it were an egg-shell, and the captain of our foes fell backward, hanging by his stirrups. One of our squires shot one of the robbers, and the remaining three took flight. Max caught the captain’s horse, and coolly extricated the dead man’s feet from the stirrups. Then he thrust the body to the roadside with the indifference of a man whose life has been spent in slaughter. Among his many inheritances, Max probably had taken this indifference, together with his instinctive love of battle. He was not quarrelsome, but he took to a fight as naturally as a duck takes to water.

When the robbers had left, Yolanda came running from her hiding-place. She was not frightened; she was aglow with excitement. She, too, must have inherited the love of battle. Twonette was trembling with fear.

“Ah, Sir Max, it was beautifully done,” said Yolanda. “You sprang upon the rock with the quickness of a panther, and the blow was dealt with the strength of a lion. I saw it all. When your battle-axe rose above the robber’s head, death was written on the steel. It was beautiful to see you kill him, Sir Max. Strength is always beautiful in the eyes of a woman, but it is doubly so when used in her defence and linked with ‘wise bravery.’ I thank you, Sir Karl, for teaching me that word. Sir Max, I—I cannot thank you now.”

She stopped speaking and covered her face with her hands. In a moment she partly recovered composure and smiled her gratitude through a little shower of tears. Max



was, of course, aglow with pleasure at Yolanda's praise, but he bore his honors meekly. He did not look upon his tremendous feat of arms as of much importance.



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Fearing the return of the Schwartreiter with reenforcements, we lost no time in resuming our journey, Max and Yolanda quickly finished their dinner, but Castleman, Twonette, and myself did not care to eat.

Within ten minutes after Max had killed the captain of the Black Riders we were on our road travelling downhill, very joyful in our victory and very proud of our knight, Sir Max. We left the dead men by the roadside, but took with us two fine horses as compensation for our trouble. The captain's great charger Max appropriated for his own. He will appear again in this chronicle.

We rode silently but joyfully. Twonette slowly recovered from her fright, and the pink crept back to her cheeks. The pink had not left Yolanda's cheeks, nor had her nerves been disturbed by the adventures of the morning. Max tried hard to suppress his exuberance of spirit, and Yolanda laved him in the sunshine of her smiles.

Within three hours we were safely housed at a village by the Rhine. Castleman, finding me alone, said:—

“You, Sir Karl, and Sir Max little know the value of the friend you have made this day.”

“I thank you, good Castleman,” I answered, hardly liking so great an air of condescension on the part of a burgher. An afterthought suggested that perhaps Castleman had not referred to himself as the friend we had made. Strange thoughts and speculations had of late been swarming in my mind until they had almost taken the form of a refrain, “Who is Yolanda?” Though the question repeated itself constantly by day and by night, I received no whisper of an answer.

We travelled slowly, and it was not until the second day after our conflict with the Black Riders that we found ourselves near Strasburg. A league from the city gates we met Raoul de Rose, a herald of the Duke of Burgundy. Yolanda recognized his banner at a distance and hastily veiled herself. Twonette remained unveiled.

We halted, and De Rose, who was travelling alone, safe under a herald's privileges, drew rein beside Castleman and me, who had been riding in advance of our cavalcade. While Castleman was talking to De Rose, Yolanda and Twonette rode forward, passing on that side of the highway which left Castleman and me between them and the herald.

“Ah, good Castleman,” said De Rose, “you are far from home these troublous times.”

“Your words imply bad news, monsieur,” returned Castleman. “I have already heard hints of trouble, though all was quiet when I left Peronne.”

“When did you leave?” asked the herald.

“More than two months ago,” answered Castleman.



“With our rapidly moving duke, two months is ample time to make a deal of trouble, to gain victories, and to compel peace among his quarrelsome neighbors,” answered De Rose. “It is publicly known that I carry defiance to the Swiss. They cannot comply with Burgundy’s terms, and war will surely follow. Our duke will teach these Swiss sheep to stop bleating, and when this war is finished, the dominion of Burgundy will include the Alps. Duke Charles will have fresh ice for his dinner every day—ice from the mountain tops.”



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“That is all he will get from the barren Swiss land, I fear,” remarked Castleman.

“But if he wants it?” answered De Rose, shrugging his shoulders.

“Yes,” returned Castleman, “if the duke wants it, God give it him; but I am sorry to see war with so peaceful a people as the Swiss.”

“There are many persons in Burgundy foolish enough to agree with you,” answered De Rose, laughingly, “but for my part, the will of my master is my will.”

“Amen!” said the cautious burgher.

De Rose smiled, and said:—

“There is but one will in Burgundy, and that will be done.”

“Where is the duke?” asked Castleman.

“He is at home in Ghent,” answered the herald.

“Is he to remain there?” asked the burgher, displaying a sudden interest.

“I believe he goes soon to Peronne to look after his affairs, on the French border, and to see the duchess and the princess before leaving for Switzerland. It is also publicly known that the duke, while at Peronne, intends to arrange for the immediate marriage of the princess to the Dauphin. He wishes to tie the hands of King Louis before making war elsewhere, and he is going to Peronne to cause this marriage to be celebrated before he leaves Burgundy.”

“Sacred God!” exclaimed the usually phlegmatic burgher. “We must hasten home. Farewell, Monsieur de Rose. Your news indeed is bad—your news of war.”

Castleman urged “Last Week” to an unwonted pace, and drew rein beside Yolanda. I followed slowly, and unintentionally overhead him say:—

“Your father will soon be in Peronne. The duke leaves Ghent within a day or two.”

“Holy Virgin!” cried Yolanda, excitedly. “We must make all haste, good uncle. Hereafter we must travel night and day. We must double our retinue at Strasburg and hasten forward regardless of danger and fatigue. I wish we were across Lorraine and well out of Metz. If this war begins, Lorraine will surely turn upon Burgundy.”

“I begged you not to come upon this journey,” said Castleman, complainingly.

“I know you did, uncle,” returned Yolanda, repentantly.



“But you would come,” continued Castleman, determined to give vent to his feelings. “I could not dissuade you, and now if the duke leaves Ghent—if your father reaches Peronne—before we return, God help us all.”

“Yes, dear uncle,” said Yolanda, humbly; “as usual, I was at fault. I have been a source of trouble and danger to you nearly all my life, and you, of all persons in the world, I would make happy.”

I was riding ten paces behind Castleman, but the wind came toward me, and I was an involuntary listener. What I had heard was of such tremendous import to Max that I could not bring myself to rein back my horse, though I despised myself for listening. I believe that moment was, of all my life, the greatest test of my love for Max. No less a motive could have induced me to become an eavesdropper. Castleman was silent for a short time, and then I heard him say:—



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“You have also brought me happiness, Yolanda, and I shall be wretched when your father takes you from me. Twonette is not dearer to me than you. Whatever befalls, I shall still thank God for the happiness He has given me in you.”

“Ah, uncle, your kind words almost break my heart,” said Yolanda, placing her kerchief to her eyes. “I wish you would not forgive me for having brought you into this hard case. I wish you would upbraid me. I will pray to the Blessed Virgin night and day to protect you from this trouble my wilfulness has brought upon you. Never again will I be wilful, dear uncle, never again—with you. At Strasburg I will make an offering to the Virgin.”

“Make her an offering of this young man on whom you are smiling,” suggested Castleman. “I would have left him at Basel but for your wilfulness and entreaties. We know nothing of him save that he is big, honest, brave, gentle, and good to look upon. I have already warned you against the great favor you show him. I shall not do so again. I advise that we leave him at Metz.”

“I will do as you advise,” said Yolanda, mournfully. “I will offer even this, my first great happiness, to the Virgin. Surely it will propitiate her.”

This conversation almost deprived me of the power to think. In a dimly conscious fashion, I wondered whether Castleman could possibly have meant the Duke of Burgundy when he told Yolanda that her father would soon be at Peronne. I could find no other meaning for his words, and I was almost ready to believe that the brown-eyed, laughing Yolanda was none other than the far-famed Mary of Burgundy, whose tiny hand was sought by every nation of Europe having a marriageable king or prince.

Kings in their dotage and princes in their nonage wooed her. Old men and babes eagerly sought the favor of this young girl, and stood ready to give their gold, their blood, and the lives of their subjects on even the shadow of a chance to win her. The battle-field and the bower alike had been wooing-ground for her smiles. After all this, she had been affianced to the Dauphin of France, and her father would bring the marriage about within a few weeks. To this girl I had thought to be gracious, and had feared that I might be too condescending. I then realized what a pitiable ass a man may make of himself by giving his whole time and attention to the task.

Of course I was not sure that Yolanda was the princess. Her father, spoken of by Castleman, might be, and probably was, a great lord in the duke's train. Yolanda might be the love-daughter of Charles of Burgundy. Many explanations might be given to Castleman's remarks; but I could not help believing that Yolanda was the far-famed Burgundian princess. If so, what a marvellous romance was this journey that Max and I had undertaken, and what a fantastic trick fate had played in bringing these two from the ends of the earth to meet in the quaint old Swiss city. It seemed almost as if their souls had journeyed toward each other, since the beginning of time.



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That the princess should be abroad with Castleman and his daughter unattended by even a lady-in-waiting seemed improbable—almost impossible.

My wavering mind veered with each moment from the conviction that Yolanda was the princess to a feeling of certainty that she was not, and back again. That she was the princess seemed at one moment indubitably true; the next moment it appeared absurdly impossible. Still, Castleman's words rang in my ears.

I was glad that Max was riding a hundred yards behind me. My first determination was that he should know nothing of what I had heard. My second was that he and I should leave the party at Metz. If I were to disclose to Max my suspicions concerning Yolanda, I well knew that it would be beyond my power or that of any man to prevent his journeying to Peronne.

This meeting with the princess far from home, one might suppose, was the event of all others that I desired, but the situation presented many points to be considered. If we should conduct Yolanda to Peronne and should reach that city after the duke's arrival, there would be untold trouble for us, if (oh, that mighty if!) she were the Princess Mary. I was thoroughly frightened, since I could not know what trouble I might bring to Max. We might, with comparative safety, visit Peronne at a later period; but I sincerely hoped that Yolanda would offer Max to the Virgin when we reached Metz.

If Yolanda were the princess, and if the duke with his intentions regarding her immediate marriage, should reach Peronne and find his daughter absent, his wrath against all concerned would be unappeasable. If he should learn that she had been absent from Peronne on this journey, even though she reached home before her father, Castleman would probably lose his head for the crime of taking her, and all concerned in the journey might meet with evil fortune. Any of these catastrophes might occur if she were the princess. If she were not the princess, some other great catastrophe, hinted by Castleman and dreaded by Yolanda, might happen; and it is well for disinterested persons to remain away from the scene of impending trouble.

Aside from all these good reasons for cutting short our journey to Peronne, was the fact that our motive for going there had ceased to exist. The princess was soon to become the wife of the Dauphin. If Yolanda were not the princess, there was still good reason why we should abandon her at Metz. She was dangerously attractive and was gaining too great a hold on Max. We were under contract to escort Castleman to Peronne, and no danger should prevent us from fulfilling our agreement; but if Castleman should voluntarily release us, our obligation would cease.

As we passed under the portcullis at Strasburg, Max spurred his horse to Yolanda's side. She neither lifted her veil nor gave any sign of recognition. The news of impending war had been discussed, and Max supposed Yolanda was frightened. He spoke reassuringly to her, and she answered:—



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"I thank you, Sir Max, but our danger is greater than you know."

It was four o'clock when we reached Strasburg, where we stopped at The Cygnet. Soon after we entered the inn, Twonette and Yolanda went forth, heavily veiled, and walked rapidly in the direction of the cathedral. Yolanda was going to make her offering to the Virgin of the man she loved; surely woman could make no greater.

When Yolanda and Twonette had gone, Castleman asked me to assist him in procuring a score of men-at-arms. They might be needed in crossing Lorraine from Strasburg to Metz.

"I shall travel night and day till we reach home," said Castleman. "I have news of war that hastens us, and—and it is most important that Yolanda should deliver certain papers at the castle before the duke arrives at Peronne. If she reaches the castle one hour or one minute after the duke, the results will be evil beyond remedy."

"I sincerely hope there may be no delay," I answered, believing that the papers were an invention of Castleman's.

"Yes," responded the burgher; "and, Sir Karl, I deem it best for all concerned that you and Sir Max part company with us at Metz. I thank you for your services, and hope you will honor us by visiting Peronne at some future time. But now it is best that you leave us to pursue our journey without you."

Castleman's suggestion was most welcome to me, and I communicated it to Max when I returned to the inn. He was sorrowful; but I found that he, too, felt that he should part from Yolanda.

Castleman and I found the burgomaster, to whom we paid five hundred guilders (a sum equal to his entire annual salary), and within an hour a troop of twenty men-at-arms awaited us in the courtyard of The Cygnet. Castleman barely touched his meat at supper, though he drank two bottles of Johannesburg; Max ate little, and I had no appetite whatever.

When Yolanda returned, I said:—

"Fraeulein, will you not eat?"

"I do not care to eat," she replied, and I could easily see that she was struggling to keep back the tears. "Let us resume our journey at once. I see the men-at-arms are waiting."

Our rare days of sunshine had surely been weather-breeders. We were all under a dark cloud.



We left Strasburg by the north gate, and, as the city fell back of us, Max, riding by my side, asked:—

“What is the evil news that has cast this gloom over Yolanda and good Castleman? If our friends are in danger, I would not leave them at Metz, and you would not have me do so.”

“The evil news grows out of the war,” I answered evasively. “I heard every word spoken by the herald and Castleman. The burgher is wise to hasten home. If he delays his journey even for a day, he may find Burgundy—especially Lorraine—swarming with lawless men going to the various rendezvous. He also tells me he has important papers that must be delivered in the castle before the duke arrives at Peronne.”



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"It is strange," said Max, "that news of merely a general nature should produce so gloomy an effect; but, if you heard all that De Rose said, that must be the only cause."

"I cannot say," I responded, "what the cause may be. All I know is that De Rose spoke of the impending war, and said that the duke was hastening to Peronne for the purpose of consummating the French marriage at once. There is now no reason why we should journey to Peronne. My air-castles have crumbled about my ears in fine shape."

"I am not sorry, Karl," replied Max. "During the last fortnight I have changed. Should my marriage with the princess, by any marvellous chance, become possible, it would now be wholly for the sake of her estates, and I despise myself when I try to think that I wish to bring it about. Ah, Karl, it is now impossible even to hope for this marriage, and I tell you I am glad of it. We will see the world, then we will return to Styria; and I shall thank you all my life for having made a man of me."

CHAPTER VI

DUKE CHARLES THE RASH

Our caravan travelled with the mournfulness of a funeral procession. Early in the evening Max spoke to Yolanda:—

"I hear your uncle desires Sir Karl and me to leave you at Metz."

"Yes," she answered dolefully, hanging her head, "we part at Metz. I shall see you there before I leave, and then—and then—ah, Sir Max, I was wrong and you were right; there is no hope."

"What of the lady who gave me the ring?" asked Max, in a feeble effort to banter her.

"She would have made you very happy, Sir Max. Her estates would have compensated for all losses elsewhere."

"You know, that is not true, Yolanda," said Max, earnestly.

"I am not sure, Sir Max," responded the girl, "and do not wish to be sure. I will see you at Metz, and there we may part. It is our fate. We must not be doleful, Sir Max, we must be—we must be—happy and brave." Her poor little effort to be happy and brave was piteous.

Castleman soon fell back with Yolanda, and Max rode forward beside me.

At midnight we offsaddled by a stream in a forest and allowed our horses and mules to rest until sunrise. Then we took up our journey again, and by forced marches reached



Metz one morning an hour before dawn. We waited in a drizzling rain till the gates opened, and, after a long parley with the warder, entered the city. We were all nearly exhausted, and our poor mules staggered along the streets hardly able to carry their burdens another step. Two had fallen a half-league outside of Metz; and three others fell with their loads within the city gates.

Castleman had determined to stop with a merchant friend, and after what seemed a long journey from the gates we halted at the merchant's house. Our host left us in his parlor while he went to arrange for breakfast. When he had gone Castleman turned to me:—



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“You and Sir Max will, if you please, find good lodging at the Great Tun. My friend will send a man in advance to bespeak your comfort.”

Max and I rose to leave, and Yolanda offered him her hand, saying:—

“It may be that we are to part here at Metz, but I will send for you soon and will see you before we leave, and—and—” She could not speak further; tears were in her eyes and her voice. It was not so easy after all to be happy and brave.

“You will not fail to send for me?” asked Max, clinging to her hand.

“I will not fail,” she answered, looking up timidly and instantly dropping her eyes. “Of that you have better assurance than you will ever know.”

Castleman followed us to the street door and handed me a purse of gold.

“I have expected to part from you here,” he said, “and it may be so; but I fear I shall need your services still further. My mules are unfit to travel at present; they may never be fit to use; surely not within a fortnight. I must find other sumpter mules, wait for those I have to regain their strength, or leave my goods at Metz. My fortune is invested in these silks, and if I leave them here, I shall never see them again. In case the Duke of Lorraine succeeds in rallying his subjects against Burgundy, I shall find it difficult to buy sumpter mules on the eve of war, and may be compelled to remain in Metz until my own mules are able to travel. In that event may I depend upon you and Sir Max to escort my niece and my daughter to Peronne without me?”

I answered promptly, though against my desires:—“You may depend on us.”

At midnight I was aroused by a knock at my door. I arose and admitted Castleman.

“I will take you at your word, Sir Karl,” said the burgher. “I cannot obtain sumpter mules, and I shall be ruined in fortune if I leave my silks at Metz. I have had word that the Duke of Burgundy leaves Ghent the day after to-morrow for Peronne. If he leaves late in the day, you may, by starting at once, reach Peronne Castle ahead of him. His journey will be shorter than yours by twenty-five leagues, but you will have a better road. If you travel with all haste, you may be able to take Yolanda, with—with the important papers, to the castle a half-day before my lord arrives there. Are you ready to begin the journey at once?”

“We are ready,” answered Max.

“I will meet you at the Deutsches Thor Gate within an hour,” said Castleman. “My daughter and my niece will be there. Since you are to travel rapidly I advise a small retinue. Your squires have proved themselves worthy men, and I feel sure you will be able to protect your charges.”

“We’ll not boast of what we shall do, good Castleman,” said Max, “but we’ll do our best.”



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“If you reach Peronne after the duke arrives,” said Castleman, “I advise you not to enter the gates of the city, but to leave Burgundy at once and with all the speed you can make. If you reach Peronne before the duke, I advise you not to tarry; but if you determine to remain, you will go to The Mitre—a quiet inn kept by my good friend Marcus Grote. I strongly advise you not to remain at Peronne; but if you do not see fit to follow my advice, I hope you will remain close at The Mitre until my return, which, I trust, will be within three weeks. Danger will attend you if you do not follow my suggestion. In any case, Sir Max, I hope you will not visit my house. My words may seem ungracious, but they are for your good and mine. When I return to Peronne, I shall be happy if you will honor my poor house; but until my return, untold trouble to many persons may follow your disregard of what I say.”

Castleman then departed, and we immediately arranged for the journey.

Max and I, with our squires, were waiting at the Deutsches Thor Gate when Castleman arrived with Twonette, Yolanda, and a guide. I knocked at the door of the lodge to rouse the warder, who, of course, was asleep, and that alert guardian of a drowsy city came grumbling to the wicket.

“What in the devil’s name do you want at this time of night?” he growled. “The gates won’t open till dawn.”

“Yes, they will,” replied Castleman. “I have the burgomaster’s order.”

“I open the gates only on an order from the governor of the citadel,” said the warder.

“I have not that, my good friend,” responded Castleman, “but I have a hundred silver marks in my purse.”

“Let me see the burgomaster’s order,” said the worthy gatekeeper. “I am always glad to be accommodating.”

Castleman handed over the order and the purse, and the warder pretended to read the paper in the dark.

“I’ll open the gate to accommodate you and to please the burgomaster,” he said.

The gates screeched upon their hinges, and every link in the portcullis chain groaned as if it wished to alarm the city. When the portcullis was a-block, Max, myself, and the squires mounted our horses. Yolanda leaned down from her saddle and, placing her arms about Castleman’s neck, kissed him. Twonette followed her example; then our small cavalcade passed out through the gate, and we entered on our long, hard race with the Duke of Burgundy.

At dawn Yolanda called me to her side.



“Our guide will conduct us to Cinq Voies on the Somme, eight leagues this side of Peronne,” she said. “There we shall dismiss him. From Cinq Voies the road is straight to Peronne down the river. Shall we put our horses to the gallop?”

To her last suggestion I objected:—

“We have no relays. These horses must carry us to Peronne. In Styria we have an adage, ‘If you would gallop on a long journey, walk your horse.’”



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“In Styria!” exclaimed Yolanda, laughing. “You told me you were from Italy.”

“So I am,” I replied.

“Now you say *we* have an adage in Styria,” she returned, amused at my discomfiture. “I hope you have not been wandering from the path of truth in your long journey, Sir Karl.”

“No farther than yourself, Fraeulein,” I answered.

A frown came instantly to her face and, after a moment’s hesitation, she retorted:—

“Ah, but I am a woman; I am privileged to wander a little way from the narrow road. A man may protect himself with his sword and battle-axe, and need never stray. A woman’s defence lies in her wit and her tongue.” The frown deepened, and she turned sharply upon me: “But in what respect, pray, have I wandered? I have not spoken a word to you which has not been the exact truth. If I have left anything untold, it is because I do not wish to tell it, in which case, of course, you would not wish to pry.”

Her audacity amused me, and though I knew I ought to hold my tongue, I could not resist saying:—

“I have asked no questions, Fraeulein.”

Yolanda cast a surprised glance toward me and then broke into a merry laugh.

“That is to say *I* have asked too many questions. Good for you, Sir Karl! I have had the worst of this encounter. I will ask no more questions nor give you further cause to wander from the truth. Your memory, Sir Karl, is poor. ‘To be a good liar, one must have a good memory,’ as King Louis of France has said.”

“Ask all the questions you wish, Fraeulein,” I responded penitently, “I will answer with the truth.”

“There is no need to ask questions,” she said, giving me a side glance full of sauciness. “I already know all that I wish to know.”

I could not resist saying:—

“Perhaps, Fraeulein, I know quite as much about you as you know about us.”

“There is little to know about me that is really worth while, but what little there is I sincerely hope you do not know,” she replied half angrily. “If you do know anything which I have left untold, or if, in your vanity, you think you have discovered some great mystery concerning me, I advise you to keep your supposed knowledge to yourself.”



The day that I am made sure you know too much, our friendship ceases, and that, Sir Karl, would give me pain. I hope it would pain you.”

I at once began an orderly though hasty retreat.

“I do not know to what you refer concerning yourself,” I explained. “All I know about you is that you are Fraeulein Castleman, and a very charming person, whom I would have for my friend, if that be possible. I spoke but jestingly. I have often doubted that you are a burgher maiden, but there my knowledge ceases; and I am willing that it should so remain till you see fit to enlighten me.”

“There is little knowledge in doubt,” said Yolanda, with a nervous laugh, “though a doubt usually precedes wisdom.”



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Although I was looking at my horse's ears, I could see the light of her eyes as she watched me inquiringly. After a long pause she stroked her horse's mane with her whip, and said, musingly:—

“A man should seek to know only the languages, philosophy, and other useful learning. Useless knowledge has cost many a man his head.”

After a long pause she turned to me with a broad smile:—

“But it is usually not dangerous so long as it does not lodge in the tongue.”

I replied quickly:—

“Fraeulein, when my tongue makes a fool of me, I pray God I may lose it.”

“God save all fools by a like fate,” she answered.

I was sure she did not mean to include me in the category of fools.

This conversation revealed to me two facts: first, I learned that by some means—possibly the ring Max wore—this girl, Yolanda, whoever she might be, knew Max. Second, I discovered in myself a dangerous propensity to talk, and of all sure roads to ruin the tongue is the surest. A man's vanity prompts him to be witty; hatred prompts him to cut his enemy, and his love of truth often prompts him to speak it at the wrong time. These three motives combined often prompt him to lose his head. Max and I were on dangerous ground, and one untimely error might make it perilous.

We travelled rapidly, and near midnight of the second day out of Metz we reached Cinq Voies on the Somme. The village, consisting of a large inn, a church, a priest's house, and a farrier's shop, is situate at the meeting of five roads, from which the hamlet takes its name. One road led down from Cambrai and Ghent in the north, one from Liege in the northeast, and the one over which we had travelled from Metz came out of the southeast. Two roads led westward to Peronne. One followed the right bank of the Somme, passed Peronne, and thence on to Amiens. Another road followed the left bank of the Somme, touched Peronne, and thence ran southwesterly to Paris.

When we reached Cinq Voies on the Somme—within eight leagues of Peronne—we halted for supper, very tired and weary. While supper was preparing, we held a consultation, and determined to rest there for the night. I advised against this course, believing that the duke would pass that way on his road from Ghent to Peronne. But Yolanda's sweet face was pinched by weariness, and Twonette was sound asleep. Our horses, I feared, might fail, and leave us hopelessly in the lurch. Therefore, I gave the command to offsaddle, and we halted at the inn for the night.



Our host told me his house was full of guests who had arrived two hours before, but he found a room for Yolanda and Twonette, and told Max and me to sleep, if we could, on the tap-room floor. After an hour on the hard boards I went to the stable, and, rousing a groom, gave him a silver crown for the privilege of sleeping on a wisp of hay. I fell asleep at once and must have slept like the dead, for the dawn was breaking when one of our squires wakened me. I could not believe that I had been sleeping five minutes, but the dim morning light startled me, and I ordered the horses saddled.

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I hastened to the inn and wakened Max, to whose well-covered bones a board was as soft as a feather bed. While I was speaking to him, I heard a noise in an adjoining room and saw the door opening. Max and I barely escaped through an open arch when a commanding figure clad in light armor entered the tap-room.

I had not seen Charles of Burgundy since he was a boy—he was then Count of Charolois—but I at once knew with terrifying certainty that I looked on the most dreaded man in Europe. He had changed greatly since I last had seen him. He was then beardless; now he wore a beard that reached almost to his belt, and I should not have recognized in him the young Count of Charolois. There was, however, no doubt in my mind concerning his identity.

Even had I failed to see the angry scar on his neck, of which I had often heard, or had I failed to note the lack of upper teeth (a fact known to all Europe) which gave his face an expression of savagery, I should have recognized him by his mien. There was not another man like him in all the world, and I trust there never will be. His face wore an expression of ferocity that was almost brutal. The passions of anger, arrogance, and hatred were marked on every feature; but over all there was the stamp of an almost superhuman strength, the impress of an iron will, the expression of an exhaustless energy, and the majesty of a satanic bravery. If Yolanda was the daughter of this terrible man, and if he should discover that I had her hidden in the room above his head, I should never eat another breakfast. Truly, Max and I were on perilous ground.

Max remained in concealment, and I climbed the stairs, two steps at a time, to Yolanda's room. I gently knocked, and received a sleepy response.

"Rise at once," I whispered. "I must speak to you instantly."

"Enter—we are already dressed," answered Yolanda.

When I entered she had risen from the bed and was rubbing her eyes.

"We were so tired we slept in our garments. Don't we show it?" said Yolanda.

Her hands were above her head, vainly endeavoring to arrange her hair, which had fallen in a great tumble of dark curls over her shoulder. Rest had flushed her cheeks, and her lips and her eyes were moist with the dew of sleep. Though my business was urgent I could not resist exclaiming:—

"Ah, Fraeulein, you surely are beautiful."

"I thank you, Sir Karl," she answered, flashing a smile upon me. "You may kiss my hand."

She offered me her hand and asked:—



“But what is your news?”

While she spoke I heard voices and the tramping of hoofs beneath the window in front of the inn, and turned to look. I quickly drew away from the window and beckoned Yolanda:—

“Come here, Fraeulein.”

She came to my side, and as she looked out upon the road two men emerged from the inn door. One of them was the Duke of Burgundy. She clutched my arm and whispered excitedly:—



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“Watch them, Sir Karl! Note the road they take! If they go by the right, we shall take the left. We *must* reach Peronne Castle before the duke. Death itself hangs upon the issue, Sir Karl.”

I watched till the duke and all his people had left the inn; then I followed till I saw them take the road leading down the right bank of the Somme. When I returned to the inn, I paid the score, and gave each member of our little party a *boule* of bread to be eaten as we rode; and within five minutes after the duke’s departure we were fording the Somme to take the left bank for Peronne.

CHAPTER VII

A RACE WITH THE DUKE

Neither road clung to the river in all its windings, but at too frequent intervals both touched the stream at the same points. At places the roads hugged the Somme, separated only by its width—perhaps two hundred yards. These would be our danger points. I did not know them, and Yolanda’s knowledge of the road was imperfect.

Soon after leaving Cinq Voies, the road on the right bank—the one taken by the duke—gained a mile over the road on the left by cutting across a great bend in the river around which we had to travel. We therefore lost the duke’s cavalcade at the outset.

Hoping to pass the duke before the roads came again within sight of each other, we urged our horses to full speed. But the duke also was travelling rapidly, as we learned when we reached the first point of contact. Should the duke’s men see us they would certainly hail. Four men in armor and two ladies, travelling the road to Peronne would not be allowed to pass unchallenged. Fortunately, just before the danger point, a clump of trees and underbushes grew between our road and the river. Max, who was riding a hundred yards in advance, suddenly stopped and held up his hand warningly. We halted immediately, and Max turned back to us, guiding his horse to the roadside to avoid raising a dust-cloud.

We listened in silence, and I beckoned the squires to our sides. The men of our little party all dismounted and stood by their horses’ heads, ready to strike the noses of the animals should they offer to salute the horses across the river with a neigh. Had not our danger been so great it would have been amusing to see each man, with uplifted hand, watching the eyes of his horse as intently as though they were the eyes of his lady-love. Yolanda laughed despite the danger, but covered her mouth with her hand when I frowned warningly.

Presently we heard the tramping of horses and the voices of men across the river, and soon the duke approached at a canter. I could not help speculating on the



consequences should His Grace know that Yolanda was watching him—if Yolanda were his daughter.

That “if” would surely be the death of me.

When the duke had passed a little way down the road, I peered through the bushes and saw the dust-cloud ahead of us.

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We could not venture from our hiding-place till the duke was out of sight, and by the delay we lost a good half-league in our race. I asked Yolanda if she knew how far it was to the next point of contact, She did not know, but I learned from a peasant that the river made a great bend, and that our road gained nearly a league over the other before each again touched the river. This was our great chance.

We put our horses to their best; and when we again reached the river, Max, who was riding in advance, announced that the other cavalcade was not in sight. If it had passed, our race was lost; if it had not, we felt that we could easily ride into Peronne ahead of Duke Charles. At that point the roads followed the river within a stone's throw of each other for a great distance. If the duke had not reached this point, our need for haste was greater than ever before. We must be beyond the open stretch before the other cavalcade should come up to it.

Our poor blown horses were loath to run, but we urged them to it. When we had covered half this open road, we took to the sod at the roadside to avoid raising a telltale cloud of dust. After a hard gallop we reached a forest where the road again left the river. Here we halted to breathe our horses and to watch the road on the right bank. After ten minutes we became uneasy and began to fear that the duke's cavalcade had passed us, but Max insisted that our fears were groundless.

"Their dust could not have settled so quickly," he declared. "We should see at least traces of it. They cannot have passed."

"One cannot help believing," said Yolanda, musingly, "that there are men who command the elements. One would almost say they make the rain to fall or to cease, the wind to rise or to drop, to suit their purposes, and the dust to lie quietly beneath their horses' feet. I pray God we may soon know, else I shall surely die of suspense."

"There are also some persons, Fraeulein, whom God answers quickly," said Max, looking under his hand down the road. "Do you see yonder dust-cloud? It is a good two miles back of us."

"It may not be the duke," said Yolanda, doubtingly.

"Let us trust it is," said Max, "and lose no more time here."

We watered our horses at a small brook and entered the forest, feeling that our race was won. The exultation of victory was upon Yolanda, and her buoyant spirits mounted to the skies. All fear and gloom had left her. She laughed and sang, and the sunshine of her humor filled all our hearts with delight. Since leaving Metz we had travelled so rapidly, and a cloud of uncertainty and fear was so constantly over us, that Yolanda had spoken little to Max or to any one; but now that victory was in her grasp, she intended to waste not one moment more in troubled thoughts and painful fears.



“Ride beside me, Sir Max,” she cried, beckoning him as if she were a great princess and he her page. Max spurred his horse to her side, and after a moment Twonette fell back with me. I overheard all that was said between Max and Yolanda, and though I do not pretend to quote accurately, I will give you the substance of their conversation.



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“I cannot help laughing,” she said, suiting the action to the word, “over our tragic parting at Metz. We were separated a whole day!”

“But we supposed it was to be for a very long time,” said Max. “We—that is, I—feared I should never see you again. As it was, the day seemed long to me, Fraeulein.”

The girl laughed joyously. She had, you remember, offered Max to the Virgin at Strasburg. Perhaps part of her joy was because the Queen of Heaven had returned him to her.

“I should like to try a separation for many days,” she said.

“You will soon have the opportunity,” returned Max, with wounded vanity. She paid no heed to his remark, and continued:—

“The second day would not seem so long to you. The third would be still shorter, and at the end of a fortnight—nay, at the end of a week—you would wonder how you were ever brought to fix your eyes on a poor burgher girl, even for a passing moment—you, a great lord. You see, I have no vast estates to hold you constant, such as those possessed by the forward lady who sent you the letter and the ring. Do you know, Sir Max, if I were very fond of you,—if I were your sweetheart,—I should be jealous of this brazen lady, very jealous.”

There was a glint in her eyes that might have caused one to believe the jealousy already existed.

“Your raillery ill becomes you,” said Max, half sullenly. “If I forget my rank and hold it of small account for your sake, you should not make a jest of it.”

You see, he had not entirely washed out of himself the ceremonious starch of Hapsburg.

She glanced quickly toward him and answered poutingly:—

“If you don’t like my jesting, Sir Max, you may leave me to ride alone.”

“You asked me to ride with you,” returned Max, “but if you have changed your mind and insist on being ill-tempered, I will—”

She reached out her hand, and, grasping his bridle-reins, threw them over the pommel of her saddle.

“Now let me see what you will do, my great Lord Somebody,” she cried defiantly. “You shall not only ride beside me, but you shall also listen good-humoredly to my jests when I am pleased to make them, and bear with my ill-humor when I am pleased to be ill-humored.”



Max left the bridle-reins in her hand, but did not smile. She was not to be driven from her mood.

“You are such a serious person, Sir Max, that you must, at times, feel yourself a great weight—almost burdensome—to carry about.” She laughed, though his resentment had piqued her, and there was a dash of anger in her words. “Ponderous persons are often ridiculous and are apt to tire themselves with their own weight—no, Sir Max, you can’t get away. I have your reins.”

“I can dismount,” returned Max, “and leave you my horse to lead.”

He turned to leave his saddle, but she caught his arm, rode close to his side, and, slipping her hand down his sleeve, clasped his hand—if a hand so small as hers can be said to clasp one so large as his.



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A beautiful woman is born with a latent consciousness of her power over the subjugated sex. Max found in the soft touch of the girl's hand a wonderful antidote to her sharp words. She continued to hold his hand as compensation while she said, laughing nervously:—

“Sir Max, you are still young. A friend would advise you: Never lose a chance to laugh, even though it be at your own expense. There will always be opportunity to grieve and be gloomy. I tell you frankly, Sir Max, I almost wept when I bade you good-by at Metz. Now, I am telling you my state secret and am giving you more than you have asked.”

Max joyfully interrupted her:—

“I can forgive you all your raillery, Fraeulein, for that admission.”

“Yes, I confess it is a very important admission,” she said, in half-comic seriousness, “but you see, I really did weep when I parted from my great mastiff, Caesar, at Peronne.”

The saucy turn was made so quickly that its humor took Max unawares, and he laughed.

“There, there! Sir Max, there is hope for you,” she cried exultantly. Then she continued, stealing a side glance at him, “I loved Caesar very, very much.”

There was a satisfying implication in her laughing words, owing to the fact that she had almost wept at Metz. Max was eager to take advantage of the opportunity her words gave him, for his caution was rapidly oozing away; but he had placed a seal on his lips, and they were shut—at least, for the time. His silence needed no explanation to Yolanda, and she continued laughingly:—

“Yes, I almost wept. Perhaps I did weep. I will not say truly that I did not, Sir Max, but within an hour I was laughing at my foolish self and feared that you, too, would be laughing at me. I wondered if in all the world there was another burgher maiden so great a fool as to lift her eyes to a mighty lord, or to think that he could lower his eyes to her with true intent.”

At that point in the conversation I felt that the seal upon Max's lips would not stand another attack. It was sure to melt; so I rode to Yolanda's side and interrupted the interesting colloquy.

Max supposed the girl to be of the burgher class, and if by any chance she were Mary of Burgundy, he might ruin his future, should he become too insistent upon his rank in explaining the reasons why he could not follow the path of his inclinations. He might make himself ridiculous; and that mistake will ruin a man with any woman, especially if she be young and much inclined to laugh.



During the foregoing conversation we had been travelling at a six-mile canter. The day was warm, and I suggested breathing the horses in the shade of the forest.

“I believe we are approaching the river,” I said, “and we should rest the horses before taking a dash over the open road.”



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Yolanda assented—in a manner she seemed to have taken command of the party—and we halted under the trees. Max rode forward to a point from which he could view the other road, and waved his hand to let us know that the duke was not in sight. We immediately put spurs to our horses and covered the stretch of open road by the river in a short, brisk gallop. On leaving the road again we saw no indication of the duke's cavalcade. Evidently the race was ours by an easy canter. From that point to within two miles of Peronne, Yolanda's song was as joyous as that of a wooing bird. The sun beat down upon us, and blinding clouds of dust rose from every plunge of our horses' hoofs; but Yolanda's song transformed our hot, wearisome journey into a triumphant march. Happiness seemed to radiate from her and to furnish joy for all.

For a stretch of two miles up river from Peronne the roads approached each other, but, owing to an intervening marsh, they were fully half a mile apart. We, or at least Yolanda, had apparently forgotten the duke when, near the hour of eight in the morning, we approached the marsh; but when we entered the open country we saw, to our consternation, the duke's cavalcade within one mile of Peronne. Where they had passed us we did not know, nor did we stop to consider. They were five minutes ahead, and if we could not enter Peronne in advance of them, it were no worse had they been a day before us.

Yolanda cast one frightened glance toward the duke's party, and struck her horse a blow with her whip that sent it bounding forward at a furious gallop. We reached the river and were crossing as the duke entered Cambrai Gate—the north entrance to the city. We would enter by the gate on the south known as the Somme Gate; Cambrai Gate was nearer the castle.

The duke, I supposed, would go directly to the castle; where Yolanda would go I could not guess. From outside the Somme Gate we saw the duke enter Cambrai, but after we had passed under the arch we could not see him for a time because of intervening houses. The huge, grim pile of stone known as Peronne Castle loomed ominously on the opposite side of the small town. Yolanda veiled herself before passing under the gate and hastened, though without conspicuous speed, toward the castle.

I afterward learned that there was but one entrance to the castle from the town. It was known as the Postern, though it had a portcullis and a drawbridge spanning the moat. To the Postern the duke took his way, as we could see at intervals by looking down cross streets. Yolanda did not follow him. She held her course down a narrow street flanked by overhanging eaves. Looking down this street, I could see that it terminated abruptly at the castle wall, which rose dark and unbroken sixty feet above the ground.



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At the end of this street a stone footbridge spanned the moat, leading to a strip of ground perhaps one hundred yards broad and two hundred long that lay between the moat and the castle wall. At either end of this strip the moat again turned to the castle. The Cologne River joined the moat at the north end of this tract of ground and flowed on by the castle wall to the Somme. In a grove of trees stood a large two-story house of time-darkened stone, built against the castle wall. One could not leave the strip of ground save by the stone footbridge, unless by swimming the moat or scaling the walls.

When we reached the footbridge, Yolanda and Twonette, without a word of farewell, urged their horses across, and, springing from their saddles, hurriedly entered the house. Max and I turned our horses' heads, and, as we were leaving the footbridge, saw the duke's cavalcade enter the Postern, which was perhaps three hundred yards back and north of the strip on which stood the House under the Wall.

To reach the Postern in the castle wall from the footbridge one must go well up into the town and cross the great bridge that spans the Cologne; then back along the north bank of the river by the street that leads to the Postern. From the House under the Wall to the Postern, by way of the Cologne bridge, is a half-hour's walk, though in a direct line, as the crow flies, it may be less than three hundred yards. Neither Max nor I knew whether our journey had been a success or a failure.

We rode leisurely back to the centre of the town, and asked a carter to direct us to Marcus Grote's inn, The Mitre. We soon found it, and gave mine host the letter that we bore from Castleman. Although the hour of nine in the morning had not yet struck, Max and I eagerly sought our beds, and did not rise till late in the afternoon. The next morning we dismissed our squires, fearing they might talk. We paid the men, gave them each a horse, and saw them well on their road back to Switzerland. They were Swiss lads, and could not take themselves out of Burgundy fast enough to keep pace with their desires.

Notwithstanding Castleman's admonition, Max determined to remain in Peronne; not for the sake of Mary the princess, but for the smile of Yolanda the burgher girl. I well knew that opposition would avail nothing, and was quite willing to be led by the unseen hand of fate.

The evening of the second day after our arrival I walked out at dusk and by accident met my friend, the Sieur d'Hymbercourt. He it was to whom my letters concerning Max had been written, and who had been responsible for the offer of Mary's hand. He recognized me before I could avoid him, so I offered my hand and he gave me kindly welcome.

"By what good fortune are you here, Sir Karl?" he asked.

“I cannot tell,” I answered, “whether it be good or evil fortune that brings me. I deem it right to tell you that I am here with my young pupil, the Count of Hapsburg.”



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Hymbercourt whistled his astonishment.

“We are out to see a little of the world, and I need not tell you how important it is that we remain unknown while in Burgundy. I bear my own name; the young count has assumed the name of his mother’s family and wishes to be known as Sir Maximilian du Guelph.”

“I shall not mention your presence even to my wife,” he replied. “I advise you not to remain in Burgundy. The duke takes it for granted that Styria will aid the Swiss, or at least will sympathize with them in this brewing war, and I should fear for your safety were he to discover you.”

“I understand the duke recently arrived in Peronne?” I asked.

“Yes,” answered Hymbercourt, “we all came yesterday morning.”

“How is the fair princess? Did she come with you?” I asked, fearing to hear his reply.

“She is well, and more beautiful than ever before,” he answered. “She did not come with us from Ghent; she has been here at the castle with her stepmother, the Duchess Margaret. They have lived here during the last two or three years. The princess met her father just inside the Postern, lovely and fresh as a dew-dipped rose.”

“She met her father just inside the Postern?” I asked, slowly dropping my words in astonishment. “She was in the castle yard when her father entered,—and at the Postern?”

“Yes, she took his hand and sprang to a seat behind him,” answered Hymbercourt.

“She met him inside the Postern, say you?” I repeated musingly.

“What is there amazing about so small an act?” asked Hymbercourt. “Is it not natural that she should greet her father whom she has not seen for a year?”

“Indeed, yes,” I replied stumblingly, “but the weather is very hot, and—and I was thinking how much I should have enjoyed witnessing the meeting. She doubtless was dressed in gala attire for so rare an occasion?” I asked, wishing to talk upon the subject that touched me so nearly. Yolanda was in short skirts, stained and travel-worn, when she left us.

“Indeed she was,” answered Hymbercourt. “I can easily describe her dress. She loves woman’s finery, and I must confess that I too love it. She wore a hawking costume; a cap of crimson—I think it was velvet—with little knots on it and gems scattered here and there. A heron’s plume clasped with a diamond brooch adorned the cap. Her hair hung over her shoulders. It is very dark and falls in a great bush of fluffy curls. When her



headgear is off, her hair looks like a black corona. She is wonderfully beautiful, wonderfully beautiful. Her gown was of red stuff. Perhaps it was of velvet like the cap. It was hitched up with a cord and girdle, with tassels of gold lace and—and—Sir Karl, you are not listening.”

“I am listening,” I replied. “I am greatly interested. Her gown—she wore a gown—she wore a gown—”

“Yes, of course she wore a gown,” laughingly retorted Hymbercourt. “Your lagging attention is what I deserve, Sir Karl, for trying in my lame fashion to describe a woman’s gear to a man who is half priest, half warrior. I do not wonder that you did not follow me.”



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I had heard him, but there was another question dinning in my ears so loudly that it drowned all other sounds—"Who is Yolanda?"

Yolanda was entering the door of the House under the Wall less than five minutes before I saw the duke pass through the Postern. Marcus Grote had told me there were but two openings to the castle, the Postern and the great gate on the other side of the castle by the donjon keep. To reach the great gate one must pass out by Cambrai or the Somme Gate and go around the city walls—an hour's journey.

With an air of carelessness I asked Hymbercourt concerning the various entrances to the castle. He confirmed what Grote had said. Considering all the facts, I was forced to this conclusion: If the Princess Mary had met the duke at the Postern, Yolanda was not the Princess Mary.

The next day I reconnoitred the premises, and again reached the conclusion that Yolanda could not have met the duke inside the Postern unless she were a witch with wings that could fly thither over the castle walls; ergo, she was not the princess. With equal certainty she was not a burgher girl.

In seeking an identity that would fit her I groped among many absurd propositions. Yolanda might be the duke's ward, or she might be his daughter, though not bearing his name. My brain was in a whirl. If she were the princess, I wished to remain in Peronne to pursue the small advantage Max had assuredly gained in winning her favor. The French marriage might miscarry. But if she were not the princess, I could not get my Prince Max away from her dangerous neighborhood too quickly. I could not, of course, say to Max, "You shall remain in Peronne," or "You shall leave Peronne at once;" but my influence over him was great, and he trusted my fidelity, my love, and my ability to advise him rightly. I had always given my advice carefully, but, above all, I had given him the only pleasurable moments he had ever known. That, by the way, may have been the greatest good I could have offered him.

When Max was a child, the pleasure of his amusements was smothered by officialism. My old Lord Aurbach, though gouty and stiff of joint, was eager to "run" his balls or his arrows, and old Sir Giles Butch could be caught so easily at tag or blind man's buff that there was no sport for Max in doing it. Everything the boy did was done by the heir of Styria, except on rare occasions when he and I stole away from the castle. Then we were boys together, and then it was I earned his love and confidence. At such times we used to leave the Hapsburg ancestry to care for itself and dumped Hapsburg dignity into the moat. But the crowning good I had brought to him was this journey into the world. The boy loathed the clinging dignities that made of him, at home, a royal automaton, tricked out in tarnished gold lace, faded velvets, and pompous airs. He often spoke of the pleasures I had given him. One evening at Grote's inn I answered:—



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“Nonsense, Max, nonsense,” though I was so pleased with his gratitude I could have wept.

“It is not nonsense. You have saved me from becoming a mummy. I see it all, Karl, and shudder to think of the life that might have been mine. I take no pleasure in seeing gouty old dependents bowing, kneeling, and smirking before me. Of course, these things are my prerogative, and a man born to them may not forego what is due to his birth even though it irks him. But such an existence—I will not call it living—saps the juice of life. Even dear old mother is compelled to suppress her love for me. Often she has pressed me to her breast only to thrust me away at the approach of footsteps. By the way, Karl,” continued Max, while preparing for bed, “Yolanda one day at Basel jestingly called me ‘Little Max.’”

“The devil she did,” I exclaimed, unable to restrain my words.

“Yes,” answered Max, “and when in surprise I told her that it was my mother’s love-name for me, she laughed saucily, ‘Yes, I know it is.’”

“The dev— Max, you can’t mean what you say?” I cried, in an ecstasy of delight over the news he was telling me.

“Indeed I do,” he returned. “I told her I loved the name as a sweet reminder of my mother.”

“What did she say?” I asked.

“She seemed pleased and flashed her eyes on me—you know the way she has—and said: ‘I, too, like the name. It fits you so well—by contraries.’ Where could she have learned it, and how could she have known it was my mother’s love-name for me?”

“I cannot tell,” I answered.

So! here was a small fact suddenly grown big, since, despite all evidence to the contrary, it brought me back to my old belief that this fair, laughing Yolanda was none other than the great Princess of Burgundy. I was sure that she had gained all her information concerning Max from my letters to Hymbercourt.

It racks a man’s brain to play shuttlecock with it in that fashion. While I lay in bed trying to sleep, I thought of the meeting between the duke and the princess at the Postern, and back again flew my mind to the conviction that Yolanda was not, and could not possibly be, the Princess Mary. For days I had been able to think on no other subject. One moment she was Yolanda; the next she was the princess; and the next I did not know who she was. Surely the riddle would drive me mad. The fate of nations—but, infinitely more important to me, the fate of Max—depended upon its solution.



Castleman had told us to remain at the inn until his return, and had exacted from Max, as you will remember, a promise not to visit the House under the Wall, which we had learned was the home of our burgher friend. We therefore spent our days and evenings in Grote's garden near the banks of the river Cologne.

One afternoon, while we were sitting at a table sipping wine under the shade of a tree near the river bank, Max said:—



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“I have enjoyed every day of our journey, Karl. I have learned the great lesson of life, and am now ready to go back to Styria and take up my burden. We must see our friends and say farewell to them. Then—”

“You forget the object of our journey to Burgundy,” I answered.

“No, I have not forgotten it,” he replied. “I had abandoned it even before I heard of the impending French marriage.”

“Not with my consent, Max,” I answered almost fiercely. “The princess is not yet married, and no one can foresee the outcome of these present complications into which the duke is plunging. We could not have reached Burgundy at a more auspicious time. God’s hand seems to have been in our venture. If evil befall the duke, there will be an open gate for you, Max,—a gate opened by fate.”

I could not, by my utmost effort, force myself entirely away from the belief that Yolanda was the princess, and I was near to telling Max of my suspicions; but doubt came before my words, and I remained silent. Before many days I was glad of my caution.

“I knew,” said Max, “that I would pain you, Karl, by this determination to return to Styria without so much as an effort to do—to do what we— what you wished; but it must be as I say. I must leave Burgundy and go back to my strait-jacket. I have lived my life, Karl, I have had my portion of sweet joy and sweeter pain. The pain will give me joy as long as I live. Now for my duty to my father, my house, and my ancestors.”

“But your duty to all these lies here in Peronne,” I answered, almost stifled by the stupendous import of the moment.

“I suppose you are right,” sighed Max, speaking gently, though with decision. “But that duty I’ll shirk, and try to make amends in other ways. I shall never marry. That, Karl, you may depend upon. Styria may go at my death to Albert of Austria, or to his issue.”

“No, no! Max,” I cried. He ignored my interruption.

“Along with the countless duties that fall to the lot of a prince are a few that one owes to himself as a man. There are some sacrifices a man has no right to inflict upon himself, even for the sake of his family, his ancestors, or his state.” He paused for the space of a minute, and, dropping his words slowly, continued in a low voice vibrant with emotion: “There is but one woman, Karl, whom I may marry with God’s pleasure. Her, I may not even think upon; she is as far from me as if she were dead. I must sacrifice her for the sake of the obligations and conditions into which I was born; but—” here he hesitated, rose slowly to his feet, and lifted his hands above his head, “but I swear before the good God, who, in His wisdom, inflicted the curse of my birth upon me, that I will marry no other woman than this, let the result be what it may.”

He sank back into the chair and fell forward on the table, burying his face in his arms. His heart for the moment was stronger than his resolution.



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"That question is settled," thought I. No power save that of the Pope could absolve the boy from his oath, and I knew that the power of ten score of popes could not move him from its complete fulfilment. The oath of Maximilian of Hapsburg, whose heart had never coined a lie, was as everlasting as the rocks of his native land and, like Styria's mountain peaks, pierced the dome of heaven.

If Yolanda were not the princess, our journeying to Burgundy had been in vain, and our sojourn in Peronne was useless and perilous. It could not be brought to a close too quickly. But (the question mark seems at times to be the greatest part of life) if Yolanda were Mary of Burgundy, Max had, beyond doubt, already won the lady's favor, unless she were a wanton snare for every man's feet. That hypothesis I did not entertain for a moment. I knew little of womankind, but my limited knowledge told me that Yolanda was true. Her heart was full of laughter,—a rare, rich heritage,—and she was little inclined to look on the serious side of life if she could avoid it; but beneath all there was a real Yolanda, with a great, tender heart and a shrewd, helpful brain. She was somewhat of a coquette, but coquetry salts a woman and gives her relish. It had been a grievous waste on the part of Providence to give to any girl such eyes as Yolanda's and to withhold from her a modicum of coquetry with which to use them. Taken all in all, Yolanda, whoever she was, would grace any station in life. But if she were not the princess, I would be willing to give my life—nay, more, I would almost be willing to take hers—rather than see her marry Maximilian of Hapsburg. Happiness could not come from such a union.

Should Max marry a burgher girl, his father and mother would never look upon his face again. It would alienate his subjects, humble his house, and bring him to the level of the meanest noble on the Danube. To all these dire consequences Max was quite as wide awake as I. He had no intention of bringing them upon his house, though for himself he would have welcomed them. So I felt little uneasiness; but when a great love lays hold upon a great heart, no man may know the outcome.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE MOAT BRIDGE

Awaiting Castleman's return, we remained housed up at The Mitre, seldom going farther abroad than Grote's garden save in the early morning or after dark. But despite our caution trouble befell us, as our burgher friend had predicted.

Within a week Max began to go out after dark without asking me to accompany him. When he came into our room late one evening, I asked carelessly where he had been. I knew where he had been going, and had burned to speak, but the boy was twenty-two. Within the last few months he had grown out of my tutelage, and his native strength of character had taught me to respect him and in a certain way to fear him. From the

promptness of his reply I thought that he had wished me to ask concerning his outgoing and incoming.



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"I have been to the bridge over the moat, near Castleman's House under the Wall," he answered.

"What did you there?" I asked, seeing his willingness to be questioned.

"I stood there—I—I—" He paused, laughed, and stammered on. "I looked at the castle and at the moat, like a silly fool, and—and—"

"Castleman's house?" I suggested, helping him out.

"Y-e-s," he answered hesitatingly, "I could not help seeing it. It is close by the bridge—not twenty paces distant."

"Did you see any one else—except the house?" I asked.

"No," he returned promptly. "I did not want to see any one else. If I had I should have entered the house."

"Why, then, did you go to the bridge?" I queried.

"I cannot answer that question even to myself," he replied. "I—I—there is a constant hungering for her, Karl, that I cannot overcome; it seems as if I am compelled to go to the bridge, though I know I should not. It is very foolish in me, I am sure, but—"

"I heartily agree with you," I answered. "It is not only foolish, it is rash; and it may bring you great trouble."

I did not deem it necessary to tell him that he was following in the footsteps of his race. I left him to suppose that he was the only fool of the sort that had ever lived. The thought would abate his vanity.

"But I *must* go to the bridge," he continued, finishing the sentence I had interrupted, "and I do not see how there can be evil in it."

"No, Max, it is not wrong in itself," I said reprovingly; "but Castleman, evidently for good reasons, asked you to stay away from his house, and counselled us to remain close at the inn. It has also this evil in it for you, aside from the danger: it will make your duty harder to perform. When a man longs for what he may not have, he should not think upon it, much less act on it. Our desires, like covetousness and jealousy, feed upon themselves. We may, if we but knew it, augment or abate them at will."

"I shall always think on—on my love for Yolanda," he replied. "I would not abate it one jot; I would augment it in my heart. But, Karl—you see, Karl, it is not a question of my own strength to resist. I need no strength. There is no more reason for you to warn me against this danger than to admonish a child not to long for a star, fearing he might get



it. The longing may be indulged with impunity; the star and the danger are out of reach.”

I had nothing to say; Max was stronger and nobler than ever I had believed.

Max continued to go to the bridge, and I made no effort to prevent him. Meddling mars more frequently than it mends, and when the Fates are leading, a man is a fool to try to direct their course. Whatever was to be would be. Fate held Max by the hand and was leading him. I almost feared to move or to speak in his affairs, lest I should make a mistake and offend these capricious Fates. The right or the wrong of his visits to the moat depended entirely upon the answer to my riddle, “Who is Yolanda?” and I dared not put it to the touch.



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On one occasion he returned from the bridge, and without lighting the lamp, sat on the arm of my chair. The moonlight streaming through the window illumined his head as with a halo. He tossed the damp curls from his face, and his eyes were aglow with joy. There was no need to tell me what had happened, but he told me.

“Ah, Karl, I’ve seen the star,” he cried triumphantly. He was but a boy-man, you must remember.

“I was sure you would see her,” I answered. “How did you bring the meeting about?”

“I did not bring it about,” he answered, laughing softly. “The star came to the child.”

“All things come to him that waits at the bridge,” I replied sarcastically. He paid no heed to the sarcasm, but continued:—

“She happened to be near the bridge when I got there, and she came to me, Karl,—she came to me like a real star falling out of the darkness.”

That little fact solved once more my great riddle—at least, it solved it for a time. Yolanda was not Mary of Burgundy. I had little knowledge of princesses and their ways, but I felt sure they were not in the habit of lurking in dark places or wandering by sluggish moats in the black shadow of a grim castle. A princess would not and could not have been loitering by the bridge near the House under the Wall. Castleman’s words concerning Yolanda’s residence under his roof came back and convinced me that my absurd theory concerning her identity was the dream of a madman.

“She happened to be near the bridge?” I asked, with significant emphasis.

“Perhaps I should not have used the word ‘happened,’” returned Max.

“I thought as much. What did she have to say for herself, Max?”

“If I were not sure of your devotion, Karl, I should not answer a question concerning Yolanda put in such a manner,” he replied; “but I’ll tell you. When I stepped on the bridge, she came running to me from the shadow of the trees. Her arms were uplifted, and she moved so swiftly and with such grace one could almost think she was flying—”

“Witches fly,” I interrupted. My remark checked his flow of enthusiasm. After a long silence I queried, “Well?”

Max began again.

“She gave me her hand and said: ‘I knew you would come again, Sir Max. I saw you from the battlements last night and the night before and the night before that. I could not, with certainty, recognize you from so great a distance, but I was sure you would



come to the bridge—I do not know why, but I was sure you would come; so to-night I too came. You cannot know the trouble I took or the risk I ran in coming. You have not seen me for many days, yet you remember me and have come five times to the bridge. I was wrong when I said you would forget the burgher girl within a fortnight. Sir Max, you are a marvel of constancy.’ At that moment the figures of two men appeared on the castle battlements, silhouetted against the moon; they seemed of enormous stature, magnified in the moonlight. One of them was the Duke of Burgundy. I recognized him by his great beard, of which I have heard you speak. Yolanda caught one glimpse of the men and ran back to the house without so much as giving me a word of farewell.”



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“What did you say during the brief interview?” I asked.

“Not one word,” he replied.

“By my soul, you are an ardent lover,” I exclaimed.

“I think she understood me,” Max replied, confidently; and doubtless he was right.

Once more the riddle was solved. A few more solutions and there would be a mad Styrian in Burgundy. My reflections were after this fashion: Princesses, after all, do wander by the moat side and loiter by the bridge. Princesses do go on long journeys with no lady-in-waiting to do their bidding and no servants ready at their call. Yolanda was Mary of Burgundy, thought I, and Max had been throwing away God-given opportunities. Had she not seen Max from the battlements, and had she not fled at sight of the duke? These two small facts were but scant evidence of Yolanda’s royalty, but they seemed sufficient.

“What would you have me say, Karl?” asked Max. “You would not have me speak more than I have already said and win her love beyond her power to withdraw it. That I sometimes believe I might do, but if my regard for her is true, I should not wish to bring unhappiness to her for the sake of satisfying my selfish vanity. If I am not mistaken, a woman would suffer more than a man from such a misfortune.”

Here, truly, was a generous love. It asked only the privilege of giving, and would take nothing in return because it could not give all. If Yolanda were Mary of Burgundy, Max might one day have a reward worthy of his virtue. Yolanda’s sweetness and beauty and Mary’s rich domain would surely be commensurate with the noblest virtue. I was not willing that Max should cease wooing Yolanda—if I might give that word to his conduct—until I should know certainly that she was not the princess. This, I admit, was cruel indifference to Yolanda’s peace of mind or pain of heart, if Max should win her love and desert her.

Because of a faint though dazzling ray of hope, I encouraged Max after this to visit the bridge over the moat, dangerous though it was; and each night I received an account of his doings. Usually the account was brief and pointless. He went, he stood upon the bridge, he saw the House under the Wall, he returned to the inn. But a night came when he had stirring adventures to relate.

At the time of which I am writing every court in Europe had its cluster of genteel vagabonds,—foreigners,—who stood in high favor. These hangers-on, though perhaps of the noblest blood in their own lands, were usually exiles from their native country. Some had been banished for crimes; others had wandered from their homes, prompted by the love of roaming so often linked with unstable principles and reckless dispositions. Burgundy under Charles the Rash was a paradise for these gentry. The

duke, who was so parsimonious with the great and wise Philip de Comines that he drove him to the court of Louis XI, was open-handed with these floating villains.



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In imitation of King Louis's Scotch guard, Charles had an Italian guard. The wide difference in the wisdom of these princes is nowhere more distinctly shown than in the quality of the men they chose to guard them. Louis employed the simple, honest, brave Scot. Charles chose the most guileful of men. They were true only to self-interest, brave only in the absence of danger. The court of Burgundy swarmed with these Italian mercenaries, many of whom had followed Charles to Peronne. Count Campo-Basso, who afterward betrayed Charles, was their chief. Among his followers was a huge Lombard, a great bully, who bore the name of Count Calli.

On the evening of which I speak Max had hardly stepped on the bridge when Yolanda ran to him.

"I have been waiting for you, Sir Max," she said. "You are late. I feared you would not come. I have waited surely an hour, though I am loath to confess it lest you think me a too willing maiden."

"It would be hard, Fraeulein, for me to think you too willing—you are but gracious and kind, and I thank you," answered Max. "But you have not waited an hour. Darkness has fallen barely a quarter of that time."

"I was watching long before dark on the battlements, and—"

"On the battlements, Fraeulein?" asked Max, in surprise.

"I mean from—from the window battlements in uncle's house. I've been out here under the trees since nightfall, and that seems to have been at least an hour ago. Don't you understand, Sir Max?" she continued, laughing softly and speaking as if in jest; "the longer I know you the more shamefully eager I become; but that is the way with a maid and a man. She grows more eager and he grows less ardent, and I doubt not the time will soon arrive, Sir Max, when you will not come at all, and I shall be left waiting under the trees to weep in loneliness."

Max longed to speak the words that were in his heart and near his lips, but he controlled himself under this dire temptation and remained silent. After a long pause she stepped close to him and asked:—

"Did you not want me to come?"

Max dared not tell her how much he had wanted her to come, so he went to the other extreme—he must say something—and, in an excess of caution, said:—

"I would not have asked you to come, Fraeulein, though I much desired it; but sober judgment would prompt me to wish that—that is, I—ah, Fraeulein, I did not want you to come to the bridge."



She laughed softly and said:—

“Now, Little Max, you do not speak the truth. You did want me to come, else why do you come to the bridge? Why do you come?”

In view of all the facts in the case the question was practically unanswerable unless Max wished to tell the truth, so he evaded by saying:—

“I do not know.”

She looked quickly up to his face and stepped back from him:—

“Did you come to see Twonette? I had not thought of her. She is but drained milk and treacle. Do you want to see her, Sir Max? If so, I’ll return to the house and send her to you.”



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“Fraeulein, I need not answer your question,” returned Max, convincingly.

“But I love Twonette. I know you do not come to see her, and I should not have spoken as I did,” said Yolanda, penitently.

Perhaps her penitential moods were the most bewitching—certainly they were the most dangerous—of all her many phases.

“You know why I come to the bridge, even though I do not,” said Max. “Tell me, Fraeulein, why I come.”

“That is what you may tell me. I came to hear it,” she answered softly, hanging her head.

“I may not speak, Fraeulein,” he replied, with a deep, regretful sigh. “What I said to you on the road from Basel will be true as long as I live, but we agreed that it should not again be spoken between us. For your sake more than for mine it is better that I remain silent.”

Yolanda hung her head, while her fingers were nervously busy with the points of her bodice. She uttered a low laugh, flashed her eyes upon him for an instant, and again the long lashes shaded them.

“You need not be *too* considerate for my sake, Sir Max,” she whispered; “though—though I confess that I never supposed any man could bring me to this condition of boldness.”

Max caught her hands, and, clasping them between his own, drew the girl toward him. The top of her head was below his chin, and the delicious scent from her hair intoxicated his senses. She felt his great frame tremble with emotion, and a thrill of exquisite delight sped through every fibre of her body, warming every drop of blood in her veins. But Max, by a mighty effort, checked himself, and remained true to his self-imposed renunciation in word and act. After a little time she drew her hands from his, saying:—

“You are right, Max, to wish to save yourself and me from pain.”

“I wish to save you, Yolanda. I want the pain; I hope it will cling to me all my life. I want to save you from it.”

“Perhaps you are beginning too late, Max,” said the girl, sighing, “but—but after all you are right. Even as you see our situation it is impossible for us to be more than we are to each other. But if you knew all the truth, you would see how utterly hopeless is the future in which I at one time thought I saw a ray of hope. Our fate is sealed, Max; we are doomed. Before long you shall know. I will soon tell you all.”



“Do you wish to tell me now, Fraeulein?” he asked.

“No,” she whispered.

“In your own good time, Yolanda. I would not urge you.”

Max understood Yolanda’s words to imply that her station in life was even lower than it seemed, or that there was some taint upon herself or her family. Wishing to assure her that such a fact could not influence him, he said:—

“You need not fear to tell me all concerning yourself or your family. There can be no stain upon you, and even though your station be less than—”



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“Hush, Max, hush,” she cried, placing her hand protestingly against his breast. “You do not know what you are saying. There is no stain on me or my family.”

Max wondered, but was silent; he had not earned the right to be inquisitive.

The guard appeared at that moment on the castle battlements, and Max and Yolanda sought the shelter of a grove of trees a dozen paces from the bridge on the town side of the moat. They seated themselves on a bench, well within the shadow of the trees, and after a moment's silence Max said:—

“I shall not come to the bridge again, Fraeulein. I'll wait till your uncle returns, when I shall see you at his house. Then I'll say farewell and go back to the hard rocks of my native land—and to a life harder than the rocks.”

“You are right in your resolve not to come again to the bridge,” said Yolanda, “for so long as you come, I, too, shall come—when I can. That will surely bring us trouble sooner or later. But when Uncle Castleman returns, you must come to his house, and I shall see you there. As to your leaving Peronne, we will talk of that later. It is not to be thought of now.”

She spoke with the confidence of one who felt that she might command him to stay or order him to go. She would settle that little point for herself.

“I will go, Fraeulein,” said Max, “soon after your uncle's return.”

“Perhaps it will be best, but we will determine that when we must—when the time comes that we can put it off no longer. Now, I wish you to grant me three promises, Sir Max. First, ask me no questions concerning myself. Of course, you will ask them of no one else; I need not demand that promise of you.”

“I gladly promise,” he answered. “What I already know of you is all-sufficient.”

“Second, do not fail to come to my uncle's house when he invites you. His home is worthy to receive the grandest prince in the world. My—my lord, Duke Philip the Good, was Uncle Castleman's dear friend. The old duke, when in Peronne, dined once a week with my uncle. Although uncle is a burgher, he could have been noble. He refused a lordship and declined the Order of the Golden Fleece, preferring the freedom of his own caste. I have always thought he acted wisely.”

“Indeed he was wise,” returned Max. “You that have never known the restraints of one born to high estate cannot fully understand how wise he was.”

Yolanda glanced up to Max with amusement in her eyes:—



“Ah, yes! For example, there is poor Mary of Burgundy, who is to marry the French Dauphin. I pity her. For all we know, she may be longing for another man as I—I longed for my mastiff, Caesar, when I was away. By the way, Sir Max, are you still wearing the ring?” She took his hand and felt for the ring on his finger. “Ah, you have left it off,” she cried reproachfully, answering her own question.

“Yes,” answered Max. “There have been so many changes within the last few weeks that I have taken it off, and—and I shall cease to wear it.”



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"Then give it to me, Sir Max," she cried excitedly.

"I may not do that, Fraeulein," answered Max. "It was given to me by one I respect."

"I know who the lady is," answered Yolanda, tossing her head saucily and speaking with a dash of irritation in her voice.

"Ah, you do?" asked Max. "Tell me now, my little witch, who is the lady? If you know so much tell me."

Yolanda lifted her eyes solemnly toward heaven, invoking the help of her never failing familiar spirit.

"I see an unhappy lady," she said, speaking in a low whisper, "whose father is one of the richest and greatest princes in all the world. A few evenings ago while we were standing on the moat bridge talking, I saw the lady's father on the battlements of yonder terrible castle. His form seemed magnified against the sky till it was of unearthly size and terrible to look on—doubly terrible to those who know him. If she should disobey her father, he would kill her with his battle-axe, I verily believe, readily as he would crush a rebellious soldier. Yet she fears him not, because she is of his own dauntless blood and fears not death itself. She is to marry the Dauphin of France, and her wishes are of so small concern, I am told that she has not yet been notified. This terrible man will sell his daughter as he would barter a horse. She is powerless to move in her own behalf, being bound hand and foot by the remorseless shackles of her birth. She will become an unhappy queen, and, if she survives her cruel father, she will, in time, take to her husband this fat land of Burgundy, for the sake of which he wishes to marry her. She is Mary of Burgundy, and even I, poor and mean of station, pity her. She—gave—you—the—ring."

"How did you learn all this, Fraeulein? You are not guessing, as you would have had me believe, and you would not lie to me. What you have just said is a part with what you said at Basel and at Strasburg. How did you learn it, Fraeulein?"

"Twonette," answered Yolanda.

That simple explanation was sufficient for Max. Yolanda might very likely know the private affairs of the Princess Mary through Twonette, who was a friend of Her Highness.

"But you have not promised to visit Uncle Castleman's house when he invites you," said Yolanda, drawing Max again to the bench beside her.

"I gladly promise," said Max.



“That brings me to the third promise I desire,” said Yolanda. “I want you to give me your word that you will not leave Burgundy within one month from this day, unless I give you permission.”

“I cannot grant you that promise, Fraeulein,” answered Max.

“Ah, but you must, you shall,” cried Yolanda, desperately clutching his huge arms with her small hands and clinging to him. “I will scream, I will waken the town. I will not leave you, and you shall not shake me off till I have your promise. I may not give you my reasons, but trust me, Max, trust me. Give me your unquestioning faith for once. I am not a fool, Max, nor would I lie to you for all the world, in telling you that it is best for you to give me the promise. Believe me, while there may be risk to me in what I ask, it is best that you grant it, and that you remain in Peronne for a month—perhaps for two months, unless I sooner tell you to go.”



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"I may not give you the promise you ask, Fraeulein," answered Max, desperately. "You must know how gladly I would remain here forever."

"I believe truly you want to stay," she answered demurely, "else I surely would not ask this promise of you. Your unspoken words have been more eloquent than any vows your lips could coin, and I know what is in your heart, else my boldness would have been beyond excusing. What I wish is that your desire should be great enough to keep you when I ask you to remain."

"I may not think of myself or my own desires, Fraeulein," he answered. "Like the lady of Burgundy, I was shackled at my birth."

"The lady of Burgundy is ever in your mind," Yolanda retorted sullenly. "You would give this promise quickly enough were she asking it—she with her vast estate."

There was an angry gleam in the girl's eyes, and a dark cloud of unmistakable jealousy on her face. She stepped back from Max and hung her head. After a moment of silence she said:—

"You may answer me to-morrow night at this bridge, Sir Max. If you do not see fit to give me the promise, then I shall weary you no further with importunity, and you may go your way."

There was a touch of coldness in her voice as she turned and walked slowly toward the bridge. Max called softly:—

"Yolanda!"

She did not answer, but continued with slow steps and drooping head. As her form was fading into the black shadow of the castle wall he ran across the bridge to her, and took her hand:—

"Fraeulein, I will be at the bridge to-morrow night, and I will try to give the promise you ask of me."

CHAPTER IX

THE GREAT RIDDLE

Max was cautious in the matter of making promises, as every honest man should be, since he had no thought of breaking them once they were given. Therefore, he wished to know that he could keep his word before pledging it. His lifelong habit of asking my advice may also have influenced him in refusing the promise that he so much wished to



give; or perhaps he may have wanted time to consider. He did not want to give the promise on the spur of an impulse.

When he had finished telling me his troubles, I asked:—

“What will you do to-morrow night?”

My riddle was again solved; Yolanda was the princess. Her words were convincing. All doubt had been swept from my mind. There would be no more battledore and shuttlecock with my poor brain on that subject. So when Max said, “I do not know what I shall do,” I offered my opinion; “You surprise me, Max. You lack enterprise; there is no warmth in your blood. The girl cannot harm you. Give her the promise. Are your veins filled with water and caution?”



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“What do you mean, Karl?” cried Max, stepping toward me with surprise and delight in his face. “Are you advising me wrongly for the first time in my life?” Then there was a touch of anger in his voice as he continued: “Have I blood in my veins? Aye, Karl, burning, seething blood, and every drop cries wildly for this girl—this child. I would give the half of it to make her my wife and to make her happy. But I would not abate one jot of my wretchedness at her expense. As I treat her I pray God to deal with me. I cannot make her my wife, and if I am half a man, I would not win her everlasting love and throw it to the dogs. She all but asked me last night to tell her of my love for her, and almost pressed hers upon me, but I did not even kiss her hand. Ah, Karl, I wish I were dead!”

The poor boy threw himself on the bed and buried his face in his hands. I went to him and, seating myself on the bed, ran my fingers through his curls.

“My dear Max, I have never advised you wrongly. Perhaps luck has been with me. Perhaps my good advice has been owing to my great caution and my deep love for you. I am sure that I do not advise you wrongly now. Go to the bridge to-morrow night, and give Yolanda the promise she asks. If she wants it, give her the ring. Keep restraint upon your words and acts, but do not fear for one single moment that my advice is wrong. Max, I know whereof I speak.”

Max rose from the bed and looked at me in surprise; but my advice jumped so entirely with the longing deep buried in his heart that he took it as a dying man accepts life.

The next evening Max met Yolanda under the trees near the bridge.

“I may remain but a moment,” she said hurriedly and somewhat coldly. “Do you bring me the promise?”

“Yes,” answered Max. “I have also brought you the ring, Fraeulein, but you may not wear it, and no one may ever see it.”

“Ah, Max, it is well that you have brought me the promise, for had you not you would never have seen me again. I thank you for the promise and for the ring. No one shall see it. Of that you may be doubly sure. If by any chance some meddling body should see it and tell this arrogant lady of the castle that I have the keepsake she sent you, there would be trouble, Max, there would be trouble. She is a jealous, vindictive little wretch and you shall not think on her. No doubt she would have me torn limb from limb if she knew I possessed the jewel. When I touch it, I feel that I almost hate this princess, whose vast estates have a power of attraction greater than any woman may exert.”

There was real anger in her tone. In truth, dislike and aversion were manifest in every word she spoke of the princess, save when the tender little heart pitied her.



“Now I must say good night and adieu, Sir Max, until uncle returns,” said Yolanda. She gave Max her hands and he, in bringing them to his lips, drew her close to him. At that moment they were startled by a boisterous laugh close beside them, and the fellow calling himself Count Calli slapped Max on the back, saying in French:—



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“Nicely done, my boy, nicely done. But you are far too considerate. Why kiss a lady’s hand when her lips are so near? I will show you, Fraeulein Castleman, exactly how so delicate a transaction is conducted by an enterprising gentleman.”

He insultingly took hold of Yolanda, and, with evident intent to kiss her, tried to lift the veil with which she had hastily covered her face. Max struck the fellow a blow that felled him to the ground, but Calli rose and, drawing his dagger, rushed upon Max. Yolanda stood almost paralyzed with terror. Max was unarmed, but he seized Calli’s wrist and twisted it till a small bone cracked, and the dagger fell from his hand to the ground. Calli’s arm hung limp at his side, and he was powerless to do further injury. Max did not take advantage of his helplessness, but said:—

“Go, or I will twist your neck as I have broken your wrist.”

Max had gone out that evening without arms or armor. He had not even a dagger.

When Calli had passed out of sight, Yolanda stooped, picked up his dagger, and offered it to Max, saying:—

“He will gather his friends at once. Take this dagger and hasten back to the inn, or you will never reach it alive. No, come with me to Uncle Castleman’s house. There you may lie concealed.”

“I may not go to your uncle’s house, Fraeulein,” answered Max. “I can go safely to the inn. Do not fear for me.”

Yolanda protested frantically, but Max refused.

“Go quickly, then,” she said, “and be on your guard at all times. This man who came upon us is Count Calli, the greatest villain in Burgundy. He is a friend of Campo-Basso. Now hasten to the inn, if you will not come with me to uncle’s house, and beware, for this man and his friends will seek vengeance; of that you must never allow yourself to doubt. Adieu, till uncle comes.”

Max reached the inn unmolested. We donned our mail shirts, expecting trouble, and took turn and turn watching and sleeping. Next day we hired two stalwart Irish squires and armed them cap-a-pie. We meant to give our Italian friends a hot welcome if they attacked us, though we had, in truth, little fear of an open assault. We dreaded more a dagger thrust in the back, or trouble from court through the machinations of Campo-Basso.

The next morning Max sent one of our Irishmen to Castleman’s house with a verbal message to Fraeulein Castleman. When the messenger returned, he replied to my question:—



“I was shown into a little room where three ladies sat. ‘What have you to say?’ asked the little black-haired one in the corner—she with the great eyes and the face pale as a chalk-cliff. I said, ‘I am instructed, mesdames, to deliver this simple message: Sir Max is quite well.’ ‘That will do. Thank you.’ said the big eyes and the pale face. Then she gave me two gold florins. The money almost took my breath, and when I looked up to thank her, blest if the white face wasn’t rosy as a June dawn. When I left, she was dancing about the room singing and laughing, and kissing everybody but me—worse luck! By Saint Patrick, I never saw so simple a message create so great a commotion. ‘Sir Max is quite well.’ I’m blest if he doesn’t look it. Was he ever ill?”



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After five or six days we allowed ourselves to fall into a state of unwatchfulness. One warm evening we dismissed our squires for an hour's recreation. The Cologne River flows by the north side of the inn garden, and, the spot being secluded, Max and I, after dark, cooled ourselves by a plunge in the water. We had come from the water and finished dressing, save for our doublets, which lay upon the sod, when two men approached whom we thought to be our squires. When first we saw them, they were in the deep shadow of the trees that grew near the water's edge, and we did not notice their halberds until they were upon us. When the men had approached within four yards, we heard a noise back of us and turning saw four soldiers, each bearing an arquebuse pointed in our direction. At the same moment another man stepped from behind the two we had first seen and came quickly to me. He was Count Calli. In his left hand he held a parchment. Max and I were surrounded and unarmed.

"I arrest you on the order of His Grace, the duke," said Calli, in low tones, speaking French with an Italian accent.

"Your authority?" I demanded.

"This," he said, offering me the parchment, "and this," touching his sword. I took the parchment but could not read it in the dark.

"I'll go to the inn to read your warrant," I said, stooping to take up my doublet.

"You will do nothing of the sort," he answered. "One word more from you, and there will be no need to arrest you. I shall be only too glad to dispense with that duty."

I felt sure he wished us to resist that he might have a pretext for murdering us. I could see that slow-going Max was making ready for a fight, even at the odds of seven to two, and to avert trouble I spoke softly in German:—

"These men are eager to kill us. Our only hope lies in submission."

While I was speaking the men gathered closely about us, and almost before my words were uttered, our wrists were manacled behind us and we were blindfolded. Our captors at once led us away. A man on either side of me held my arms, and by way of warning I received now and then a merciless prod between my shoulder-blades from a halberd in the hands of an enthusiastic soul that walked behind me. Max, I supposed, was receiving like treatment.

After a hundred paces or more we waded the river, and then I knew nothing of our whereabouts. Within a half-hour we crossed a bridge which I supposed was the one over the moat at the Postern. There we halted, and the password was given in a whisper. Then came the clanking of chains and creaking of hinges, and I knew the

gates were opening and the portcullis rising. After the gates were opened I was again urged forward by the men on either side of me and the enterprising soul in the rear.



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I noticed that I was walking on smooth flags in place of cobble-stones, and I was sure we were in the bailey yard of the castle. Soon I was stopped again, a door opened, squeaking on its rusty hinges, and we began the descent of a narrow stairway. Twenty or thirty paces from the foot of the stairway we stopped while another door was opened. This, I felt sure, was the entrance to an underground cell, out of which God only knew if I should ever come alive. While I was being thrust through the door, I could not resist calling out, "Max—Max, for the love of God answer me if you hear!" I got no answer. Then I appealed to my guard:—

"Let me have one moment's speech with him, only one moment. I will pay you a thousand crowns the day I am liberated if you grant me this favor."

"No one is with you," the man replied. "I would willingly earn the thousand crowns, but if they are to be paid when you are liberated, I fear I should starve waiting for them."

With these comforting words they thrust me into the cell, manacled and blindfolded. I heard the door clang to; the rusty lock screeched venomously, and then I was alone in gravelike silence. I hardly dared to take a step, for I knew these underground cells were honeycombed with death-traps. I could not grope about me with my hands, for they were tied, and I knew not what pitfall my feet might find.

How long I stood without moving I did not know; it might have been an hour or a day for all I could tell. I was almost stupefied by this misfortune into which I had led Max. I do not remember having thought at all of my own predicament. I cannot say that I suffered; I was benumbed. I remember wondering about Max and speculating vaguely on his fate, but for a time the thought did not move me. I also remember sinking to the floor, only half conscious of what I was doing, and then I must have swooned or slept.

When I recovered consciousness I rose to my feet. A step or two brought me against a damp stone wall. Three short paces in another direction, and once more I was against the wall. Then I stopped, turned my back to the reeking stone, and cursed the brutes that had treated me with such wanton cruelty. It was not brutal; it was human. No brute could feel it; only in the heart of man could it live.

By chafing the back of my head against the wall I succeeded in removing the bandage from my eyes. Though I was more comfortable, I was little better off, since I could see nothing in the pitiless black of my cell. I stretched my eyes, as one will in the dark, till they ached, but I could not see even an outline of the walls.

A burning thirst usually follows excitement, and after a time it came to me and grew while I thought upon it. My parched throat was almost closed, and I wondered if I were to be left to choke to death. I knew that in Spain and Italy such refinement of cruelty was oftener practised, but I felt sure that the Duke of Burgundy would not permit the infliction of so cruel a fate, did he know of it. But our captors were not Burgundians, and

I doubted if the duke even knew of our imprisonment. I suffered intensely, though I believe I could have endured it with fortitude had I not known that Max was suffering a like fate.



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I believed I had been several days in my cell when I heard a key turn in the lock. The door opened, and a man bearing a basket and a lantern entered. He placed the basket on the ground and, with the lantern hung over his arm, unfastened the manacles of my wrists. In the basket were a *boule* of black bread and a stone jar of water. I eagerly grasped the jar, and never in my life has anything passed my lips that tasted so sweet as that draught.

“Don’t drink too much at one time,” said the guard, not unkindly. “It might drive you mad. A man went mad in this cell less than a month ago from drinking too much water.”

“How long had he been without it?” I asked of this cheering personage.

“Three days,” he responded.

“I did not know that men of the north could be so cruel as to keep a prisoner three days without water,” I said.

“It happened because the guard was drunk,” answered the fellow, laughing.

“I hope you will remain sober,” said I, not at all intending to be humorous, though the guard laughed.

“I was the guard,” he replied. “I did not intend to leave the prisoner without water, but, you see, I was dead drunk and did not know it.”

“Perhaps you have been drunk for the last three or four days since I have been here?” I asked.

He laughed boisterously.

“You here three or four days! Why, you are mad already! You have been here only over night.”

Well! I thought surely I was mad!

Suddenly the guard left me and closed the cell door. I called frantically to him, but I might as well have cried from the bottom of the sea.

After what seemed fully another week of waiting, the guard again came with bread and water. By that time my mind had cleared. I asked the guard to deliver a message to my Lord d’Hymbercourt and offered a large reward for the service. I begged him to say to Hymbercourt that his friends of The Mitre had been arrested and were now in prison. The guard willingly promised to deliver my message, but he did not keep his word, though I repeated my request many times and promised him any reward he might name when I should regain my liberty. With each visit he repeated his promise, but one day



he laughed and said I was wasting words; that he would never see the reward and that in all probability I should never again see the light of day. His ominous words almost prostrated me, though again I say I suffered chiefly for Max's sake. Could I have gained his liberty at the cost of my life, nay, even my soul, I should have been glad to do it.

But I will not further describe the tortures of my imprisonment. The greatest of them all was my ignorance of Max's fate. It was a frightful ordeal, and I wonder that my reason survived it.

CHAPTER X

THE HOUSE UNDER THE WALL

To leave Max and myself in our underground dungeon, imprisoned for an unknown, uncommitted crime, while I narrate occurrences outside our prison walls looks like a romancer's trick, but how else I am to go about telling this history I do not know. Yolanda is quite as important a personage in this narrative as Max and myself, and I must tell of her troubles as I learned of them long afterwards.



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Castleman reached home ten days or a fortnight after our arrest, bringing with him his precious silks, velvets, and laces to the last ell. As he had predicted, they were quadrupled in value, and their increase made the good burgher a very rich man.

Soon after Castleman reached the House under the Wall, Yolanda came dancing into the room where he was sitting with good Frau Katherine, drinking a bottle of rich Burgundy wine well mixed with pepper and honey.

“Ah, uncle,” she cried joyously, “at last you are at home, and I have a fine kiss for you.”

“Thank you, my dear,” said Castleman, “you have spoiled my wine. The honey will now taste vinegarish.”

“You are a flatterer, uncle—isn’t he, tante?” laughed Yolanda, turning to Aunt Castleman.

“I am afraid he is,” said the good frau, in mock distress. “Every one tries to spoil him.”

“You more than any one, tante,” cried Yolanda.

“Tut, tut, child,” cried Frau Katherine, “I abate his vanity with frowns.”

Yolanda laughed, and the burgher, pinching his wife’s red cheek, protested:—

“*You* frown? You couldn’t frown if you tried. A clear sky may rain as easily. Get the peering glass, Yolanda, and find, if you can, a wrinkle on her face.”

Yolanda, who was always laughing, threw herself upon the frau’s lap and pretended to hunt for wrinkles. Soon she reported:—

“No wrinkles, uncle—there, you dear old tante, I’ll kiss you to keep you from growing jealous of uncle on my account.”

“If any one about this house has been spoiled, it’s you, Yolanda,” said Frau Kate, affectionately.

“When you speak after that fashion, tante, you almost make me weep,” said Yolanda.

“Surely you and uncle and Twonette are the only friends I have, and give me all the joy I know. But, uncle, now that you are at home, I want you to drink your wine quickly and give me a great deal of joy—oh, a great deal.”

“Indeed I will, my dear. Tell me where to begin,” answered Castleman, draining his goblet.

Yolanda flushed rosily and hesitated. At that moment Twonette, who had already greeted her father, entered the room.



“Twonette will tell you,” said Yolanda, laughing nervously.

“What shall I tell him?” asked Twonette.

“You will tell him what I want him to do quickly, at once, immediately,” pleaded Yolanda. “You know what I have waited for this long, weary time.”

“Tell him yourself what you want quickly, at once, immediately,” answered Twonette. “I, too, have wants.”

“What do you want, daughter?” asked Castleman, beaming upon Twonette.

“I want thirty ells of blue velvet for a gown, and I want you to ask permission of the duke for me to wear it.”

“Many noble ladies would not dare to ask so much of the duke,” suggested Castleman.

“It is true, George,” said Frau Kate, “that only noble ladies of high degree are permitted to wear velvet of blue; but it is also true that only your stubbornness has deprived our daughter of that privilege. She might now be noble had you not been stubborn.”



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"I also want—" began Twonette.

"You shall wear the duke's own color, purple, if you will hold your tongue about worthless matters and tell your father what I want," cried Yolanda, impetuously thrusting Twonette toward Castleman.

"You tell him your own wants," answered Twonette, pouting. "Then perhaps his own daughter may have his ear for a moment or two."

Yolanda laughed at Twonette's display of ill-temper.

"Well, uncle, since I must tell my own tale, I will begin," said Yolanda, blushing. "I want you to go to The Mitre and ask a friend—two friends—of yours here to supper this evening. I have waited a weary time for you to give this invitation, and I will not wait another hour, nay, not another minute. We have a fat peacock that longs to be killed; it is so fat that it is tired of life. We have three pheasants that will die of grief if they are not baked at once. I myself have been feeding them this fortnight past in anticipation of this feast. We have a dozen wrens for a live pie, so tame they will light on our heads when you cut the crust. We shall have a famous feast, uncle. There will be present only tante, you, Twonette, our two guests, and myself. Now, uncle, the wine is consumed. Hurry to the inn."

"My dear child," said Castleman, seriously, "you know that I am almost powerless to refuse any request you make, but in this case I must do so."

"Ah, uncle, please tell me why," coaxed Yolanda, with trouble in her eyes and grief at the corners of her mouth.

"Because you must see no more of this very pleasing young man," answered Castleman. "I yielded to your wishes at Basel and brought him with us; I was compelled to send him with you from Metz; but now that our journey is over, I shall thank him and pay him an additional sum, since my goods are safe home, and say farewell to him. I believe he is a worthy and honorable young man, but we do not know who he is, and if we did—"

"Ah, but I know who he is," interrupted Yolanda, tossing her head. "We may not know, but I know, and that is sufficient."

"Do you know?" asked Castleman. "Pray tell me of him. The information was refused me; at least, it was not given. He is probably of noble birth, but we have nobles here in Peronne whom we would not ask to our house. We know nothing of this wandering young Max, save that he is honest and brave and good to look upon."

"In God's name, uncle, what more would you ask in a man?" cried Yolanda, stamping her foot. "'Noble, honest, brave, and good to look upon!' Will not those qualities fit a man



for any one's regard and delight any woman's heart? I tell you I will have my way in this. I tell you I know his degree. I know who he is and what he is and all about him, though I don't intend to tell you anything, and would inform you now that it's no business of yours."

"Did you coax all this information out of him, you little witch?" asked Castleman, smiling against his will.



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"I did not," retorted Yolanda, leaning forward and lifting her chin defiantly. "I learned it soon after we reached Basel. I discovered it by—by magic—by sorcery. He will tell you as much."

"By the magic of your eyes and smiles. That's the way you wheedled it out of him, and that's the way you coax every one to your will," said Castleman, laughing while Yolanda pouted.

"I never saw a girl make such eyes at a man as you made at this Sir Max," said Twonette, who was waiting for her blue velvet gown.

"Twonette, you are prettier with your mouth shut. Silence becomes you," retorted Yolanda, favoring Twonette with a view of her back. "Now, uncle," continued Yolanda, "all is ready: peacock, pheasants, wrens; and I command you to procure the guests."

Castleman laughed at her imperious ways and said:—

"I will obey your commands in all else, Yolanda, but not in this."

The girl, who was more excited than she appeared to be, stood for a moment by her uncle's side, and, drawing her kerchief from its pouch, placed it to her eyes.

"Every one tries to make me unhappy," she sobbed. "There is no one to whom I may turn for kindness. If you will not do this for me, uncle, if you will not bring him—them—to me, I give you my sacred word I will go to them at the inn. If you force me to do an act so unmaidenly, I'll leave you and will not return to your house. I shall know that you do not love me!"

Castleman was not ready to yield, though he was sure that in the end he would do so. He also knew that her threat to go to the inn was by no means an idle word.

Yolanda was not given to tears, but she used them when she found she could accomplish her ends by no other means. A long pause ensued, broken by Yolanda's sobs.

"Good-by, uncle. Good-by, tante. Good-by, Twonette. I mean what I say, uncle. I am going, and I shall not come back if you will not do this thing for me. I am going to the inn."

She kissed them all and started toward the door. The loving old tante could not hold out. She, too, was weeping, and she added her supplications to Yolanda's.

"Do what she asks, father—only this once," said Frau Kate.



“Only this once,” pleaded Yolanda, turning her tear-moistened eyes upon the helpless burgher.

“I suppose I must surrender,” exclaimed Castleman, rising from his chair. “I have been surrendering to you, your aunt, and Twonette all my life. First Kate, then Twonette, and of late years they have been reenforced by you, Yolanda, and my day is lost. I do a little useless fighting when I know I am in the right, but it is always followed by a cowardly surrender.”

“But think of your victories in surrender, uncle. Think of your rewards,” cried Yolanda, running to his side and kissing him. “Many a man would fight a score of dragons for that kiss.”

“Dragons!” cried Castleman, protestingly. “I would rather fight a hundred dragons than do this thing for you, Yolanda. I know little concerning the ways of a girl’s heart, but, ignorant as I am, I could see—Mother, I never saw a girl so infatuated with a man as our Yolanda is with this Sir Max—this stranger.”



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“There, tante,” cried Yolanda, turning triumphantly to Frau Kate, “you hear what uncle says. Now you see the great reason for having him here—this Sir Max and his friend. But, uncle, if you think I mean to make a fool of myself about this man, put the notion out of your head. I know only too well the barrier between us, but, uncle mine,” she continued pleadingly, all her wonted joyousness driven from her face, “I am so wretched, so unhappy. If I may have a moment of joy now, for the love of the Blessed Virgin don’t deny me. I sometimes think you love me chiefly because I so truly deserve your pity. As for this young man, he is gentle, strong, and good, and, as you say, he certainly is good to look upon. Twonette knows that, don’t you, Twonette? He is wise, too, and brave, even against the impulse of his own great heart. He thinks only of my good and his own duties. I am in no danger from him, uncle. He can do me only good. I shall be happier and better all my life long for having known him. Now, uncle?”

“I will fetch him,” exclaimed Castleman, seeking his hat. “You may be right or you may be wrong, but for persuasiveness I never saw your like. I declare, Yolanda, you have almost made me feel like a villain for refusing you.”

“I wish the world were filled with such villains, uncle. Don’t you, tante?” said Yolanda, beaming upon the burgher.

“No,” answered the frau, “I should want them all for my husbands.”

“God forbid!” cried Yolanda, lifting her hands as she turned toward the door, laughing once more. “Tell them to be here by six o’clock, uncle. No! we will say five. Tell them to come on the stroke of five. No! four o’clock is better; then we will sup at six, and have an hour or two before we eat. That’s it, uncle; have them here by four. Tell them to fail not by so much as a minute, upon their allegiance. Tell them to be here promptly on the stroke of four.”

She ran from the room singing, and Castleman started toward the front door.

“The girl makes a fool of me whenever she wishes,” he observed, pausing and turning toward his wife. “She coaxed me to take her to Basel, and life was a burden till I got her home again. Now she winds me around her finger and says, ‘Uncle Castleman, obey me,’ and I obey. Truly, there never was in all the world such another coaxing, persuasive little witch as our Yolanda.”

“Poor child,” said Frau Kate, as her husband passed out of the door.

Castleman reached The Mitre near the hour of one, and of course did not find us. At half-past four, Yolanda entered the great oak room where Twonette and Frau Kate were stitching tapestry.



“Where suppose you Sir Max is—and Sir Karl?” asked Yolanda, with a touch of anger in her voice. “Why has he not come? I have been watching but have not seen him—them. He places little value on our invitation to slight it by half an hour. I am of half a mind not to see him when he comes.”



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“Your uncle is downstairs under the arbor, Yolanda,” said Frau Castleman, gently. “He will tell you, sweet one, why Sir Max is not here.”

Frau Katherine and Twonette put aside their tapestry, and went with Yolanda to question Castleman in the arbor.

“Well, uncle, where are our guests?” asked Yolanda.

“They are not at the inn, and have not been there since nearly a fortnight ago,” answered Castleman.

“Gone!” cried Yolanda, aflame with sudden anger. “He gave me his word he would not go. I’m glad he’s gone, and I hope I may never see his face again. I deemed his word inviolate, and now he has broken it.”

“Do not judge Sir Max too harshly,” said Castleman; “you may wrong him. I do not at all understand the absence of our friends. Grote tells me they went to the river one night to bathe and did not return. Their horses and arms are at the inn. Their squires, who had left them two hours before, have not been seen since. Grote has heard nothing of our friends that will throw light on their whereabouts. Fearing to get himself into trouble, he has stupidly held his tongue. He was not inclined to speak plainly even to me.”

“Blessed Mother, forgive me!” cried Yolanda, sinking back upon a settle. After a long silence she continued: “Two weeks ago! That was a few days after the trouble at the bridge.”

“What trouble?” asked Castleman.

“I’ll tell you, uncle, and you, tante. Twonette already knows of it,” answered Yolanda. “Less than three weeks ago I was with Sir Max near the moat bridge. It was dark—after night—”

“Yolanda!” exclaimed Castleman, reproachfully.

“Yes, uncle, I know I ought not to have been there, but I was,” said Yolanda.

“Alone with Sir Max after dark?” asked the astonished burgher.

“Yes, alone with him, after it was *very* dark,” answered Yolanda. “I had met him several times before.”

Castleman tried to speak, but Yolanda interrupted him:—

“Uncle, I know and admit the truth of all you would say, so don’t say it. While I was standing very near to Sir Max, uncle, very near, Count Calli came upon us and offered



me gross insult. Sir Max, being unarmed, knocked the fellow down, and in the struggle that ensued Count Calli's arm was broken. I heard the bone snap, then Calli, swearing vengeance, left us. Why Sir Max went out unarmed that night I do not know. Had he been armed he might have killed Calli; that would have prevented this trouble."

"I, too, wonder that Sir Max went out unarmed," said Castleman musingly. "Why do you suppose he was so incautious?"

"Perhaps that is the custom in Styria. There may be less danger, less treachery, there than in Burgundy," suggested Yolanda.

"In Styria!" exclaimed Castleman. "Sir Karl said that he was from Italy. He did not tell me of Sir Max's home, but I supposed he also was from Italy, or perhaps from Wuerttemberg—there are many Guelphs in that country."



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“Yes, I will tell you of that later, uncle,” said Yolanda. “When Calli left us, Sir Max returned safely to the inn, having promised me not to leave Peronne within a month. This trouble has come from Calli and Campo-Basso.”

“But you say this young man is from Styria?” asked Castleman, anxiously.

“Yes,” replied Yolanda, drooping her head, “he is Maximilian, Count of Hapsburg.”

“Great God!” exclaimed Castleman, starting to his feet excitedly. “If I have brought these men here to be murdered, I shall die of grief; all Europe will turn upon Burgundy.”

Yolanda buried her face in Mother Kate’s breast; Castleman walked to and fro, and sympathetic Twonette wept gently. It was not in Twonette’s nature to do anything violently. Yolanda, on the contrary, was intense in all her joys and griefs.

“Did Sir Max tell you who he is?” asked Castleman, stopping in front of Yolanda.

“No,” she replied, “I will tell you some day how I guessed it. He does not know that I know, and I would not have you tell him.”

“Tell me, Yolanda,” demanded Castleman, “what has passed between you and this Sir Max?”

“Nothing, uncle, save that I know—ah, uncle, there is nothing. God pity me, there can be nothing. Whatever his great, true heart feels may be known to me as surely as if he had spoken a thousand vows, but he would not of his own accord so much as touch my hand or speak his love. He knows that one in his station may not mate with a burgher girl. He treats me as a true knight should treat a woman, and if he feels pain because of the gulf between us, he would not bring a like pain to me. He is a strong, noble man, Uncle Castleman, and we must save him.”

“If I knew where to begin, I would try at once,” said Castleman, “but I do not know, and I cannot think of—”

“I have a plan,” interrupted Yolanda, “that will set the matter going. Consult my Lord d’Hymbercourt; he is a friend of Sir Karl’s; he may help us. Tell him of the trouble at the bridge, but say that Twonette, not I, was there. If Lord d’Hymbercourt cannot help us, I’ll try another way if I die for it.”

Castleman found Hymbercourt and told him the whole story, substituting Twonette for Yolanda.

“It is the work of that accursed Basso,” said Hymbercourt, stroking his beard. “No villany is too black for him and his minions to do.”



“But what have they done?” asked Castleman. “They surely would not murder these men because of the quarrel at the bridge.”

“They would do murder for half that cause,” replied Hymbercourt. “A brave man hates an assassin, and I am always wondering why the duke, who is so bold and courageous, keeps this band of Italian cut-throats at his court.”

“What can we do to rescue our friends if they still live, or to avenge them if dead?” asked Castleman.



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"I do not know," answered Hymbercourt. "Let me think it all over, and I will see you at your house to-night. Of this I am certain: you must not move in the matter. If you are known to be interested, certain facts may leak out that would ruin you and perhaps bring trouble to one who already bears a burden too heavy for young shoulders. We know but one useful fact: Calli and Campo-Basso are at the bottom of this evil. The duke suspects that the states adjacent to Switzerland, including Styria, will give aid to the Swiss in this war with Burgundy, and it may be that Duke Charles has reasons for the arrest of our friends. He may have learned that Sir Max is the Count of Hapsburg. I hope his finger is not in the affair. I will learn what I can, and will see you to-night. Till then, adieu."

True to his promise, Hymbercourt went to Castleman's that evening, but he had learned nothing and had thought out no plan of action. Two days passed and there was another consultation. Still the mystery was as far from solution as on the day of its birth. Yolanda was in tribulation, and declared that she would take the matter into her own hands. Her uncle dissuaded her, however, and she reluctantly agreed to remain silent for a day or two longer, but she vowed that she would give tongue to her thoughts and arouse all Burgundy in behalf of Max and myself if we were not soon discovered.

CHAPTER XI

PERONNE LA PUCELLE

The next morning Duke Charles went down to the great hall of the castle to hear reports from his officers relating to the war that he was about to wage against the Swiss. When the duke ascended the three steps of the dais to the ducal throne, he spoke to Campo-Basso who stood upon the first step at the duke's right.

"What news, my Lord Count?" asked Charles. "I'm told there is a messenger from Ghent."

"Ill news, my lord," answered Campo-Basso.

"Out with it!" cried the duke. "One should always swallow a bitter draught quickly."

"We hear the Swiss are gathering their cantons in great numbers," said Campo-Basso.

"Let the sheep gather," said Charles, waving his hands. "The more they gather to the fold, the more we'll shear." He laughed as if pleased with the prospect, and continued, "Proceed, my Lord Count."

"The Duke of Lorraine is again trying to muster his subjects against Your Grace, and sends a polite message asking and offering terms of agreement. Shall I read the missive, my lord?"



“No!” cried the duke, “Curse his soft words. There is no bad news yet. Proceed.”

“It is rumored, Your Grace,” continued the count, “that Frederick, Duke of Styria, is preparing to aid the Swiss against Your Grace.”

“With his advice?” asked the duke. “The old pauper has nothing else to give, unless it be the bones of his ancestors.”

“It is said, Your Highness, that Wuerttemberg will also aid the Swiss, and that Duke Albert will try to bring about a coalition of the German states for the purpose of assisting the Swiss, aiding Lorraine, and overthrowing Burgundy. This purpose, our informant tells us, has been fostered by this same Duke Frederick of Styria.”



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"This news, I suppose, is intended for our ears by the Duke of Styria. He probably wishes us to know that he is against us," said Charles. "He wanted our daughter for his clown of a son, and our contempt for his claims rankles in his heart. He cannot inflame Wuerttemberg, and Wuerttemberg cannot influence the other German princes."

The duke paused, and Campo-Basso proceeded:—

"The citizens of Ghent, my lord, petition Your Grace for the restoration of certain communal rights, and beg for the abolition of the hearth tax and the salt levy. They also desire the right to elect their own burgomaster and—"

"Give me the petition," demanded the duke. Campo-Basso handed the parchment to Charles, and he tore it to shreds.

"Send these to the dogs of Ghent, and tell them that for every scrap of parchment I'll take a score of heads when I return from Switzerland."

"We hear also, my lord," said the Italian, "that King Edward of England is marshalling an army, presumably for the invasion of France and, because of the close union that is soon to be between King Louis and Burgundy, I have thought proper to lay the news before Your Grace."

"Edward wants more of King Louis' gold," answered Charles. "We'll let him get it. We care not how much he has from this crafty miser of the Seine. Louis will buy the English ministers, and the army will suddenly vanish. When King Edward grows scarce of gold, he musters an army, or pretends to do so, and Louis fills the English coffers. The French king would buy an apostle, or the devil, and would sell his soul to either to serve a purpose. Have you more in your budget, Sir Count?"

"I have delivered all, I believe, my lord," answered Campo-Basso.

"It might have been worse," said the duke, rising to quit his throne.

"One moment, my lord! There is another matter to which I wish to call Your Grace's attention before you rise," said the count. "I have for your signature the warrants for the execution of the Swiss spies, who, Your Highness may remember, were entrapped and arrested by the watchfulness of Your Grace's faithful servant, the noble Count Calli."

"Give me the warrant," said the duke, "and let the execution take place at once."

Hymbercourt had been standing in the back part of the room, paying little attention to the proceedings, but the mention of Calli's name in connection with the Swiss spies quickly roused him, and he hurriedly elbowed his way to the ducal throne. A page was handing Charles a quill and an ink-well when Hymbercourt spoke:—



“My Lord Duke, I beg you not to sign the warrant until I have asked a few questions of my Lord Campo-Basso concerning these alleged spies.”

“Why do you say ‘alleged spies,’ my Lord d’Hymbercourt?” asked the duke. “Do you know anything of them? Are they friends of yours?”

“If they are friends of mine, Your Grace may be sure they are not spies,” answered Hymbercourt. “I am not sure that I know these men, but I fear a mistake has been made.”



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A soft cry, a mere exclamation, was heard behind the chancel in the ladies' gallery, which was above the throne, a little to the right. But it caused no comment other than a momentary turning of heads in that direction.

"On what ground do you base your suspicion, my lord?" asked Charles.

"Little ground, Your Grace," answered Hymbercourt. "I may be entirely wrong; but I beg the privilege of asking the noble Count Calli two or three questions before Your Grace signs the death warrant. We may avert a grave mistake and prevent a horrible crime."

"It is a waste of valuable time," answered Charles, "but if you will be brief, you may proceed. Count Calli, come into presence."

Calli stepped forward and saluted the duke on bended knee.

"Your questions, Hymbercourt, and quickly," said Charles, testily. "We are in haste. Time between the arrest and the hanging of a spy is wasted."

"I thank you, my lord," said Hymbercourt. He then turned to Calli, and asked, "When were these men arrested?"

"More than a fortnight ago," answered Calli.

"How came you to discover they were spies?" asked Hymbercourt.

"I watched them, and their actions were suspicious," replied the Italian.

"In what respect were they suspicious?"

"They went abroad only at night, and one of them was seen near the castle several evenings after dark," responded Calli.

"Is that your only evidence against them?" demanded Hymbercourt.

"It is surely enough," replied Calli, "but if more is wanted, they were overheard to avow their guilt."

"What were they heard to say and where did they say it?" asked Hymbercourt.

"I lay concealed, with six men-at-arms, near the river in the garden of The Mitre Inn, where the spies had been bathing. We heard them speak many words of treason against our gracious Lord Duke, but I did not move in their arrest until the younger man said to his companion: 'I will to-morrow gain entrance to the castle as a pedler and will stab this Duke Charles to death. You remain near the Postern with the horses, and I will



try to escape to you. If the gate should be closed, ride away without me and carry the news to the cantons. I would gladly give my life to save the fatherland.”

“Hang them,” cried the duke. “We are wasting time.”

“I pray your patience, my Lord Duke,” said Hymbercourt, holding up his hand protestingly. “I know these men whom Count Calli has falsely accused. They are not spies; they are not Swiss; neither are they enemies of Burgundy. Were they so, I, my lord, would demand their death were they a thousand-fold my friends. I stake my life upon their honesty. I offer my person and my estates as hostages for them, and make myself their champion. Count Calli lies.”

Hymbercourt’s words caused a great commotion in the hall. Swords and daggers sprang from the scabbards of the Italians, and cries of indignation were uttered by the mercenaries, who saw their crime exposed, and by the Burgundians, who hated the Italians and their dastardly methods. Charles commanded silence, and Campo-Basso received permission to speak.



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“Since when did my Lord d’Hymbercourt turn traitor?” said he. “His fealty has always been as loud-mouthed as the baying of a wolf.”

“I am a Burgundian, my lord,” said Hymbercourt, ignoring the Italian and addressing Charles. “I receive no pay for my fealty. I am not a foreign mercenary, and I need not defend my loyalty to one who knows me as he knows his own heart.”

“My Lord d’Hymbercourt’s honor needs no defence,” said Charles. “I trust his honesty and loyalty as I trust myself. He may be mistaken; he may be right. Bring in these spies.”

“Surely Your Grace will not contaminate your presence with these wretches,” pleaded Campo-Basso. “Consider the danger to yourself, my dear lord. They are desperate men, who would gladly give their lives to take yours and save their country. I beg you out of the love I bear Your Grace, pause before you bring these traitorous spies into your sacred presence.”

“Bring them before me!” cried the duke. “We will determine this matter for ourselves. We have a score of brave, well-paid Italians who may be able to protect our person from the onslaught of two manacled men.”

* * * * *

On this same morning the guard had been to my cell with bread and water, and had departed. I did not know, of course, whether it was morning, noon, or night, but I had learned to measure with some degree of accuracy the lapse of time between the visits of the guard, and was surprised to hear the rusty lock turn long before the time for his reappearance. When the man entered my cell, bearing his lantern, he said:—

“Come with me.”

The words were both welcome and terrible. I could not know their meaning—whether it was liberty or death. I stepped from the cell and, while I waited for the guard to relock the door, I saw the light of a lantern at the other end of a passageway. Two men with Max between them came out of the darkness and stopped in front of me. Our wrists were manacled behind us, and we could not touch hands. I could have wept for joy and grief at seeing Max.

“Forgive me, Max, for bringing you to this,” I cried.

“Forgive me, Karl. It is I who have brought you to these straits,” said Max. “Which is it to be, think you, Karl, liberty or death?”

“God only knows,” I answered.



“For your sake, Karl, I hope He cares more than I. I would prefer death to the black cell I have just left.”

We went through many dark passageways and winding stairs to the audience hall.

When we entered the hall, the courtiers fell back, leaving an aisle from the great double doors to the ducal throne. When we approached the duke, I bent my knee, but Max simply bowed.

“Kneel!” cried Campo-Basso, addressing Max.

“If my Lord of Burgundy demands that I kneel, I will do so, but it is more meet that he should kneel to me for the outrage that has been put upon me at his court,” said Max, gazing unfalteringly into the duke’s face.



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"Who are you?" demanded the duke, speaking to me.

"I am Sir Karl de Pitti," I replied. "Your Grace may know my family; we are of Italy. It was once my good fortune to serve under your father and yourself. My young friend is known as Sir Maximilian du Guelph."

"He is known as Guelph, but who is he?" demanded Charles.

"That question I may not answer, my lord," said I, speaking in the Walloon tongue.

"You shall answer or die," returned the duke, angrily.

"I hope my Lord of Burgundy will not be so harsh with us," interrupted Max, lifting his head and speaking boldly. "We have committed no crime, and do not know why we have been arrested. We beg that we may be told the charge against us, and we would also know who makes the charge."

"Count Calli," said the duke, beckoning that worthy knight, "come forward and speak."

Calli came forward, knelt to the duke, and said:

"I, my lord, charge these unknown men as being Swiss spies and assassins, who seek to murder Your Grace and to betray Burgundy."

"You lie, you dog," cried Max, looking like an angry young god. "You lie in your teeth and in your heart. My Lord of Burgundy, I demand the combat against this man who seeks my life by treachery and falsehood. I waive my rank for the sweet privilege of killing this liar."

"My Lord Duke," I exclaimed, interrupting Max, "if my Lord d'Hymbercourt is in presence, I beg that I may have speech with him."

Hymbercourt stepped to my side, and the duke signified permission to speak.

"My Lord d'Hymbercourt," said I, turning to my friend, "I beg you to tell His Grace that we are not spies. I may not, for reasons well known to you, give you permission to inform His Grace who my young companion is, and I hope my Lord of Burgundy will be satisfied with your assurance that we are honest knights who wish only good to this land and its puissant ruler."

"Indeed, my Lord Duke, I was right," answered Hymbercourt. "Again I offer my person and my estates as hostages for these men. They are not spies. They are not of Switzerland, nor are they friends to the Swiss; neither are they enemies of Burgundy. I doubt not they will gladly join Your Lordship in this war against the cantons. These



knights have been arrested to gratify revenge for personal injury received and deserved by this traitorous Count Calli.”

“It is false,” cried Campo-Basso.

“It is true—pitifully true, my lord,” returned Hymbercourt. “This young knight was at the moat bridge near Castleman’s House under the Wall talking with a burgher maid, Fraeulein Castleman. Count Calli stole upon them without warning and insulted the maiden. My young friend knocked down the ruffian, and, in the conflict that ensued, broke Calli’s arm. Your Grace may have seen him carrying it in a sling until within the last forty-eight hours.



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“For this deserved chastisement Count Calli seeks the young man’s life by bearing false witness against him; and with it that of my old friend, Sir Karl de Pitti. It is Burgundy’s shame, my lord, that these treacherous mercenaries should be allowed to murder strangers and to outrage Your Grace’s loyal subjects in the name of Your Lordship’s justice. Sir Maximilian du Guelph has demanded the combat against this Count Calli. Sir Maximilian is a spurred and belted knight, and under the laws of chivalry even Your Grace may not gainsay him.”

“My lord, I do not fight assassins and spies,” said Calli, addressing the duke.

“I do,” cried Max, “when they put injuries upon me as this false coward has done. I will prove upon his body, my Lord Duke, who is the assassin and the spy. My Lord d’Hymbercourt will vouch that my rank entitles me to fight in knightly combat with any man in this presence. My wrists are manacled, my lord, and I have no gage to throw before this false knight; but, my Lord of Burgundy, I again demand the combat. One brave as Your Grace is must also be just. We shall leave Count Calli no excuse to avoid this combat, even if I must tell Your Grace my true rank and station.”

“This knight,” said Hymbercourt, addressing Charles and extending his hand toward Max, “is of birth entitling him to meet in the lists any knight in Burgundy, and I will gladly stand his sponsor.”

“My Lord d’Hymbercourt’s sponsorship proves any man,” said the duke, who well knew that Campo-Basso and his friends would commit any crime to avenge an injury, fancied or real.

“My Lord Duke, I pray your patience,” said Campo-Basso, obsequiously. “No man may impugn my Lord d’Hymbercourt’s honesty, but may he not be mistaken? In the face of the evidence against this man, may he not be mistaken? The six men who were with Count Calli will testify to the treasonable words spoken by this young spy.”

“Does any other man in presence know these men?” asked the duke. No one responded.

After a little time Hymbercourt broke silence.

“I am grieved and deeply hurt, my lord, that you should want other evidence than mine against the witnesses who make this charge. I am a Burgundian. These witnesses are Italians who love Your Grace for the sake of the gold they get. I had hoped that my poor services had earned for me the right to be believed, but if I may have a little time, I will procure another man whose word shall be to you as the word of your father.”

“Bring him into our presence,” answered the duke. “We will see him to-morrow at this hour.”



“May I not crave Your Grace’s indulgence for a half-hour?” pleaded Hymbercourt. “I will have this man here within that time.”

“Not another minute,” replied the duke. “Heralds, cry the rising.”

“Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! His Grace, the Duke of Burgundy, is about to rise. His Grace has risen,” cried the herald.



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The duke left the hall by a small door near the dais.

Hymbercourt was standing beside us when the captain of the guard approached to lead us back to our cells.

“May we not have comfortable quarters, and may we not be placed in one cell?” I asked, appealing to Hymbercourt. “I have been confined in a reeking, rayless dungeon unfit for swine, and doubtless Sir Max has been similarly outraged.”

Hymbercourt put his hand into his pouch and drew forth two gold pieces. These he stealthily placed in the captain’s hand, and that worthy official said:—

“I shall be glad to oblige, my lord.”

Hymbercourt left us, and Campo-Basso, beckoning the captain to one side, spoke to him in low tones. The captain, I was glad to see, was a Burgundian.

After we left the hall we were taken to our old quarters. The captain followed me into the cell, leaving his men in the passageway.

“My Lord Count ordered me to bring you here,” he said; “but I will, if I can, soon return with other men who are not Italians and will remove you to a place of safety.”

“Am I not safe here? Is my friend in danger?” I asked.

The man smiled as though amused at my simplicity:—

“If you remain here to-night, there will be no need to hang you in the morning. Our Italian friends have methods of their own that are simple and sure. But I will try to find a way to remove you before—before the Italians have time to do their work. I will see my Lord d’Hymbercourt, and if the duke has not gone a-hunting, we will induce His Grace to order your removal to a place of safety.”

“But if the duke is gone, cannot you get the order when he returns?” I asked.

“That will be too late, I fear,” he answered, laughing, and with these comforting remarks he left me.

After two or three hours—the time seemed days—I heard a key enter the lock of my cell door. If the hand inserting the key was that of an Italian, I might look for death. To my great joy the man was my Burgundian captain.

“The duke had gone a-hunting,” he said, “and I could not find my Lord d’Hymbercourt; but Her Highness, the princess, asked me to remove you, and I am willing to risk my



neck for her sweet sake. I am to place you in one of the tower rooms, out of the reach of our Italian cut-throats.”

“Will my young friend be with me?” I asked eagerly.

“Yes,” responded the captain.

Again I met Max with a man-at-arms in the passageway outside my cell door, and we all went up the steps together. We were hurried through dark passages to a spiral stairway, which we climbed till my knees ached. But we were going up instead of down, and I was overjoyed to have the aching leave my heart for my knees.



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The room in which the Burgundian left us was large and clean. There were two beds of sweet straw upon the floor, and to my unspeakable joy there was a bar on the door whereby it could be locked from within. There were also two tubs of water for a bath. On a rude bench was a complete change of clothing which had been brought by some kind hand from the inn. On an oak table were two bottles of wine, a bowl of honey, a cellar of pepper, white bread, cold meat, and pastry. A soul reaching heaven out of purgatory must feel as we felt then. We were too excited to eat, so we bathed, dressed, and lay down on the straw beds.

Before leaving us our captain had said:—

“Do not unbolt your door except to the password ‘Burgundy.’”

We slept till late in the afternoon. When we wakened the sun was well down in the west, and we could see only its reflected glare in the eastern sky. There was but one opening in the room through which the light could enter—a narrow window, less than a foot wide. The light in the room was dim even at noon, but the long darkness had so affected our eyes that the light from the window was sufficient to illumine the apartment and to make all objects plainly discernible. There was little to be seen. The arched roof was of solid masonry; the walls were without a break save the narrow window and the door. Through the window we could see only a patch of sky in the east, reddened by the reflection of the sinking sun; but the sight was so beautiful that Max and I were loath to leave it even for supper.

“We must eat before the light dies,” said Max, whose young stomach was more imperious than mine, “or we shall have to eat in the dark. I have had more than enough of that.”

“Fall to,” I said, as we drew the stools to the table. With the first mouthful of clean, delicious food my appetite returned, and I ate ravenously. Had the repast been larger I believe we should have killed ourselves. Fortunately it was consumed before we were exhausted, and we came off alive and victorious. After supper darkness fell, and Max sat beside me on the bench. He was very happy, for he felt that our troubles would end with the night. I put my arm over his neck and begged him to forgive me for bringing this evil upon him.

“You shall not blame yourself, Karl,” he protested. “There is no fault in you. No one is to blame save myself; I should not have gone to the bridge. I wonder what poor Yolanda is doing. Perhaps she is suffering in fear and is ignorant of our misfortune. Perhaps she thinks I have broken my promise and left Peronne. I can see her stamp her little foot, and I see her great eyes flashing in anger. Each new humor in her seems more beautiful than the last, Karl. Knowing her, I seem to have known all mankind—at least, all womankind. She has wakened me to life. Her touch has unsealed my eyes,

and the pain that I take from my love for her is like a foretaste of heaven. I believe that a man comes to his full strength, mental and moral, only through the elixir of pain.”



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"We surely have had our share of late," I said dolefully.

"All will soon be well with us, Karl; do not fear. We shall be free to-morrow, and I will kill this Calli. Then I'll go back to Styria a better, wiser, stronger man than I could ever have been had I remained at home. This last terrible experience has been the keystone of my regeneration. It has taught me to be merciful even to the guilty, and gentle with the accused. No man shall ever suffer at my command until he has been proved guilty. Doubtless thousands of innocent men as free from crime and evil intent as we, are wasting their lives away in dungeons as loathsome as those that imprisoned us."

"Calli will not fight you," I said.

"If he refuses, I will kill him at the steps of the throne of Burgundy, let the result be what it may. God will protect me in my just vengeance. I will then go home; and I'll not return to Burgundy till I do so at the head of an army, to compel Duke Charles to behead Campo-Basso."

"What will you do about Yolanda, Max?" I asked.

The interference of the princess in our behalf had thrown more light on my important riddle, and once again I was convinced that she was Yolanda.

"I'll keep her in my heart till I die, Karl," he responded, "and I pray God to give her a happier life than mine can be. That is all I can do."

"Will you see her before you go?" I asked, fully intending that there should be no doubt on the question.

"Yes, and then—" He paused; and, after a little time, I asked:—

"And what then, Max?"

"God only knows what, Karl. I'm sure I don't," he answered.

We talked till late into the night, lay down on our soft, clean beds of straw, and were soon asleep.

I did not know how long I had been sleeping when I was awakened by a voice that seemed to fill the room, low, soft, and musical as the tones of an Aeolian harp. I groped my way noiselessly in the dark to Max's bed and aroused him. Placing my hand over his mouth to insure silence, I whispered:—

"Listen!"



He rested on his elbow, and we waited. After a few seconds the voice again resounded through the room, soft as a murmured ave, distinct as the notes of a bird. Max clutched my hand. Soon the voice came again, and we heard the words:—

“Little Max, do you hear? Answer softly.”

“I hear,” responded Max.

There was an uncanny note in the music of the voice. It seemed almost celestial. We could not tell whence it came. Every stone in the walls and ceiling, every slab in the floor seemed resonant with silvery tones. After Max had answered there was a pause lasting two or three minutes, and the voice spoke again:—

“I love you, Little Max. I tell you because I wish to comfort you. Do not fear. You shall be free to-morrow. Do not answer. Adieu.”

“Yolanda! Yolanda!” cried Max, pleadingly; but he received no answer. He put his hand on my shoulder and said:—



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“It was Yolanda, Karl—ah, God must hate a child that He brings into the world a prince.”

For the rest of the night we did not sleep, neither did we speak. The morrow was to be a day of frightful import to us, and we awaited it in great anxiety.

When the morning broke and the sun shot his rays through the narrow window, we carefully examined the floor and walls of our room, but we found no opening through which the voice could have penetrated. In the side of the room formed by the wall of the tower, the mortar had fallen from between two stones, leaving one of them somewhat loose, but the castle wall at that point was fully sixteen feet thick, and it was impossible that the voice should have come through the layers of stone.

From my first acquaintance with Yolanda there had seemed to be a supernatural element in her nature, an elfin quality in her face and manner that could not be described. Max had often told me that she impressed him in like manner. The voice in our stone-girt chamber, coming as it did from nowhere, and resounding as it did everywhere, intensified that feeling till it was almost a conviction, though I am slow to accept supernatural explanations—a natural one usually exists. Of course, there are rare instances of supernatural power vested in men and women, and Yolanda’s great, burning eyes caused me at times, almost to believe that she was favored with it.

The voice that we had heard was unquestionably Yolanda’s, but by what strange power it was enabled to penetrate our rock-ribbed prison and give tongues to the cold stones I could not guess, though I could not stop trying. Here was another riddle set by this marvellous girl for my solving. This riddle, however, helped to solve the first, and confirmed my belief that Yolanda was Mary of Burgundy.

After breakfast Max and I were taken to the great hall, where we found Castleman standing before the ducal throne, speaking to Charles. The burgher turned toward us, and as we approached I heard him say:—

“My lord, these men are not spies.”

“Who are they?” demanded the duke.

Castleman gave our names and told the story of our meeting at Basel, after we had escorted Merchant Franz from Cannstatt. Then he narrated Max’s adventure at the moat bridge, closing with:—

“Count Calli grossly insulted Fraeulein Castleman, for which Sir Max chastised him; and no doubt, my lord, this arrest has been made for revenge.”

“Has the younger man name or title other than you have given?” asked Charles.

The burgher hesitated before he answered:—

“He has, my lord, though I may not disclose it to Your Grace without his permission, unless you order me so to do upon my fealty. That I humbly beg Your Grace not to do.”



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“I beg Your Grace not to ask me to disclose my identity at this time,” said Max. “I am willing, should you insist upon knowing who I am, to tell it privately in Your Grace’s ear; but I am travelling incognito with my friend, Sir Karl de Pitti, and I beg that I may remain so. My estate is neither very great nor very small, but what it is I desire for many reasons not to divulge. These reasons in no way touch Burgundy, and I am sure Your Grace will not wish to intrude upon them. Within a month, perhaps within a few days, I will enlighten you. If you will permit me to remain in Peronne, I will communicate my reasons to you personally; if I leave, I will write to Your Grace. I give my parole that I will, within a month, surrender myself to Your Lordship, if you are not satisfied, upon hearing my explanations, that my word is that of an honorable knight, and my station one worthy of Your Grace’s respect. I hope my Lord d’Hymberecourt and my good friend Castleman will stand as hostages for me in making this pledge.”

Both men eagerly offered their persons and their estates as hostages, and the duke, turning to the captain of the guard, said:—

“Remove the manacles from these knights.”

The chains were removed, and the duke, coming down to the last step of the dais, looked into Max’s face.

Max calmly returned the fierce gaze without so much as the faltering of an eyelid.

“All step back save this young man,” ordered the duke, extending his open palm toward the courtiers.

We all fell away, but the duke said:—

“Farther back, farther back, I say! Don’t crowd in like a pack of yokels at a street fight!”

Charles was acting under great excitement. I was not sure that it was not anger since his mien looked much like it. I did not know what was going to happen, and was in an agony of suspense. Anything was possible with this brutish duke when his brain was crazed with passion.

All who had been near the ducal throne moved back, till no one was within ten yards of Charles save Max. The duke wore a dagger and a shirt of mail; Max wore neither arms nor armor. After the courtiers stepped back from the throne a deep, expectant hush fell upon the room. No one could guess the intentions of this fierce, cruel duke, and I was terribly apprehensive for Max’s safety. Had Max been armed, I should have had no fear for him at the hands of the duke or any other man.

Charles stepped from the dais to the floor beside Max, still gazing fixedly into his face. The men were within four feet of each other. The silence in the room was broken only



by the heavy breathing of excited courtiers. The duke's voice sounded loud and harsh when he spoke to Max, and his breath came in hoarse gusts:—

“You are accused, Sir Knight, by credible witnesses of intent to murder me. For such a crime it is my privilege to kill you here and now with my own hand. What have you to say?”



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Charles paused for a reply, drawing his dagger from its sheath. When Max saw the naked weapon, I noticed that he gave a start, though it was almost imperceptible. He at once recovered himself, and straightening to his full height, stepped to within two feet of the duke.

“If I plotted or intended to kill you, my lord,” said Max, less moved than any other man in the room, “it is your right to kill me; but even were I guilty I doubt if my Lord of Burgundy, who is noted the world over for his bravery, would strike an unarmed man. If Your Grace wished to attack me, you would give me arms equal to your own. If you should kill me, unarmed as I am, you would be more pitiable than any other man in Burgundy. You would despise yourself, and all mankind would spurn you.”

“Do you not fear me?” asked the duke, still clutching the hilt of his unsheathed dagger.

“I do not believe you have the least intent to kill me,” answered Max, “but if you have, you may easily do so, and I shall be less to be pitied than you. No, I do not fear you! Do I look it, my lord?”

“No, by God, you don’t look it. Neither have you cause to fear me,” said Charles. “There is not another man in Christendom could have stood this ordeal without flinching.”

To a brave man, bravery is above all the cardinal virtue. Charles turned toward his courtiers and continued:—

“There is one man who does not fear me—man, say I? He is little more than a boy. Men of Burgundy, take a lesson from this youth, and bear it in mind when we go to war.”

The duke began to unbuckle his shirt of mail, speaking as he did so:—

“I’ll soon learn who has lied. I’ll show this boy that I am as brave as he.”

Charles turned to Calli.

“Sir Count, did you not say this knight wished to kill me, even at the cost of his own life?”

“I so said, my lord, and so maintain upon my honor as a knight and upon my hope of salvation as a Christian. I so heard him avow,” answered Calli.

“I will quickly prove or disprove your words, Sir Count,” said the duke, removing his mail shirt and throwing it to the floor. Then he turned to Max and offered him the hilt of his dagger: “If you would purchase my death at the cost of your life, here is my dagger, and you may easily make the barter. I am unarmed. One blow from that great arm of yours will end all prospects of war with your Switzerland.”



Max hesitatingly took the dagger and looked with a puzzled expression from it to the duke's face. Campo-Basso and his Italian friends moved toward their lord as if to protect him, but Charles waved them back with a protesting palm.

"Switzerland is not my native land, Your Grace, nor do I seek your life. Take your dagger," said Max.

"I offer you better terms," said Charles. "If you wish to kill me, I now give you safe conduct beyond the borders of Burgundy."



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“My lord, you are mistaken,” said Max, impatiently, tossing the dagger to the floor and stepping back from the duke. A soft ripple of laughter was heard in the ladies’ gallery.

“No, it is not I that am mistaken,” said Charles. “It is Campo-Basso and his friends. Count Calli, prepare to give the combat to this knight, whoever he may be, and God have mercy on your soul, for the day of your death is at hand.”

Another ripple of soft laughter came from the ladies’ gallery.

“I cannot fight him,” wailed Calli. “I am suffering from a broken arm. My horse fell with me three weeks ago, as Your Grace well knows.”

“When your arm mends, you must fight and prove your cause, or by the soul of God, you hang! We’ll make a fete of this combat, and another of your funeral. There shall be a thousand candles, and masses sufficient to save the soul of Satan himself. My Lord Campo-Basso, let not the like of this happen again. Vengeance in Burgundy is mine, not my Italians’. Heralds, dismiss the company. These men are free.”

All departed save Castleman, Hymbercourt, Max, and myself, who remained at the duke’s request.

“If you will remain at the castle, you are most welcome,” said Charles, addressing Max and me.

I would have jumped at the offer, but Max thanked the duke and declined.

“We will, with Your Grace’s permission, remain at Grote’s inn for a short time and then ask leave to depart from Burgundy.”

The duke answered:—

“As you will. I do not press you. If you change your mind, come to the castle, and you will be very welcome.”

He turned and, with brief adieu, left the great-hall by the small door near the dais. Castleman, Hymbercourt, and Max passed out through the great doors, and I was about to follow them when I was startled by the voice I had heard in the night:—

“Little Max, Little Max,” came softly from the ladies’ gallery.

I paused to hear more, but all was silent in the great hall. The words could have come from no other lips than Yolanda’s—Mary’s. True, I reasoned, Yolanda might be one of the ladies of the court, perhaps a near relative of the duke. Once the horrifying thought that he was her lover came to my mind, but it fled instantly. There was no evil in Yolanda.



Max did not hear the voice. I intended to tell him of it when we should reach the inn, and I thought to tell him also that I believed Yolanda was the Princess Mary. I changed my mind, however, and again had reason to be thankful for my silence.

CHAPTER XII

A LIVE WREN PIE

The next day came the invitation to sup at Castleman's, and we were on hand promptly at the appointed time—four o'clock. Before leaving the inn I had determined to ask Castleman to satisfy my curiosity concerning Yolanda. With good reason I felt that it was my duty and my right to know certainly who she was. She might not be Mary of Burgundy, but she surely was not a burgher girl, and in some manner she was connected with the court of Duke Charles.



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Max and I were sitting in the long room (it was on the ground floor and extended across the entire front of the house) with Castleman when Frau Kate entered followed by Yolanda and Twonette. The frau courtesied, and gave us welcome. Twonette courtesied and stepped to her father's side. Yolanda gave Max her hand and lifted it to be kissed. The girl laughed joyously, and, giving him her other hand, stood looking up into his face. Her laughter soon became nervous, and that change in a womanly woman is apt to be the forerunner of tears. They soon came to moisten Yolanda's eyes, but she kept herself well in hand and said:—

“It has been a very long time, Sir Max, since last I saw you.”

“A hard, cruel time for me, Fraeulein. Your hot-headed duke gives strange license to his murderous courtiers,” answered Max.

“It has been a hard time for others, too,” she responded. “Hard for uncle, hard for tante, hard for Twonette—very hard for Twonette.” She spoke jestingly, but one might easily see her emotion.

“And you, Fraeulein?” he asked smilingly.

“I—I dare not say how hard it has been for me, Little Max. Do you not see? I fear—I fear I shall—weep—if I try to tell you. I am almost weeping now. I fear I have grown gray because of it,” she answered, closing with a nervous laugh. Max, too, could hardly speak. She smiled up into his face, and bending before him stood on tiptoe to bring the top of her head under his inspection.

“You may see the white hairs if you look carefully,” she said.

Max laughed and stooped to examine the great bush of fluffy dark hair.

“I see not one white hair,” he said.

“Look closely,” she insisted.

He looked closely, and startled us all, including Yolanda, by putting his lips to the fragrant, silky mass.

“Ah!” exclaimed Yolanda, stepping back from him and placing her hand to the top of her head on the spot that he had kissed. She looked up to him with a fluttering little laugh:

—

“I—I did not know you were going to do that.”

“Neither did I,” said Max.



Castleman and his wife looked displeased and Twonette's face wore an expression of amused surprise.

After a constrained pause Frau Katherine said:—

“Our guests are not in the habit of kissing us.”

“No one has kissed you, tante,” retorted Yolanda, “nor do they intend to do so. Do not fear. I—I brought it on myself, and if I do not complain, you may bear up under it.”

“It certainly is unusual to—” began the frau.

“Tante,” cried Yolanda, flushing angrily and stamping her foot. Tante was silent.

“Your words night before last brought marvellous comfort to us, Fraeulein,” said Max.

“Where were you, and how—”

“My words? Night before last?” asked Yolanda, in open-eyed wonder, “I have not seen you since three weeks ago.”



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“You called to me in my prison in the tower,” said Max. “You called to me by the name you sometimes use.”

“Ah, that is wonderful,” exclaimed Yolanda. “I wakened myself night before last calling your name, and telling you not to fear. I was dreaming that you were in danger, but I also dreamed that you would soon be free. Can it be possible that the voice of a dreamer can travel to a distance and penetrate stone walls? You almost make me fear myself by telling me that you heard my call.”

Like most persons, Max loved the mysterious, so he at once became greatly interested. He would have discussed the subject further had not Yolanda turned to me, saying:—

“Ah, I have not greeted Sir Karl.”

She gave me her hand, and I would have knelt had she not prevented me by a surprised arching of her eyebrows. My attempt to salute her on my knee was involuntary, but when I saw the warning expression in her eyes, I quickly recovered myself. I bowed and she withdrew her hand.

“Let us go to the garden,” she suggested.

The others left the room, but Yolanda held back and detained me by a gesture.

“You would have knelt to me,” she said almost angrily.

“Yes, mademoiselle,” I replied, “the movement was involuntary.”

“I once warned you, Sir Karl, not to try to learn anything concerning me. I told you that useless knowledge was dangerous. You have been guessing, and probably are very far wrong in your conclusion. But whatever your surmises are, don’t let me know them. Above all, say nothing to Sir Max; I warn you! Unless you would see no more of me, bear this warning in mind. Yolanda is a burgher girl. Treat her accordingly, and impress the fact on Sir Max. Were I as great as the ill-tempered Princess of Burgundy, whose estates you came to woo, I should still despise adulation. Bah! I hate it all,” she continued, stamping her foot. “I hate princes and princesses, and do not understand how they can endure to have men kneel and grovel before them. This fine Princess of Burgundy, I am told, looks—” She paused and then went on: “I sometimes hate her most of all. I am a burgher girl, I tell you, and I am proud of it. I warn you not to make me other.”

“Your warning, my lady, is—”

“Fraeulein!” interrupted Yolanda, angrily stamping her foot, “or Yolanda—call me either. If I give you the privilege, you should value it sufficiently to use it.”



“Yolanda, I will sin no more,” I responded. Her face broke into a smile, and she took my arm, laughing contentedly.

I walked out to the garden—Yolanda danced out—and we sat with the others under the shade of the arbor vines. Castleman and Max drank sparingly of wine and honey, while I sipped orange water with Yolanda, Twonette, and Frau Kate.

“What do you think of Burgundy, Sir Max?” asked the burgher.

“I like Grote’s inn well,” answered Max. “I like the castle dungeon ill. I have seen little else of Burgundy save in our journey down the Somme. Then I saw nothing but the road on the opposite bank. Had I tried to see the country I should have failed; the dust-cloud we carried with us was impenetrable.” He turned to Yolanda, “That was a hard journey for you, Fraeulein.”



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“No, no,” she cried, “it was glorious. The excitement was worth a lifetime of monotony; it was delightful. I could feel my heart beat all the time, and no woman is sure she lives until she feels the beating of her heart.”

I suspected a double meaning in her words, but no trace of self-consciousness was visible in her face.

“I have often wondered, Fraeulein, if the papers reached the castle before the duke arrived?” asked Max.

“What papers?” queried Yolanda.

“Why, the papers we made the mad race to deliver,” answered Max.

“Oh, y-e-s,” responded the girl, “they arrived just in time.”

“And were delivered at the gate?” I suggested.

A quick, angry glance of surprise shot from Yolanda’s eyes, and rising from her chair she entered the house. Twonette followed her, and the two did not return for an hour. I was accumulating evidence on the subject of my puzzling riddle, but I feared my last batch might prove expensive. I saw the mistake my tongue had led me into. Many a man has wrecked his fortune by airing his wit.

When Yolanda returned, she sat at a little distance from us, pouting beautifully. The cause of her unmistakable ill-humor, of course, was known only to me, and was a source of wonder to Max. At the end of five minutes, during which there had been little conversation, Max, who was amused at Yolanda’s pouting, turned to her, and said:—

“The Fates owe me a few smiles as compensation for their frowns during the last three weeks. Won’t you help them to pay me, Fraeulein?”

Her face had been averted, but when Max spoke she turned slowly and gave him the smile he desired as if to say, “I am not pouting at you.”

Her act was so childlike and her face so childishly beautiful that we all smiled with amusement and pleasure. Yolanda saw the smiles and turned on us, pouting though almost ready to laugh. She rose from her chair, stamped her foot, stood irresolutely for a moment, and then breaking into a laugh, drew her chair to our little circle—next to Max—and sat down.

“Tante, is supper never to be served?” she asked. “I am impatient to see the live wren pie.”

“Live wren pie?” asked Max, incredulously.



“Yes. Have you never seen one?” asked Yolanda.

“Surely not,” he replied.

“Ah, you have a treat in store,” she exclaimed, clapping her hands enthusiastically.

“Uncle carves the pie, the wrens fly out, you open your mouth, and the birds, being very small, fly down your throat and save you the trouble eating them. They are trained to do it, you know.”

A chorus of laughter followed this remarkable statement. Max leaned forward, rested his elbows on his knees, looked at the ground for the space of half a minute, and said:

—

“I was mistaken in saying that I had never partaken of the dish. While at Basel I foolishly opened my mouth, and a beautiful little bird flew down my throat to my heart.”



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Frau Castleman coughed, and the burgher moved in his chair and swallowed half a goblet of wine. Twonette laughed outright at the pretty turn Max had made upon Yolanda, and I ridiculously tried to keep my face expressionless. Yolanda laughed flutteringly, and the long lashes fell.

“That was prettily spoken, Sir Max,” she said, smiling. “No Frenchman could improve upon it. You are constantly surprising me.”

“Are Frenchmen apt at such matters, Fraeulein?” I asked.

“I have known but few Frenchmen,” she responded. “You know Burgundy and France are natural enemies, like the cat and the dog. I have little love for the French. I speak only from hearsay.”

“You will do well to learn to like them,” I suggested. “Burgundy itself will soon be French, if the Princess Mary weds the Dauphin.”

By speaking freely of the princess, I hoped Yolanda might believe that, whatever my surmises were concerning her identity, I did not suspect that she was Mademoiselle de Burgundy.

Yolanda sighed, but did not answer. Silence fell upon our little party, and after a long pause I turned to Twonette:—

“I remember that Franz told me at Basel, Fraeulein Twonette, that you and this famous Princess Mary of Burgundy were friends.”

“Yes,” answered Twonette, with an effort not to smile, “she has, at times, honored me with her notice.”

“Out of that fact grows Twonette’s serene dignity,” laughed Yolanda. “On the strength of this acquaintance she quite lords it over us at times, and is always reminding me of the many haughty virtues of her friend as a pattern that I should follow. You see, I am incessantly confronted with this princess.”

I thought it was a pretty piece of acting, though the emphasis of her dislike for the princess was unmistakably genuine.

“The duke has graciously invited us to the castle,” I said, “and I hope to have the honor of seeing the princess.”

When I spoke of the duke’s invitation, I at once caught Yolanda’s attention.

“You will not meet the princess if you go to the castle,” said Yolanda. “She is an ill-natured person, I am told, and is far from gracious to strangers.”



“I do not hope for such an honor,” I replied. “I should like merely to see her before I leave Burgundy. That is all the favor I ask at her hands. She is a lady famed throughout all Europe for her beauty and her gentleness.”

“She doesn’t merit her fame,” responded Yolanda, carefully examining her hands folded in her lap, and glancing nervously toward Max.

“Do you know Her Highness?” I asked.

“I—I have heard enough of her and have often seen her,” she replied. “She usually rides out with her ladies at this hour. From the upper end of the garden you may soon see her come through the Postern gate, if you care to watch.”

“I certainly should like to see her,” I answered, rapidly losing faith in my conclusion that Yolanda was the princess.



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The Castlemans did not offer to move, but Yolanda, springing to her feet, said, "Come," and led the way.

The upper end of the garden, as I have told you, was on the banks of the Cologne at a point where it flowed into the castle moat. The castle wall, sixty feet high at that point, bordered the west side of the garden. The moat curved along the right side, and the river flowed past the upper end. Castleman's house faced south, and stood on the lower end of the strip of ground that lay between the castle wall and the moat. The Postern was perhaps three hundred yards north from the upper end of Castleman's garden. Since it was on the opposite side of the river, one could reach the Postern, from Castleman's house, only by going up to the town bridge and back to the castle by the street that followed the north side of the Cologne.

We all walked to the upper end of the garden, and stood leaning against the low stone wall at the river's edge. We had waited perhaps ten minutes when we heard a blare of trumpets and saw a small cavalcade of ladies and gentlemen ride from the castle and pass over the drawbridge.

"The lady in scarlet is the duchess," said Castleman.

"She is English," remarked Yolanda, "and loves bright colors."

"Which is the princess?" I asked of Yolanda, feeling that I also was acting my part admirably. To my surprise she answered promptly:—

"She in blue with a falcon on her shoulder. Am I not right, uncle?"

"Yes," responded Castleman. Twonette confirmed the statement.

My air-castles fell noiselessly about my head. My dreams vanished like breath from a cold mirror, and the sphinx-like face of my great riddle rose before me in defiance.

After the cavalcade had passed I found myself with Yolanda a dozen paces from the others.

"Fraeulein," I said, "I want to confess I thought you were the Princess Mary of Burgundy."

Yolanda laughed softly.

"I was sure you had some such absurd notion. I supposed you had seen her, and had believed she was Yolanda, the burgher girl; that mistake has often been made. You may see this princess at the castle, and I warn you not to be deceived. I have the great honor, it is said, to resemble Her Highness as one pea resembles another. I have been told that she has heard of the low-born maiden that dares to have a face like hers, and



she doubtless hates me for it, just as I bear her no good-will for the same reason. When two women greatly resemble each other, there is seldom good feeling between them. Each believes the other is stealing something of her personality, and a woman's vanity prompts her to resent it. If you make the mistake with the princess that you made with me, I warn you it will not be so easily corrected."



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My poor riddle! My stony sphinx! My clinging hallucination! Again I should have it with me, stalking at my side by day, lying by me at night, whirling through my brain at all times, and driving me mad with its eternal question, "Who is Yolanda?" The solution of my riddle may be clear to you as I am telling you the story. At least, you may think it is, since I am trying to conceal nothing from you. I relate this history in the order of its happening, and wish, if possible, to place before you the manner in which this question of Yolanda's identity puzzled me. If you will put yourself in my place, you will at once realize how deeply I was affected by this momentous, unanswered, unanswerable question, "Who is Yolanda?" and you will understand why I could not see the solution, however clear you may believe it to be to yourself.

We soon went in to supper and, after the peacock, the pheasants, and the pastries were removed, we were served with a most delicious after-dish in sparkling glass cups. It was frozen orange-water mixed with wine of Burgundy. I had never tasted a dish so palatable. I had dined at the emperor's table in Vienna; I had lived in Italy; I had sojourned in the East, where luxuries are most valued and used, but I had never partaken of a more delicious supper than that which I ate at the house of my rich burgher friend, George Castleman. There might have been a greater showing of plate, though that was not lacking, but there could have been no whiter linen nor more appetizing dishes than those which good Frau Kate gave us that evening.

After the frozen wine had disappeared, a serving-maid brought in a stoneware pan covered with a snowy pastry, made from the whites of eggs and clear sugar. At its entry Yolanda clapped her hands and cried out with childish delight. When the pan was placed before Castleman, she exclaimed:—

"Be careful, uncle! Don't thrust the knife too deep, or you will kill the birds."

Uncle Castleman ran the point of the knife around the outer edge of the crust, and, with a twist of the blade, quickly lifted it from the pan, when out flew a dozen or more wrens. Yolanda's delight knew no bounds. She sprang from her chair, exclaiming:—

"Catch them! Catch them!" and led the way.

She climbed on chairs, tables, and window shelves, and soon had her hands full of the demure little songsters. Max, too, was pursuing the wrens, and Twonette, losing part of her serenity, actually caught a bird. The sport was infectious, and soon fat old Castleman was puffing like a tired porpoise, and sedate old Karl de Pitti was in the chase. Frau Katherine grabbed desperately at a bird now and then, but she was too stout to catch one and soon took her chair, laughing and out of breath. Yolanda screamed with laughter, and after she had caught six or seven birds and put them in the cage provided for them, she asked Max to lift her in his arms that she might reach one resting on a beam near the ceiling. Max gladly complied, and Yolanda, having caught the bird, said:—



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“Now, Sir Max, open your mouth.”

“I have already swallowed one,” said Max, laughing, “and I will swallow none other so long as I live.”

As Max lowered her to the floor her arm fell about his neck for an instant, and the great strong boy trembled at the touch of this weak girl.

Out to the garden we went again after supper, and when dusk began to fall, Yolanda led Max to a rustic seat in the deep shadow of the vines. I could not hear their words, but I learned afterward of the conversation.

When I thought Yolanda was the princess, I was joyful because of the marked favor that she showed Max. When I thought she was a burgher girl, I felt like a fussy old hen with a flock of ducks if he were alone with her. She seemed then a bewitching little ogress slowly devouring my handsome Prince Max. That she was fair, entrancing, and lovable beyond any woman I had ever known, only added to my anxiety. Would Max be strong enough to hold out against her wooing? I don't like to apply the word “wooing” to a young girl's conduct, but we all know that woman does her part in the great system of human mating when the persons most interested do the choosing; and it is right that she should. The modesty that prevents a woman from showing her preference is the result of a false philosophy, and flies in the face of nature. Her right to choose is as good as man's.

If Yolanda's wooing was more pronounced than is usual with a modest young girl, it must be remembered that her situation was different. She knew that Max had been restrained from wooing her only because of the impassable gulf that lay between them. Ardor in Max when marriage was impossible would have been an insult to Yolanda. His reticence for conscience' sake and for her sake was the most chivalric flattery he could have paid her. She saw the situation clearly, and, trusting Max implicitly, felt safe in giving rein to her heart. She did not care to hide from him its true condition. On the contrary she wished him to be as sure of her as she was of him, for after all that would be the only satisfaction they would ever know.

I argued: If Yolanda were the princess, betrothed to the Dauphin, the gulf between her and Max was as impassable as if she were a burgher girl. In neither case could she hope to marry him. Therefore, her girlish wooing was but the outcry of nature and was without boldness.

The paramount instinct of all nature is to flower. Even the frozen Alpine rock sends forth its edelweiss, and the heart of a princess is first the heart of a woman, and must blossom when its spring comes. All the conventions that man can invent will not keep back the flower. All created things, animate and inanimate, have in them an

uncontrollable impulse which, in their spring, reverts with a holy retrospect to the great first principle of existence, the love of reproduction.



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Yolanda's spring had come, and her heart was a flower with the sacred bloom. Being a woman, she loved it and cuddled it for the sake of the pain it brought, as a mother fondles a wayward child. Max, being a man, struggled against the joy that hurt him and, with a sympathy broad enough for two, feared the pain he might bring to Yolanda. So this unresponsiveness in Max made him doubly attractive to the girl, who was of the sort, whether royal or bourgeois, before whom men usually fall.

"I thought you had left me, Sir Max," she said, drawing him to a seat beside her in the shade.

"I promised you I would not go," he responded, "and I would not willingly break my word to any one, certainly not to you, Fraeulein."

"I was angry when I heard you had left the inn," she said, "and I spoke unkindly of you. There has been an ache in my heart ever since that nothing but confession and remission will cure."

"I grant the remission gladly," answered Max. "There was flattery in your anger."

The girl laughed softly and, clasping her hands over her knee, spoke with a sigh.

"I think women have the harder part of life in everything. I again ask you to promise me that you will not leave Peronne within a month."

"I cannot promise you that, Fraeulein," answered Max.

"You will some day—soon, perhaps—know my reasons," said Yolanda, "and if they do not prove good I am willing to forfeit your esteem. That is the greatest hostage I can give."

"I cannot promise," answered Max, stubbornly.

"I offer you another inducement, one that will overmatch the small weight of my poor wishes. I promise to bring you to meet this Mary of Burgundy whom you came to woo. I cannot present you, but I will see that Twonette brings about the meeting. I tell you, as I have already told Sir Karl, that it is said I resemble this princess, so you must not mistake her for me."

When Max told me of this offer I wondered if the girl had been testing him, and a light dawned on me concerning her motives.

"I did not come to woo her," answered Max, "though she may have been a part of my reason for coming. I knew that she was affianced to the Dauphin of France. Her beauty and goodness were known to me through letters of my Lord d'Hymbercourt, written to my dear old friend Karl. Because of certain transactions, of which you do not know and



of which I may not speak, I esteemed her for a time above all women, though I had never seen her. I still esteem her, but—but the other is all past now, Fraeulein, and I do not wish to meet the princess, though the honor would be far beyond my deserts.”

“Why do you not wish to meet her?” asked Yolanda, with an air of pleasure. Max hesitated, then answered bluntly:—

“Because I have met you, Fraeulein. You should not lead me to speak such words.”

Yolanda touched Max’s arm and said frankly:—



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“There can be no harm, Max. If you knew all,—if I could tell you all,—you would understand. The words can harm neither of us.” She hesitated and, with drooping head, continued: “And they are to me as the sun and the south wind to the flowers and the corn. You already know all that is in my heart, or I would not speak so plainly. In all my life I have known little of the sweet touch of human sympathy and love, and, Max, my poor heart yearns for them until at times I feel like the flowers without the sun and the corn without the rain,—as if I will die for lack of them. I am almost tempted to tell you all.”

“Tell me all, Yolanda,” entreated Max, “for I, too, have suffered from the same want, though my misfortune comes from being born to a high estate. If you but knew the lonely, corroding misery of those born to a station above the reach of real human sympathy, you would not envy, you would pity them. You would be charitable to their sins, and would thank God for your lowly lot in life. I will tell you my secret. I am Maximilian of Hapsburg.”

“I have known it since the first day I saw you at Basel,” answered Yolanda.

“I have felt sure at times that you did,” responded Max, “though I cannot think how you learned it. Will you tell me of yourself?”

The girl hung her head and hesitated. Once she lifted her face to speak, but changed her mind.

“Please don’t ask me now. I will tell you soon, but not now, not now. Be patient with me. I do pity you. I do, I do. If we could help each other—but we cannot, and there is no use longing for it. I sometimes fear that your attitude is the right one, and that it is best that we should part and meet no more.”

The proposition to part and meet no more was good in theory, but Max found that the suggestion to make a fact of it frightened him.

“Let us not speak of that now,” he said. “The parting will come soon enough. You will surely deem me cold and unworthy, Fraeulein, but you cannot understand. One may not call a man hard and selfish who plucks out his eye for the sake of a God-imposed duty, or who deliberately thrusts away happiness and accepts a life of misery and heartache because of the chains with which God bound him at his birth.”

“Ah, I do understand, Max; I understand only too well,” answered the girl.

I have often wondered why Max did not suspect that Yolanda was the Princess Mary; but when I considered that he had not my reasons to lead him to that conclusion, I easily understood his blindness, for even I was unconvinced. Had I not overheard Castleman’s conversation with Yolanda on the road to Strasburg, after meeting De



Rose, the supposition that the burgher girl travelling unattended with a merchant and his daughter could possibly be the Princess Mary would have been beyond the credence of a sane man. The thought never would have occurred to me. Even with Castleman's words always ringing in my ears, I was constantly in doubt.



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“There is no reason why one should deliberately hasten the day of one’s thralldom,” said Yolanda, softly. “If one may be free and happy for an hour without breaking those terrible chains of God’s welding, is he not foolish to refuse the small benediction? The memory of it may sweeten the years to come.”

“To woman, such a memory is sweet,” answered Max, striving to steel his heart against the girl. “To men, it is a bitter regret.”

To me he had spoken differently of his pain.

“Then be generous, Little Max, and give me the sweet memory,” said the girl, carried away by the swirling impulse of her heart.

“You will not need it,” answered Max. “Your lot will be different from mine.”

“Yes, it will be different, Max—it will be worse,” she cried passionately, almost in tears. “I think I shall kill myself when you leave Burgundy.” She paused and turned fiercely upon him, “Give me the promise I ask. I demand at least that consolation as my right—as a poor return for what you take from me.”

Max gently took her hand, which was at once lost in his great clasp.

“Fraeulein, I will not leave Burgundy within a month, whatever the consequences may be,” he said tenderly.

“Upon your honor?” she asked, joyously clapping her hands.

“Every promise I make, Fraeulein, is on my honor,” said Max, seriously.

“So it is, Little Max, so it is,” she answered gently. Then they rose and came to the table where Castleman and I were sitting.

Yolanda had gained her point and was joyful over her victory.

Frau Katherine was asleep in a high-backed chair. Twonette slept in a corner of the arbor, her flaxen head embowered in a cluster of leaves and illumined by a stray beam of moonlight that stole between the vines.

“I am going in now. Come, Twonette,” said Yolanda, shaking that plump young lady to arouse her. “Come, Twonette.”

Twonette slowly opened her big blue eyes, but she was slower in awakening.



“Twonette! Twonette!” cried Yolanda, pulling at the girl’s hand. “I declare, if you don’t resist this growing drowsiness you will go down in history as the ‘Eighth Sleeper,’ and will be left snoring on resurrection morn.”

When Twonette had awakened sufficiently to walk, we started from the arbor to the house. As we passed from beneath the vines, the frowning wall of the castle and the dark forms of its huge towers, silhouetted in black against the moon-lit sky, formed a picture of fierce and sombre gloom not soon to be forgotten.

“The dark, frowning castle reminds one of its terrible lord,” said Max, looking up at the battlements.

“It does, indeed,” answered Yolanda, hardly above a whisper. Then we went into the house.

“We hope to see you again for supper to-morrow evening, don’t we, uncle?” said Yolanda, addressing Max and me, and turning to Castleman.



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“Yes—yes, to-morrow evening,” said the burgher, hesitatingly.

Max accepted the invitation and we made our adieux.

At the bridge over the Cologne we met Hymbercourt returning to his house from the castle. While we talked, the cavalcade of ladies and gentlemen that we had watched from Castleman’s garden cantered up the street.

“You will now see the princess,” said Hymbercourt. “She comes with the duke and the duchess. They left the castle at five, and have been riding in the moonlight.”

We stepped to one side of the street as the cavalcade passed, and I asked Hymbercourt to point out the princess.

“She rides between the duke—the tall figure that you may recognize by his long beard—and the page carrying a hooded falcon,” he answered.

Surely this evidence should have put my mind at rest concerning my hallucination that Yolanda was Mary of Burgundy; but when we reached the inn and Max told me of his conversation with Yolanda the riddle again sprang up like a jack-in-the-box. I felt that I was growing weak in mind. Yolanda’s desire to tell Max her secret, and her refusal; her longing for human sympathy, and the lack of it; her wish that he should remain in Peronne for a month—all these made me feel that she was the princess.

I could not help hoping that Hymbercourt was mistaken in pointing out Her Highness. She rode in the shadow of the buildings and the moon was less than half full. Yolanda might have wished to deceive us by pointing out the princess while we watched the cavalcade from Castleman’s garden. The burgher and Twonette might have been drawn into the plot against us by the impetuous will of this saucy little witch. Many things, I imagined, had happened which would have appeared absurd to a sane man—but I was not sane. I wished to believe that Yolanda was the princess, and I could not get the notion out of my head.

Yolanda’s forwardness with Max, if she were Mary of Burgundy, could easily be explained on the ground that she was a princess, and was entitled to speak her mind. I was sure she was a modest girl, therefore, if she were of lowly birth, she would have hesitated to speak so plainly to Max. So, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, I refused to be convinced that Yolanda was not Mademoiselle de Burgundy. I loved the thought so dearly that I could not and would not part with it. That night, while I lay pondering over the riddle, I determined to do no more guessing, and let the Fates solve it for me. They might give me the answer soon if I would “give it up.”

The next evening we went to Castleman’s house, but we did not see Yolanda. Frau Kate said she was indisposed, and we ate supper without her. It was a dull meal,—so

much does a good appetite wait upon good company,—and for the first time I realized fully the marvellous quality of this girl's magic spell. Max, of course, was disappointed, and we walked back to The Mitre in silence.



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CHAPTER XIII

A BATTLE IN MID AIR

A day or two after the supper of the wren pie, Max bought from a pedler a gray falcon most beautifully marked, with a scarlet head and neck, and we sent our squires to Hymbercourt, asking him to solicit from the duke's seneschal, my Lord de Vergy, permission to strike a heron on the marshes. The favor was easily obtained, and we went forth that afternoon to try the new hawk.

The hours passed quickly. The hawk was perfectly trained, and as fierce as a mountain wildcat. Its combats in mid air were most exciting. It would attack its prey and drive it back to a point nearly over our heads. There it waged the battle of death. It had killed three herons, all of which had fallen at our feet, and we were returning home when a fourth rose from the marsh. We were on a side road or path, perhaps five hundred yards from the main highway.

At the moment Max gave wing to his bird, two ladies and three gentlemen came up the road, returning to Peronne, and halted to witness the aerial combat. That they were of the court, I could easily see by their habits, though the distance was so great that I could not distinguish their faces.

Never did hawk acquit itself more nobly. It seemed to realize that it had a distinguished audience. The heron opened the battle desperately, and persisted in keeping its course to the south. The hawk, not ready for battle till the prey should be over our heads, circled round and round the heron, constantly striking, but carefully avoiding the *coup de grace*. After the birds had flown several hundred yards away from us, and were growing small in the distance, the heron, less hardy than its knightly foe, showed signs of weariness and confusion. It changed its course, still flying away from us. This did not suit the hawk, and it continued circling about its faltering prey with a vicious swiftness well calculated to inspire terror. Its movements became so rapid that it appeared to describe a gray circle about the heron. These circles, with the heron as the centre, constantly grew smaller, and after a time we could see that the birds were slowly but surely approaching us.

When they were almost over our heads, the hawk rose with incredible swiftness above its prey, and dropped like a bolt of gray lightning upon the heron. Then followed a struggle that lasted while the birds fell three hundred feet. When within fifty feet of the ground the hawk suddenly spread its wings and stood motionless in mid air, watching its vanquished foe as it fell to a spot within ten yards of where we stood. The movement of the falcon in descending to us can only be described as a settling or gradual sinking, with outstretched, motionless wings. When Max piped, the bird flew to its master's wrist and held down its beak for the hood.



At the close of the battle, the gentlemen of our little audience clapped their hands, and the ladies waved their kerchiefs. Max and I raised our caps and reined our horses toward the main road. As we approached, the ladies and one of the gentlemen resumed their journey toward Cambrai Gate, but the others awaited us. When we reached them we found, to our surprise, Duke Charles and my Lord d'Hymbercourt.



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“Ah, it is our unknown knight who was so eager to fight Count Calli,” exclaimed the duke.

“And still eager, Your Grace,” answered Max. He uncovered upon approaching the duke, but after a moment said, “By Your Grace’s leave,” and resumed his cap. I, of course, remained uncovered. The duke showed surprise and irritation as he answered:

—

“Since you do not see fit to tell us who you are, you should have the grace to remain uncovered.”

Max glanced quickly at the duke’s face, and removed his cap, as he answered, smiling:

—

“If it pleases Your Grace, I will remain uncovered even though I be the Pope himself.”

The duke saw the humor of the situation and replied:—

“One who owns so noble a hawk may remain covered in any man’s presence. Never have I seen so rare a battle in mid air. The soul of Roland himself must inhabit the bird.”

“Will Your Grace accept the hawk?” Max asked.

“Gladly,” answered the duke, “though I hesitate to deprive you of a bird to which you must be attached.”

“Do not hesitate to give me that pleasure, my lord,” answered Max. “The bird is yours. His name is Caesar. I will send him to the castle this evening.”

“Do not send him,” suggested the duke. “Double your kindness by bringing him tomorrow at the noon hour, after the morning audience. We must now follow the princess. Adieu, messieurs.”

The duke touched his cap, and we bent almost to our horses’ manes.

Charles and Hymbercourt rode forward at a brisk canter, and Max and I followed slowly. We entered Cambrai Gate three or four minutes after the duke and the princess.

Max, eager to exhibit his hawk to Yolanda, proposed that we ride directly to Castleman’s house.

While we were crossing the Cologne bridge we saw the duke’s party enter the castle by the Postern, and as we turned a corner toward Castleman’s the ladies looked in our direction and the gentlemen lifted their caps.



“Yolanda will be delighted when she sees my hawk,” said Max.

I did not answer, but I thought that Yolanda would not see the bird that evening, since she had just entered the castle with her father. I was in great glee of spirits; I had at last trapped the young lady. If she were not at Castleman’s house there could be but one answer to my riddle. I did not merely believe that I should not find her there; I knew I should not.

Max and I hitched our horses, and when Castleman’s front door opened, lo! there stood Yolanda. Never in all my life have I taken such a fall.

Somewhat out of breath, Yolanda exclaimed:—

“Ah, Sir Max and Sir Karl, I saw you coming and ran to give you welcome.”

She was in an ecstasy of glee, strangely out of proportion to the event, and there was a look of triumph in her eyes.

After we entered the house Yolanda’s laughter continued, and if it ceased for a moment it broke out again without a pretext. She was always pleased to see Max, and never failed to show her pleasure in laughter more or less; but Max’s presence could hardly account for her high merriment and the satisfaction she seemed to feel, as if a great victory had been gained. My sense of utter defeat had nothing but Yolanda’s peculiar conduct to comfort it.



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To the arbor we went, Yolanda carrying the hawk on her shoulder and caressing it with her cheek. In the garden, when our adventures were related, Yolanda, all excitement, could not keep her chair, but danced delightedly like a child and killed a score of imaginary herons.

She stroked the falcon's wings, and when I said, "My lord the duke has graciously consented to accept the bird," she turned upon Max, exclaiming in mock anger:—

"The duke has graciously consented to accept the bird! I should think it required little grace to accept such a gift, though much to give it. Why don't you give the bird to me, Sir Max, if you are eager to part with it?"

"I would gladly have given it to you, Fraeulein," answered Max, "had I supposed you could use it on the duke's marshes. Only nobles practise the royal sport of falconry."

Yolanda glanced quickly from Max to Castleman, turned her face to the bird upon her shoulder, and said, with a touch of dignity:—

"We receive small favors from court once in a while, don't we, uncle? We are not dirt under the nobles' feet, if we are plain burgher folk, are we, uncle?"

"Don't you know, Fraeulein, what great pleasure I should have taken in giving you the bird?" asked Max.

Yolanda bent her head to one side, placed her cheek against the falcon's wing and pouted. Her pout was prettier even than her smile, and that is saying a great deal.

After a few minutes Yolanda started to walk up the garden path and Max followed her, leaving the Castlemans and me under the arbor. Yolanda, still pouting, carried Caesar on her shoulder, lavishing caresses on the bird that excited Max's bitterest envy. Max spoke at intervals, but she answered only to the bird. After many futile efforts to make her speak, he said:—

"If you won't talk to me, I'll go back to the arbor."

She turned to the bird: "We are willing, Caesar, aren't we—if he can go."

Max laughed and started toward the arbor.

"Tell him to come back, Caesar. Tell him to come back," exclaimed Yolanda.

"I take no orders from a bird," declared Max, with pretended seriousness. Then she turned toward him and her face softened. She smiled and the dimples came, though there was a nervous tremor in the upturned corners of her mouth that belied her bantering air and brought Max quickly to her side. I saw the pantomime, though I did



not hear the words; and I knew that neither Max nor any other man could withstand the quivering smile that played upon Yolanda's lips and the yearning invitation that was in her eyes. If Max did not soon take himself away from Burgundy and lead himself out of this temptation, I feared that in the end he would cast aside his ancient heritage, rend his sacred family ties, and forego everything he possessed in response to this mighty cry of nature, offering the one chance in life for happiness.



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“Now you will give me the bird—I know you will,” exclaimed Yolanda.

A remnant of the pout still hovered about her lips, doing battle with the dimples of a smile.

“I have already given him to the duke,” answered Max.

“Tell the duke the bird escaped, or died suddenly of an apoplexy. Tell him anything you like, but give me the hawk,” said Yolanda.

“Would you have me lie, Fraeulein?” asked Max, amused at her persistency. “I cannot do that, even for you. If you insist upon having the bird, I may go to the duke and withdraw my gift.”

“Would you do that for me, Sir Max?” she asked, eagerly.

“Ay, and a great deal more, Fraeulein. I tremble at the thought of what you could make me do,” he answered.

“In the fiend’s name, let the duke have the bird,” cried Yolanda. “He will pout more than I if you don’t. He is of a sullen nature.”

“Do you know the duke?” asked Max, suspecting for the first time that Yolanda might be more intimate about the court than he had supposed.

“I have heard much of him from those who know him,” answered Yolanda.

So the duke got Caesar.

The next morning Hymbercourt came to the inn to accompany us to the castle. While we were sipping a mug of wine at a garden table, he said:—

“I do not want to be officious in your affairs, but I am convinced that it will be well for you to tell the duke who you are. If you do not see fit to do so, it were wise in you to leave Burgundy at your earliest convenience.”

“I cannot leave within a month,” said Max. I knew the cause of his detention, and, ignoring his remark, turned to Hymbercourt:—

“Do you want to give the reasons for your advice?”

“Yes, I am quite willing,” he answered, “but I would not have my words repeated.”

“Of that you may rest assured,” I answered.



“If you do not tell the duke who you are,” said Hymbercourt, “he will soon learn it from our Italian friends, who have the fiend’s own energy in the pursuit of vengeance. They will discover who you are, and you will lose the advantage of a frank avowal. Duke Charles admires Sir Max, but our liege lord is capricious and can easily fancy that others are plotting to injure him. I am sure that he will now receive the Count of Hapsburg graciously if you tell him that Sir Max is that person. What he would do were he to learn the fact highly colored by his Italians, I cannot say. These mercenaries have a strange influence over His Grace, and there is not a nobleman in Burgundy who does not fear them.”

“How will the duke feel concerning the old proposition of marriage?” I asked.



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“That, I hope, will be of no moment now, since the duke is arranging for the immediate celebration of this marriage with the Dauphin. I am given to understand that His Grace, the Bishop of Cambrai, secretary to the duke, has received orders to draught a letter to King Louis expressing our lord’s pleasure. King Louis is so eager for the marriage, which will once more bring Burgundy to the French kingship, that Duke Charles deems it sufficiently courteous to express his intentions to Louis, rather than to request the king’s compliance. The duke’s contempt for the king of France is so great that he causes the letter to be written in English, a language which Charles loves because of the English blood in his veins, and which Louis, with good reason, hates.”

“Has this letter been despatched?” I asked, concealing as well as I could my deep concern.

Max heard Hymbercourt’s statement without even a show of interest. Had he suspected that Hymbercourt was speaking of Yolanda’s marriage, there surely would have been a demonstration.

“No,” answered Hymbercourt, “the letter has not been sent, but the duke will despatch it at once. It will probably be the chief business of this morning’s audience. The duke wants the marriage celebrated before he leaves for Switzerland. That will be within three or four weeks. I am not informed as to the details of the ceremony, but I suppose the princess will be taken to St. Denis, and will there be married. The unfortunate princess, doubtless, has not yet been told of her impending fate, though she may have heard of it by rumor. There will be tears and trouble when she learns of it, for she has a strong dash of her father’s temper. But—” He shrugged his shoulders as if to say that her tears would count for nothing.

Hymbercourt’s words took the heart out of me; and when he left us for a moment, I urged Max to leave Burgundy at once.

“I must see Yolanda and ask her to release me from my promise before I go,” he said.

“You are surely not so weak as to allow a burgher girl to hold you?” I asked.

“The girl does not hold me,” he answered. “I was so weak as to give my promise, and that holds me.”

“She will give you your release if you demand it,” I suggested.

“If she does, I will go with you to-morrow. It is time that we were out of Burgundy. I will forego even my combat with Calli to get away. I should not have given Yolanda my promise; but she is so persuasive, and I pity her, and—and, oh! Karl, I—the trouble is, I love her, and it is like death to part from her forever. That is my weakness.”

The poor, suffering boy leaned forward on the table and buried his face in his arms.



“That isn’t your weakness, Max, it’s your strength,” I responded. “Few men are so unfortunate as to escape it. God must pity those who do. It may be well to tell the duke who you are. If he is displeased, we may leave Burgundy at once. If he receives you graciously, we may remain and you may fight this Calli. That is the one duty that holds you in Peronne.”



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My heart was hardened with years, and its love of just vengeance was stronger than young Max could feel. Besides, he was possessed by a softer passion; and though he felt it his pleasant duty to fight Calli, vengeance held second place in his breast.

Hymbercourt returned, and we started for the castle accompanied by our squires; all riding in fine state.

We arrived at the great hall before the duke had arisen from the morning audience, and waited unobserved in the back part of the chamber. Our Irish squire, Michael, carried Caesar, hooded and belled. He was held by a golden chain that we had bought from a goldsmith, notwithstanding our purse was growing dangerously light.

There was a great stir in the hall as we entered. The courtiers were buzzing like a swarm of bees discussing a new queen. Evidently matters of importance had been under consideration. Campo-Basso, my Lord de Vergy, seneschal of Burgundy, and the Bishop of Cambrai, clerk to the duke, were standing on the second step of the dais, each with hand resting on knee, and leaning eagerly toward the duke. Charles and these councillors were speaking in low tones, and the courtiers of less degree were taking advantage of the intermission in public business to settle the great question among themselves. Each petty courtier felt that he could offer a suggestion that would be of great value, could he but gain the duke's ear.

After a little time, Charles saw Hymbercourt with us, and sent a page to fetch him. Hymbercourt left us, and soon we saw him in whispered conversation with the duke. Soon after Hymbercourt had gone to the ducal throne, Calli, with two Italians, stopped four paces from where we were standing. He gazed insolently at Max, and said in Italian to his companions:—

“There is the loutish outlander, who boasted before the duke that he would fight me. He is a big callow fellow, and it would be a shame to stick the swine.”

Max, who understood the Italian language sufficiently to grasp Calli's meaning, flushed angrily, but I touched his arm and he turned his back upon the fellow. Then I spoke in tones that Calli could not fail to hear:—

“Never turn your face from a cowardly foe, Max. He will, if he can, stab you in the back. Your revenge will come when you send his soul to hell.”

Calli grasped his dagger hilt and muttered something about the duke's presence. The incident determined us in the course Max should take. He should tell the duke who he was, remain in Burgundy to kill this fellow Calli, and to meet such other fortune as the Fates might have in store for him.



Hymbercourt and the duke spoke together for the space of five minutes, evidently discussing a parchment that Charles held in his hand. Then the duke resumed his seat, and handed the parchment to the Bishop of Cambrai, when all save His Reverence stepped from the dais to the floor. A herald commanded silence, and the bishop spoke:



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“It is the will of our most gracious lord that I announce to the court the impending marriage of Her Grace, the Princess, Mademoiselle de Burgundy, to the princely Dauphin of France, son to our lord’s royal ally, King Louis. His Grace of Burgundy hopes within three weeks to open his campaign against the Swiss, and it is his intention to cause the marriage ceremony to take place before his departure. When the details have been arranged, they will be announced to the court.”

The bishop had barely stopped speaking when the shutter in the chancel of the ladies’ gallery above the throne opened, and a voice rang through the vast audience hall, like the tones of an alarm bell:—

“Make one more announcement, please, my Lord Bishop. Say that if this wondrous ceremony is to come off within three weeks, the Dauphin of France must be content with a dead bride.”

No one saw the face of the speaker. The shutter closed, and a deep silence fell upon the room. The duke sprang angrily to his feet; his face was like a thunder-cloud. He looked toward the ladies’ gallery, and stood for a moment like the incarnation of wrath. A puzzled expression followed the glare of anger; and within a moment he laughed, and waved his hands to the heralds, directing them to cry the rising. The audience was dismissed, and the courtiers left the hall, laughing in imitation of their lord and master.

Nothing could be more indicative of cruelty than the laughter that followed the passionate protest of the unhappy princess. To the duke, and of course to his courtiers, the girl’s suffering and the fate that was in store for her were mere matters of mirth. They laughed at her pain as savages laugh at the agonies of a tortured victim.

I was so startled by the cry of the princess that for a time I could not think coherently. My first clear thought was of Yolanda. If she were the princess, this sacrifice that is practised without a protest throughout the world had come home to me, for Yolanda had nestled in my heart. That she, the gentle, the tender, the passionate, the sensitive, should be the victim of this legalized crime; that she, innocent of all fault, save that she had been born a girl, should be condemned to misery because the laws of chivalry and the laws of God, distorted by men to suit their purposes, declared her to be the chattel of her father, moved me as I was never moved before. My sympathy for this rare, sweet girl, so capable of joy, so susceptible to pain, almost brought tears to my eyes; for I could not help thinking that she was the suffering princess.

When the courtiers had left the great hall Hymbercourt, Max, and I approached the duke. Hymbercourt and I made obeisance on bended knee, but Max saluted the duke with a low bow. After the duke had spoken, Max said:—

“I hope Your Grace has not forgotten your promise to honor me by accepting the falcon you admired yesterday.”



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"I have not, my unknown friend," answered the duke.

Max took the bird from Michael and offered it to Charles, who accepted the gift graciously. I looked toward Hymbercourt and he, understanding my unspoken word, again bent his knee before the duke:—

"My gracious lord, it is the desire of this young knight that he be presented to you in due form under his own name and title, though he would humbly ask that he be permitted to retain the name by which he is known in Burgundy. His reasons for so doing are good, though they would not interest Your Grace. Have I my lord's permission to present him?"

"In God's name, yes!" exclaimed the duke, stirred by some irritation, but spurred by curiosity.

"My lord," said Hymbercourt, speaking to the duke and extending his hand toward Max, "it is my great honor to present to Your Grace his highness, Maximilian, Count of Hapsburg."

"By the just God, my lord, you certainly have given us a surprise," said the duke, stepping back and making no offer of his hand to Max. He passed the falcon to a page, and continued, "What business have these men at my court?"

"None, Your Grace, absolutely none," answered Max, standing proudly before the duke and steadfastly meeting his gaze. "It was my desire to see the world and to learn something of its people before I undertook to govern my own. My country is not rich and fat like this great land of Burgundy. I have neither the means nor the inclination to travel in state; so my dear friend and instructor, Sir Karl de Pitti, undertook to guide me and teach me in this journey to the outer world. I would rather have missed seeing all other countries than Burgundy, and of all the princes of the world Your Grace was and is to me the most interesting. Your hand is the strongest, your courage the bravest, and your land the richest in Europe. We heard at Metz that you were here in Peronne; and now, my lord, you understand what business I have in Burgundy."

I had never given the boy credit for so much adroitness. What the duke's intentions were, immediately after Hymbercourt presented Max, I could not have told, but his words sounded ominous, and the expression of his face was anything but pleasant. Max, though not quarrelsome, was not given to the soft answer that turneth away wrath; but on this occasion discretion came to his rescue, and he made the soft answer with a dignity and boldness that won Charles's respect. The duke's face softened into a half-smile,—if anything so hard as his face can be said to soften,—and he offered his hand to Max. He withdrew it almost instantly from Max's grasp, and said:—



“Are you sure my armament against Switzerland is no part of the reason for your presence in Burgundy?” Like all highly pugnacious men, he was suspicious. “I have been told your father is a friend to the Swiss.”

“Does Your Grace mean to ask if I am here in the capacity of a spy, as Calli has charged?” asked Max, lifting his head and looking boldly into the duke’s face.



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"I do not know," said the duke, hesitatingly. "I do not say you are. I do not think you are, but—"

"I am glad Your Grace does not think we are spies, and am pleased to believe that you would not put so great an insult upon us," answered Max, "else we should ask permission to leave Burgundy at once. I am sure my lord knows we are not spies. If Your Lordship had a son, would you send him forth as a spy for the sake of Burgundy? Much less would you do it for another land. Your Grace is misinformed. My father is not a friend to the Swiss; neither does he hate them, though perhaps he has better cause to do so than has Your Grace. Your quarrel with the Swiss is over a few cart-loads of sheepskins. These same Swiss took from my father our ancient homestead, the old Castle of Hapsburg, and the surrounding territory of Aargau."

"I have heard of the spoliation, and have often wondered at your father's meek submission," said the duke, with an almost imperceptible sneer. Like Richard the Lion-hearted, of England, butchery was this duke's trade, and he despised a man who did not practise it on all possible occasions. A pretext for a quarrel is balm to the soul of a hero.

"The mountains of Switzerland, my lord, are the graveyard of foreign soldiers," Max replied. "Old Hapsburg Castle is a mere hawk's crag, as its name implies, and the half-score of mountain peaks my father lost with it are not worth the life of his humblest subject. He loves his people, and would not shed their blood to soothe his wounded pride. The man who makes war should fight in the front rank."

"There is where I fight, young sir," returned Charles.

"The world knows that fact, my lord," responded Max. "My father cannot fight at the head of his army, therefore, he makes war only in defence of his people's hearths. It is possible that after consulting with my friend, Sir Karl, I may ask the honor of serving with Your Grace against these Swiss who despoiled my house. Is Your Grace now satisfied that we are not Swiss spies? And are we welcome to sojourn for a time in Peronne? Or shall we leave Burgundy and return to my father in Styria, to tell him that you turned a guest and a friend from your door?"

"You are very welcome, Sir Count, and you, Sir Karl," answered the duke, giving his right hand to Max and familiarly offering me his left. This hard duke had been beaten into a gracious mood by Max's adroit mixture of flattery and boldness.

A soft answer may turn away wrath, but it may also involve the disagreeable necessity of turning the other cheek. If it be not tempered by spirit, it is apt to arouse contempt. The duke remained silent for the space of a minute or two. He was evidently struggling to suppress a good impulse. Then he turned to me and said, laughingly:—



“By my soul, Sir Karl, you have brought us a Roland and a Demosthenes in one. Where learned you your oratory, Sir Count?”



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“From a just cause, my lord,” quickly retorted Max.

“I fear I have had the worst of this encounter, Hymbercourt,” said the duke, smiling, “and I see nothing left for me but apology.”

“I sincerely hope Your Grace will not embarrass us by apologizing,” said Max.

Charles hesitated, gave a short laugh, and apologized by placing his hand on Max’s shoulder.

“Let us go into the little parley room,” he said. “Hymbercourt, lead the way with Sir Max; Sir Karl and I will follow presently.”

Max and Hymbercourt passed out at a small door near the throne, and the duke turned to me:—

“I like the boy’s modest boldness, and I hope that I may induce him and you to accompany me against the Swiss. I would not accept his offer made on the spur of the moment, but if, on talking it over with him, you make up your minds to come with me, I will make it well worth your while. This war will be but a May-day outing. We’ll speak on the subject again. Meantime, I understand that you and Sir Max wish to remain incognito at Peronne?”

“We do, Your Grace,” I responded. “I fear it will be impossible to accept the honor you have offered, but, as you have graciously said, we will, if you wish, speak of it again.”

“I am content,” said the duke. “Let us follow Hymbercourt.”

CHAPTER XIV

SIR KARL MEETS THE PRINCESS

The duke and I passed through the door by which Max and Hymbercourt had left the hall, and entered a narrow passageway eight or ten yards long, having two doors at the farther end. The door to the right, I soon learned, led to the little parley room where Max and Hymbercourt had gone. The door to the left opened into a staircase that led to the apartments of the duchess. A narrow flight of stone steps that led from the ladies’ gallery opened into the passage, and, just as the duke entered in advance of me, two ladies emerged from the stairs. They did not see me in the shadow, and supposed that the duke was alone. The taller, who I soon learned was the duchess, hastened down the passage and through the door leading to her apartments. The smaller I at once recognized. She was Yolanda.



“Father, you cannot mean to send me into France,” she cried, trying to detain the duke. “Kill me, father, if you will, but do not send me to that hated land. I shall not survive this marriage a fortnight, and if I die, Burgundy will go to our cousin of Bourbon.”

“Don’t hinder me, daughter,” returned the duke, impatiently. “Don’t you see we are not alone?”

Yolanda turned in surprise toward me, and the duke said:—

“Go by the right door, Sir Karl. I will be with you at once. I wish to speak with the duchess.”

He hurriedly followed his wife and left me alone with Yolanda.

“Fraeulein, my intrusion was unintentional,” I stammered. “I followed the duke at his request.”



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“Fraeulein!” exclaimed the girl, lifting her head and looking a very queen in miniature. “Fraeulein! Do you know, sir, to whom you speak?”

“I beg your pardon, most gracious princess,” I replied. “Did you not command me to address you as Fraeulein or Yolanda?”

“My name, sir, is not Yolanda. You have made a sad mistake,” said the princess, drawing herself up to her full height. Then I thought of Yolanda’s words when she told me that she resembled the princess as one pea resembles another.

The girl trembled, and even in the dim light I could see the gleam of anger in her eyes. I was endeavoring to frame a suitable apology when she spoke again:—

“Fraeulein! Yolanda! Sir, your courtesy is scant to give me these names. I do not know you, and—did I not tell you that if you made this mistake with the princess you would not so easily correct it? That I—you—Blessed Virgin! I have betrayed myself. I knew I should. I knew I could not carry it out.”

She covered her face with her hands and began to weep, speaking while she sobbed:

—
“My troubles are more than I can bear.”

I wished to reassure her at once:—

“Most Gracious Princess—Yolanda—your secret is safe with me. You are as dear to me as if you were my child. You have nestled in my heart and filled it as completely as one human being can fill the heart of another. I would gladly give my poor old life to make you happy. Now if you can make use of me, I am at your service.”

“You will not tell Sir Max?” she sobbed.

She was no longer a princess. She was the child Yolanda.

“As I hope for salvation, no, I will not tell Sir Max,” I responded.

“Sometime I will give you my reasons,” she said.

“I wish none,” I replied.

After a short pause, she went on, still weeping gently:—

“If I must go to France, Sir Karl, you may come there to be my Lord Chamberlain. Perhaps Max should not come, since I shall be the wife of another, and—and there would surely be trouble. Max should not come.”



She stepped quickly to my side. Her hand fell, and she grasped mine for an instant under the folds of her cloak; then she ran from the passage, and I went to the room where Max and Hymbercourt were waiting.

After a few moments the duke joined us. Wine was served, but Charles did not drink. On account of the excessive natural heat of his blood he drank nothing but water. His Grace was restless; and, although there was no lack of courtesy, I fancied he did not wish us to remain. So after our cups were emptied I asked permission to depart. The duke acquiesced by rising, and said, turning to Max:—

“May we not try our new hawk together this afternoon?”

“With pleasure, Your Grace,” responded Max.

“Then we’ll meet at Cambrai Gate near the hour of two,” said the duke.



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"I thank Your Grace," said Max, bowing.

On our way back to the inn, I told Max of my meeting with the princess, and remarked upon her resemblance to Yolanda.

"You imagined the resemblance, Karl. There can be but one Yolanda in the world," said Max. "Her Highness, perhaps, is of Yolanda's complexion and stature,—so Yolanda has told me,—and your imagination has furnished the rest."

"Perhaps that is true," said I, fearing that I had already spoken too freely.

So my great riddle was at last solved! The Fates had answered when I "gave it up." I was so athrill with the sweet assurance that Yolanda was the princess that I feared my secret would leap from my eyes or spring unbidden from my lips.

I cast about in my mind for Yolanda's reasons in wishing to remain Yolanda to Max, and I could find none save the desire to win his heart as a burgher girl. That, indeed, would be a triumph. She knew that every marriageable prince in Europe coveted her wealth and her estates. The most natural desire that she or any girl could have would be to find a worthy man who would seek her for her own sake. As Yolanda, she offered no inducement save herself. The girl was playing a daring game, and a wise one.

True, there appeared to be no possibility that she could ever have Max for her husband, even should she win his heart as Yolanda. In view of the impending and apparently unavoidable French marriage, the future held no hope. But when her day of wretchedness should come, she would, through all her life, take comfort from the sweetest joy a woman can know—that the man she loved loved her because she was her own fair self, and for no other reason. There would, of course, be the sorrow of regret, but that is passive, while the joy of memory is ever active.

When Max and I had departed, the duke turned to Hymbercourt and said:—

"The bishop's letter is not sufficiently direct. It is my desire to inform King Louis that this marriage shall take place at once—now! Now! It will effectually keep Louis from allying with Bourbon and Lorraine, or some other prince, while I am away from home. They all hate me, but not one of the cowards would say 'Booh!' unless the others were back of him. A word from Louis would kindle rebellion in Liege and Ghent. This war with Switzerland is what Louis has waited for; and when I march to the south, he will march into Burgundy from the west unless he has a counter motive."

"That is but too true, my lord," said Hymbercourt.

"But if my daughter marries the Dauphin, Louis will look upon Burgundy as the property of the French kingship in the end, and the marriage will frighten Bourbon and Lorraine to our feet once more. This hypocrite, Louis, has concocted a fine scheme to absorb



Burgundy into his realm by this marriage with my daughter. But I'll disappoint his greed. I'll whisper a secret in your ear, Hymbercourt,—a secret to be told to no one else. I'll execute this treaty of marriage now, and will use my crafty foe for my own purposes so long as I need him; but when I return from Switzerland, I will divorce my present duchess and take a fruitful wife who will bear me a son to inherit Burgundy; then King Louis may keep the girl for his pains.”



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The duke laughed, and seemed to feel that he was perpetrating a great joke on his rival.

“But your brother-in-law, Edward of England, may object to having his sister divorced,” suggested Hymbercourt.

“In that case we’ll take a page from King Louis’ book,” answered Charles. “We’ll use gold, Hymbercourt, gold! I shall not, however, like Louis, buy Edward’s ministers! They are too expensive. I’ll put none of my gold in Hastings’s sleeve. I’ll pension Shore’s wife, and Edward will not trouble himself about his sister. He prefers other men’s sisters. Do not fear, Hymbercourt; the time has come to meet Louis’ craft with craft.”

“And Your Grace’s unhappy daughter is to be the shuttlecock, my lord?” suggested Hymbercourt.

“She will serve her purpose in the weal of Burgundy, as I do. I give my life to Burgundy. Why should not this daughter of mine give a few tears? But her tears are unreasonable. Why should she object to this marriage? Even though God should hereafter give me a son, who should cut the princess out of Burgundy, will she not be queen of France? What more would the perverse girl have? By God, Hymbercourt, it makes my blood boil to hear you, a man of sound reason, talk like a fool. I hear the same maudlin protest from the duchess. She, too, is under the spell of this girl, and mourns over her trumped-up grief like a parish priest at a bishop’s funeral.”

“But, my lord, consider the creature your daughter is to marry,” said Hymbercourt. “He is but a child, less than fourteen years of age, and is weak in mind and body. Surely, it is a wretched fate for your daughter.”

“I tell you the girl is perverse,” interrupted the duke. “She would raise a storm were the Dauphin a paragon of manliness. He is a poor, mean wretch, whom she may easily rule. His weakness will be her advantage. She is strong enough, God knows, and wilful enough to face down the devil himself. If there is a perverse wench on all the earth, who will always have her own way by hook or by crook, it is this troublesome daughter of mine. She has the duchess wound around her finger. I could not live with them at Ghent, and sent them here for the sake of peace. When she is queen of France she will also be king of that realm—and in God’s name what more could the girl ask?”

“But, my lord, let me beg you to consider well this step before you take it. I am sure evil will come of it,” pleaded Hymbercourt.

“I have considered,” answered the duke. “Let me hear no more of this rubbish. Two women dinning it into my ears morning, noon, and night are quite enough for my peace of mind. I hear constantly, ‘Dear father, don’t kill me. Spare your daughter,’ and ‘Dear my lord, I beg you not to sacrifice the princess, whom I so love.’ God’s mercy! I say I am tired of it! This marriage shall take place at once! Now, now, now, do you hear,



Hymbercourt? Tell the bishop to write this letter in English. We will make the draught as bitter as possible for Louis. He hates the sight of an English word, and small wonder. Direct the bishop to make the letter short and to the point. Tell him to say the marriage shall take place *now*. Have him use the word *now*. Do you understand?"



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“Yes, my lord,” answered Hymbercourt.

“Order him to fetch the missive immediately to the apartments of the duchess. It shall be read, signed, and despatched in the presence of my daughter and my wife, so that they may know what they have to expect. I’ll see that I’m bothered no more with their tears and their senseless importunities.”

“I’ll carry out your instructions,” said Hymbercourt, bowing and taking his leave.

The duke went to his wife’s parlor and fell moodily into a chair. The duchess was sitting on a divan, and the princess was weeping in her arms. After a long silence, broken only by Mary’s half-smothered sobs, the duke turned sharply upon the women:—

“For the love of God, cease your miserable whimpering,” growled his lordship. “Is not my life full of vexations without this deluge of tears at home? A whimpering woman will do more to wear out the life of a man than a score of battling enemies. Silence, I say; silence, you fools!”

Mary and the duchess were now unable to control themselves. Charles rose angrily and, with his clenched hand raised for a blow, strode across the room to the unhappy women. Clinging to each other, the princess and Duchess Margaret crouched low on the divan. Then this great hero, whom the world worships and calls “The Bold,” bent over the trembling women and upbraided them in language that I will not write.

“God curse me if I will have my life made miserable by a pair of fools,” cried the duke. “I am wretched enough without this useless annoyance. Enemies abroad and disobedience in my own family will drive me mad!”

The women slipped from the divan to the floor at the duke’s feet, and clung to each other. The duchess covered the princess to protect her from the duke’s blow, and, alas! took it herself. Charles stepped back, intending to kick his daughter, but the duchess again threw herself on Yolanda and again received the blow. By that time the duke’s fury was beyond all measure, and he stooped to drag his wife from Yolanda that he might vent his wrath upon the sobbing girl. The duchess, who was a young, strong woman, sprang to her feet and placed herself between Yolanda, lying on the floor, and the infuriated duke.

“You shall not touch the child, my lord!” cried the duchess. “Though she is your child, you shall not touch her if I can help it. Twice, my lord, you have almost killed your daughter in your anger, and I have sworn to prevent a recurrence of your brutality or to die in my attempt to save her.”

She snatched a dagger from her bosom, and spoke calmly: “Now come, my lord; but when you do so, draw your dagger, for, by the Virgin, I will kill you if you do not kill me,



before you shall touch that girl. Before you kill me, my lord, remember that my brother of England will tear you limb from limb for the crime, and that King Louis will gladly help him in the task. Come, my husband! Come, my brave lord! I am but a weak woman. You may easily kill me, and I will welcome death rather than life with you. When I am out of the way, you may work your will on your daughter. Because I am your wife, my brother has twice saved you from King Louis. You owe your domain and your life to me. I should sell my life at a glorious price if my death purchased your ruin. Come, my lord!"



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The duke paused with his hand on his dagger; but he knew that his wife's words were true, and he realized that his ruin would follow quickly on the heels of her death.

"You complain that the world and your own family are against you, my lord," said the duchess. "It is because you are a cruel tyrant abroad and at home. It is because you are against the world and against those whom you should protect and keep safe from evil. The fault is with you, Charles of Burgundy. You have spoken the truth. The world hates you, and this girl—the tenderest, most loving heart on earth—dreads you as her most relentless enemy. If I were in your place, my lord, I would fall upon my sword."

Beaten by his wife's just fury, this great war hero walked back to his chair, and the duchess tenderly lifted Mary to the divan.

"He will not strike you, child," said Margaret. Then she fell to kissing Yolanda passionately, and tears came to her relief.

Poor Yolanda buried her face in her mother's breast and tried to smother her sobs. Charles sat mumbling blasphemous oaths. At the expiration of half an hour, a page announced the Bishop of Cambrai and other gentlemen. The duke signified that they were to be admitted; and when the bishop entered the room, Charles, who was smarting from his late defeat, spoke angrily:—

"By the good God, my Lord Bishop, you are slow! Does it require an hour to write a missive of ten lines? If you are as slow in saving souls as in writing letters, the world will go to hell before you can say a mass."

"The wording was difficult, Your Grace," replied the bishop obsequiously. "The Lord d'Hymbercourt said Your Grace wished the missive to be written in English, which language my scrivener knows but imperfectly. After it was written I received Your Lordship's instructions to use the word 'now,' so I caused the letter to be rewritten that I might comply with your wishes."

"Now" is a small word, but in this instance it was a great one for Yolanda, as you shall soon learn.

"Cease explaining, my Lord Bishop, and read me the missive," said the duke, sullenly.

The bishop unfolded the missive, which was in a pouch ready for sealing. Yolanda stopped sobbing that she might hear the document that touched so closely on her fate. Her tear-stained face, with its childlike pathos, but served to increase her father's anger.

"Read, my Lord Bishop! Body of me, why stand you there like a wooden quintain?" exclaimed the duke. "By all the gods, you are slow! Read, I say!"

"With pleasure, my lord," answered the bishop.

“To His Majesty, King Louis of France, Charles, Duke of Burgundy and Count of Charolois, sends this Greeting:—

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“His Grace of Burgundy would recommend himself to His Majesty of France, and would beg to inform the most puissant King Louis that the said Charles, Duke of Burgundy, will march at the head of a Burgundian army within three weeks from the date of these presents, against the Swiss cantons, with intent to punish the said Swiss for certain depredations. Therefore, the said Charles, Duke of Burgundy and Count of Charolois, begs that His Majesty of France will now move toward the immediate consummation of the treaty existing between Burgundy and France, looking to the marriage of the Princess Mary, Mademoiselle de Burgundy, with the princely Dauphin, son to King Louis; and to these presents said Charles, Duke of Burgundy, requests the honor of an early reply.

“We recommend Your Majesty to the protection of God, the Blessed Virgin, and the Saints.”

“Words, words, my Lord Bishop,” said Charles. “Why waste them on a graceless hypocrite?”

“I thought only to be courteous,” returned the bishop.

“Why should we show King Louis courtesy?” asked the duke. “Is it because we give him our daughter to be the wife of his bandy-shanked, half-witted son? There is small need for courtesy, my Lord Bishop. We could not insult this King Louis, should we try, while he sees an advantage to be gained. Give me the letter, and I will sign it, though I despise your whimpering courtesy, as you call it.”

Charles took the letter, and, going to a table near a window, drew up a chair.

“Give me a quill,” he said, addressing the bishop. “Did you not bring one, my lord?”

“Your Grace—Your Grace,” began the bishop, apologetically.

“Do you think I am a snivelling scrivener, carrying quill and ink-well in my gown?” asked the duke. “Go to your parlor and fetch ink and quill,” said Charles, pointing with the folded missive toward Yolanda.

“A page will fetch the quill and ink, my lord,” suggested the duchess.

“Go!” cried the duke, turning angrily on the princess. Yolanda left the room, weeping, and hastened up the long flight of steps to her parlor. It was the refinement of cruelty in Charles to send Yolanda for the quill with which he was to sign the instrument of her doom.

Still weeping, Yolanda hurried back with the writing materials, but before entering the room she stopped at the door to dry her tears and stay her sobs. When she entered, she said:—



“There is the quill, father, and there is the ink.”

She placed them before the duke and stood trembling with one hand on the table. After a moment she spoke in a voice little above a whisper:—“You will accomplish nothing, my lord, my father, by sending the letter. I shall die before this marriage can take place. I am willing to obey you, but, father, I shall die. Ah, father, pity me.”

She fell upon her knees before the duke and tried to put her hands about his shoulders. He repulsed her, and, taking up the quill, signed the letter. After he had affixed his signature and had sealed the missive with his private seal, he folded the parchment and handed it to the bishop, saying:—



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“Seal the pouch, my lord, and send Byron, the herald, here to receive our personal instructions.”

“The herald has not yet returned from Cambrai, my lord,” said De Vergy, who stood near by. “He is expected between the hours of five and six this evening.”

“Leave the letter, my lord,” said Charles, “and send Byron to me when he arrives. I shall be here at six o’clock to give him full instructions.”

The letter was deposited in a small iron box on the table, and the duke left the room, followed closely by the lords and pages.

CHAPTER XV

THE CROSSING OF A “T”

Yolanda and her stepmother remained on the divan in silence for fully an hour after the duke had left. The duchess was first to speak.

“Be resigned, sweet one, to your fate. It is one common to women. It was my hard fate to be compelled to marry your father. It was your mother’s, poor woman, and it killed her. God wills our slavery, and we must submit. We but make our fate harder by fighting against it.”

Yolanda answered with convulsive sobs, but after a while she grew more calm.

“Is there nothing I can do to save myself?” she asked.

“No, sweet one,” answered the duchess.

“Has God put a curse upon women, mother?” asked Yolanda.

“Alas! I fear He has,” answered Margaret. “The Holy Church teaches us that He punishes us for the sin of our mother Eve, but though He punishes us, He loves us, and we are His children. He knows what is best for us here and hereafter.”

“He certainly is looking to my *future* good, if at all,” sighed Yolanda. “But I do believe in God’s goodness, mother, and I am sure He will save me. Holy Virgin! how helpless a woman is.” She began to weep afresh, and the duchess tried to soothe her.

“I believe I will pray to the Virgin. She may help us,” said the girl, in a voice that was plaintively childlike.

“It is a pious thought, Mary,” answered the duchess.



Yolanda slipped from the divan to the floor, and, kneeling, buried her face in her mother's lap. She prayed aloud:—

“Blessed Virgin, Thou seest my dire need. Help me. My prayer is short, but Thou, Blessed Lady, knowest how fervent it is.” The duchess crossed herself, bowed her head, and murmured a fervent “Amen.”

Yolanda rose from her prayer with a brighter face, and exclaimed almost joyfully:—

“It was impious in me to doubt God's love, mother. I do believe I heard the Blessed Virgin say, ‘Help is at hand.’ At least, I felt her words, mother.”



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Yolanda moved about the room aimlessly for several minutes and by chance stopped at the table. She started to take up the quill and ink-well to carry them back to her parlor, which was in Darius (Darius was the name of the tower that rose from the castle battlements immediately above Castleman's House under the Wall), and her eyes rested on the small iron box in which the letter to King Louis had been deposited. An unconscious motive, perhaps it was childish curiosity, prompted her to examine the missive. She took the pouch from the box and found it unsealed. She listlessly drew out the missive and began to read, when suddenly her face grew radiant with joy. She ran excitedly to her mother, who was sitting on the divan, and exclaimed:—

“Oh! mother, the sweet Blessed Virgin has sent help!”

“In what manner, child?” asked the duchess, fondling Yolanda's hair while the girl knelt beside her.

“Here, mother, here! Here is help; here in this very letter that was intended to be my undoing. I cannot wait to thank the Holy Mother.” She crossed herself and buried her face in her mother's lap while she thanked the Virgin.

“What is it, Mary, and where is the help?” asked Margaret, fearing the girl's mind had been touched by her troubles.

“Listen!” cried Yolanda.

Her excitement was so great that she could hardly see the words the bishop's scrivener had written.

“Listen, listen! Father in this letter first tells the king that he—that is, father, you understand—is going to war with Lorraine—no, with Bourbon. I am wrong again. Father is so constantly warring with some one that I cannot keep track of his enemies—against the Swiss. See, mother, it is the Swiss. He says he will go—will start—will begin the war—no, I am wrong again. I can hardly see the words. He says he will march at the head of a Burgundian army—poor soldiers, I pity them—within three weeks. Ah, how short that time seemed when I heard the letter read an hour ago. How long it is now! I wish he would march to-morrow. Three long weeks!”

“But, my dear, how will that help you?” asked the duchess. “In what manner will—”

“Do not interrupt me, mother, but hear what follows. Father says he will march in three weeks and 'begs that His Majesty of France will *now* move toward the immediate consummation of the treaty existing between Burgundy and France looking to the marriage of the Princess, Mademoiselle de Burgundy, with the princely Dauphin, son to King Louis.' In that word 'now,' mother, lies my help.”

“In what manner does help lie in the word 'now,' child?” asked the duchess.



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“In this, mother. ‘Now’ is a little word of three letters, n-o-v. See, mother, the letter ‘v’ is not perfectly made. We will extend the first prong upward, cross it and make ‘t’ of it, using the second prong as a flourish. Then the letter will read, ‘begs that His Majesty of France will *not* move toward the immediate consummation of the treaty.’ What could be more natural than that my father should wish nothing of importance to occur until after this war with Switzerland is over? The French king, of course, will answer that he will not move in the matter, and his letter will throw father into a delightful frenzy of rage. It may even induce him to declare war against France, and to break off the treaty of marriage when he returns from Switzerland. He has often done battle for a lesser cause. It will at least prevent the marriage for the present. It may prevent it forever.”

“Surely that cannot be; King Louis will immediately explain the mistake to your father,” suggested Margaret.

“But father, you know, will not listen to an explanation if he fears it may avert blows,” returned Yolanda; “and he will be sure not to believe King Louis whose every word he doubts. I shall enjoy King Louis’ efforts to explain. ‘Hypocrite,’ ‘liar,’ ‘coward,’ ‘villain,’ will be among father’s most endearing terms when speaking of His Majesty. If by chance the error of ‘not’ for ‘now’ be discovered, the Bishop of Cambrai and father will swear it is King Louis who has committed the forgery. But should the worst come, our ‘t’ will have answered its purpose, at least for the present. The bishop may suffer, but I care not. He did his part in bringing about this marriage treaty, bribed, doubtless, by King Louis’ gold. In any case, we have no reason to constitute ourselves the bishop’s guardians. We have all we can do to care for ourselves—and more.”

She sprang to her feet and danced about the room, ardently kissing the letter she had so recently dreaded.

“Mary, you frighten me,” said the duchess. “If we should be discovered in changing this letter, I do believe your father would kill us. I do not know that it would be right to make the alteration. It would be forgery, and that, you know, is a crime punishable by death.”

“We shall not be discovered,” said Mary. “You must have no part in this transaction, mother. Father would not kill me; I am too valuable as a chattel of trade. With my poor little self he can buy the good-will of kings and princes. I am more potent than all his gold. This alteration can be no sin; it is self-defence. Think how small it is, mother. It is only a matter of the crossing of a ‘t.’ But I care not how great the crime may be; I believe, mother, I would commit murder to save myself from the fate father wishes to put upon me.”

“You frighten me, child,” said Margaret. “I tremble in terror at what you propose to do.”

“I, too, am trembling, mother,” sighed Yolanda, “but you must now leave the room. You must know nothing of this great crime.”



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The girl laughed nervously and tried to push her mother from the room.

“No, I will remain,” said the duchess. “I almost believe that you are right, and that the Virgin has prompted you to do this to save yourself.”

“I know she has,” answered Yolanda, crossing herself. “Now leave me. I must waste no more time.”

“I will remain with you, Mary,” said Margaret, “and I will myself make the alteration. Then I’ll take all the blame in case we are discovered.”

Margaret rose, walked over to the table, and took up the quill. She trembled so violently that she could not control her hand.

“No, mother, you shall not touch it,” cried Yolanda, snatching the parchment from the countess and holding it behind her. “If I would let you, you could not make the alteration; see, your hand trembles! You would blot the parchment and spoil all this fine plan of mine. Give me the quill, mother! Give me the quill!”

She took the quill from Margaret’s passive hand and sat down at the table. Spreading the missive before her, she dipped the quill in the ink-well, and when she lifted it, a drop of ink fell upon the table within a hair’s breadth of the parchment.

“Ah, Blessed Virgin!” cried Yolanda, snatching the missive away from the ink blot. “If the ink had fallen on the parchment, we surely had been lost. I, too, am trembling, and I dare not try to make the alteration now. What a poor, helpless creature I am, when I cannot even cross a ‘t’ to save myself. Blessed Virgin, help me once more!”

But help did not come. Yolanda’s excitement grew instead of subsiding, and she was so wrought upon by a nameless fear that she began to weep. Margaret seated herself on the divan and covered her face with her hands. Yolanda walked the floor like a caged wild thing, uttering ejaculatory prayers to the Virgin. Again she took up the quill, but again put it down, exclaiming:—

“I have it, mother! There is a friend of whom I have often told you—Sir Karl. He will help us if I can bring him here in time. If father has left the castle, I’ll take the letter to my parlor and fetch Sir Karl. He is a brave, strong old man and his hand will not tremble.”

Yolanda left the room and soon returned.

“Father has gone to the marshes,” she whispered excitedly. “We have ample time if I can find Sir Karl.”



She took the missive, the ink, and the quill to her parlor in Darius Tower, and hurried to Castleman's house. How she got there I will soon tell you.

She found Twonette sewing, and hastily explained her wishes.

"Run, Twonette, to The Mitre, and fetch me Sir Karl. I don't want Sir Max to know that I am sending. I think Sir Max has gone falconing with father; I pray God he has gone, and I pray that Sir Karl has not. Tell Sir Karl to come to me at once. If he is not at the inn send for him. If you love me, Twonette, make all haste. Run! Run!"



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Twonette's haste was really wonderful. When she found me her cheeks were like red roses, and she could hardly speak for lack of breath. For the first and last time I saw Twonette shorn of her serenity.

The duke had not invited me to go hawking, and fortunately I had stayed at home cuddling the thought that Yolanda was the Princess Mary, and that my fair Prince Max had found rare favor in her eyes.

"Yolanda wants you at my father's house immediately," said Twonette, when I stepped outside the inn door. "The need is urgent beyond measure." Whereupon she courtesied and turned away. Twonette held that words were not made to be wasted, so I asked no questions. I almost ran to Castleman's house, and was taken at once to a large room in the second story. It was on the west side of the house immediately against the castle wall. The walls of the room were sealed with broad oak panels, beautifully carved, and the west end of the apartment—that next the castle wall—was hung with silk tapestries. When I entered the room I found Yolanda alone. She hurriedly closed the door after me and spoke excitedly:—

"I am so glad Twonette found you, Sir Karl. I am in dire need. Will you help me?"

"I will help you if it is in my power, Yolanda," I answered. "You can ask nothing which I will not at least try to do."

"Even at the risk of your life?" she asked, placing her hand upon my arm.

"Even to the loss of my life, Yolanda," I replied.

"Would you commit an act which the law calls a crime?" she asked, trembling in voice and limb.

"I would do that which is really a crime, if I might thereby serve you to great purpose," I answered. "God often does apparent evil that good may come of it. An act must be judged as a whole, by its conception, its execution, and its result. Tell me what you wish me to do, and I will do it without an 'if'—God giving me the power."

"Then come with me."

She took my hand and led me to the end of the room next the castle wall. There she held the draperies to one side while she pushed back one of the oak panels. Through this opening we passed, and the draperies fell together behind us. After Yolanda had opened the panel a moment of light revealed to me a flight of stone steps built in the heart of the castle wall, which at that point was sixteen feet thick. When Yolanda closed the panel, we were in total darkness. She took my left hand in her left and with her right arm at my back guided me up the long, dark stairway. While mounting the steps, she said:—"Now, Sir Karl, you have all my great secrets—at least, they are very great to



me. You know who I am, and you know of this stairway. No one knows of it but my mother, uncle, aunt, Twonette, and my faithful tire-woman, Anne. Even my father does not know of its existence. If he knew, he would soon close it. My grandfather, Duke Philip the Good, built it in the wall to connect his bedroom with the house of his true friend, burgher Castleman. Some day I'll tell you the story of the stairway, and how I discovered it. My bedroom is the one my grandfather occupied.”



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The stairway explained to me all the strange occurrences relating to Yolanda's appearances and disappearances at Castleman's house, and it will do the same for you.

After we had climbed until I felt that surely we must be among the clouds, I said:—

"Yolanda, you must be leading me to heaven."

"I should like to do that, Sir Karl," she responded, laughing softly.

"I would gladly give my life to lead you and Max to heaven," said I.

"Ah, Sir Karl," she answered gently, pressing my hand and caressingly placing her cheek against my arm. "I dare not even think on that. If he could and would take me, believing me to be a burgher girl, he would truly lead me to heaven."

After a pause, while we rested to take a breath, I said: "What is it you want me to do, Yolanda? I am unarmed."

"I shall not ask you to do murder, Sir Karl," she said, laughing nervously. I fancied I could see a sparkle of mirth in her eyes as she continued: "It is not so bad as that. Neither is there a dragon for you to overthrow. But I shall soon enlighten you—here we are at the top of the steps."

At the moment she spoke I collided with a heavy oak partition, in which Yolanda quickly found a moving panel, and we entered a dimly lighted room. I noticed among the furniture a gorgeously tapestried bed. A rich rug, the like of which I had seen in Damascus, covered the floor. The stone walls were draped with silk tapestry, and a jewelled lamp was pendant from the vaulted ceiling. This was Yolanda's bedroom, and truly it was a resting-place worthy of the richest princess in Christendom. I felt that I was in the holy of holies. I found difficulty in believing that the childlike Yolanda could be so important a personage in the politics of Europe. She seemed almost to belong to me, so much at that time did she lean on my strength.

Out of her sleeping apartment she led me to another and a larger room, lighted by broad windows cut through the inner wall of the castle, which at that point was not more than three or four feet thick. This was Yolanda's parlor. The floor, like that of the bedroom, was covered with a Damascus rug. The windows were closed by glass of crystal purity, and the furniture was richer than any I had seen in the emperor's palace.

Yolanda led me to a table, pointed to a chair for me, and drew up one for herself. At that moment a lady entered, whom Yolanda ran to meet. The princess took the lady's hand and led her to me:—



“Sir Karl, this is my mother. As you already know, she is my stepmother, but I forget that in the love I bear her, and in the sweet love she gives to me.”

I bent my knee before the duchess, who gave me her hand to kiss, saying:—

“The princess has often spoken to me of you, Sir Karl. I see she has crept into your heart. She wins all who know her.”

“My devotion to Her Highness is self-evident and needs no avowal,” I answered, “but I take pleasure in declaring it. I am ready to aid her at whatever cost.”



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“Has the princess told you what she wants you to do?” asked the duchess.

I answered that she had not, but that I was glad to pledge myself unenlightened. I then placed a chair for the duchess, but, of course, remained standing. Yolanda resumed her chair, and said:—

“Fetch a chair, Sir Karl. We are glad to have you sit, are we not, mother?”

“Indeed we are,” said Margaret. “Please sit by the table, and the princess will explain why she brought you here.”

“I believe I can now do it myself, mother,” said Yolanda, taking a folded parchment from its pouch.

“See, my hand is perfectly steady. Sir Karl has given me strength.”

She spread the parchment before her, and, taking a quill from the table, dipped it in the ink-well.

“I’ll not need you after all, Sir Karl. I find I can commit my own crime,” she said, much to my disappointment. I was, you see, eager to sin for her. I longed to kill some one or to do some other deed of valiant and perilous villany.

Yolanda bent over the missive, quill in hand, but hesitated. She changed her position on the chair, squaring herself before the parchment, and tried again, but she seemed unable to use the quill. She placed it on the table and laughed nervously.

“I surely am a great fool,” she said. “When I take the quill in my hand, I tremble like a squire on his quintain trial. I’ll wait a moment, and grow calm again,” she added, with a fluttering little laugh peculiar to her when she was excited. But she did not grow calm, and after she had vainly taken up the quill again and again, her mother said:—

“Poor child! Tell Sir Karl what you wish him to do.”

Yolanda did so, and then read the missive. I did not know the English language perfectly, but Yolanda, who spoke it as if it were her mother tongue, translated as she read. I had always considered the island language harsh till I heard Yolanda speak it. Even the hissing “th” was music on her lips. Had I been a young man I would doubtless have made a fool of myself for the sake of this beautiful child-woman. When she had finished reading the missive, she left her chair and came to my side. She bent over my shoulder, holding the parchment before me.

“What I want to do, but can’t—what I want you to do is so small and simple a matter that it is almost amusing. I grow angry when I think that I cannot do so little a thing to help myself; but you see, Sir Karl, I tremble and my hand shakes to that extent I fear to mar



the page. I simply want to make the letter 't' on this parchment and I can't. Will you do it for me?"

"Ay, gladly," I responded, "but where and why?" Then she pointed out to me the word "nov" in the manuscript and said:—

"A letter 't,' if deftly done, will make 'not' instead of 'nov.' Do you understand, Sir Karl?"



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I sprang to my feet as if I had been touched by a sword-point. The thought was so ingenious, the thing itself was so small and the result was so tremendous that I stood in wonder before the daring girl who had conceived it. I made no answer. I placed the parchment on the table, unceremoniously reached in front of the duchess for the quill, and in less time than one can count three I made a tiny ink mark not the sixteenth part of an inch long that changed the destinies of nations for all time to come.

I placed the quill on the table and turned to Yolanda, just in time to catch her as she was about to fall. I was frightened at the sight of her pale face and cried out:—

“Yolanda! Yolanda!”

Margaret quickly brought a small goblet of wine, and I held the princess while I opened her lips and poured a portion of the drink into her mouth. I had in my life seen, without a tremor, hundreds of men killed, but I had never seen a woman faint, and the sight almost unmanned me.

Stimulated by the wine Yolanda soon revived; and when she opened her eyes and smiled up into my face, I was so joyful that I fell to kissing her hands and could utter no word save “Yolanda, Yolanda.” She did not at once rise from my arms, but lay there smiling into my face as if she were a child. When she did rise she laughed softly and said, turning to the duchess:—

“‘Yolanda’ is the name by which Sir Karl knows me. You see, mother, I was not mistaken in deeming him my friend.”

Then she turned suddenly to me, and taking my rough old hand in hers, lifted it to her lips. That simple act of childish gratitude threw me into a fever of ecstasy so great that death itself could have had no terrors for me. He might have come when he chose. I had lived through that one moment, and even God could not rob me of it.

Yolanda moved away from me and took up the parchment.

“Don’t touch it till the ink dries,” I cried sharply.

She dropped it as if it were hot, and the duchess came to me, and graciously offered her hand:—

“I thank you with my whole heart, not only for what you have done, but for the love you bear the princess. She is the one I love above all others, and I know she loves me. I love those who love her. As the French say, *‘Les amies de mes amies sont mes amies.’* I am a poor helpless woman, more to be pitied than the world can believe. I have only my gratitude to offer you, Sir Karl, but that shall be yours so long as I live.”



“Your Grace’s reward is far too great for the small service I have rendered,” I replied, dropping to my knee. I was really beginning to live in my sixtieth year. I was late in starting, but my zest for life was none the less, now that I had at last learned its sweetness through these two gracious women.



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When we had grown more composed, Yolanda explained to me her hopes regarding the French king's answer to the altered missive, and the whole marvellous possibilities of the letter "t" dawned upon my mind. The princess bent over the parchment, watching our mighty "t" while the ink was drying, but the process was too slow for her, so she filled her cheeks and breathed upon the writing. The color returned to her face while I watched her, and I felt that committing a forgery was a small price to pay for witnessing so beautiful a sight. Yolanda's breath soon dried the ink, and then we examined my work. I had performed wonders. The keenest eye could not detect the alteration. Yolanda, as usual, sprang from the deepest purgatory of trouble to the seventh heaven of joy. She ran about the room, singing, dancing, and laughing, until the duchess warned her to be quiet. Then she placed her hand over her mouth, shrugged her shoulders, walked on tiptoe, and spoke only in whispers. Margaret smiled affectionately at Yolanda's childish antics and said:—

"I think the conspirators should disperse. I hope, Sir Karl, that I may soon meet you in due form. Meantime, of course, it is best that we do not know each other."

After examining the missive for the twentieth time, Yolanda placed it in its pouch and turned to the duchess.

"Take it, mother, to the iron box, and I will lead Sir Karl back to Uncle Castleman's," she said.

The duchess graciously offered me a goblet of wine, and after I had drunk, Yolanda led me down the stairway to the House under the Wall. While descending Yolanda called my attention to a loose stone in the wall of the staircase.

"The other end of this stone," she said, "penetrates the wall of the room that you and Sir Max occupied the night before you were liberated. The mortar has fallen away, and it was here that I spoke to you and told you not to fear."

Here was another supernatural marvel all too easily explained.

CHAPTER XVI

PARTICEPS CRIMINIS

That evening after supper Max and I walked over to Castleman's. The evening was cool, and we were sitting in the great parlor talking with Castleman and Twonette when Yolanda entered. The room was fully fifty feet long, and extended across the entire front of the house. A huge chimney was built at the east end of the room, and on either side of the fireplace was a cushioned bench. A similar bench extended across the entire west end of the room. When Yolanda entered she ran to me and took my hand.



“Come, Sir Karl, I want to speak with you,” she said.

She led me to the west end of the room, sat down on the cushioned bench, and drew in her skirts that I might sit close beside her.



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“I want to tell you about the missive, Sir Karl,” she whispered, laughing and shrugging her shoulders in great glee. “Mother returned it to the box, and when I left you I hurried back and haunted the room, fearing that some one might meddle with the parchment. Near the hour of six o’clock father entered. I was sitting on the divan, and he sat down in his great chair, of course taking no notice of me—I am too insignificant for so great a person to notice, except when he is compelled to do so. I was joyful in my heart, but I conjured up all my troubles that I might make myself weep. I feared to show any change in myself, so I sobbed aloud now and then, and soon father turned angrily toward me. ‘Are you still there?’ he asked. ‘Yes, father,’ I answered, as if trying to stifle my sobs. ‘Are you really going to send that cruel letter to King Louis?’”

“Cruel, indeed,” I interrupted.

“Ah, yes! Well, father made no reply, and I went over to him and began to plead. I should have wanted to cut my tongue out had I succeeded, but I had little fear. Father is not easily touched by another’s suffering, and my tears only hardened his heart. Well, of course, he repulsed me; and soon a page announced Byron the herald and the Bishop of Cambrai. Father took the packet from the iron box, and put his fingers in the pouch, as if he were going to take out the letter. He hesitated, and during that moment of halting I was by turns cold as ice and hot as fire. Finally his resolution took form, and he drew out the missive. I thought I should die then and there, when he began to look it over. But after a careless glance he put it back in the pouch, and threw it on the table in front of the bishop. I could hardly keep from shouting for joy. He had failed to see the alteration, and in case of its discovery, he might now be his own witness against King Louis, should that crafty monarch dare to alter my father’s missive by so much as the crossing of a ‘t’. If father hereafter discovers anything wrong in the letter, he will be able to swear that King Louis was the evil doer, since father himself put the letter in the pouch with his own hands. Father will never suspect that a friend came to me out of far-away Styria to commit this crime.”

“I rejoice that I came,” I said.

“And I,” she answered. “I feared the bishop would read the letter, but he did not. He tied the ribbon, softened the lead wafer over the lamp flame, and placed it on the bow-knot; then he stamped it with father’s small seal. When it was finished I did not want to laugh for joy—when one is very happy one wants to weep. That I could safely do, and I did. The bishop handed the letter to Byron, and father spoke commandingly: ‘Deliver the missive to the French king before you sleep or eat, unless he has left Paris. If he has gone to Tours, follow him and loiter not.’ ‘And if he is not in Tours, Your Grace?’ asked Byron. ‘Follow him till you find him,’ answered father, ‘if you must cross the seas.’ ‘Shall I do all this without eating or sleeping?’ asked Byron. Father rose angrily, and Byron said: ‘If Your Grace will watch from the donjon battlements, in five minutes you will see me riding on your mission. When Your Grace sees me riding back, it will be, I fear, the ghost of Byron.’”



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“It was a wearisome task for me to climb the donjon stairs, but I knew father would not be there to watch Byron set out, and I felt that one of the family should give him God-speed; so alone, and frightened almost out of my wits, I climbed those dark steps to the battlements, and gazed after Byron till he was a mere speck on the horizon down toward Paris. I pray God there may be a great plenty of trouble grow out of the crossing of this ‘t’. Father is always saying that women were put on earth to make trouble, so I’ll do what little I can to make true His Lordship’s words.” She threw back her head, laughing softly. “Is it not glorious, Sir Karl?”

“Indeed, Princess—” I began, but she clapped her hand over my mouth and I continued, “Indeed, Yolanda, the plan is so adroit and so effective that it fills me with admiration and awe.”

“I like the name Yolanda,” said she, looking toward Max, who was sitting with Twonette on one of the benches by the chimney.

“And I, too, like it,” I responded. “I cannot think of you as the greatest and richest princess in Europe.”

“Ah, I wish I, too, could forget it, but I can’t,” she answered with a sigh, glancing from under her preposterously long lashes toward Max and Twonette.

“How came you to take the name Yolanda?” I asked.

“Grandfather wished to give me the name in baptism,” she answered, “but Mary fell to my lot. I like the present arrangement. Mary is the name of the princess—the unhappy, faulty princess. Yolanda is my name. Almost every happy hour I have ever spent has been as Yolanda. You cannot know the wide difference between me and the Princess Mary. It is, Sir Karl, as if we were two persons.”

She spoke very earnestly, and I could see that there was no mirth in her heart when she thought of herself as the Princess Mary; she was not jesting.

“I don’t know the princess,” I said laughingly, “but I know Yolanda.”

“Yes; I’ll tell you a great secret, Sir Karl. The Princess Mary is not at all an agreeable person. She is morose, revengeful, haughty, cold—” here her voice dropped to a whisper, “and, Sir Karl, she lies—she lies. While Yolanda—well, Yolanda at least is not cold, and I—I think she is a very delightful person. Don’t you?”

There was a troubled, eager expression in her eyes that told plainly she was in earnest. To Yolanda the princess was another person.

“Yolanda is very sure of me,” I answered.



“Ah, that she is,” answered the girl. You see, this was a real case of billing and cooing between December and May.

A short silence followed, during which Yolanda glanced furtively toward Max and Twonette.

“You spoke of your grandfather,” said I, “and that reminds me that you promised to tell me the story of the staircase in the wall.”

“So I did,” answered Yolanda, haltingly. Her attention was at the other end of the room.



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“Do you think Twonette a very pretty girl?” she asked.

“Yes,” I answered, surprised at the abrupt question. I caught a glimpse of Yolanda’s face and saw that I had made a mistake, so I continued hastily: “That is—yes—yes, she is pretty, though not beautiful. Her face, I think, is rather dollish. It is a fine creation in pink and white, but I fear it lacks animation.”

“Now for the stairway in the wall,” said Yolanda, settling herself with the pretty little movements peculiar to her when she was contented. “As I told you, grandfather built it. Afterward he ceded Peronne to King Louis, and for many years none of our family ever saw the castle. A few years ago King Louis ceded it to my father. Father has never lived here, and has visited Peronne only once in a while, for the purpose of looking after his affairs on the French border. The castle is very strong, and, being here on the border at the meeting of the Somme and the Cologne, it has endured many sieges, but it has never been taken. It is called ‘Peronne La Pucelle.’

“Father’s infrequent visits to the castle have been brief, and all who have ever known of the stairway are dead or have left Burgundy, save the good people in this house, my mother, my tire-woman, and myself. Three or four years ago, when I was a child, mother and I, unhappy at Ghent and an annoyance to father, came here to live in the castle, and—and—I wonder what Sir Max and Twonette find to talk about—and Twonette and I became friends. I love Twonette dearly, but she is a sly creature, for all she is so demure, and she is bolder than you would think, Sir Karl. These very demure girls are often full of surprises. She has been sitting there in the shadow with Sir Max for half an hour. That, I say, would be bold in any girl. Well, to finish about the staircase: my bedroom, as I told you, was my grandfather’s. One day Twonette was visiting me, and we—we—Sir Max, what in the world are you and Twonette talking about? We can’t hear a word you say.”

“We can’t hear what you are saying,” retorted Max.

“I wish you were young, Sir Karl,” whispered Yolanda, “so that I might make him jealous.”

“Shall we come to you?” asked Max.

“No, no, stay where you are,” cried Yolanda; then, turning to me, “Where did I stop?”

“Your bedroom—” I suggested.

“Yes—my bedroom was my grandfather’s. One day I had Twonette in to play with me, and we rummaged every nook and corner we could reach. By accident we discovered the movable panel. We pushed it aside, and spurring our bravery by daring each other, we descended the dark stairway step by step until we came suddenly against the oak



panel at the foot. We grew frightened and cried aloud for help. Fortunately, Tante Castleman was on the opposite side of the panel in the oak room, and—and—”

She had been halting in the latter part of her narrative and I plainly saw what was coming.



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“Tante Castleman was—was—It was fortunate she—was in—” She sprang to her feet, exclaiming: “I’m going to tell Twonette what I think of her boldness in sitting there in the dark with Sir Max. Her father is not here to do it.” And that was the last I heard of the stairway in the wall.

Yolanda ran across the room to the bench by the fireplace and stamped her foot angrily before Twonette.

“It—it is immodest for a girl to sit here in the deep shadow beside a gentleman for hours together. Shame, Twonette! Your father is not here to correct you.”

Castleman had left the room.

Twonette laughed, rose hurriedly, and stood by Yolanda in front of Max. Yolanda, by way of apology, took Twonette’s hand, but after a few words she coolly appropriated her place “in the deep shadow beside a gentleman.” A princess enjoys many privileges denied to a burgher girl. When a girl happens to be both, the burgher girl is apt to be influenced by the princess, as the princess is apt to be modified by the life of the burgher girl. Presently Yolanda said:—

“Please go, Twonette, and mix a bowl of wine and honey. Yours is delicious. Put in a bit of allspice, Twonette, and pepper, beat it well, Twonette, and don’t spare the honey. Now there’s a good girl. Go quickly, but don’t hurry back. Haste, you know, Twonette, makes waste, and you may spoil the wine.”

Twonette laughed and went to mix the wine and honey. I walked back to the other end of the room, and sat down by a window to watch the night gather without. I was athrill with the delightful thought that, all unknown to the world, unknown even to himself, Max, through my instrumentality, was wooing Mary of Burgundy within fifty feet of where I sat. He was not, of course, actively pressing his suit, but all unconsciously he was taking the best course to win her heart forever and ever. Now, with a propitious trick of fortune, my fantastic dream, conceived in far-off Styria, might yet become a veritable fact. By what rare trick this consummation might be brought about, I did not know, but fortune had been kind so far, and I felt that her capricious ladyship would not abandon us.

Yolanda turned to Max with a soft laugh of satisfaction, settled her skirts about her, as a pleased woman is apt to do, and said contentedly:—

“There, now!”

“Fraeulein, you are very kind to me,” said Max.

“Yes—yes, I am, Sir Max,” she responded, beaming on him. “Now, tell me what you and Twonette have been talking about.”



“You,” answered Max.

A laugh gurgled in her throat as she asked:—

“What else?”

“I’ll tell you if you will tell me what you and Sir Karl were saying,” he responded.

“Ah, I see!” she exclaimed, clapping her hands gleefully. “You were jealous.”

“I admit it,” he answered, so very seriously that one might have thought him in earnest.

“And you, Fraeulein?”



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"I jealous?" she responded, with lifted eyebrows. "You are a vain man, Sir Max. I was not jealous—only—only a tiny bit—so much—" and she measured the extent of her jealousy on the pink tip of her little finger. "I am told you were falconing with the Duke of Burgundy to-day. If you go in such fine company, I fear we shall see little of you."

"There is no company finer than—than—" Max checked his tongue.

"Say it, Max, say it," she whispered coaxingly, leaning toward him.

"Than you, Fraeulein." The girl leaned back contentedly against the wall, and Max continued: "Yes, his lordship was kind to me, and most gracious. I cannot believe the stories of cruelty I hear of him. I have been told that on different occasions he has used personal violence on his wife and daughter. If that be true, he must be worse than the brutes of the field, but you may be sure, Yolanda, the stories are false."

"Alas! I fear they are too true," responded the girl, sighing in memory of the afternoon.

"He is a pleasing companion when he wishes to be," said Max, "and I hear his daughter, the princess, is much like him."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Yolanda, "I hope she is like him only when he is pleasing."

"That is probably true," said Max.

"There is where I am really jealous, Max—this princess—" she said, leaning forward and looking up into his face with unmistakable earnestness.

"Why?" asked Max, laughing.

"Because men love wealth and high estate. There are scores of men—at least, so I have been told—eager to marry this princess, who do not even know that she is not hideous to look upon and vixenish in temper. They would take her gladly, with any deformity, physical, mental, or moral, for the sake of possessing Burgundy."

"But I am told she is fair and beautiful," said Max.

"Believe it not," said Yolanda, sullenly. "Whoever heard of a rich princess who was not beautiful? Anne and Joan, daughters of King Louis, are always spoken of as paragons of beauty; yet those who know tell me these royal ladies are hideous. King Louis has nicknamed Joan 'The Owlet' because she is little, ill-shapen, and black. Anne is tall, large of bone, fat, and sallow. He should name her 'The Giantess of Beaujeu'; and the little half-witted Dauphin he should dub 'Knight of the Princely Order of House Rats.'"

That she was deeply in earnest there could be no doubt.



“I hope you do not speak so freely to others,” said Max. “If His Grace of Burgundy should hear of your words he might—”

“I hope you will not tell him,” said Yolanda, laughing. “But this Mary!” she continued, clinging stubbornly to the dangerous topic. “You came to woo her estates, and in the end you will do so.”

I am convinced that the girl was intensely jealous of herself. When she feared that Max might seek the Princess Mary, her heart brooded over the thought that he would do so for the sake of her wealth and her domains.



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"I have told you once, Fraeulein, what I will do and what I will not. For your own sake and mine I'll tell you no more," said Max.

"If I were a great princess," said Yolanda, pouting and hanging her head, "you would not speak so sharply to me." Evidently she was hurt by Max's words, though they were the expression, not of his displeasure, but of his pain.

"Fraeulein, forgive me; my words were not meant to be sharp. It was my pain that spoke. You torture me and cause me to torture myself," said Max. "To keep a constant curb on one's ardent longing is exhausting. It takes the heart out of a man. At times you seem to forget that my silence is my great grief, not my fault. Ah, Fraeulein! you cannot understand my longing and my struggle."

"I do understand," she answered plaintively, slipping her hand into his, "and unless certain recent happenings have the result I hope for, you, too, will understand, more clearly than you now do, within a very short time."

She covered her face with her hands. Her words mystified Max, and he was on the point of asking her to explain. He loved and pitied her, and would have put his arm around her waist to comfort her, but she sprang to her feet, exclaiming:—

"No, no, Little Max, let us save all that for our farewell. You will not have long to wait."

Wisdom returned to Max, and he knew that she was right in helping him to resist the temptation that he had so valiantly struggled against since leaving Basel.

All that I had really hoped for in Styria, all our fair dreams upon the castle walls of Hapsburg, had come to pass. Max had, beyond doubt, won the heart of Mary of Burgundy, but that would avail nothing unless by some good chance conditions should so change that Mary would be able to choose for herself. In such case, ambition would cut no figure in her choice. The chains of duty to family, state, and ancestry that bound Max's feet so firmly would be but wisps of straw about Yolanda's slender ankles. She would have no hesitancy in making her choice, were she free to do so, and states might go hang for all she would care. Her heart was her state. Would she ever be able to choose? Fortune had been kind to us thus far; would she remain our friend? She is a coquette; but the heart of a coquette, if truly won, is the most steadfast of all.

Twonette brought in the wine and honey; Castleman soon returned and lighted the lamp, and we all sat talking before the small blaze in the fireplace, till the great clock in the middle of the room chimed the hour of ten. Then Yolanda ran from us with a hurried good night, and Max returned with me to the inn.

* * * * *



I cannot describe the joy I took from the recurring thought that I was particeps criminis with the Princess of Burgundy in the commission of a crime. At times I wished the crime had been greater and its extenuation far less. We hear much about what happens when thieves fall out, but my observation teaches me that thieves usually remain good friends. The bonds of friendship had begun to strengthen between Yolanda and me before she sought my help in the perpetration of her great crime. After that black felony, they became like links of Milan chain. I shared her secrets, great and small.



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One day while Yolanda and I were sitting in the oak room,—the room from which the panel opened into the stairway in the wall,—I said to her:—

“If your letter ‘t’ causes a break with France, perhaps Max’s opportunity may come.”

“I do not know—I cannot hope,” she responded dolefully. “You see, when father made this treaty with France, he was halting between two men in the choice of a husband for me. One was the Dauphin, son to King Louis, whom father hates with every breath he draws. The other was the Duke of Gelders, whom father really likes. Gelders is a brute, Sir Karl. He kept his father in prison four years, and usurped his domain. He is a drunkard, a murderer, and a profligate. For reasons of state father chose the Dauphin, but if the treaty with France is broken, I suppose it will be Gelders again. If it comes to that, Sir Karl—but I’ll not say what I’ll do. My head is full of schemes from morning till night, and when I sleep my poor brain is a whirl of visions. Self-destruction, elopement, and I know not what else appeal to me. How far is it to Styria, Sir Karl?” she asked abruptly.

“Two or three hundred leagues, perhaps—it may be more,” I answered. “I do not know how far it is, Yolanda, but it is not far enough for your purposes. Even could you reach there, Styria could not protect you.”

“I was not thinking of—of what you suppose, Sir Karl,” she said plaintively.

“What were you thinking of, Yolanda?” I asked.

“Of nothing—of—of—a wild dream of hiding away from the world in some unknown corner, at times comes to me in my sleep—only in my sleep, Sir Karl—for in my waking hours I know it to be impossible. The only pleasant part of being a princess is that the world envies you; but what a poor bauble it is to buy at the frightful price I pay!”

“I have been on mountain tops,” I answered philosophically, “and I find that breathing grows difficult as one ascends.”

“Ah, Sir Karl,” she answered tearfully, “I believe I’ll go upstairs and weep.”

I led her to the moving panel and opened it for her. Without turning her face she held back her hand for me to kiss. Then she started up the dark stone steps, and I knew that she was weeping. I closed the panel and sat on the cushioned bench. To say that I would have given my old life to win happiness for her but poorly measures my devotion. A man’s happiness depends entirely on the number and quality of those to whom his love goes out. Before meeting Yolanda I drew all my happiness from loving one person—Max. Now my source was doubled, and I wished for the first time that I might live my life again, to lay it at this girl’s feet.



CHAPTER XVII

TRIAL BY COMBAT

Max had waited until Calli's arm was mended to bring up the subject of the trial by combat; but when he would have taken it before the duke, I dissuaded him by many pretexts, and for a few days it was dropped. But soon it was brought forward in a most unpleasant way. Max and I were in the streets of Peronne one afternoon, and as we approached a group of ragged boys, one of them cried out:—



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“There is the fellow that challenged Count Calli, but won’t fight him!”

Max turned upon the boy, caught him roughly by the shoulder, and asked him where he got his information. The frightened boy replied that his father was a hostler in the duke’s stables, and had heard Count Calli say that the fellow who had challenged him was “all gauntlet but no fight.”

We at once sought Hymbercourt, who, on being closely questioned, admitted that the Italians in the castle were boasting that the stranger who seemed so eager to fight when Calli’s arm was lame, had lost his courage now that the arm was healed.

Of course I was in a deal of trouble over this combat, and heartily wished the challenge had never been given, though I had all faith in Max’s strength and skill. I, who had fought constantly for twenty years, had trained him since his tenth birthday. I had not only trained him; I had introduced him to the lists at eighteen—he being well grown, strong of limb, and active as a wildcat. I waged him against a famous tilt-yard knight, and Max held his own manfully, to his great credit and to my great joy. The battle was a draw. My first great joy in life came a few months afterward, when Max unhorsed this same knight, and received the crown of victory from the queen of the lists.

But this combat would be a battle of death. Two men would enter the lists; one would die in the course.

Max could, with propriety, announce his title and refuse to fight one so far beneath him as Calli; but even my love for the boy and my fear of the outcome, could not induce me to advise this. The advice would have been little heeded had I given it. Max was not one in whose heart hatred could thrive, but every man should have a just sense of injury received, and no one should leave all vengeance to God. In Max’s heart this sense was almost judicial. The court of his conscience had convicted Calli of an unforgivable crime, and he felt that it was his God-appointed duty to carry out the sentence.

While I had all faith in Max’s strength and skill, I also knew Calli to be a strong, time-hardened man, well used to arms. What his skill was, I could not say, but fame proclaimed it great. It would need to be great to kill Max, boy though he was, but accidents are apt to happen in the lists, and Calli was treacherous. I was deep in trouble, but I saw no way out but for Max to fight. So, on the morning after our conversation with Hymbercourt, Max and I sought admission to the duke’s audience. Charles had been privately told of our purpose and of course was delighted at the prospect of a battle to the death.

A tournament with, mayhap, a few broken heads furnished him great enjoyment; but a real battle between two men, each seeking the other’s life, was such keen pleasure to his savage, blood-loving nature, that its importance could hardly be measured. Charles

would have postponed his war against the Swiss, I verily believe, rather than miss this combat between Max and Calli.



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The duke hurried through the business of the morning, and then turned toward Max, signifying that his time had come. Max stepped before the ducal throne, made his obeisance, and said:—

“May it please Your Highness to recall a wage of battle given by me some weeks ago, in this hall and in this august presence, to one who calls himself Count Calli? The cause of my complaint against the said Calli I need not here rehearse. I have waited to repeat my defiance until such time as Count Calli’s arm should mend. I am told that he is now strong; and, most gracious Lord Charles, Duke of Burgundy, I again offer my wage of battle against this said knight and demand the trial by combat.”

Thereupon he drew an iron gauntlet from his girdle and threw it clanking on the stone floor. The gauntlet lay untouched for the space of a minute or two; and the duke turned toward Calli and Campo-Basso, who stood surrounded by their Italian friends at the right of the throne. After a long pause Charles said:—

“Will Count Calli lift the gage, or shall we appoint a court of heraldry to determine whether or no the combat shall take place?”

There was a whispered conversation among the Italians, after which Campo-Basso addressed the duke.

“My most gracious lord,” said he, “the noble Count Calli is loath to lift the gage of an unknown man, and would make bold to say that he will not do so until he is satisfied that he who so boastingly offers it is worthy in blood, station, and knighthood to stand before him.”

“For all that I will stand surety,” said Hymbercourt, turning to the duke and to Campo-Basso.

“The Lord d’Hymbercourt’s honor is beyond reproach,” replied the Italian, “but Count Calli must have other proof.”

Hymbercourt was about to make an angry reply, but he was silenced by the duke’s uplifted hand.

“We will ourself be surety for this knight,” said Charles.

“We cannot gainsay Your Lordship’s surety, most gracious duke,” returned Campo-Basso; “but with all meekness and humility we would suggest, with Your Grace’s permission, that when a man jeopardds his life against another he feels it his right to know at least his foe’s name.”

“Count Calli must content himself with knowing that the knight’s name is Sir Maximilian du Guelph. If Count Calli is right and his cause just, God will give him victory, and the



whole world shall know of his deed. If he is in the wrong and his cause unjust, may God have mercy on his soul.”

A long pause ensued during which Max stood before the duke, a noble figure of manly beauty worthy the chisel of a Greek sculptor. The shutter in the ladies’ gallery was ajar and I caught a glimpse of Yolanda’s pale, tear-stained face as she looked down upon the man she loved, who was to put his life in peril to avenge her wrong.



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“We are wasting time, Count Calli,” spoke the duke. “Take up the gage or demand a court. The charge made by Sir Max will certainly justify a court of chivalry in ordering the combat. The truth or falsity of that charge you and Sir Max must prove on each other’s bodies. His desire to remain unknown the court will respect; he has ample precedent. If you are convinced by the word of our Lord d’Hymbercourt and myself that he is of birth and station worthy to engage with you in knightly and mortal combat, you can ask no more. Few courts of chivalry, I take it, would hold the evidence inconclusive. Take up or leave the gage, Sir Count, and do one or the other at once.”

Calli walked over to the gauntlet and, taking it from the floor, held it in his right hand while he bent his knee before the duke. He did not look toward Max, but turned in the direction of his friends and tucked the gauntlet in his girdle as he strode away.

“We appoint this day twelve days, on a Sunday afternoon, for the combat,” said Charles. “Then these men shall do their endeavor, each upon the other; and may God give victory to the right!”

* * * * *

That evening, as usual, Max and I were at Castleman’s. Yolanda did not come down till late, but when she came she clung silently to Max, and there was a deep pathos in her every word and glance. As we left, I went back and whispered hurriedly to her:—

“Have no fear, dear one. Our Max will take no harm.”

My words were bolder than my heart, but I thought to comfort her.

“I have no fear, Sir Karl,” she said, in a trembling voice. “There is no man so strong and brave as Max. He is in the right, and God is just. The Blessed Virgin, too, will help him. It would be sacrilege to doubt her. I do not doubt. I do not fear, Sir Karl, but, oh, my friend—” Here she buried her face on my breast and wept convulsively. Her words, too, had been bolder than her heart—far bolder.

The brooding instinct in me—the faint remnant of mother love, that kind Providence has left in every, good man’s heart—longed to comfort her and bear her pains. But I was powerless to help her, and, after all, her suffering was wholesome. In a moment she continued, sobbing while she spoke:—

“But—oh! if by any mischance Max should fall; if by treachery or accident—oh, Sir Karl, my heart is breaking. Do not let Max fight.” These words were from her woman’s heart. “His station will excuse him, but if the affair has gone too far for him to withdraw, tell him to—to leave Burgundy, to run away, to—”

“Yolanda, what are you saying?” I asked. “Would you not rather see him dead than a coward?”



“No, no, Sir Karl,” she cried, wrought almost to a frenzy by her grief and fear. “No, no, anything but dead.”

“Listen to reason, Yolanda,” I answered. “I, who love Max more than I love the blood of my heart, would kill him with my own hand rather than have cause to call him coward and speak the truth.”



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“No, no,” she cried desperately, grasping my hand. “Do not let him fight. Ah, Sir Karl, if you bear me any love, if my grief and unhappy lot have touched your heart, even on the smallest spot, I pray you, do this thing for me. Do not let Max fight with this Count Calli. If Max falls—”

“But Max will not fall,” I answered boldly. “He has overthrown better men than Calli.”

“Has he? Ah, tell me, has he? He is little more than a boy. I seem older than he at times, and it is hard to believe what you say, though I know he is strong, and that fear has no place in his heart. Tell me, whom has he overthrown?”

“Another time, Yolanda,” I responded soothingly, “but this I say now to comfort you. Calli is no match for our Max. In the combat that is to come, Max can kill him if he chooses, barring accidents and treachery. Over and above his prowess, his cause, you know, is just, and for that reason God will be with him.”

“Yes, yes,” sobbed Yolanda, “and the Virgin, too.”

The Virgin was a woman in whom she could find a woman’s sympathy. She trusted God and stood in reverent awe of Him; but one could easily see that the Virgin held her heart and was her refuge in time of trouble. When I turned to leave she called me back, saying:—

“I have a mind to tell Max the truth—to tell him who I am.”

“I would not do so now,” I answered, fearing, perhaps with good reason, the effect of the disclosure on Max. “After the combat, if you wish to tell him—”

“But if he should fall?” said the girl, beginning to weep again and clinging desperately to my arm. “If he should fall, not knowing who I am?”

“Max will not fall, Yolanda. Dismiss that fear from your heart.”

My bold words served a double purpose. They at least partially satisfied Yolanda, and they strengthened me.

Of course Max and I at once began to prepare for the combat. The charger we had captured from the robbers on the Rhine now came to our hand as if sent by Providence. He was a large, active horse, with limbs like steel. He was an intelligent animal, too, and a good brain is almost as valuable in a horse as in a man. He had evidently borne arms all his life, for when we tried him in the tilt-yard we found him trained at every point.

There was no heavy plate at the Peronne armorer’s large enough for Max, so Hymbercourt dropped a hint to Duke Charles, and His Grace sent two beautiful suits to



our inn. One was of Barcelona make, the other an old suit which we judged had come from Damascus. I tried the latter with my sword, and spoiled a good blade. Although the Damascus armor was too heavy by a stone, we chose it, and employed an armorer to tighten a few nuts, and to adjust new straps to the shoulder plates and arm pieces.

We caused lists to be built outside the walls, and Max worked eight hours a day to harden himself. He ran against me, against our squires, who were lusty big fellows, and now and then against Hymbercourt, who was a most accomplished knight.



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Yolanda was prone to coax Max not to fight, and her fear showed itself in every look and gesture. Her words, of course, could not have turned him, but her fears might have undermined his self-confidence. So I pointed out to her the help he would get from encouragement, and the possible hurt he would take were her fears to infect him. After my admonition, her efforts to be cheerful and confident almost brought tears to my eyes. She would sing, but her song was joyless. She would banter Max and would run imaginary courses with him, taking the part of Calli, and always falling dead at Max's feet; but the moment of relaxation brought a haunting, terrified expression to her eyes. The corners of her sweet mouth would droop, effacing the cluster of dimples that played about her lips, and the fair, childish face, usually so joyful, wore the mask of grief. For the first time in her life real happiness had come, not within her grasp, but within sight; and this combat might snatch it from her.

Once when I was helping Max to buckle on his armor for a bout at practice, he said:—

“Yolanda seems to treat this battle as a jest. She laughs and banters me as if it were to be a justing bout. I wonder if she really has a heart?”

“Max, I am surprised at your dulness,” I said. “Do you not see her manner is assumed, though her fear is small because of her great faith in your prowess?”

“I'll try to deserve her faith,” answered Max.

* * * * *

When at last the day arrived, Max was in prime condition. At the inn we carefully adjusted the armor and fitted it on him. One of our squires led the charger, carefully trapped, to the lists, which had been built in an open field outside the town, west of the castle.

Max and I, accompanied by Hymbercourt and two other friends, rode down to Castleman's, and Max entered the house for a few minutes. Yolanda had told him that she would not be at the lists, and Max felt that it were better so.

Twonette and her father had gone to the lists when we reached the House under the Wall, but Yolanda and Frau Kate were awaiting us. There was a brief greeting and a hurried parting—tearful on Yolanda's part. Then we rode around to the Postern and entered the courtyard of the castle. Crossing the courtyard, we passed out through the great gate at the keep, and soon stood demanding admission to the lists.

The course was laid off north and south, the sun being in the southwest. The hour of battle was fixed at four o'clock, and the combat was to continue till sundown, if neither champion fell before that time. The pavilion for the duke and the other spectators was

built at the west side of the false lists—a strip of ground ten feet wide, extending entirely around the true lists, but separated from it by a barrier or railing three feet high.



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It was an hour after we left Castleman's house before Max and I entered the false lists. As I expected, the princess was sitting in the pavilion with her father and Duchess Margaret. A veil partly concealed her features, and when Max rode down the false lists to make his obeisance before the duke and the duchess, he could not know that the white face of Yolanda looked down upon him. I was sorry to see the princess in the pavilion, because I knew that if an untoward fate should befall Max, a demonstration would surely follow in the ducal gallery.

At the gate of the true lists, Max was met by a priest, who heard his oath, and by a herald, who read the laws and the agreement relating to the combat. A court of heraldry had decided that three lances should be broken, after which the champions, if both alive, should dismount and continue the fight with battle-axes of whatever weight they might choose. If either knight should be disabled, it was the other's right to kill him.

After Max had entered the true lists the gates were closed, and Hymbercourt, myself, and our squires stood outside the barrier at the north end of the false lists,—the north being Max's station on the course.

Max sat his charger, lance in rest; Calli waited in the south, and these two faced each other with death between them.

When all was ready the heralds raised their banners, and the duke gave the word of battle. There was a moment of deep silence, broken by the thunder of tramping hoofs, as horses and men rushed upon each other. Calli and Max met in mid-course, and the din of their contact was like the report of a cannon. Each horse fell back upon its haunches; each rider bent back upon his horse. Two tough yule lances burst into a hundred splinters. Then silence ensued, broken after a moment by a storm of applause from the pavilion.

The second course was like the first, save that Max nearly unhorsed Calli by a marvellous helmet stroke. The stroke loosened Calli's helmet by breaking a throat-strap, but neither he nor his friends seemed to notice the mishap, and the third course was begun without remedying it. When the champions were within ten yards of each other, a report like the discharge of an arquebuse was heard, coming apparently from beneath the pavilion. I could not say whence the report came—I was too intent upon the scene in the lists to be thoroughly conscious of happenings elsewhere—but come it did from somewhere, and Max's fine charger plunged forward on the lists, dead. Max fell over his horse's head and lay half-stunned upon the ground.

Above the din rose a cry, a frantic scream, that fairly pierced my heart. Well I knew the voice that uttered it. The people in the pavilion rose to their feet, and cries of "Treachery! treachery!" came from all directions. Calli was evidently expecting the shot, for just before it came he reined in his horse, and when Max fell the Italian instantly brought his charger to a standstill and began to dismount with all the speed his heavy



armor would permit. When safely down, he unclasped his battle-axe from the chain that held it to his girdle and started toward Max, who was lying prone upon the ground. Cries of "Shame! shame!" came from the pavilion, but no one, not even the duke, dared to interfere; it was Calli's right to kill Max if he could.



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I had covered my eyes with my hand, thinking that surely the boy's hour had come. I removed my hand when I heard the scream, and I have thanked God ever since for prompting me to do that little act, for I saw the most beautiful sight that my eyes have ever beheld. Calli had reached his prostrate foe and was standing over him with battle-axe uplifted to deal the blow of death. At that same moment Yolanda sprang from the duke's side, cleared the low railing in front of the ducal box, and jumped to the false lists six or eight feet below. Her gown of scarlet and gold shone with dazzling radiance in the sunlight.

Calli was facing the pavilion, and Yolanda's leap probably attracted his attention. However that may have been—perhaps it was because of Calli's haste, perhaps it was the will of God—the blow fell short, and Calli's battle-axe, glancing from Max's helmet, buried itself in the hard ground. While Calli was struggling to release his axe, Yolanda cleared the low barrier of the true lists, sped across the intervening space like a flash of red avenging flame, and reached Max not one second too soon, for Calli's axe was again uplifted. She fell upon Max, and had the axe descended she would have received the blow. Calli stepped back in surprise, his heel caught on the toe of Max's iron boot, he fell prone upon his back, and the weight of his armor prevented him from rising quickly. The glancing blow on Max's helmet had roused him, and when he moved Yolanda rose to her knees beside him.

"Let me help you," she cried, lifting Max's mailed hand to her shoulder; Max did so, and by help of the frail girl he drew himself to his knees and then to his feet. Meantime, Calli was attempting to rise. I can still see the terrible picture. Calli's panting horse stood near by with drooping head. Max's charger lay quivering in the convulsions of death. Calli, whose helmet had dropped from his head when he fell, lay resting on his elbow, half risen and bareheaded. Max stood deliberately taking his battle-axe from his girdle chain, while Yolanda still knelt at his feet. Battle-axe in hand, Max stepped toward Calli, who had risen to his knees. The expression on the Italian's face I shall never forget. With bared head and upturned face he awaited the death that he knew he deserved. Max lifted his battle-axe to give the blow. I wondered if he would give it. He lowered the axe, and a shout went up from the pavilion:—

"Kill him! Kill him!"

He lifted the axe again, and a silence like the hush of death fell upon the shouting audience. Again Max hesitated, and I distinctly heard Yolanda, who was still upon her knees, whisper:—

"Kill him! Kill him!"

Then came the shouts of a thousand voices, thrilling me to the marrow:—



“Kill him! Kill him!” and I knew that if I were standing in Max’s shoes, Calli would die within a moment. I also remember wondering in a flash of thought if Max were great enough to spare him. Again the battle-axe came slowly down, and the din in the pavilion was deafening:—



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“Kill him! Kill him!”

Again the battle-axe rose; but after a pause, Max let it fall to the ground behind him; and, turning toward the girl, lifted her with his mailed hands to her feet. When she had risen Max looked into her face, and, falling back a step, exclaimed in a voice hushed by wonder:—

“Yolanda!”

His words coming to the girl’s ears, like a far-away sound, from the cavernous recesses of his helmet, frightened her.

“No, no, my name is not Yolanda. You are mistaken. You do not know me. I—I am the princess. You do not know me.”

Her words were prompted by two motives: she wished to remain unknown to Max, and she feared lest her father should come to know that a great part of her life was spent as a burgher girl. Her hands were clasped at her breast; her face was as pale as a gray dawn; her breath came in feeble gusts, and her words fell haltingly from her lips. She took two steps forward, her eyes closed, and she began to fall. Max caught her and lifted her in his strong arms. On great occasions persons often do trivial acts. With Yolanda held tightly in the embrace of his left arm, Max stooped to the ground and picked up his battle-axe with his right hand. Then he strode to the north end of the lists and placed the girl in my arms.

“Yolanda,” he said, intending to tell me of his fair burden.

“No, Max,” I whispered, as he unfastened his helmet. “Not Yolanda, but the princess. The two resemble each other greatly.”

“Yolanda,” returned Max, doggedly. “I know her as a mother knows her first-born.”

Not one hundred seconds had elapsed between the report of the arquebuse and the placing of Yolanda in my arms; but hardly had Max finished speaking when a dozen ladies crowded about us and took possession of the unconscious princess.

After the duke had set on foot a search for the man who had fired the arquebuse, he came down to the false lists and stood with Hymbercourt and me, discussing the event. Campo-Basso said that his heart was “sore with grief,” and the Italians jabbered like monkeys. One of them wanted to kiss Max for sparing his kinsman’s life, but Max thrust him off with a fierce oath. The young fellow was in an ugly mood, and if I had been his enemy, I would sooner have crossed the path of a wounded lion than his. He was slow to anger, but the treachery he had encountered had raised all of Satan that was in him. Had he stood before Calli thirty seconds longer that treacherous heart would have ceased to beat.



While we were standing in the false lists, speaking with the duke, an Italian approached Max, bowed low, and said:—

“The noble Count Calli approaches to thank you for your mercy and to extol your bravery.”

Max turned his head toward the centre of the course, and saw Calli surrounded by a crowd of jabbering friends who were leading him toward us. A black cloud—a very mist from hell—came over Max’s face. He stooped and took his battle-axe from the ground. I placed my hand on the boy’s arm and warningly spoke his name:—



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“Max!” After a pause I continued, “Leave murder to the Italians.”

Max uttered a snort of disdain, but, as usual, he took my advice. He turned to Campo-Basso, still grasping his battle-axe:—

“Keep that fellow away from me,” he said, pointing toward Calli. “My merciful mood was brief. By the good God who gave me the villain’s life, I will kill him if he comes within reach of my axe.”

An Italian ran to the men who had Calli in charge, and they turned at once and hurried toward the south gate of the lists. All this action was very rapid, consuming only a minute or two, and transpired in much less time than it requires to tell of it.

While our squires were removing Max’s armor, I heard the duke say:—

“Arrest Calli. We will hold him until the shot is explained. If he was privy to it, he shall hang or boil.” Then the duke, placing his hand on Max’s shoulder, continued: “You are the best knight in Christendom, the bravest, the most generous, and the greatest fool. Think you Calli would have spared you, boy?”

“I am not Calli, my lord,” said Max.

“You certainly are not,” returned the duke.

Visions of trouble with France growing out of Yolanda’s “t,” and of a subsequent union between Max and the princess, floated before my mind, even amidst the din that surrounded me. Taking the situation by and large, I was in an ecstasy of joy. Max’s victory was a thousand triumphs in one. It was a triumph over his enemy, a triumph over his friends, but, above all, a triumph over himself. He had proved himself brave and merciful, and I knew that in him the world had a man who would leave it better and happier than he found it.

Calli was arrested and brought to the duke’s presence. Of course he denied all knowledge of the shot that had killed Max’s horse. Others were questioned, including three Italian friars wearing cassocks and cowls, who bore a most wondrous testimony.

“Your Grace,” said one of the friars, “we three men of God can explain this matter that so nearly touches the honor of our fair countryman, the noble Count Calli.”

“In God’s name, do so,” exclaimed the duke.

“This is the explanation, most gracious lord. When the third course was preparing, we three men of God prayed in concert to God the Father,”—all the friars crossed themselves,—“God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, to save our countryman, and lo! our prayers were most graciously answered; for, noble lord, at the moment when this



most valiant knight was about to kill our friend, we each heard a report marvellously like to the discharge of an arquebuse. At the same instant a fiery shaft descended from the palm of a mighty hand in the heavens, and the horse of this valiant and most generous knight, Sir Max, fell dead, stricken by the hand of God.”

I had no doubt that this absurd explanation would be received with scorn and derision; but the friar knew his audience, and I did not. His statement was not really accepted as true, but it was not cast aside as utterly absurd. I saw that it might easily be believed.



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“Why did not others see your wondrous shaft from the hand of God?” I asked.

“Because, noble lord,” answered the friar, “our eyes were looking upward in prayer. All others were fixed on this worldly combat.”

The explanation actually seemed to explain.

Just then the men who had been sent out to seek evidence concerning the shot returned, and reported that no arquebuse was to be found. The lists were surrounded by an open field, and a man endeavoring to escape would have been seen.

“Did you search all places of possible concealment for an arquebuse?” asked the duke.

“All, my lord,” answered the men, who were Burgundians and to be trusted.

Faith in the friars absurd story was rapidly gaining ground, and several of the Italian courtiers, emboldened by encouragement, affirmed upon their hope of salvation and their knightly honor that they, too, had witnessed the descent of the shaft from heaven. Touch a man on his superstitions, and he will believe anything you tell him. If you assure him that an honest friend has told you so and so, he may doubt you, but tell him that God tells you, and he will swallow your hook. If you would have your lie believed, tell a great one.

Charles, more credulous and gullible than I should have believed, turned to Hymbercourt. He spoke reverentially, being, you understand, in the presence of a miracle:—

“This is a wondrous happening, my lord,” said the duke.

“If it happened, Your Grace,” returned Hymbercourt, “it certainly was marvellous.”

“Don’t you think it did happen? Do not you believe that this bolt came from the hand that was seen by these worthy friars?” asked the duke.

“The shaft surely did not come from a just God, my lord,” returned Hymbercourt.

“Whence, then, did it come?” asked the duke. “No arquebuse has been found, and a careful scrutiny has been made.”

“Aye!” echoed the friars. “Whence else did it come? Whence, my Lord d’Hymbercourt, whence?”

I had noticed our Irish servant Michael standing near one of the friars. At this point in the conversation the Irishman plucked me by the sleeve, pointed to a friar, and



whispered a word in my ear. Like a stone from a catapult I sprang on the friar indicated, threw him to the ground, and drew from under his black cassock an arquebuse.

“Here is the shaft from God!” I exclaimed, holding the arquebuse up to view. Then I kneeled on the prostrate wretch and clutched his throat. Anger gathered in my brain as lightning clusters about a mountain top. I threw aside the arquebuse and proceeded to kill the canting mendicant. I do not know that I killed him; I hope I did. I cannot speak with certainty on that point, for I was quickly thrown away from him by the avenging mob that rushed upon us and tore the fellow limb from limb. The other friars were set upon by the populace that had witnessed the combat from without the lists, and were beaten so unmercifully that one of them died. Of the other’s fate I know nothing, but I have my secret desires.



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“Kill the Italians! Murder the assassins! Down with the mercenaries,” cried the populace, who hated the duke’s guard. The barriers were broken down, and an interesting battle ensued. Surely the people got their full satisfaction of blood and excitement that day. The Italians drew their swords, but, being separated, they were at a disadvantage, though their assailants carried only staves. I expected the duke to stop the fight, but he withdrew to a little distance and watched it with evident interest. My interest was more than evident; it was uproarious. I have never spent so enjoyable a day. The fight raged after Max and I left, and there was many a sore head and broken bone that night among the Italian mercenaries of the Duke of Burgundy.

When Max and I returned to Peronne, we went to the noble church of St. Jean and offered our humble gratitude. Max, having thrown off his anger, proposed to buy a mass for the dead friar; but I was for leaving him in purgatory where he belonged, and Max, as usual, took my advice.

On reaching the inn, Max cried loudly for supper. His calmness would have done credit to a hardened warrior. There was at least one hardened warrior that was not calm. I was wrought almost to a pitch of frenzy and could not eat, though the supper prepared by Grote was a marvel in its way. The old man, usually grave and crusty, after the manner of German hosts, actually bent his knee to Max and said:—

“My poor house has entertained kings and princes; but never has it had so great an honor as that which it now has in sheltering you.”

That night the duke came with Hymbercourt to honor us at the inn. Each spoke excitedly and warmly. Max seemed to be the only calm man in Peronne.

CHAPTER XVIII

YOLANDA OR THE PRINCESS?

After these adventures we could no longer conceal Max’s identity, and it soon became noised about that he was Count of Hapsburg. But Styria was so far away, and so little known, even to courtiers of considerable rank, that the fact made no great stir in Peronne. To Frau Kate and Twonette the disclosure came with almost paralyzing effect.

The duke remained with us until late in the night, so Max and I did not go over to the House under the Wall. When we were alone in our room, Max said:

“The Princess Mary has treated me as if I were a boy.”

“She saved your life,” I returned. “Calli would certainly have killed you had she not acted quickly.”



“I surely owe her my life,” said Max, “though I have little knowledge of what happened after I fell from my horse until I rose to my feet by her help. I complain of her conduct in deceiving me by pretending to be a burgher maiden. It was easily done, Karl, but ungraciously.”

“You are now speaking of Yolanda,” I said, not knowing what the wishes of the princess might be in regard to enlightening him. He looked at me and answered:—



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“Karl, if a woman’s face is burned on a man’s heart, he knows it when he sees it.”

“You know Yolanda’s face, certainly, and I doubt if Yolanda will thank you for mistaking another’s for it.”

“I have made no mistake, Karl,” he answered.

“I am not so sure,” I replied. “The girl you placed in my arms seemed taller by half a head than Yolanda. I noticed her while she was standing. She seemed rounder and much heavier in form; but I, too, thought she was Yolanda, and, after all, you may be right.”

“I caught but a glimpse of her face, and that poorly,” said Max. “It is difficult to see anything looking downward out of a helmet; one must look straight ahead. But the glimpse I had of her face satisfied me.”

“Do not be too sure, Max. I once took another man for myself.” Max laughed. “I am sure no one could have told us apart. He was the Pope, and I his cousin. Yolanda herself once told me—I believe she has also told you—that she has the honor to resemble the princess.”

I did not wish to lie to Max, and you will note that I did not say the princess was not Yolanda. Still, I wished him to remain ignorant upon the important question until Yolanda should see fit to enlighten him. I was not sure of her motive in maintaining the alias, though I was certain it was more than a mere whim. How great it was I could not know. Should she persist in it I would help her up to the point of telling Max a downright falsehood. There I would stop.

We spent two evenings at Castleman’s, but did not see Yolanda. On the first evening, after an hour of listlessness, Max hesitatingly asked:—

“Where is Yo—that is, the princess has not been here this evening.”

“The princess!” exclaimed Frau Kate. “No, she has not been here this evening—nor the duke, nor the king of France. No titled person, Sir Count, save yourself, has honored us to-day. Our poor roof shelters few such.”

“I mean Yolanda,” said Max. Good-natured Frau Kate laughed softly, and Twonette said, with smiling serenity:—

“Yolanda’s head will surely be turned, Sir Count, when she hears you have called her the princess. So much greatness thrust upon her will make it impossible for us to live with her.”

“She rules us all as it is, sweet soul,” said Castleman.



“Yolanda is ill upstairs, Sir Count,” said Frau Kate. “She wanted to come down this evening, but I commanded otherwise. Twonette, go to her. She will be lonely.”

Twonette rose, courtesied, and departed. This splendid bit of acting almost made me doubt that Yolanda was the princess, and it shook Max’s conviction to its very foundation.

I wish to warn you that the deception practised upon Max by Yolanda will seem almost impossible, except on the hypothesis that Max was a very simple fellow. But the elaborate scheme designed and executed by this girl, with the help of the Castlemans and myself,—all of whom Max had no reason to distrust,—would have deceived any man. Max, though simple and confiding where he trusted,—judging others’ good faith by his own,—was shrewd for his years, and this plan of Yolanda’s had to be faultless, as it really was, to mislead him.



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On the morning of the fourth day after the trial by combat, Yolanda made her appearance at Castleman's, looking pale and large-eyed. Max and I had walked down to the House under the Wall before going to dine with the duke. Soon after we were seated Twonette left, and within five minutes Yolanda came suddenly upon us in the long parlor. She ran to Max, grasping both his hands. For a moment she could only say, "Max, Max," and he remained silent.

When she recovered control of her voice she said:—

"How proud we are of you, Sir Max! Uncle and aunt have told me how brave and merciful you were at the combat."

"Your Highness surely knows all that can be told on the subject, since you were there and took so active a part in the adventure," answered Max. "It is I who should be grateful, and I am. I owe my life to Your Highness."

"You honor me too much, Sir Max," said Yolanda, looking up with surprise and bowing low before him. "Let my elevation be gradual that I may grow accustomed to my rank. Make of me first a great lady, and then, say, a countess. Afterward, if I prove worthy, call me princess."

"We will call you a princess now, Your Highness," answered Max, not to be driven from his position.

"Very well," cried Yolanda, with a laugh and a sweeping courtesy. "If you will have me a princess, a princess I'll be. But I will not be the Princess of Burgundy. She saved your life, and I am jealous of her—I hate her."

She stamped her foot, and the angry gleam in her eyes was genuine. There could be no doubt that she was jealous of the princess. I could not account for her unique attitude toward herself save on one hypothesis: she was, even to herself, two distinct persons. Yolanda was a happy burgher girl; Mary was a wretched princess. The two widely differing conditions under which she lived were so distinct, and were separated by a gulf so broad, that to her the princess and the burgher girl were in no way related.

With change of condition there was always a change of person. The unhappy princess would come down the stairway in the wall; God would kindly touch her, and lo! she was transformed into a happy Yolanda. Yolanda's light feet would climb the dark stone steps, and God was once more a frowning father. There must also be added Max's share in her emotions. Perhaps she feared the princess as she would have dreaded a rival; since she longed with all her passionate, tender heart to win Max for herself only. It would have been an easy task, as princess, to win him or any man; but if she could win him as Yolanda, the burgher girl, the prize would be the greatest that could fall to a woman.



The true situation dawned upon me as I stood before Max and watched Yolanda. I thought of her adroit plan to make trouble with France, and I wanted to shout for joy. The impossible might yet happen. God's hand surely had been in our journeying to Burgundy. Max might yet win this peerless princess, this priceless girl; or, reverse it if you choose, Mary of Burgundy might win this peerless man, and might at the same time attain the unutterable joy of knowing that she had won him for her own sake.



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Perhaps her yearning had led her to hope that he might in the end be willing to fling behind him his high estate for the sake of a burgher girl. Then, when she had brought him to that resolution, what a joy it would be to turn upon him and say: "I am not a burgher girl. I am Princess Mary of Burgundy, and all these things which you are willing to forego for my sake you may keep, and you may add to them the fair land of Burgundy!" Her high estate and rich domains, now the tokens of her thralldom, would then be her joy, since she could give them to Max.

While these bright hopes were filling my mind, Yolanda was playing well her part. She, too, evidently meant to tell no lies, though she might be forced to act many. Her fiery outburst against the Princess of Burgundy astonished Max and almost startled me. Still, the conviction was strong with him that Yolanda was Mary.

"If—if you are the princess, Yo—Yolanda," said Max, evidently wavering, "it were ungracious to deceive me."

"But I *am* the princess," cried Yolanda, lifting her head and walking majestically to and fro. "Address me not by that low, plebeian name, Yolanda."

She stepped upon a chair and thence to the top of the great oak table that stood in the middle of the room. Drawing the chair up after her she placed it on the table, and, seating herself on this improvised throne, lifted one knee over the other, after the manner of her father. She looked serenely about her in a most amusing imitation of the duke, and spoke with a deep voice:—

"Heralds!"

No one responded. So she filled the office of herald herself and cried out:—

"Oyez! Oyez! The princess now gives audience!" Resuming the ducal voice, she continued, "Are there complaints, my Lord Seneschal?" A pause. "Ah, our guards have stolen Grion's cow, have they? The devil take Grion and his cow, too! Hang Grion for complaining." A pause ensues while the duke awaits the next report. "The Swiss have stolen a sheepskin? Ah, we'll skin the Swiss. My Lord Seneschal, find me fifty thousand men who are ready to die for a sheepskin. Body of me! A sheepskin! I do love it well."

Yolanda's audience was roaring with laughter by this time, but her face was stern and calm.

"Silence, you fools," she cried hoarsely, but no one was silent, and Max laughed till the tears came to his eyes. Yolanda on her throne was so irresistibly bewitching that he ran to her side, grasped her about the waist, and unceremoniously lifted her to the floor. When she was on her feet, he raised her hand to his lips and kissed it, saying:—



“Yolanda or Mary—it’s all one to me. There is not another like you in all the world.”

She drew herself up haughtily: “Sir, this indignity shall cost you dear,” and turning her back on him she moved away three or four paces. Then she stopped and glanced over her shoulder. His face had lost its smile, and she knew the joke had gone far enough; so the dimples began to cluster about the quivering corners of her mouth, the long black lashes fell for a moment, a soft radiance came to her eyes, and she asked:—



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“Which shall it be, Sir Max, Yolanda or the princess?”

“Yolanda,” cried Max, huskily, while he held out his hands to her. Quick as the movement of a kitten, she sprang to him and allowed his arms to close about her for one brief moment. While one might count ten she rested her head on his breast, but all too quickly she turned her face to his and whispered:—

“Are you sure? Is it Yolanda?”

“Yes, yes, Yolanda. Thank God! it is Yolanda,” he replied, placing his hand before his eyes. She slipped from his arms, and Max, too deeply moved to speak, walked over to the window and looked out upon the frowning walls of Peronne the Impregnable. There was irony for you!

Probably Max was not sure that Yolanda was Yolanda; but, if he was, conviction had come through his emotions, and it might be temporary. He was, however, soon to be convinced by evidence so cunningly constructed that he was compelled to abandon the testimony of his own eyes and accept that of seemingly incontestable facts.

“We are to dine privately with the duke at twelve o’clock,” I said, while Max was standing at the window.

“Indeed?” asked Yolanda, arching her eyebrows; surprise and displeasure evident in her voice. She glanced at the great clock, then looked toward Max, and said:—

“It lacks but thirty minutes of that time now, and I suppose I shall soon lose you.”

Max turned from the window, saying:—“Yes, we must go, or we shall be late.”

“Does the princess dine with you?” asked Yolanda.

“I do not know, Fraeulein,” answered Max. Thereupon Yolanda left the room pouting, and we took our departure, having promised to return to Castleman’s after dinner.

We went at once to the castle; and thirty minutes after leaving Castleman’s we were in the small parlor or talking room of Duchess Margaret, where the famous letter to the king of France had been signed by Duke Charles. When we entered we saw the duchess and the princess sitting upon the divan. The duke was in his great oak chair, and Humbercourt and two other gentlemen were standing near by. I made obeisance to Charles on bended knee. He rose to receive Max, and, after a slight hesitation, offered his hand, saying:—

“You are welcome, my Lord Count.”



A year had passed since I had heard Max addressed as “my lord,” and the words sounded strange to my ears. I turned quickly toward the princess, expecting to see a sparkle of mirth in her eyes, but Yolanda’s ever present smile was wholly lacking. The countenance of the princess was calm, immovable, and expressionless as a mirror. I could hardly believe that it was the radiant, bedimpled, pouting face I had just seen at Castleman’s, and for the first time in all my experience I realized that I was face to face with a dual personality. The transformation was so complete that I might easily have been duped had I not known beyond peradventure the identity of Yolanda and Mary.



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After the duke had kindly saluted Max, His Grace presented us to the ladies. When the princess rose to receive us, she seemed at least half a head taller than Yolanda. Her hair was hidden, and her face seemed fuller. These changes were probably wrought by her head-dress, which towered in two great curved horns twelve inches high. She wore a long, flowing gown that trailed two yards behind her, and this added to her apparent height. Max had seen Yolanda only in the short skirts of a burgher girl's costume.

When Max rose, after kneeling before the princess, he gazed into her eyes, but the glance he received in return was calm and cold. Yolanda was rich, red wine, hot and strong; the princess was cold, clear water. The one was exhilarating, at times intoxicating; the other was chilling. The face of the princess, though beautiful, was touched with disdain. Every attitude was one of dignity and hauteur. Her words, though not lacking intelligence, were commonplace, and her voice was that of her father's daughter. Yolanda was a girl; the princess was a woman. The metamorphosis was complete, and Max's hallucination, I felt sure, would be cured. The princess's face was not burned on his heart, whatever might be true of Yolanda's. I can give no stronger testimony to the marvellous quality of the change this girl had wrought in herself than to tell you that even I began to doubt, and wonder if Yolanda had tricked me. The effect on Max was instantaneous. After looking into the princess's face, he said:—

"I wish to thank Your Highness for saving my life. I surely had been killed but for your timely help."

The situation bordered on the ridiculous.

"Do not thank me, my Lord Count," responded the princess, in cold and measured words. "I should have done the same for any man in your hard case. I once saved a yokel in like manner. Two common men were fighting with staves. One would have beaten the other to death had I not entered the lists and parted them. Father feared a similar exhibition on my part and did not wish me to attend your combat. He says now that I shall go to no more. I certainly made myself ridiculous. I enjoy a fair fight, whatever the outcome may be, but I despise murder. My act was entirely impersonal, Sir Count."

"On the lists I addressed Your Highness as 'Yolanda,'" said Max. "Your resemblance to one whom I know well was so great as to deceive me."

I was eager to take Max away from the dangerous situation, but I could not. The duke, the courtiers, and myself had moved several paces from Max and the princess. I, however, kept my eyes and ears open to what occurred between them.

"Yes," returned the princess, haughtily, "I remember you so addressed me. I have heard of the person to whom you refer. She is, I believe, a niece of one Castleman, a burgher of Peronne. I know Castleman's daughter—a simple creature, with no pretence of



being else. It has been said that—what do they call her? Yolanda, I believe—resembles me in some respects and is quite proud of the distinction. I am sure I thank no one for the compliment, since she is a low creature, but I accept your apology, my Lord Count.”



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“I do not apologize, Your Highness,” answered Max, in tones of equal hauteur. “You probably do not know the lady of whom you speak.”

The princess seemed to increase by an inch or two in stature as she drew herself up, and answered:—

“Of course we do not know her.”

“If you knew her, Your Highness would apologize,” retorted Max.

Seeing the angry color mounting to his face, I stepped to his side and joined in the conversation. Presently dinner was announced, and I rejoiced when we parted from the princess. Turning our faces toward the ladies, we moved backward from the room, and went with the duke to the dinner hall.

Compared with Castleman’s daily fare, the duke’s dinner was almost unpalatable. We had coarse beef, coarse boar’s meat, coarse bread,—not black, but brown. Frau Kate’s bread was like snow. The sour wine on the duke’s table set our teeth on edge, though it was served in huge golden goblets studded with rare gems. At each guest’s plate was a jewelled dagger. The tablecloth was of rich silk, soiled by numberless stains. Leeks and garlic were the only vegetables served.

Nothing of importance occurred at the table, but after dinner the duke abruptly offered Max a large sum of gold to accompany him to Switzerland. Max thanked His Grace and said he would give him an answer soon. The duke urged an early reply, and Max said:

—

“With Your Grace’s permission we will attend to-morrow’s morning audience, and will make our answer after Your Lordship has risen.”

Charles acquiesced, and we soon left the castle. The duke, as I have already told you, was very rich. Hymbercourt once told me that he had two hundred and fifty thousand gold crowns in his coffers at Luxembourg. That was probably more than the combined treasuries of any two kings in Europe could show. Max and I were short of money, and the sum that the duke offered seemed enormous. Neither Max nor his father, Duke Frederick, had ever possessed as much money at one time.

While we were leisurely walking across the courtyard toward the Postern, three ladies and two gentlemen, accompanied by outriders and pages carrying falcons, rode by us and passed out through the Postern. We followed, and overtook them at the town end of the drawbridge, where they had halted. When we came up to them, we recognized the duchess and the princess. The duchess bowed smilingly, but the princess did not speak, though she looked in our direction.



The cavalcade turned to the left, and went up a narrow street toward Cambrai Gate, evidently bound for the marshes. Max and I walked straight ahead toward the Cologne bridge, intending, as we had promised, to go back to Castleman's. Two hundred yards up the street I glanced back, and saw a lady riding through the Postern, back to the castle. I knew at once that the princess had returned, and I was sure of meeting Yolanda,—sweet, smiling, tender Yolanda,—at the dear old House under the Wall. I did not like the princess; she was cold, haughty, supercilious, and perhaps tinged with her father's cruelty. I longed ardently for Yolanda to come out of her skin, and my heart leaped with joy at the early prospect.



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I was right in my surmise. Yolanda's sweet face, radiant with smiles and soft with dimples, was pressed against the window-pane watching for us when we crossed the moat bridge at Castleman's door.

"To see her face again is like coming back to heaven; isn't it, Karl?" said Max.

Yolanda ran to the door and opened it.

"I am glad you did not stay with her," she said, giving a hand to Max and to me, and walking into the room between us. She was like a child holding our hands.

I had seen the world and its people in all its phases, and I prided myself on my shrewdness, but without my knowledge of the stairway in the wall, I would have sworn that Yolanda had played a trick on me by leading me to believe that she was the Princess Mary. Even with full knowledge of all the facts, I found myself doubting. It is small cause for wonder, therefore, that Max was deceived.

"Uncle is at the shop," said Yolanda. "Tante is at a neighbor's, and Twonette, of course, is asleep. We three will sit here on this bench with no one to disturb us, and I shall have you both all to myself. No! There! I'll sit between you. Now, this is delightful."

She sat between us, crossed her knees—an unpardonable crime, Frau Kate would have thought—and giving a hand to Max and to me, said contentedly:—

"Now, tell me all about it."

I was actually on the point of beginning a narrative of our adventures, just as if she did not already know them,—so great was the spell she had thrown over me,—when Max spoke:—

"We had a poor dinner, but a kind host, therefore a fine feast. The duke has asked us to go to Switzerland with him. Judging by the enormous sum he offers for our poor services, he must believe that he will need no other help to conquer the Swiss."

"Yes—yes, that is interesting," said Yolanda, hastily, "but the princess—tell me of her."

"She is a very beautiful princess," answered Max.

"Yes—I suppose she is," answered Yolanda. "I have it dinned into my ears till I ought to believe it; but tell me of her manner, her conversation, her temper. What of them?"

"She is a most beautiful princess," answered Max, evidently intending to utter no word against Her Highness, though as a matter of fact he did not like her at all. "I am sure she deserves all the good that fame speaks of her."



Yolanda flung our hands from her, sprang to her feet, and faced us angrily.

“That’s the way with all men. A rich princess, even though she be a cold devil, is beautiful and good and gentle and wise and true and quick of wit. Men care not what she is if her house be great and rich and powerful. If her domains are fat and broad, she deserves ’all the good that fame speaks of her.’ She can win no man for herself. She cannot touch a man’s heart; she can only satisfy his greed. You went to the castle, Sir Max, to see this princess. You want Burgundy. That is why you are in Peronne!”



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The girl's passionate outburst was sincere, and showed me her true motive for deceiving Max. Her plan was not the outgrowth of a whim; it was the result of a tremendous motive conceived in the depths of her soul. She had found the man she loved, and was taking her own way to win him, if she could, for herself. She judged all men by the standard that she had just announced. She would never believe in the love of a man who should woo her as Princess Mary of Burgundy.

Her words came near accomplishing more than she desired. When she stopped speaking, Max leaned forward and gently took her hand.

"Yolanda, this princess is nothing to me, and I swear to you that I will never ask her to marry—"

A frightened gleam came to the girl's eyes when she understood the oath that Max was about to take, and she quickly placed her hand over his mouth. Max was swearing too much.

"You shall not make that oath, Little Max," she said. "You shall not say that you will never marry her, nor shall you say that you will never marry any one else. You must remain free to choose the right wife when the right time comes. You must tread the path that God has marked out for you. Perhaps it leads to this princess; no one can tell. If so, you must accept your fate, Sir Max." She sighed at the mere thought of so untoward a fate for Max.

"I need make no oath not to marry the princess," answered Max. "She is beyond my reach, even though I were dying for love of her."

"And you are not dying for love of her, are you?" asked Yolanda, again taking the seat between Max and me.

"No," he responded.

"Nor for love of any woman?" she asked, looking toward Max.

"I'll not say that," he replied, laughing softly, and taking her hands between his.

"No, no," she mused, looking in revery out the window. "No, we will not say that."

I have always been as unsentimental as a man well can be, but I believe, had I been in Max's place, I should have thrown away my crown for the sake of Yolanda, the burgher girl. I remember wondering if Max would be strong enough finally to reach the same conclusion. If he should be, my faith in Yolanda's powers led me to believe that she would contrive a plan to make him her husband, despite her father, or the devil and all his imps.



There is a power of finesse in the feminine mind that no man may fully compass, and Yolanda, in that respect, was the flower of her sex. That she had been able to maintain her humble personality with Max, despite the fact that she had been compelled to meet him twice as princess, proved her ability. Of course, she had the help of good old Castleman and his sweet Frau Kate, serene Twonette, and myself; but with all this help she probably would have failed without the stairway in the wall.

When we left Castleman's, I did not bring up the subject of Mary and Yolanda. Max walked silently beside me until we had nearly reached the inn, when he said:—



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"I am almost glad I was wrong, Karl. I would not have Yolanda other than she is. At times, wild thoughts suggest themselves to me; but I am not so weak as to give way to them. I drive them off and clench my teeth, determined to take the misery God doles out to me. I am glad we are soon to leave Burgundy. The duke marches in three days, and it is none too soon for me."

"Shall not we return to Burgundy?" I asked. "I want you to see Paris and Brussels, and, if possible, London before we return to Styria. Don't you think it best that we come back to Peronne after this war?"

"You are right, Karl; we must come back," he answered. "I do not fear Yolanda. I am not weak."

"I sometimes wonder if we know our strength from our weakness," I suggested. "There is doubtless much energy wasted by conscientious men striving in the wrong direction, who fancy they are doing their duty."

"You would not have me marry Yolanda?" asked Max, a gleam of light coming to his eyes.

"I do not know, Max," I responded. "A rare thing has happened to you. You have won a marvellous love from a marvellous woman. She takes no pains to conceal it. She could not hide it if she would. What you feel, only you and God know."

"Only God," cried Max, huskily. "Only God. I cannot measure it."

"My dear boy," said I, taking his arm, "you are at a point where you must decide for yourself."

"I have decided," returned Max. "If my father and mother were not living, I might—I might—bah! there is but one life for me. I am doomed. I make myself wretched by resistance."

"When we return to Peronne, you will know your mind," I answered soothingly.

"I know my mind now," he answered. "I know that I would give half the years of my life to possess Yolanda; but I also know the fate that God has marked out for me."

"Then you know more than many a wise man thrice your age can boast," said I.

* * * * *

The duke's armies had been gathering throughout Burgundy. Men had come in great numbers to camp near Peronne, and the town was noisy with martial preparations. Contrary to Hymbercourt's advice, the duke was leaving Peronne Castle guarded by



only a small garrison. Charles had great faith in the strength of Peronne the Impregnable, and, although it was near the French border, he trusted in its strength and in his treaty with King Louis. He knew from experience that a treaty with Louis would bind that crafty monarch only so long as it was to his interest to remain bound; but Louis' interest in maintaining the treaty seemed greater than Burgundy's, and Charles rested on that fact. Peronne was to be left captained by the duchess and Mary, and garrisoned by five score men-at-arms, who were either too old or too young to go to war.

Without discussing the duke's offer, Max and I decided to accept it, though for different reasons. Max needed the gold; he also sniffed battle, and wanted the excitement and the enterprise of war. I had all his reasons, and still another; I wanted to give Yolanda time to execute her plans.



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The war with Switzerland would probably be short. Max would be with the duke, and would, I hoped, augment the favor with which Charles already honored him. Should Yolanda's letter make trouble with France, Duke Charles might be induced, through his personal feelings, to listen to Max's suit. If Charles returned from Switzerland victorious—and no other outcome seemed possible—he would no longer have reason to carry out the marriage treaty with France. It had been made largely for the purpose of keeping Louis quiet while Charles was absent. Anything might happen; everything might happen, while Max was with Charles in Switzerland and Yolanda at home making trouble with France.

The next day, by appointment, we waited on the duke at the morning audience. When we entered the great hall, the urgent business had been transacted, and half a score of lords and gentlemen stood near the dais, discussing some topic with the duke and with one another. We moved near the throne, and I heard Charles say to Campo-Basso and Hymbercourt:—

“Almost three weeks have passed since our message to France, and we have had no answer. What think you, gentlemen, of the delay?”

“His Majesty is not in Paris, or delays answering,” said Hymbercourt.

“By the Host, if I could think that King Louis were holding Byron and delaying an answer, I would change my plans and march on Paris rather than on Switzerland.”

“I fear, my lord,” said Campo-Basso, with a sympathetic desire to make trouble, if possible, “that His Majesty delays an answer while he frames one that shall be elusive, yet conciliatory. King Louis, Your Grace knows, thinks many times before each word he speaks or writes.”

“If he has intentionally delayed this answer, I'll give him cause to think many times *after* his words,” said Charles.

Conversations of like nature had occurred on several occasions since the sending of the missive to Louis, and they offered the stormy duke opportunity to vent his boastfulness and spleen. While Charles was pouring out his wrath against his brother-in-law, Byron, the herald, appeared at the door of the great hall. He announced himself, and, when ordered to approach, ran to the dais, knelt on the second step, and placed a small sealed packet in the duke's hand.

“Did you find King Louis at Paris?” asked the duke, addressing Byron.

“I did, my lord.”

“Paris is but thirty leagues distant, and you certainly have had sufficient time since leaving us to journey across Europe and back. Did not I command you to make haste?”



“You did, my lord,” answered the herald. “King Louis put me off from day to day, always promising me an answer, but giving it only yesterday afternoon when the sun was half below the horizon.”

Charles nervously broke the seals of the package, and attempted to read the letter. He failed, and handed it to Campo-Basso, saying:—



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“Read the missive. I already know its contents, but read, my lord, read.”

Campo-Basso read the letter.

“To Our Most Illustrious Brother Charles Duke of Burgundy, and Count of Charolois:—

“We recommend us and send Your Grace greeting. We are anxious to pleasure our noble brother of Burgundy in all things, and heartily desire the marriage between our son and the illustrious Princess of Burgundy, but we shall not move toward it until our said noble brother shall return from Switzerland, nor will we do aught to distract his attention from the perilous business he now has on hand. We pray that the saints may favor his design, and would especially recommend that our noble brother propitiate with prayers and offerings the holy Saint Hubert. We, ourselves, have importuned this holy saint, and he has proved marvellously helpful on parlous occasions.

“Louis, R.”

The duke’s anger was terrible and disgusting to behold. When his transports of rage allowed him to speak, he broke forth with oaths too blasphemous to write on a white page.

“The fawning hypocrite!” he cried. “He thinks to cozen us with his cheap words. The biting insult in his missive is that he takes it for granted that we are so great a fool as to believe him. Even his recommendation of a saint is a lie. The world knows his favorite saint is Saint Andrew. King Louis spends half his time grovelling on his marrow bones before that saint and the Blessed Virgin. He recommends to us Saint Hubert, believing that his holy saintship will be of no avail.”

Charles was right. Sir Philip de Comines, seneschal to King Louis, afterward told me that His Majesty, in writing this letter to the Duke of Burgundy, actually took counsel and devoted much time and thought to the choice of a baneful or impotent saint to recommend to his “noble brother of Burgundy.” Disaster to Louis had once followed supplication to Saint Hubert, and the king hoped that the worthy saint might prove equally unpropitious for Charles. Yolanda’s wonderful “t” was certainly the most stupendous single letter ever quilled. Here were the first-fruits of it.

“Were it not that these self-sufficient Swiss need to be blooded, I would turn my army against France to-morrow,” said the duke.

“And have Bourbon and Lorraine upon Your Lordship’s back from the east, Ghent rebelling in the north, and the Swiss pouring in from the south,” interrupted Hymbercourt.



“You are certainly right, my Lord d’Hymbercourt,” replied Charles, sullenly. “They surround us like a pack of starved wolves, ready to spring upon us the moment we are crippled. Burgundy stands alone against all Europe.”

“A vast treasure, my lord, attracts thieves,” said Hymbercourt. “Burgundy is the richest land on earth.”

“It is, indeed it is,” replied the duke, angrily, “and I have no son to keep it after me. But France shall not have it; that I swear upon my knighthood. Write to France, my Lord Bishop of Cambrai, and tell King Louis that my daughter shall not marry his son. Waste no words, my Lord Bishop, in what you call courtesy. We need no double meaning in our missives.”



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Those who heard the duke's words knew that he was committing a costly error, but no one dared to suggest as much. One might, with equal success, have flung soft words at a mad bull. Truly that "t"—but I will speak of it no more, though I have a thrill of joy and mirth even now when I think of it.

After many explosions, the duke's pent-up wrath found vent, and began to subside. Espying Max and me he called us to the throne.

"Have you concluded to join us in our little holiday excursion against these mountain swine?" asked His Grace, addressing us.

"We have, my lord. We shall be proud to serve under the banner of so brave a prince," I answered.

"We have' would have been sufficient, Sir Karl," answered the duke, still surly from the dregs of his wrath. "We hear so many soft words from France that we despise them in the mouths of honest men."

The duke then turned to his seneschal, De Vergy, and spoke in tones that were heard all over the room:—

"My lord, Maximilian, Count of Hapsburg, and Sir Karl de Pitti have consented to join our banners. Enroll them in places of honor, my Lord Seneschal. See that they are supplied with horses, accoutrements, and tents for themselves and their squires, and direct my Lord Treasurer to pay to them upon demand a sum of money of which he shall be duly notified."

When the duke stopped speaking, a murmur of approval ran through the audience—though the Italians had no part in it. The murmur grew clamorous and soon a mighty shout filled the vaulted roof:—

"Long life to the noble Count of Hapsburg! Burgundy and Styria forever!"

To me, the words seemed delightfully prophetic. Soon afterward the audience was dismissed, and Max and I had the great honor of being asked to join the duke's council. A council to the Duke of Burgundy was indeed a veritable fifth wheel. He made his own plans and, right or wrong, clung to them. He would, on rare occasions, listen to Hymbercourt,—a man of few words, who gave advice as if he were lending a crown,—but the suggestions of others antagonized him.

The question before the council this morning was: Should the duke's army carry provisions, or should it take them from the countries through which it was to pass? Charles favored the latter course, and it was agreed upon. The people of non-belligerent states should be paid for the provisions that were taken; that is, theoretically

they should be paid. The Swiss should furnish provision, gratis, and that doubtless would be terribly practical.

On each of the three evenings intervening between the day of this council and the departure of the army, we saw Yolanda at Castleman's. She was always waiting when we arrived. She had changed in many respects, but especially in her attitude regarding Max. She was kind and gentle, but shy. Having dropped her familiar manner, she did not go near him, but sat at a distance, holding Twonette's hand, and silently but constantly watching him, as if she were awaiting something. Her eyes, at times, seemed to be half-indignant interrogation points. At other times I could see in them doubt, waiting, and hope—hope almost tired with yearning.



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It was no small love that she wanted from Max. She had hoped—perhaps I should say she had longed with little hope—that he would, for the sake of the burgher girl, Yolanda, be willing to turn his back on his family and his land. But now he was leaving, and her dream was about to close, since Max would probably never come back to her.

Not the least painful of Yolanda's emotions was the knowledge that she could insure Max's return by telling him that she was the Princess of Burgundy. But she did not want this man whom she loved so dearly, and who, she knew, loved her, if she must win him as princess. She was strangely impelled to reject a reprieve from a life of wretchedness, unless it came through the high court of love.

Max, in speaking to me about his return, had wavered many times. One day he would return; the next, he would swallow the bitter draught fate had in store for him. He was a great, honest soul, and to such the call of duty is compelling.

On the evening before our departure we went to sup with Castleman. On our way down to the House under the Wall, Max said:—

“Karl, my duty is clear. I must not return to Peronne. If I do, I fear I shall never leave it.”

I did not answer; but I had resolved that he should return, and I intended that my resolution should become a fact. Yolanda was not present at supper, but she appeared soon after we had risen. We sat under the dim light of a lamp in the long room. Yolanda was on the cushioned bench in the shadow of the great chimney, silently clasping Twonette's hand. Twonette, of course, was silent and serene. Castleman and I talked disjointedly, and Max sat motionless, gazing through the window into the night. After greeting us, Yolanda spoke not a word; but ever in the deep shadow I could see the glow of her eyes looking toward Max. That his heart was filled with a great struggle, I knew, and I believed that Yolanda also knew.

We had many preparations to make before our departure next morning at dawn, so after an hour Max and I rose to leave. Twonette, leaving Yolanda, came to us, and the Castlemans all gave us a hearty God-speed. Yolanda sat wordless in the shadow. I went to her and gave her my hand.

“Farewell, Fraeulein,” I said.

Max followed me closely, and I stepped aside to make way for him. The girl rose and stood irresolute before him. I went to the Castlemans, who were standing at a distance.

“Fraeulein—” said Max. But she interrupted him, extending her hands, which he clasped.

“Have you no word for me, Sir Max?” she asked pathetically, tears springing to her eyes. “Are you coming back to me? Have you the right to come into my life as you



have done, and to leave me? Does God impose but one duty on you—that of your birth?”

“Ah, Fraeulein,” answered Max, huskily, “you know—you know what I suffer.”

“I surely do know,” she responded, “else I would not speak so plainly. But answer me, Sir Max. Answer my question. It is my right to know upon what I may depend. Will you come back to me?”



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The imperious will of the princess had come to the rescue of Yolanda, the burgher girl.

Max paused before speaking, then grasped her hands fiercely and answered:—

“Before God, Fraeulein, I will come back to you, if I live.”

Yolanda sank upon the cushioned bench, covered her face with her hands, and the pent-up storm of sobs and tears broke forth as Max and I passed out the door.

Yolanda had won.

CHAPTER XIX

MAX GOES TO WAR

The next morning at dawn our army marched. Although Duke Charles would not encumber himself with provisions for his men, he carried a vast train of carts filled with plate, silk tents, rich rugs, and precious jewels; for, with all his bravery, this duke's ruling passion was the love of display in the presence of foreigners.

I shall not give the story of this disastrous war in detail; that lies in the province of history, and my story relates only to Max and Yolanda, and to the manner in which they were affected by the results of the war.

We marched with forty thousand men, and laid siege to the city of Granson, in the district of Vaud. The Swiss sent ambassadors under a flag of truce, begging Charles to spare them, and saying, according to my friend Comines, that “there were among them no good prisoners to make, and that the spurs and horses' bits of the duke's army were worth more money than all the people of Switzerland could pay in ransoms, even if they were taken.” Charles rejected all overtures, and on the third of March the brave little Swiss army sallied against us, “heralding their advances by the lowings of the Bull of Uri and the Cow of Unterwalden, two enormous instruments which had been given to their ancestors by Charlemagne.”

God was against Charles of Burgundy, and his army was utterly routed by one of less than a fourth its size. I was with Charles after the battle, and his humiliation was more pitiful than his bursts of ungovernable wrath were disgusting. The king of France, hoping for this disaster, was near by at Lyons.

A cruel man is always despicable in misfortune. Charles at once sent to King Louis a conciliatory, fawning letter, recanting all that he had said in his last missive from Peronne, and expressing the hope that His Majesty would adhere to the treaty and would consent to the marriage of Princess Mary and the Dauphin at once. In this letter Yolanda had no opportunity to insert a disturbing “t.” Louis answered graciously, saying



that the treaty should be observed, and that the marriage should take place immediately upon the duke's return to Burgundy.

"We have already forwarded instructions to Paris," wrote King Louis, "directing that preparations be made at once for the celebration of this most desired union at the holy church of St. Denis. We wondered much at Your Grace's first missive, in which you so peremptorily desired us not to move in this matter till your return; and we wondered more at Your Lordship's ungracious reply to our answer in which we consented to the delay Your Grace had asked."



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Well might King Louis wonder. Charles also wondered, and cursed the stupidity of the Bishop of Cambrai, who had so “encumbered his letter with senseless courtesy as to distort its meaning.”

Charles despatched letters to Peronne and Ghent, ordering immediate preparations for the marriage. As usual, poor Mary was not considered of sufficient importance to receive notice of the event that concerned her so vitally. Others would prepare her, as one might fatten a lamb for slaughter. The lamb need not be consulted or even informed; the day of its fate would be sufficient for it. I was in despair. Max, in his ignorance, was indifferent.

After a short delay, the duke gathered his wrath and his army and laid siege to the town of Morat, announcing his intention to give no quarter, but to kill all, old and young, men, women, and children. The Swiss were prepared for us. “The energy of pride was going to be pitted against the energy of patriotism.” Again disaster fell upon Charles. Thousands of his army were slain, and thousands fled in hopeless rout. His soldiers had never wanted to fight, and one man defending his hearth is stronger than half a score attacking it.

The loss of this battle drove Charles back to Burgundy. With a few of his train, including Max and myself, he retired to the Castle of La Riviera. Here he learned that Rene, Duke of Lorraine, had mustered his forces and had laid siege to Nancy, which city Charles had taken from Duke Rene, some years before, and had garrisoned with Burgundians and English. Upon hearing this unwelcome news, Charles began the arduous task of collecting another army. He was compelled to leave the neighborhood of Switzerland and fly to the rescue of Nancy.

The first of January found us before Nancy, but our arrival was three days too late. The city had capitulated to Duke Rene. On the fifth of January a battle was fought before Nancy, but Fortune had turned her back for all and all on this cruel Duke of Burgundy and Count of Charolois. The disasters at Granson and Morat were repeated. At nightfall Charles could not be found. I supposed that he had escaped, but the next morning his body was found by a washerwoman, frozen in the ice of a pond. He had been killed through the machinations of Campo-Basso. Duke Rene magnanimously gave Charles regal burial, and dismissed his followers without ransom. You may be sure I was eager to return to Peronne.

Fortune, in turning her back upon Charles, had turned her smiling face toward Max. Her ladyship’s smiles were too precious to be wasted, so we made post-haste for Peronne, I spurred by one motive, Mary of Burgundy, Max by another—Yolanda. His heart had grieved for her in castle, in camp, and in din of battle. He had, unknown to me, formed a great and noble resolution; and there was no horse swift enough to keep pace with his desire when we started for Peronne.



I was the first to announce the duke's death. The dark news was given by me to the duchess and the princess in Margaret's parlor. These poor women tried to grieve, but they were not hypocrites, and they could not weep. Each had received at Charles's hands only ill-usage and cruelty, and in their hearts they must have felt relief at his death.



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"It was sure to come," said Margaret. "The duke's bravery led him always into danger. It is God's will, and it must be right."

The princess walked to the window, and said nothing, until I was about to leave; then she turned to me nervously and asked:—

"Did—did Sir Max come with you?"

I looked at her in surprise, and glanced inquiringly toward the duchess.

"My mother knows all, Sir Karl," said the princess, reassuringly. "There have been many things which I could not have done without her help. I have made many rapid changes, Sir Karl, from a princess to a burgher girl, and back again, and I should have failed without my mother's help. I surely mystified you often before you knew of the stairway in the wall. Indeed, I have often hurried breathless to Uncle Castleman's house to deceive you. Mother invented a burgher girl's costume that I used to wear as an under-bodice and petticoat, so, you see, I have been visiting you in my petticoats. I will show you some fine day—perhaps. I have but to unfasten a half-score of hooks, and off drops the princess—I am Yolanda! I throw a skirt over my head, fasten the hooks of a bodice, don my head-dress, and behold! the princess once more. Only a moment intervenes between happiness and wretchedness. But tell me, Sir Karl, have you ever told Sir Max who I am?"

"Never, Your Highness—"

"Yolanda," she interrupted, correcting me smilingly.

"Never, Yolanda," I responded. "He does not even suspect that you are the princess. I shall be true to you. You know what you are doing."

"Indeed I do, Sir Karl," she replied. "I shall win or lose now in a short time and in short skirts. If Max will wed me as Yolanda, I shall be the happiest girl on earth. If not, I shall be the most wretched. If he learns that I am the princess, and if I must offer him the additional inducement of my estates and my domains to bring him to me, I shall not see him again, Sir Karl, if I die of grief for it."

I knew well what she meant, but I did not believe that she would be able to hold to her resolution if she were put to the test. I was, however, mistaken. With all my knowledge of the girl I did not know her strength.

We reached Peronne during the afternoon and, of course, went early the same evening to Castleman's.

We were greeted heartily by the good burgher, his wife, and his daughter. Twonette courtesied to Max, but when she came to me, this serene young goddess of pink and



white offered me her cheek to kiss. I, who had passed my quasi-priestly life without once enjoying such a luxury, touched the velvet cheek with my lips and actually felt a thrill of delight. Life among the burghers really was delicious. I tell you this as a marked illustration of the fact that a man never grows too old to be at times a fool. Twonette slipped from the room, and within fifteen minutes returned. She went directly to Max and said:—



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“Some one is waiting for you in the oak room above.”

She pointed the way, and Max climbed the stairs two steps at a time. I thought from his eagerness he would clear the entire flight at one bound. To his knock a soft voice bade him enter. The owner of the voice was sitting demurely at the farthest end of the room on a cushioned bench. Her back rested against the moving panel that led to the stairway in the wall. She did not move when Max entered. She had done all the moving she intended to do, and Max must now act for himself. He did. He ran down the long room to her, crying:—

“Yolanda! Yolanda!”

She rose to greet him, and he, taking her in his arms, covered her face with kisses. The unconscious violence of his great strength bruised and hurt her, but she gloried in the pain, and was passive as a babe in his arms. When they were seated and half calm, she clutched one of his great fingers and said:—

“You kept your word, Little Max. You came back to me.”

“Did you not know that I would come?” he asked.

“Ah, indeed, I knew—you are not one that makes a promise to break it. Sometimes it is difficult to induce such a man to give his word, and I found it so, but once given it is worth having—worth having, Little Max.”

She smiled up into his face while she spoke, as if to say, “You gave me a deal of trouble, but at last I have captured you.”

“Did you so greatly desire the promise, Yolanda?” asked Max, solely for the pleasure of hearing her answer.

“Yes,” she answered softly, hanging her head, “more than any *man*, can know. It must be an intense longing that will drive a modest girl to boldness, such as I have shown ever since the day I first met you at dear old Basel. It almost broke my heart when father—fatherland—when Burgundy made war on Switzerland.” The word “land” was a lucky thought, and came to the girl just in the nick of time.

Max was too much interested in the girl to pay close attention to any slips she might make about the war with Switzerland. It is true he was now a soldier, and war was all right in its place; but there are things in life compared with which the wars of nations are trivial affairs. All subjects save one were unwelcome to him.

“Now I am going to ask a promise from you, Fraeulein,” said Max, loosening his hand from her grasp and placing his arm about her waist. She offered no objections to the new situation, but blushed and looked down demurely to her folded hands.



“It will, I fear, be very easy for you, Max, to induce me to promise anything you wish. It will be all too easy, for I am not strong, as you are.” She glanced into his face, but her eyes fell quickly to her hands.

“I shall soon leave you again, Fraeulein, and what I wish is of such moment that I—I almost fear to ask.”

“Yes, Max,” she murmured, gently reaching across his knee, and placing her hand in his by way of encouragement.



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"It is this, Fraeulein. I am going back to Styria, and I want to carry with me your promise to be my wife," said Max, softly.

The girl's head fell over against his shoulder, and she clasped his free hand between both of hers.

"I will ask my father's consent," said Max. "I will tell him of you and of my great love, which is so great, Fraeulein, that all the world is nothing beside it and beside you, and he will grant my request."

"But if he doesn't, Max?" asked the face hidden upon his breast.

"If he does not, Fraeulein, I will forego my country and my estates. I will come back to you and will work in the fields, if need be, to make you as happy as you will make me."

"There will be no need for that, Max," she answered, tears of happiness slowly trickling down her cheeks, "for I am rich."

"That I am sorry to hear," he responded.

"Don't you want to know who I am before you wed me?" she asked, after a long pause. She had almost made up her mind to tell him.

"That you may tell me when you are my wife," said Max. "I thought you were the Princess Mary, but I am almost glad that you are not. I soon knew that I was wrong, for I knew that you would not deceive me."

The girl winced and concluded to postpone telling her momentous secret. She was now afraid to do so. As a matter of fact, she had in her heart a healthy little touch of womanly cowardice on small occasions. After a long, delicious pause, Max said:—

"Have I your promise, Fraeulein?"

"Y-e-s," she answered hesitatingly, "I will be your wife if—if I can, and if you will take me when you learn who I am. There is no taint of disgrace about me, Max," she added quickly, in response to the look of surprise on his face. "But I am not worthy of you, and I fear that if your father but knew my unworthiness, he would refuse his consent to our marriage. You must not tell him of my boldness. I will tell you all about myself before you leave for Styria, and then, if you do not want me, you may leave me to—to die."

"I shall want you, Yolanda. I shall want you. Have no doubt of that," he answered.

"With the assurance that there is no stain or taint upon me or my family, do you give me your word, Max, that you will want me and will take me, whoever I am, and will not by word or gesture show me that you are angry or that you regret your promise?"



“I gladly give you that promise,” answered Max.

“Did you ever tell a lie, Little Max?” she asked banteringly, “or did you ever deliberately break a promise?”

“Did I ever steal or commit wilful murder?” asked Max, withdrawing his arm.

“No, Max; now put it back again,” she said.

After a long pause she continued:—

“I have lied.”

Max laughed and drew her to him.

“Your lies will harm no one,” he said joyously.



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“No,” she responded, “I only lie that good may come of it.”

Then silence fell upon the world—their world. Was not that hour with Max worth all the pains that Yolanda had taken to deceive him?

Yolanda and Max came down to the long room, and she, too, gave me her cheek to kiss.

Twonette had prepared a great tankard of wine and honey, with pepper and allspice to suit Yolanda’s taste, and we all sat before the great blazing yule fire, as joyful and content as any six people in Christendom. Twonette and Yolanda together occupied one large chair; Twonette serenely allowing herself to be caressed by Yolanda, who was in a state of mind that compelled her to caress some one. Gentle Frau Kate was sleeping in a great easy chair near the chimney-corner. Max sat at one side of the table,—the side nearest Yolanda,—while Castleman and I sat by each other within easy reach of the wine. I knew without the telling, all that had occurred upstairs, and the same light seemed to have fallen upon the Castlemans. Good old George was in high spirits, and I could see in his eye that he intended to get drunk and, if possible, to bring me, also, to that happy condition. After many goblets of wine, he remarked:—

“The king of France will probably be upon us within a fortnight after he hears the sad news from Nancy.”

Yolanda immediately sat upright in her chair, abandoning Twonette’s soft hand and softer cheek.

“Why do you believe so, uncle?” she asked nervously.

“Because he has waited all his life for this untoward event to happen.”

“Preparations should be made to receive him,” said Yolanda.

“Ah, yes,” replied Castleman, “but Burgundy’s army is scattered to the four winds. It has given its blood for causes in which its heart was not. We lack the strong arm of the duke, to force men to battle against their will. King Louis must be fought by policy, not by armies; and Hymbercourt is absent.”

“Do you know aught of him, Sir Karl?” asked Yolanda.

“I do not, Fraeulein,” I answered, “save that he was alive and well when we left Nancy.”

“That, at least, is good news,” she replied, “and I make sure he will soon come to Burgundy’s help.”

“I am sure he is now on his way,” I answered.



“What can Burgundy do?” she asked, turning to Castleman and me. “You will each advise—advise the princess, I hope.”

“If she wishes my poor advice,” I responded, “she has but to ask it.”

“And mine,” said Castleman, tipping his goblet over his nose.

“If we are to have clear heads to-morrow,” I suggested, “we must drink no more wine to-night. The counsel of wine is the advice of the devil.”

“Right you are, Sir Karl. Only one more goblet. Here’s to the health of the bride to be,” said Castleman.

Yolanda leaned back in her chair beside Twonette, and her face wore a curious combination of smile and pout.



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On the way to the inn, Max, who was of course very happy, told me what had happened in the oak room and added:—

“I look to you, Karl, to help me with father.”

“That I will certainly do,” I answered. I could not resist saying: “We came to Burgundy with the hope of winning the princess. Fortune has opened a door for you by the death of her father. Don’t you wish to try?”

“No,” said Max, turning on me. A moment later he added, “If Yolanda were but the princess, as I once believed she was, what a romance our journey to Burgundy would make!”

My spirits were somewhat dampened by Castleman’s words concerning the French king. Surely they were true, since King Louis was the last man in Europe to forego the opportunity presented by the death of Charles. Should the Princess Mary lose Burgundy just at the time when Max had won her, my disappointment would indeed be great, and Max might truly need my help with his father.

CHAPTER XX

A TREATY WITH LOUIS XI

The next day Castleman and I were called to the castle, and talked over the situation with the duchess and the Princess Mary. In the midst of our council, in walked Hymbercourt and Hugonet. They were devoted friends of Mary.

Our first move was to send spies to the court of France; so two trusted men started at once. Paris was but thirty leagues distant, and the men could reach it in fifteen hours. Half a day there should enable them to learn the true condition of affairs, since they carried well-filled purses to loosen the tongues of Cardinal Balau and Oliver the Barber. The bribery plan was Mary’s, and it worked admirably.

Within forty-eight hours the spies returned, and reported that King Louis, with a small army, was within fifteen leagues of Peronne. He had quickly assembled the three estates at Paris, all of whom promised the king their aid. In the language of the chancellor, “The commons offered to help their king with their bodies and their wealth, the nobles with their advice, and the clergy with their prayers.” This appalling news set Peronne in an uproar.

Recruiting officers were sent out in all directions, the town was garrisoned, and fortifications were overhauled. Mary was again in trouble, and the momentous affairs resting on her young shoulders seemed to have put Max out of her mind. I expected her to call him into council and reveal herself, but she did not.



On the day after we learned of King Louis' approach, the princess called Hymbercourt, Hugonet, Castleman, and myself to her closet and graciously asked us to be seated about a small table.

"I have formed a plan that I wish to submit to you," she said. "I'll send to King Louis an invitation to visit me here at Peronne, under safeguard. When he comes, I intend to offer to restore all the cities that my father took from him, if he will release me from the treaty of marriage, and will swear upon the Cross of Victory to support me against my enemies, and to assist me in subduing Ghent, now in rebellion. What think you of the plan?"



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“Your Highness is giving King Louis nearly half your domain,” suggested Hymbercourt.

“True,” answered the princess, “but it is better to give half than to lose all. Where can we turn for help against this greedy king? When Burgundy is in better case, we’ll take them all from him again.”

“Your Highness is right,” answered Hymbercourt. “But what assurance have you that King Louis will accept your terms?”

“Little, my lord, save that King Louis does not know our weakness. Oliver has by this time told him that he has news of a vast army collecting within twenty leagues of Peronne. If Louis accepts our terms, Oliver and the cardinal are each to receive twenty thousand crowns out of our treasury at Luxembourg. My father fought King Louis with blows; I’ll fight His Majesty with his own weapon, gold. That is the lesson my father should have learned.”

I rose to my feet during her recital and looked down at her in wonder.

“Yolanda”—I began, but corrected myself—“Your Highness needs no councillor. I, for one, deem your plan most wise, and I see in it the salvation of Burgundy.”

The other councillors agreed with me most heartily.

“I have still another plan which I hope may frighten King Louis into accepting our terms. During the conference which I hope to hold with His Majesty, I shall receive a message from my mother’s brother, King Edward of England. The missive, of course, will be directed to my father, since the English king cannot yet know of the duke’s death. The messenger will be an English herald, and will demand immediate audience, and—and—however, I’ll keep the remainder of that plan to myself.”

A broad smile appeared on the faces of all present. Hugonet gazed at the princess and laughed outright.

“Why did not your father take you into his council?” he asked.

“I should have been no help to him,” she responded. “A woman’s wits, dear Hugonet, must be driven by a great motive.”

“But you would have had the motive,” answered Hugonet.

“There is but one motive for a woman, my lord,” she answered.

Hugonet unceremoniously whistled his astonishment, and Yolanda blushed as she said:

—



“You shall soon know.”

Mary’s plan for an interview with Louis succeeded perfectly. He came post-haste under safe conduct to Peronne.

Whatever may be said against Louis, he did not know personal fear. He had a wholesome dread of sacrificing the lives of his people, and preferred to satisfy his greed by policy rather than by war. Gold, rather than blood, was the price he paid for his victories. Taken all in all, he was the greatest king that France ever had—if one may judge a king by the double standard of what he accomplishes and what it costs his people. He almost doubled the territory of France, and he lost fewer men in battle than any enterprising monarch of whom I know.



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Within forty-eight hours of receiving the safe conduct, King Louis was sitting beside Mary on the dais of the ducal throne in the great hall. She was heavily veiled, being in mourning for her father. At her left stood Hymbercourt, Hugonet, Max, and myself. At the king's right stood Cardinal Balau and Oliver the Barber, each anticipating a rich reward in case Louis should accept Mary's terms. Back of them stood a score of the king's courtiers. Many questions of state were discussed; and then Hymbercourt presented Mary's offer to King Louis. The king hesitated. After a long pause he spoke, looking straight ahead, at nothing; as was his custom.

"We will consult with our friends and make answer soon," he said, speaking to nobody.

Louis seemed to think that if he looked at no one and addressed nobody, when he spoke, he might the more easily wriggle out of his obligations later on.

Mary had caused to be drawn up in duplicate a treaty in accordance with the terms that she had outlined at our little council. It was handed to Oliver when the king rose to retire to a private room, to discuss the contents with his councillors.

At the moment when King Louis rose to his feet, a herald was announced at the great hall door.

"A message from His Majesty, King Edward of England," cried the Burgundian herald. Louis resumed his seat as though his feet had slipped from under him.

"We are engaged," answered Mary, acting well a difficult part. "Let the herald leave his packet, or deliver it later."

A whispered conversation took place between the Burgundian herald and the Englishman. Then spoke the Burgundian:—

"Most Gracious Princess, the English herald has no packet. He bears a verbal message to your late father, and insists that he must deliver it to Your Highness at once."

"Must, indeed!" cried Mary, indignantly. Then turning to the king: "These English grow arrogant, Your Majesty. What has the herald to say? Let him come forward. We have no secrets from our most gracious godfather, King Louis."

The English herald approached the ducal throne, but did not speak.

"Proceed," said Mary, irritably.

"With all deference, Most Gracious Princess," said the herald, "the subject-matter of my message is such that it should be communicated privately, or at Your Highness's council-board."



“If you have a message from my good uncle, King Edward, deliver it here and now,” said the princess.

“As you will, Most Gracious Princess,” said the herald. “King Edward has amassed a mighty army, which is now awaiting orders to sail for France; and His Majesty asks permission to cross the territory of Burgundy on his way to Paris. He will pay to Your Highness such compensation as may be agreed upon when His Majesty meets you, which he hopes may be within a month. His Majesty begs a written reply to the message I bear.”



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Mary paused before she answered.

“Wait without. My answer depends upon the conclusions of His Majesty, the King of France.”

The herald withdrew, but in the meantime Louis had descended to the floor and was busily conning the treaty that Mary had caused to be written. He was whispering with Cardinal Balau and Oliver, and was evidently excited by the news he had just heard from England. When he resumed his seat beside Mary, he said:—

“By this treaty, which is simple and straightforward, Your Highness cedes to me certain cities herein named, in perpetuity; and in consideration thereof, I am to be with you friend of friend and foe of foe. I am to aid you in subduing your rebellious subjects, and to sustain you in your choice of a husband. I am also to release you from the present contract of marriage with my son, the Dauphin.”

“That is all, Your Majesty,” said the princess. “It is short and to the point.”

“Indeed it is, Your Highness, and if you will answer King Edward and will deny him the privilege of crossing Burgundy, I will sign the treaty, and will swear upon the true cross to keep it inviolate.”

Mary could hardly conceal her exultation, but she answered calmly:—

“Will Your Majesty sign now?”

Louis and Mary each signed the treaty, and the piece of the true cross upon which the oath was to be made was brought before them, resting on a velvet pillow. Now there were many pieces of the true cross, of which Louis possessed two. Upon one of these he held the oath to be binding and inviolate; it was known as the Cross of Victory. Upon the other his oath was less sacred, and the sin of perjury was venial.

I stood near the throne, and, suspecting Louis of fraud, made bold to inquire:—

“Most humbly I would ask Your Majesty, is this the Cross of Victory?”

The king examined the piece of wood resting on the cushion and said:—

“By Saint Andrew, My Lord Cardinal, you have committed an error. You have brought me the wrong piece.”

The Cross of Victory was then produced, with many apologies and excuses for the mistake, and the oath was taken while Mary’s tiny hand rested on the relic beside King Louis’ browned and wrinkled talon. When the ceremony was finished, the king turned to Mary and said:—



“Whom will Your Highness select for a husband?”

“My father sometime had treaty with Duke Frederick of Styria, looking to my marriage with his son Maximilian, and I shall ratify the compact.”

Max was about to speak, but I plucked him by the sleeve.

* * * * *

Now I shall hasten to the end. The king took his departure within an hour, carrying with him his copy of the treaty. The audience was dismissed, and the princess left the great hall by the door back of the throne, having first directed Hymbercourt, Hugonet, Max, and myself to follow within five minutes, under conduct of a page. Castleman excused himself and left the hall.



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The page soon came to fetch us, and we were taken to Mary's parlor, adjoining her bedroom in Darius tower. From the bedroom, as you know, the stairway in the wall descends to Castleman's house. In the parlor we found Mary, the Duchess Margaret, and several ladies in waiting. All the ladies, including Mary, were heavily veiled. When we entered, Mary addressed Max:—

"Sir Count, you doubtless heard my announcement to the king of France. It was my father's desire at one time to unite Styria and Burgundy by marriage. I myself sent you a letter and a ring that you doubtless still possess. Are you pleased with my offer?"

Max fell to his knee before the princess:—

"Your Highness's condescension is far beyond my deserts. There are few men who could refuse your offer, but I am pledged to another, and I beg Your Highness—"

"Enough, enough," cried the princess, indignantly. "No man need explain his reasons for refusing the hand of Mary of Burgundy."

Astonishment appeared on all faces save mine. I thought I knew the purpose of Her Highness. Max rose to his feet, and Mary said:—

"We'll go downstairs now, and, if you wish, Sir Count, you may there say farewell." She whispered a word to her mother, and led the way into her bedroom. The duchess indicated that Max and I were to follow. We did so, and Margaret came after us.

"We'll go down by these steps," said the princess, leading us to the open panel. "The way is dark, and you must use care in descending, Sir Count, but this is the nearest way to the ground."

Max started down the steps and Mary followed close at his heels. I followed Mary, and Duchess Margaret came after me.

When we had descended twenty steps, the upper panel was closed by some one in the bedroom, and the stairway became inky dark. Ten steps further, I stumbled and almost fell over a soft obstruction on the stairs. I stooped and examined it. Fearing that the duchess might fall when she reached it, I took it up. It was a lady's head-dress and veil. A few steps farther I picked up a lady's bodice and then a skirt. By the time I had made this collection, Max and Mary had reached the moving panel at the foot of the stairs. I heard it slide back, and a flood of light came in upon us. Yolanda, in burgher girl's costume, sprang over the cushioned seat into Castleman's oak room. Max followed, and I, with an armful of woman's gear, helped the duchess to step to the cushion and thence to the floor. Max stood for a moment in half-vexed surprise, but Yolanda, two yards off, laughed merrily:—



“You promised, Sir Max, that you would show no anger when you learned who I was, and you said you would neither lie, steal, nor commit murder.”

The Castlemans stood near by, and the duchess and I joined them, forming an admiring group. Max did not reply. He held out his arms to the girl, and she ran to them. So closely did he hold her that she could hardly move. She did, however, succeed in turning her face toward us, and said poutingly:—

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“Why don’t you leave the room?”

THE END