

In the Fire of the Forge — Volume 05 eBook

In the Fire of the Forge — Volume 05 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER 1.

The vesper bells had already died away, yet Heinz was still listening eagerly to the aged Minorite, who was now relating the story of St. Francis, his breach with everything that he loved, and the sorrowful commencement of his life. The monk could have desired no more attentive auditor. Only the young knight often looked out of the window in search of Biberli, who had not yet returned.

The latter had gone to the Ortlieb mansion with Katterle.

The runaway maid, whose disappearance, at old Martsche's earnest request, had already been "cried" in the city, had no cause to complain of her reception; for the housekeeper and the other servants, who knew nothing of her guilt, greeted her as a favourite companion whom they had greatly missed, and Biberli had taken care that she was provided with answers to the questions of the inquisitive. The story which he had invented began with the false report that a fire had broken out in the fortress. This had startled Katterle, and attracted her to the citadel to aid her countrywoman and her little daughter. Then came the statement that she spent the night there, and lastly the tale that in the morning she was detained in the Swiss warder's quarters by a gentleman of rank—perhaps the Burgrave himself—who, after he had learned who she was, wished to give her some important papers for Herr Ernst Ortlieb. She had waited hours for them and finally, on the way home, chanced to meet Biberli.

At first the maid found it difficult to repeat this patchwork of truth and fiction in proper order, but the ex-schoolmaster impressed it so firmly on his sweetheart's mind that at last it flowed from her lips as fluently as his pupils in Stanstadt had recited the alphabet.

So she became among the other servants the heroine of an innocent adventure whose truth no one doubted, least of all the housekeeper, who felt a maternal affection for her. Some time elapsed ere she could reach the Es; they were still with their mother, who was so ill that the leech Otto left the sick-room shaking his head.

As soon as he had gone Biberli stopped Els, who had accompanied the physician outside the door of the sufferer's chamber, and earnestly entreated her to forgive him and Katterle—who stood at his side with drooping head, holding her apron to her eyes and persuade her father also to let mercy take the place of justice.

But kind-hearted Els proved sterner than the maid had ever seen her.

As her mother had been as well as usual when she woke, they had told her of the events of the previous night. Her father was very considerate, and even kept back many incidents, but the invalid was too weak for so unexpected and startling a communication. She was well aware of her excitable daughter's passionate nature; but she had never expected that her little "saint," the future bride of Heaven, would be so



quickly fired with earthly love, especially for a stranger knight. Moreover, the conduct of Eva who, though she entreated her forgiveness, by no means showed herself contritely ready to resign her lover, had given her so much food for thought that she could not find the rest her frail body required.



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Soon after these disclosures she was again attacked with convulsions, and Els thought of them and the fact that they were caused by Eva's imprudence, instigated by the maid, when she refused Biberli her intercession with her father in behalf of him and his bride, as he now called Katterle.

The servitor uttered a few touching exclamations of grief, yet meanwhile thrust his hand into the pocket of his long robe and, with a courteous bow and the warmest message of love from her betrothed husband, whom Katterle had seen in perfect health and under the best care in the Zollern castle, delivered to the indignant girl the letter which Wolff had entrusted to the maid. Els hurried with the missive so impatiently expected to the window in the hall, through which the sun, not yet reached by the rising clouds, was shining, and as it contained nothing save tender words of love which proved that her betrothed husband firmly relied upon her fidelity and, come what might, would not give her up, she returned to the pair, and hurriedly, but in a more kindly tone, informed them that her father was greatly incensed against both, but she would try to soften him. At present he was in his office with Herr Casper Eysvogel; Biberli might wait in the kitchen till the latter went away.

Els then entered the sick-chamber, but Biberli put his hand under his sweetheart's chin, bent her head back gently, and said: "Now you see how Biberli and other clever people manage. The best is kept until the last. The result of the first throw matters little, only he who wins the last goes home content. To know how to choose the bait is also an art. The trout bites at the fly, the pike at the worm, and a yearning maiden at her lover's letter. Take notice! To-day, which began with such cruel sorrow, will yet have a tolerable end."

"Nay," cried Katterle, nudging him angrily with her elbow, "we never had a day begin more happily for us. The gold with which we can set up housekeeping—"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Biberli, "the zecchins and gold florins are certainly no trifle. Much can be bought with them. But Schorlin Castle razed to the ground, my master's lady mother and Fraulein Maria held as half captives in the convent, to say nothing of the light-hearted Prince Hartmann and Sir Heinz's piteous grief—if all these things could be undone, child, I should not think the bag of gold, and another into the bargain, too high a price to pay for it. What is the use of a house filled with fine furniture when the heart is so full of sorrow? At home we all eat together out of a cracked clay dish across which a tinker had drawn a wire, with rude wooden spoons made by my father, yet how we all relished it!—what more did we want?"

As he spoke he drew her into the kitchen, where he found a friendly reception.



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True, the Ortlieb servants were attached to their employers and sincerely sorry for the ill health of the mistress of the house, but for several years the lamentations and anxiety concerning her had been ceaseless. The young prince's death had startled rather than saddened them. They did not know him, but it was terrible to die so young and so suddenly. They would not have listened to a merry tale which stirred them to laughter, but Biberli's stories of distant lands, of the court, of war, of the tournament, just suited their present mood, and the narrator was well pleased to find ready listeners. He had so many things to forget, and he never succeeded better than when permitted to use his tongue freely. He wagged it valiantly, too, but when the thunderstorm burst he paused and went to the window. His narrow face was blanched, and his agile limbs moved restlessly. Suddenly remarking, "My master will need me," he held out his hand to Katterle in farewell. But as the zigzag flash of lightning had just been followed by the peal of thunder, she clung to him, earnestly beseeching him not to leave her. He yielded, but went out to learn whether Herr Casper was still in the office, and in a short time returned, exclaiming angrily: "The old Eysvogel seems to be building his nest here!"

Then, to the vexation of the clumsy old cook, whom he interrupted by his restless movements in the Paternosters she was repeating on her rosary, he began to stride up and down before the hearth.

His light heart had rarely been so heavy. He could not keep his thoughts from his master, and felt sure that Heinz needed him; that he, Biberli, would have cause to regret not being with him at this moment. Had the storm destroyed the Ortlieb mansion he would have considered it only natural; and as he glanced around the kitchen in search of Katterle, who, like most of the others, was on her knees with her rosary in her hand, old Martsche rushed in, hurried up to the cook, shook her as if to rouse her from sleep, and exclaimed: "Hot water for the blood-letting! Quick! Our mistress—she'll slip through our hands."

As she spoke, the young kitchen maid Metz helped the clumsy woman up, and Biberli also lent his aid.

Just as the jug was filled, Els, too, hastened in, snatched it from the hand of Martsche, whose old feet were too slow for her, and hurried with it into the entry and up the stairs, passing her father, to whom she had called on the way down.

Casper Eysvogel stood at the bottom of the steps, and called after her that it would not be his fault, but her father's, if everything between her and his son was over.

She probably heard the words, but made no answer, and hastened as fast as her feet would carry her to her mother's bed.



The old physician was holding the gasping woman in his arms, and Eva knelt beside the high bedstead sobbing, as she covered the dry, burning hand with kisses.



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When Ernst Ortlieb entered the chamber of his beloved wife a cold chill ran down his back, for the odour of musk, which he had already inhaled beside many a deathbed, reached him.

It had come to this! The end which he had so long delayed by tender love and care was approaching. The flower which had adorned his youth and, spite of its broken stem, had grown still dearer and was treasured beyond everything else that bloomed in his garden, would be torn from him.

This time no friendly potion had helped her to sleep through the noise of the thunderstorm. Soon after the attack of convulsions the agitated, feeble sufferer had started up in terror at the first loud peal of thunder. Fright followed fright, and when the leech came voluntarily to enquire for her, he found a dying woman.

The bleeding restored her to consciousness for a short time, and she evidently recognised her husband and her children. To the former she gave a grateful, tender glance of love, to Els an affectionate, confidential gesture, but Eva, her pride and joy, whom the past night had rendered a child of sorrow, claimed her attention most fully.

Her kind, gentle eyes rested a long time upon her: then she looked toward her husband as if beseeching him to cherish this child with special tenderness in his heart; and when he returned the glance with another, in which all the wealth of his great and loyal love shone through his tears, her fever-flushed features brightened. Memories of the spring of her love seemed to irradiate her last moments and, as her eyes again rested on Eva, her lips once more smiled with the bewitching expression, once her husband's delight, which had long deserted them.

It seemed during this time as if she had forgotten the faithful nurse who for years had willingly sacrificed the pleasures of her days and the sleep of her nights, to lavish upon the child of her anxiety all that her mother-heart still contained, which was naught save love.

Els doubtless noticed it, but with no bitter or sorrowful thoughts. She and the beloved dying woman understood one another. Each knew what she was to the other. Her mother need not doubt, nor did she, that, whatever obstacles life might place in her pathway, Els would pursue the right course even without counsel and guidance. But Eva needed her love and care so much just now, and when the sufferer gave her older daughter also a tender glance and vainly strove to falter a few words of thanks, Els herself replaced in Eva's the hand which her mother had withdrawn.

Fran Maria nodded gently to Els, as if asking her sensible elder daughter to watch over her forsaken sister in her place.



Then her eyes again sought her husband, but the priest, to whom she had just confessed, approached her instead.

After the holy man had performed the duties of his office, she again turned her head toward Eva. It seemed as though she was feasting her eyes on her daughter's charms. Meanwhile she strove to utter what more she desired to say, but the bystanders understood only the words—they were her last: "We thought—should be untouched— But now Heaven——"



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Here she paused and, after closing her eyes for a time, went on in a lower but perfectly distinct tone: “You are good—I hope—the forge-fire of life—it is fortunate for you The heart and its demands The hap—pi —ness—which it—gave—me—— It ought—it must —you, too——”

Whilst speaking she had again glanced towards her husband, then at the Abbess Kunigunde, who knelt beside him, and as the abbess met the look she thought, “She is entrusting the child to me, and desires Eva to be happy as one of us and the fairest of the brides of Heaven!” Ernst Ortlieb, wholly overpowered by the deepest grief, was far from enquiring into the meaning of these last words of his beloved dying wife.

Els, on the contrary, who had learned to read the sufferer’s features and understood her even without words when speech was difficult, had watched every change in the expression of her features with the utmost attention. Without reflecting or interpreting, she was sure that the movements of her dying mother’s lips had predicted to Eva that the “forge fire of life” would exert its purifying and moulding influence on her also, and wished that in the world, not in the convent, she might be as happy as she herself had been rendered by her father’s love.

After these farewell words Frau Maria’s features became painfully distorted, the lids drooped over her eyes, there was a brief struggle, then a slight gesture from the physician announced to the weeping group that her earthly pilgrimage was over.

No one spoke. All knelt silently, with clasped hands, beside the couch, until Eva, as if roused from a dream, shrieked, “She will never come back again!” and with passionate grief threw herself upon the lifeless form to kiss the still face and beseech her to open her dear eyes once more and not leave her.

How often she had remained away from the invalid in order to let her aunt point out the path for her own higher happiness whilst Els nursed her mother; but now that she had left her, she suddenly felt what she had possessed and lost in her love. It seemed as if hitherto she had walked beneath the shadow of leafy boughs, and her mother’s death had stripped them all away as an autumn tempest cruelly tears off the foliage. Henceforth she must walk in the scorching sun without protection or shelter. Meanwhile she beheld in imagination fierce flames blazing brightly from the dark soot—the forge fire of life, to which the dead woman’s last words had referred. She knew what her mother had wished to say, but at the present time she lacked both the desire and the strength to realise it.

For a time each remained absorbed by individual grief. Then the father drew both girls to his heart and confessed that, with their mother’s death life, already impoverished by the loss of his only son, had been bereft of its last charm. His most ardent desire was to be summoned soon to follow the departed ones.



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Els summoned up her courage and asked: "And we—are we nothing to you, father?"

Surprised by this rebuke, he started, removed his wet handkerchief from his eyes, and answered: "Yes, yes—but the old do not reckon Ay, much is left to me. But he who is robbed of his best possession easily forgets the good things remaining, and good you both are."

He kissed his daughter lovingly as he spoke, as if wishing to retract the words which had wounded her; then gazing at the still face of the dead, he said: "Before you dress her, leave her alone with me for a time—— There is a wild turmoil here and here"—he pointed to his breast and brow—"and yet The last hours——There is so much to settle and consider in a future without her With her, with her dear calm features before my eyes——"

Here a fresh outburst of grief stifled his voice; but Els pointed to the image of the Virgin on the wall and beckoned to her sister.

Wholly engrossed by her own sorrow, Eva had scarcely heeded her father's words, and now impetuously refused to leave her mother. Herr Ernst, pleased by this immoderate grief for the one dearest to him, permitted her to remain, and asked Els to attend to the outside affairs which a death always brought with it.

Els accepted the new duty as a matter of course and went to the door; but at the threshold she turned back, rushed to the deathbed, kissed the pure brow and closed eyelids of the sleeper, and then knelt beside her in silent prayer. When she rose she clasped Eva, who had knelt and risen with her, in a close embrace, and whispered: "Whatever happens, you may rely on me."

Then she consulted her father concerning certain arrangements which must be made, and also asked him what she should say to the maid's lover, who had come to beseech his forgiveness.

"Tell him to leave me in peace!" cried Herr Ernst vehemently. Els tried to intercede for the servant, but her father pressed both hands over his ears, exclaiming: "Who can reach a decision when he is out of his senses himself? Let the man come to-morrow, or the day after. Whoever may call, I will see no one, and don't wish to know who is here."

But the peace and solitude for which he longed seemed denied him. A few hours after he left the chamber of death he was obliged to go to the Town Hall on business which could not be deferred; and when, shortly before sunset, he returned home and locked himself into his own room, old Eysvogel again appeared.

He looked pale and agitated, and ordered the manservant—who denied him admittance as he had been directed—to call Jungfrau Els. His voice trembled as he entreated her



to persuade her father to see him again. The matter in question was the final decision of the fate of his ancient house, of Wolff, and also her own and her marriage with his son. Perhaps the death of his beloved wife might render her father's mood more gentle. He did not yet know all Now he must learn it. If he again said "No," it would seal the ruin of the Eysvogel firm.

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How imploringly he could plead! how humbly the words fell from the old merchant's lips, moving Els to her inmost heart as she remembered the curt inflexibility with which, only yesterday, this arrogant man, in that very spot, had refused any connection with the Ortliebs! How much it must cost him to bow his stiff neck before her, who was so much younger, and approach her father, whose heart he had so pitilessly trampled under foot, in the character of a suppliant for aid, perhaps a beggar!

Besides, Wolff was his son!

Whatever wrong the father had done her she must forget it, and the task was not difficult; for now—she felt it—no matter from what motive, he honestly desired to unite her to his son. If her lover now led her through the door adorned with the huge, showy escutcheon, she would no longer come as a person unwillingly tolerated, but as a welcome helper—perhaps as the saviour of the imperilled house. Of the women of the Eysvogel family she forbade herself to think.

How touching the handsome, aristocratic, grey-haired man seemed to her in his helpless weakness! If her father would only receive him, he would find it no easier than she to deny him the compassion he so greatly needed.

She knocked at the lonely mourner's door and was admitted.

He was sitting, with his head bowed on his hands, opposite to the large portrait of her dead mother in her bridal robes. The dusk of the gathering twilight concealed the picture, but he had doubtless gazed long at the lovely features, and still beheld them with his mental vision.

Els was received with a mournful greeting; but when Herr Ernst heard what had brought her to him, he fiercely commanded her to tell Herr Casper that he would have nothing more to do with him.

Els interceded for the unfortunate man, begging, pleading, and assuring her father that she would never give up Wolff. The happiness of her whole life was centred in him and his love. If he refused the Eysvogels the aid besought by the old merchant who, in his humility, seemed a different man——

Here her father indignantly broke in, ordering her to disturb him no longer. But now the heritage of his own nature asserted itself in Els and, with an outburst of indignation, she pointed to the picture of her mother, whose kind heart certainly could not have endured to see a broken-hearted man, on whose rescue the happiness of her own child depended, turned from her door like an importunate beggar.

At this the man whose locks had long been grey sprang from his chair with the agility of a youth, exclaiming in vehement excitement: "To embitter the hours devoted to the



most sacred grief is genuine Eysvogel selfishness. Everything for themselves! What do they care for others? I except your Wolff; let the future decide what concerns him and you. I will stand by you. But to hope for happiness and peace-nay, even a life without bitter



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sorrow for you from the rest of the kin—is to expect to gather sweet pears from juniper bushes. Ever since your betrothal your mother and I have had no sleep, disturbed whenever we talked to each other about your being condemned to live under the same roof with that old devil, the countess, her pitiable daughter, and that worthless Siebenburg. But within the past few hours all this has been changed. The table-cloth has been cut between the Eysvogels and the Ortliebs. No power in the world can ever join it. I have not told you what has happened. Now you may learn that you—— But first listen, and then decide on whose side you will stand.

“Early this morning I went to the session of the Council. In the market-place I met first one member of it, then a second, third, and fourth; each asked me what had happened to the beautiful E, my lovely little daughter. Gradually I learned what had reached their ears. Yesterday evening, on his way home from here, the man outside, Casper Eysvogel, sullied your—our—good name, child, in a way I have just learned the particulars. He boasted, in the presence of those estimable old gentlemen, the Brothers Ebner, that he had flung at my feet the ring which bound you to his son. You had been surprised at midnight, he said, in the arms of a Swiss knight, and that base scoundrel Siebenburg, his daughter’s husband, dared at the gaming-table, before a number of knights and gentlemen—among them young Hans Gross, Veit Holzschuher, and others—to put your interview with the Swiss in so false a light that No, I cannot bring my lips to utter it——

“You need hear only this one thing more: the wretch said that he thanked his patron saint that they had discovered the jade’s tricks in time. And this, child, was the real belief of the whole contemptible crew! But now that the water is up to their necks, and they need my helping hand to save them from drowning—now they will graciously take Ernst Ortlieb’s daughter if he will give them his property into the bargain, that they may destroy both fortune and child. No—a thousand times no! It is not seemly, at this hour, to yield to the spirit of hate; but she who is lying in her last sleep above would not have counselled me by a single word to such suicidal folly. I did not learn the worst until I went to the Council, or I would have turned the importunate fellow from the door this morning. Tell the old man so, and add that Ernst Ortlieb will have nothing more to do with him.”

Here the deeply incensed father pointed to the door.

Els had listened with eyes dilating in horror. The result surpassed her worst fears.

She had felt so secure in her innocence, and the countess had interceded for her so cleverly that, absorbed by anxieties concerning Eva, Cordula, and her mother, she had already half forgotten the disagreeable incident.



Yet, now that her fair name was dragged through the mire, she could scarcely be angry with those who pointed the finger of scorn at her; for faithlessness to a betrothed lover was an offence as great as infidelity to a husband. Nay, her friends were more ready to condemn a girl who broke her vow than a wife who forgot her duty.



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And if Wolff, in his bidding-place in the citadel, should learn what was said of his Els, to whom yesterday old and young raised their hats in glad yet respectful greeting, would he not believe those who appealed to his own father?

Yet ere she had fully realised this fear, she told herself that it was her duty and her right to thrust it aside. Wolff would not be Wolff if even for a moment he believed such a thing possible. They ought not, could not, doubt each other. Though all Nuremberg should listen to the base calumny and turn its back upon her, she was sure of her Wolff. Ay, he would cherish her with twofold tenderness when he learned by whom this terrible suffering had been inflicted upon her.

Drawing a long breath, she again fixed her eyes upon her mother's portrait. Had she now rushed out to tell the old man who had so cruelly injured her—oh, it would have lightened her heart!—the wrong he had done and what she thought of him, her mother would certainly have stopped her, saying: "Remember that he is your betrothed husband's father." She would not forget it; she could not even hate the ruined man.

Any effort to change her father's mood now—she saw it plainly—would be futile. Later, when his just anger had cooled, perhaps he might be persuaded to aid the endangered house.

Herr Ernst gazed after her sorrowfully as, with a gesture of farewell, she silently left the room to tell her lover's father that he had come in vain.

The old merchant was waiting in the entry, where the wails of the servants and the women in the neighbourhood who, according to custom, were beating their brows and breasts and rending their garments, could be heard distinctly.

Deadly pale, as if ready to sink, he tottered towards the door.

When Els saw him hesitate at the top of the few steps leading to the entry, she gave him her arm to support him down. As he cautiously put one foot after the other on the stairs, she wondered how it was possible that this man, whose tall figure and handsome face were cast in so noble a mould, could believe her to be so base; and at the same moment she remembered the words which old Berthold Vorchtel had uttered in her presence to his son Ulrich: "If anything obscure comes between you and a friend, obtain a clear understanding and peace by truth."

Had the young man who had irritated his misjudged friend into crossing swords with him followed this counsel, perhaps he would have been alive now. She would take it herself, and frankly ask Wolff's father what justified him in accusing her of so base a deed.



The lamps were already lighted in the hall, and the rays from the central one fell upon Herr Casper's colourless face, which wore an expression of despair. But just as her lips parted to ask the question the odour of musk reached her from the death-chamber, whose door Eva had opened. Her mother's gentle face, still in death, rose before her memory, and she was forced to exert the utmost self-control not to weep aloud. Without further reflection she imposed silence upon herself and—yesterday she would not have ventured to do it—threw her arm around Herr Casper's shoulders, gazed affectionately at him, and whispered: "You must not despair, father. You have a faithful ally in this house in Els."



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The old man looked down at her in astonishment, but instead of drawing her closer to him he released himself with courteous coldness, saying bitterly: "There is no longer any bond between us and the Ortliebs, Jungfrau Els. From this day forth I am no more your father than you are the bride of my son. Your will may be good, but how little it can accomplish has unfortunately been proved."

Shrugging his shoulders wearily as he spoke, he nodded a farewell and left the house.

Four bearers were waiting outside with the sedan-chair, three servants with torches, and two stout attendants carrying clubs over their shoulders. All wore costly liveries of the Eysvogel colours, and when their master had taken his seat in the gilded conveyance and the men lifted it, Els heard a weaver's wife, who lived near by, say to her little boy: "That's the rich Herr Eysvogel, Fritzel. He has as much money to spend every hour as we have in a whole year, and he is a very happy man."

CHAPTER II.

Els went back into the house.

The repulse which she had just received caused her bitter sorrow. Her father was right. Herr Casper had treated her kindly from a purely selfish motive. She herself was nothing to him.

But there was so much for her to do that she found little time to grieve over this new trouble.

Eva was praying in the death-chamber for the soul of the beloved dead with some of the nuns from the convent, who had lost in her mother a generous benefactress.

Els was glad to know that she was occupied; it was better that her sister should be spared many of the duties which she was obliged to perform. Whilst arranging with the coffin-maker and the "Hegelein," the sexton and upholsterer, ordering a large number of candles and everything else requisite at the funeral of the mistress of an aristocratic household, she also found time to look after her father and Countess Cordula, who was better. Yet she did not forget her own affairs.

Biberli had returned. He had much to relate; but when forced to admit that nothing was urgent, she requested him to defer it until later, and only commissioned him to go to the castle, greet Wolff in her name, and announce her mother's death; Katterle would accompany him, in order to obtain admittance through her countryman, the Swiss warder.

Els might have sent one of the Ortlieb servants; but, in the first place, the fugitive's refuge must be concealed, and then she told herself that Biberli, who had witnessed the



occurrence of the previous evening, could best inform Wolff of the real course of events. But when she gave him permission to tell her betrothed husband all that he had seen and heard the day before at the Ortlieb mansion, Biberli replied that a better person than he had undertaken to do so. As he left his master, Sir Heinz was just going to seek

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her lover. When she learned all that had befallen the knight, she would understand that he was no longer himself. Els, however, had no time to listen, and promised to hear his story when he returned; but he was too full of the recent experience to leave it untold, and briefly related how wonderfully Heaven had preserved his master's life. Then he also told her hurriedly that the trouble which had come upon her through Sir Heinz's fault burdened his soul. Therefore he would not let the night pass without at least showing her betrothed husband how he should regard the gossip of idle tongues if it penetrated to his hiding-place.

Els uttered a sigh of relief. Surely Wolff must trust her! Yet what viciously coloured reports might reach him from the Eysvogels! Now that he would learn the actual truth from the most credible eye-witnesses she no longer dreaded even the worst calumny.

No one appeared at supper except her father. Eva had begged to be excused. She wished to remain undisturbed; but the world, with rude yet beneficent hand, interrupted even her surrender to her grief for her mother.

The tailor, who protested that, owing to the mourning for young Prince Hartmann, he had fairly "stolen" this hour for the beautiful Ortlieb sisters, came with his assistant, and at the same time a messenger arrived from the cloth-house in the market-place bringing the packages of white stuffs for selection. Then it was necessary to decide upon the pattern and material; the sisters must appear in mourning the next morning at the consecration, and later at the mass for the dead.

Eva had turned to these worldly matters with sincere repugnance, but Els would not release her from giving them due attention.

It was well for her tortured soul and the poor eyes reddened by weeping. But when she again knelt in the chamber of death beside her dear nuns and saw the grey robe, which they all wore, the wish to don one, which she had so often cherished, again awoke. No other was more pleasing to her Heavenly Bridegroom, and she forbade herself in this hour to think of the only person for whose sake she would gladly have adorned herself. Yet the struggle to forget him constantly recalled him to her mind, no matter how earnestly she strove to shut out his image whenever it appeared. But, after her last conversation, must not her mother have died in the belief that she would not give up her love? And the dead woman's last words? Yet, no matter what they meant, here and now nothing should come between her and the beloved departed. She devoted herself heart and soul to the memory of the longing for her.

Grief for her loss, repentance for not having devoted herself faithfully enough to her, and the hope that in the convent her prayers might obtain a special place in the world beyond for the beloved sleeper, now revived her wish to take the veil. She felt bound to

the nuns, who shared her aspirations. When her father came to send her to her rest and asked whether, as a motherless child, she intended to trust his love and care or to choose another mother who was not of this world, she answered quietly with a loving glance at the picture of St. Clare, "As you wish, and she commands."



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Herr Ernst kindly replied that she still had ample time to make her decision, and then again urged her to leave the watch beside the dead to the women who had been appointed to it and the nuns, who desired to remain with the body; but Eva insisted so eagerly upon sharing it that Els, by a significant gesture to her father, induced him to yield.

She kept her sister away whilst the corpse was being laid out and the women were performing their other duties by asking Eva to receive their Aunt Christine, the wife of Berthold Pfinzing, who had hurried to the city from Schweinau as soon as she had news of her sister-in-law's death.

Nothing must cloud the memory of the beloved sufferer in the mind of her child, and Els knew that Frau Christine had been a dear friend of the dead woman, that Eva clung to her like a second mother, and that nothing could reach her sister from her honest heart which would not benefit her. Nor was she mistaken, for the warm, affectionate manner in which the matron greeted the young girl restored her composure; nay, when Frau Christine was obliged to go, because her time was claimed by important duties, she would gladly have detained her.

When Eva, in a calmer mood than before, at last entered the hall where her mother's body now lay in a white silk shroud on the snowy satin pillows, as she was to be placed before the altar for the service of consecration on the morrow, she was again overwhelmed with all the violence of the deepest grief; nay, the burning anguish of her soul expressed itself so vehemently that the abbess, who had returned whilst the sisters were still taking leave of their Aunt Christine, did not succeed in soothing her until, drawing her aside, she whispered: "Remember our saint, child. He called everything, even the sorest agony, 'Sister Sorrow'. So you, too, must greet sorrow as a sister, the daughter of your heavenly Father. Remember the supreme, loving hand whence it came, and you will bear it patiently."

Eva nodded gratefully, and when grief threatened to overpower her she thought of the saint's soothing words, "Sister Sorrow," and her heart grew calmer.

Els knew how much the emotions of the previous nights must have wearied her, and had permitted her to share the vigil beside the corpse only because she believed that she would be unable to resist sleep. She had slipped a pillow between her back and that of the tall, handsome chair which she had chosen for a seat, but Eva disappointed her expectation; for whatever she earnestly desired she accomplished, and whilst Els often closed her eyes, she remained wide awake. When sleep threatened to overpower her she thought of her mother's last words, especially one phrase, "the forge fire of life," which seemed specially pregnant with meaning. Yet, ere she had reached any definite understanding of its true significance, the cocks began to crow, the song of the nightingale ceased, and the twittering of the other birds in the trees and bushes in the garden greeted the dawning day.



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Then she rose and, smiling, kissed Els, who was sleeping, on the forehead, told Sister Renata that she would go to rest, and lay down on her bed in the darkened chamber.

Whilst praying and reflecting she had thought constantly of her mother. Now she dreamed that Heinz Schorlin had borne her in his strong arms out of the burning convent, as Sir Boemund Altrosen had saved the Countess von Montfort, and carried her to the dead woman, who looked as fresh and well as in the days before her sickness.

When, three hours before noon, she awoke, she returned greatly refreshed to her dead mother. How mild and gentle her face was even now; yet the dear, silent lips could never again give her a morning greeting and, overwhelmed by grief, she threw herself on her knees before the coffin.

But she soon rose again. Her recent slumber had transformed the passionate anguish into quiet sorrow.

Now, too, she could think of external things. There was little to be done in the last arrangement of the dead, but she could place the delicate, pale hands in a more natural position, and the flowers which the gardener had brought to adorn the coffin did not satisfy her. She knew all that grew in the woods and fields near Nuremberg, and no one could dispose bouquets more gracefully. Her mother had been especially fond of some of them, and was always pleased when she brought them home from her walks with the abbess or Sister Perpetua, the experienced old doctress of the convent. Many grew in the forest, others on the brink of the water. The beloved dead should not leave the house, whose guide and ornament she had been, without her favourite blossoms.

Eva arranged the flowers brought by the gardener as gracefully as possible, and then asked Sister Perpetua to go to walk with her, telling her father and sister that she wished to be out of doors with the nun for a short time.

She told no one what she meant to do. Her mother's favourite flowers should be her own last gift to her.

Old Martsche received the order to send Ortel, the youngest manservant in the household, a good-natured fellow eighteen years old, with a basket, to wait for her and Sister Perpetua at the weir.

After the thunderstorm of the day before the air was specially fresh and pure; it was a pleasure merely to breathe. The sun shone brightly from the cloudless sky. It was a delightful walk through the meadows and forest over the footpath which passed near the very Dutzen pool, where Katterle the day before had resolved to seek death. All Nature seemed revived as though by a refreshing bath. Larks flew heavenward with a low sweet song, from amidst the grain growing luxuriantly for the winter harvest, and

butterflies hovered above the blossoming fields. Slender dragon-flies and smaller busy insects flitted buzzing from flower to flower, sucking honey from the brimming calyxes and bearing to others the seeds needed to form fruit. The songs of finches and the twitter of white-throats echoed from many a bush by the wayside.



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In the forest they were surrounded by delightful shade animated by hundreds of loud and low voices far away and close at hand. Countless buds were opening under the moss and ferns, strawberries were ripening close to the ground, and the delicate leafy boughs of the bilberry bushes were full of juicy green oared fruit.

Near the weir they heard a loud clanking and echoing, but it had a very different effect from the noise of the city; instead of exciting curiosity there was something soothing in the regularity of the blows of the iron hammer and the monotonous croaking of the frogs.

In this part of the forest, where the fairest flowers grew, the morning dew still hung glittering from the blossoms and grasses. Here it was secluded, yet full of life, and amidst the wealth of sounds in which might be heard the tapping of the woodpecker, the cry of the lapwing, and the call of the distant wood-pigeon, it was so still and peaceful that Eva's heart grew lighter in spite of her grief.

Sister Perpetua spoke only to answer a question. She sympathised with Eva's thought when she frankly expressed her pleasure in every new discovery, for she knew for whom and with what purpose she was seeking and culling the flowers and, instead of accusing her of want of feeling, she watched with silent emotion the change wrought in the innocent child by the effort to render, in league with Nature, an act of loving service to the one she held dearest.

True, even now grief often rudely assailed Eva's heart. At such times she paused, sighing silently, or exclaimed to her companion, "Ah, if she could be with us!" or else asked thoughtfully if she remembered how her mother had rejoiced over the fragrant orchid or the white water-lily which she had just found.

Sister Perpetua had taken part of the blossoms which she had gathered; but Ortel already stood waiting with the basket, and the house-dog, Wasser, which had followed the young servant, ran barking joyously to meet the ladies. Eva already had flowers enough to adorn the coffin as she desired, and the sun showed that it was time to return.

Hitherto they had met no one. The blossoms could be arranged here in the forest meadow under the shade of the thick hazel-bushes which bordered the pine wood.

After Eva had thrown hers on the grass, she asked the nun to do the same with her own motley bundle.

Between the thicket and the road stood a little chapel which had been erected by the Mendel family on the spot where a son of old Herr Nikolaus had been murdered. Four Frank robber knights had attacked him and the train of waggons he had ridden out to meet, and killed the spirited young man, who fought bravely in their defence.



Such an event would no longer have been possible so near the city. But Eva knew what had befallen the Eysvogel wares and, although she did not lack courage, she started in terror as she heard the tramp of horses' hoofs and the clank of weapons, not from the city, but within the forest.



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She hastily beckoned to her companion who, being slightly deaf had heard nothing, to hide with her behind the hazel-bushes, and also told the young servant, who had already placed the basket beside the flowers, to conceal himself, and all three strained their ears to catch the sounds from the wood.

Ortel held the dog by the collar, silenced him, and assured his mistress that it was only another little band of troopers on their way from Altdorf to join the imperial army.

But this surmise soon proved wrong, for the first persons to appear were two armed horsemen, who turned their heads as nimbly as their steeds, now to the right and now to the left, scanning the thickets along the road distrustfully. After a somewhat lengthy interval the tall figure of an elderly man followed, clad in deep mourning. Beneath his cap, bordered with fine fur, long locks fell to his shoulders, and he was mounted on a powerful Binzgau charger. At his side, on a beautiful spirited bay, rode a very young woman whose pliant figure was extremely aristocratic in its bearing.

As soon as the hazel-bushes and pine trees, which had concealed the noble pair, permitted a view of them, Eva recognised in the gentleman the Emperor Rudolph, and in his companion Duchess Agnes of Austria, his young daughter-in-law, whom she had not forgotten since the dance at the Town Hall. Behind them came several mailed knights, with the emblems of the deepest mourning on their garments and helmets, and among those nearest to the Emperor Eva perceived—her heart almost stood still—the person whom she had least expected to meet here—Heinz Schorlin.

Whilst she was gathering the flowers for her mother's coffin his image had almost vanished from her mind. Now he appeared before her in person, and the sight moved her so deeply that Sister Perpetua, who saw her turn pale and cling to the young pine by her side, attributed her altered expression to fear of robber knights, and whispered, "Don't be troubled, child; it is only the Emperor."

Neither the first horsemen-guards whom the magistrate, Berthold Pfinzing, Eva's uncle, had assigned to the sovereign without his knowledge, to protect him from unpleasant encounters during his early morning ride—nor the Emperor and his companions could have seen Eva whilst they were passing the chapel; but scarcely had they reached it when the dog Wasser, which had escaped from Ortel's grasp, burst through the hazel copse and, barking furiously, dashed towards the duchess's horse.

The spirited animal leaped aside, but a few seconds later Heinz Schorlin had swung himself from the saddle and dealt the dog so vigorous a kick that it retreated howling into the thicket. Meanwhile he had watched every movement of the bay, and at the right instant his strong hand had grasped its nostrils and forced it to stand.

"Always alert and on the spot at the right time!" cried the Emperor, then added mournfully, "So was our Hartmann, too."



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The duchess bent her head in assent, but the grieving father pointed to Heinz, and added: "The boy owed his blithe vigour partly to the healthful Swiss blood with which he was born, but yonder knight, during the decisive years of life, set him the example. Will you dismount, child, and let Schorlin quiet the bay?"

"Oh, no," replied the duchess, "I understand the animal. You have not yet broken the wonderful son of the desert of shying, as you promised. It was not the barking cur, but yonder basket that has dropped from the skies, which frightened him."

She pointed, as she spoke, to the grass near the chapel where, beside Eva's flowers, stood the light willow basket which was to receive them.

"Possibly, noble lady," replied Heinz, patting the glossy neck of the Arabian, a gift to the Emperor Rudolph from the Egyptian Mameluke Sultan Kalaun. "But perhaps the clever creature merely wished to force his royal rider to linger here. Graciously look over yonder, Your Highness; does it not seem as if the wood fairy herself had laid by the roadside for your illustrious Majesty the fairest flowers that bloom in field and forest, mere and moss?"

As he spoke he stooped, selected from the mass of blossoms gathered by Eva those which specially pleased his eye, hastily arranged them in a bouquet, and with a respectful bow presented them to the duchess.

She thanked him graciously, put the nosegay in her belt, and gazed at him with so warm a light in her eyes that Eva felt as if her heart was shrinking as she watched the scene.

Even princesses, who were separated from him by so wide a gulf, could not help favouring this man. How could she, the simple maiden whom he had assured of his love, ever have been able to give him up?

But she had no time to think and ponder; the Emperor was already riding on with the Bohemian princess, and Heinz went to his horse, whose bridle was held by one of the troopers who followed the train.

Ere he swung himself into the saddle again, however, he paused to reflect.

The thought that he had robbed some flower or herb-gatherer of a portion of the result of her morning's work had entered his mind and, obeying a hasty impulse, he flung a glittering zecchin into the basket.

Eva saw it, and every fibre of her being urged her to step forward, tell him that the flowers were hers, and thank him in the name of the poor for whom she destined his gift; but maidenly diffidence held her in check, although he gave her sufficient opportunity; for when he perceived the image of the Virgin in the Mendel chapel, he crossed himself, removed his helmet, and bending the knee repeated, whilst the others



rode on without him, a silent prayer. His brown locks floated around his head, and his features expressed deep earnestness and glowing ardour.

Oh, how gladly Eva would have thrown herself on her knees beside him, clasped his hands, and—nay, not prayed, her heart was throbbing too stormily for that—rested her head upon his breast and told him that she trusted him, and felt herself one with him in earthly as well as heavenly love!

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Whoever prayed thus in solitude had a soul yearning for the loftiest things. Others might say what they chose, she knew him better. This man, from the first hour of their meeting, had loved her with the most ardent but also with the holiest passion; never, never had he sought her merely for wanton amusement. Her mother's last wish would be fulfilled. She need only trust him with her whole soul, and leave the "forge fire of life" to strengthen and purify her.

Now she remembered where the dying woman had heard the phrase.

Her Aunt Christine had used it recently in her mother's presence. Young Kunz Schurstab had fallen into evil ways in Lyons. Every one, even his own father, had given him up for lost; but after several years he returned home and proved himself capable of admirable work, both in his father's business and in the Council. In reply to Frau Ortlieb's enquiry where this transformation in the young man had occurred, her aunt answered:

"In the forge fire of life." Eva told herself that she had intentionally kept aloof from its flames, and in the convent, perhaps, they would never have reached her. Yesterday they had seized upon her for the first time, and henceforward she would not evade them, that she might obey her mother and become worthy of the man praying silently yonder. He owed to his heroic courage and good sword a renowned name; but what had she ever done save selfishly to provide for her own welfare in this world and the next? She had not even been strong enough to hold the head of the mother, to whom she owed everything and who had loved her so tenderly, when the convulsions attacked her.

Even after she closed her eyes in death—she had noticed it—she had been kept from every duty in the household and for the beloved dead, because it was deemed unsuitable for her, and Els and every one avoided putting the serious demands of life between the "little saint" and her aspirations towards the bliss of heaven. Yet Eva knew that she could accomplish whatever she willed to do, and instead of using the strength which she felt stirring with secret power in her fragile body, she had preferred to let it remain idle, in order to dwell in another world from that in which she had been permitted to prove her might. The fire of the forge, by whose means pieces of worthless iron were transformed into swords and ploughshares, should use its influence upon her also. Let it burn and torture her, if it only made her a genuine, noble woman, a woman like her Aunt Christine, from whom her mother had heard the phrase of "the forge fire of life," who aided and pointed out the right path to hundreds, and probably, at her age, had needed neither an Els nor an Abbess Kunigunde to keep her, body and soul, in the right way. She loved both; but some impulse within rebelled vehemently against being treated like a child, and—now that her mother was dead—subjecting her own will to that of any other person than the man to whom she would have gladly looked up as a master.

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Whilst Heinz knelt in front of the chapel without noticing Sister Perpetua, who was praying before the altar within, these thoughts darted through Eva's brain like a flash of lightning. Now he rose and went to his horse, but ere he mounted it the dog, barking furiously, again broke from the thicket close at her side.

Heinz must have seen her white mourning robes, for her own name reached her ears in a sudden cry, and soon after—she herself could not have told how—Heinz was standing beside the basket amidst the flowers, with her hand clasped in his, gazing into her eyes so earnestly and sadly that he seemed a different person from the reckless dancer in the Town Hall, though the look was equally warm and tender. Whilst doing so, he spoke of the deep wound inflicted upon her by her mother's death. Fate had dealt him a severe blow also, but grief taught him to turn whither she, too, had directed him.

Just at that moment the blast of the horn summoning the Emperor's train to his side echoed through the forest.

"The Emperor!" cried Heinz; then bending towards the flowers he seized a few forget-me-nots, and, whilst gazing tenderly at them and Eva, murmured in a low tone, as if grief choked his utterance: "I know you will give them to me, for they wear the colour of the Queen of Heaven, which is also yours, and will be mine till my heart and eyes fail me."

Eva granted his request with a whispered "Keep them"; but he pressed his hand to his brow and, as if torn by contending emotions, hastily added: "Yes, it is that of the Holy Virgin. They say that Heaven has summoned me by a miracle to serve only her and the highest, and it often seems to me that they are right. But what will be the result of the conflicting powers which since that flash of lightning have drawn one usually so prompt in decision as I, now here, now there? Your blue, Eva, the hue of these flowers, will remain mine whether I wear it in honour of the Blessed Virgin, or—if the world does not release me—in yours. She or you! You, too, Eva, I know, stand hesitating at the crossing of two paths—which is the right one? We will pray Heaven to show it to you and to me."

As he spoke he swung himself swiftly into the saddle and, obeying the summons, dashed after his imperial master.

Eva gazed silently at the spot where he had vanished behind a group of pine trees; but Ortel, who had gathered a few early strawberries for her, soon roused her from her waking dream by exclaiming, as he clapped his big hands: "I'll be hanged, Jungfrau Eva, if the knight who spoke to you isn't the Swiss to whom the great miracle happened yesterday!"

“The miracle?” she asked eagerly, for Els had intentionally concealed what she heard, and this evidently had something to do with the “wonderful summons” of which Heinz had spoken without being understood.



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“Yes, a great, genuine miracle,” Ortel went on eagerly. “The lightning—I heard it from the butcher boy who brings the meat, he learned it from his master’s wife herself, and now every child in the city knows it—the lightning struck the knight’s casque during the thundershower yesterday; it ran along his armour, flashing brightly; the horse sank dead under him without moving a limb, but he himself escaped unhurt, and the mark of a cross can be seen in the place where the lightning struck his helmet.”

“And you think this happened to the very knight who took the flowers yonder?” asked Eva anxiously.

“As certainly as I hope to have the sacrament before I die, Jungfrau Eva,” the youth protested. “I saw him riding with that lank Biberli, Katterle’s lover, who serves him, and such noblemen are not found by the dozen. Besides, he is one of those nearest to the Emperor Rudolph’s person. If it isn’t he, I’ll submit to torment——”

“Fie upon your miserable oaths!” Eva interrupted reprovingly. “Do you know also that the tall, stately gentleman with the long grey hair——”

“That was the Emperor Rudolph!” cried Ortel, sure he was right. “Whoever has once seen him does not forget him. Everything on earth belongs to him; but when the knight took our flowers so freely just now as if they were his own, I thought But there—there—there! See for yourself, Jungfrau! A heavy, unclipped yellow zecchin!”

As he spoke he took the coin in his hand, crossed himself, and added thoughtfully: “The little silver coin, or whatever he flung in here— perhaps to pay for the flowers, which are not worth five shillings—has been changed into pure gold by the saint who wrought the miracle for him. My soul! If many in Nuremberg paid so high for forage, the rich Eysvogel would leave the Council and go in search of wild flowers!”

Eva begged the man to leave the zecchin, promising to give him another at home and half a pound in coppers as earnest money. “This is what I call a lucky morning!” cried Ortel. But directly after he changed his tone, remembering Eva’s white mourning robe and the object of their expedition, and his fresh voice sounded very sympathetic as he added: “If one could only call your lady mother back to life! Ah, me! I’d spend all my savings to buy for the saints as many candles as my mother has in her little shop, if that would change things.”

Whilst speaking he filled the basket with flowers, and the nun helped him. Eva walked before them with bowed head.

Could she hope to wed the man for whom Heaven had performed such a miracle? Was it no sin to hope and plead that he would wear their common colour, not in honour of the Queen of Heaven, but of the lowly Eva, in whom nothing was strong save the desire for good? Was not Heinz forcing her to enter into rivalry with one the most distant



comparison with whom meant defeat? Yet, no! Her gracious Friend above knew her and her heart. She knew with what tender love and reverence she had looked up to her from childhood, and she now confided the love in her heart to her who had shown herself gracious a thousand times when she raised her soul to her in prayer.



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Eva was breathing heavily when she emerged from the forest and stopped to wait until Sister Perpetua had finished her prayer in the chapel and overtook her. Her heart was heavy, and when, in the meadow beyond the woods, the heat of the sun, which was already approaching the zenith, made itself felt, it seemed as if she had left the untroubled happiness of childhood behind her in the green thicket. Yet she would not have missed this forest walk at any price. She knew now that she had no rival save the one whom Heinz ought to love no less than she. Whether they both decided in favour of the world or the cloister, they would remain united in love for her and her divine Son.

CHAPTER III.

Outside the courtyard of the Ortlieb mansion Eva saw Biberli going towards the Frauenthor. He had been with Els a long time, giving a report as frankly as ever. The day before he said to Katterle: "Calm yourself, my little lamb. Now that the daughters need you and me to carry secret messages, the father will leave us in peace too. A member of the Council would be like the receiver of stolen goods if he allowed a man whom he deemed worthy of the stocks to render him many services."

And Herr Ernst Ortlieb really did let him alone, because he was forced to recognise that Biberli and Katterle were indispensable in carrying on his daughter's intercourse with Wolff.

Els had forgiven the clever fellow the more willingly the more consoling became the tidings he brought her from her betrothed bridegroom. Besides, she regarded it as specially fortunate that she learned through him many things concerning Heinz Schorlin, which for her sister's sake she was glad to know.

True, it would have been useless trouble to try to extort from the true and steadfast Biberli even a single word which, for his master's sake, it would have been wiser to withhold, yet he discussed matters patiently, and told her everything that he could communicate conscientiously. So, when Eva returned, she was accurately informed of all that had befallen and troubled the knight the day before.

She listened sympathisingly to the servant's lamentation over the marvellous change which had taken place in Heinz since his horse was killed under him. But she shook her head incredulously at Biberli's statement that his master seriously intended to seek peace in the cloister, like his two older sisters; yet at the man's animated description of how Father Benedictus had profited by Sir Heinz's mood to estrange him from the world, the doubt vanished.

Biberli's assurance that he had often seen other young knights rush into the world with specially joyous recklessness, who had suddenly halted as if in terror and known no other expedient than to change the coat of mail for the monk's cowl, reminded her of

similar incidents among her own acquaintances. The man was right in his assertion that most of them had been directed to the monastery by monks of the Order of St. Francis, since the name of the Saint of Assisi and the miracles he performed had become known in this country also. Whoever believed it impossible to see the gay Sir Heinz in a monk's cowl, added the experienced fellow, might find himself mistaken.

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He had intentionally kept silence concerning Sir Seitz Siebenburg's challenge and his master's other dealings with the "Mustache." On the other hand, he had eagerly striven to inform Els of the minutest details of the reception he met with from her betrothed lover. With what zealous warmth he related that Wolff, like the upright man he was, had rejected even the faintest shadow of doubt of her steadfastness and truth, which were his own principal virtues also.

Even before Sir Heinz Schorlin's visit young Herr Eysvogel had known what to think of the calumnies which, it is true, were repeated to him. His calm, unclouded courage and clear mind were probably best shown by the numerous sheets of paper he had covered with estimates, all relating to the condition of the Eysvogel business. He had confided these documents also to him to be delivered to his father, and after discharging this duty he had come to her. According to his custom, he had reserved the best thing for the last, but it was now time to give it to her.

As he spoke he drew from the breast pocket of his long coat a wrought-iron rose. Els knew it well; it had adorned the clasp of her lover's belt, and the unusual delicacy of the workmanship had often aroused her admiration. What the gift was to announce she read on the paper accompanying it, which contained the following simple lines:

"The iron rude, when shaped by fire and blows,
Delights our eyes as a most beauteous rose.
So may the lies which strove to work us ill
But serve our hearts with greater love to fill."

Biberli withdrew as soon as he had delivered the gift; his master was awaiting him on his return from his early ride with the Emperor; but Els, with glowing cheeks, read and reread the verse which brought such cheering consolation from her lover. It seemed like a miracle that they recalled the words of her dying mother concerning the forge fire which, in her last moments, she had mentioned in connection with Eva's future. Here it had formed from rude iron the fairest of flowers. Nothing sweeter or lovelier, the sister thought, could be made from her darling. But would the fire also possess the power to lead Eva, as it were, from heaven to earth, and transform her into an energetic woman, symmetrical in thought and deed? And what was the necessity? She was there to guide her and remove every stone from her path.

Ah, if she should renounce the cloister and find a husband like her Wolff! Again and again she read his greeting and pressed the beloved sheet to her lips. She would fain have hastened to her mother's corpse to show it to her. But just at that moment Eva returned. She must rejoice with her over this beautiful confirmation of her hope, and as, with flushed cheeks and brow moist with perspiration, she stood before her, Els tenderly embraced her and, overflowing with gratitude, showed her her lover's

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gift and verse, and invited her to share the great happiness which so brightly illumined the darkness of her grief. Eva, who was so weary that she could scarcely stand thought, like her sister, as Els read Wolff's lines aloud, of her mother's last words. But the forge fire of life must not transform her into a rose; she would become harder, firmer, and she knew why and for whose sake. Only yesterday, had she been so exhausted, nothing would have kept her, after a few brief words to prevent Els's disappointment, from lying down, arranging her pillows comfortably, and refreshing herself with some cooling drink; but now she not only succeeded in appearing attentive, but in sympathising with all her heart in her sister's happiness. How delightful it was, too, to be able to give something to the person from whom hitherto she had only received.

She succeeded so fully in concealing the struggle against the claims of her wearied body that Els, after joyously perceiving how faithfully her sister sympathised with her own delight, continued to relate what she had just heard. Eva forced herself to listen and behave as if her account of Heinz Schorlin's wonderful escape and desire to enter a monastery was news to her.

Not until Els had narrated the last detail did she admit that she needed rest; and when the former, startled by her own want of perception, urged her to lie down, she would not do so until she had put the flowers she had brought home into water. At last she stretched herself on the couch beside her sister, who had so long needed sleep and rest, and a few minutes after the deep dreamless slumber of youth chained both, until Katterle, at the end of an hour, woke them.

Both used the favourable moments which follow the awakening from a sound sleep to cherish the best thoughts and most healthful resolutions. When Eva left her chamber she had clearly perceived what the last hours had taken and bestowed, and found a positive answer to the important question which she must now confront.

Els, like her lover, would cling fast to her love, and strive with tireless patience to conquer whatever obstacles it might encounter, especially from the Eysvogel family.

Before leaving home Eva adorned the beloved dead with the flowers, leaves, and vines which the gardener had brought and she herself had gathered, and at the church she put the last touches to this work so dear to her heart. She gave the preference to the flowers which had been her mother's favourites, but the others were also used. With a light hand and a delicate appreciation of harmony and beauty she interwove the children of the forest with those of the garden. She could not be satisfied till every one was in the right place.

Countess Cordula had insisted upon attending the consecration, but she had not known who cared for its adornment. Yet when she stood in the church by the side of the open



coffin she gazed long at the gentle face of the quiet sufferer, charming even in death, who on her bright couch seemed dreaming in a light slumber. At last she whispered to Els: "How wonderfully beautiful! Did you arrange it?"



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The latter shook her head, but Cordula added, as if soliloquising: “It seems as though the hands of the Madonna herself had adorned a sleeping saint with garden flowers, and child-angels had scattered over her the blossoms of the forest.”

Then Els, who hitherto had refused to talk in this place and this solemn hour, broke her silence and briefly told Cordula who had artistically and lovingly adorned her mother.

“Eva?” repeated the countess, as if surprised, gazing at her friend’s younger sister who, as the music of the organ and the alternate chanting had just begun, had already risen from her knees. Cordula felt spellbound, for the young girl looked as fresh as a May rose and so touchingly beautiful in the deep, earnest devotion which filled her whole being, and the white purity of her mourning robes, that the countess did not understand how she could ever have disliked her. Eva, with her up lifted eyes, seemed to be gazing directly into the open heavens.

Cordula paid little attention to the sacred service, but watched the Es, as she liked to call the sisters, all the more closely. The elder, though so overwhelmed with grief that she could not help sobbing aloud, did not cease to think of her dear ones, and from time to time gazed with tender sympathy at her father or with quiet sorrow at her sister. Eva, on the contrary, was completely absorbed by her own anguish and the memory of her to whom it was due. The others appeared to have no existence for her. Whilst the large tears rolled slowly down her cheeks, she sometimes gazed tenderly at the face of the beloved dead; sometimes, with fervent entreaty, at the image of the Virgin. The pleading expression of the large blue eyes seemed to the countess to express such childlike need of help that the impetuous girl would fain have clasped her to her heart and exclaimed:

“Wait, you lovely, obstinate little orphan; Cordula, whom you dislike, is here, and though you don’t wish to receive any kindness from her, you must submit. What do I care for all the worshippers of a very poor idol who call themselves my ‘adorers’? I need only detain wandering pilgrims, or invite minnesingers to the castle, to shorten the hours. And he for whom yonder child-angel’s heart yearns—would he not be a fool to prefer a Will-o’-the-wisp like me? Besides, it is easy for the peasant to give his neighbour the cloud which hangs over his field. True, before the dance—But the past is past. Boemund Altrosen is the only person who is always the same. One can rely upon him, but I really need neither. If I could only do without the open air, the forest, horses, and hunting, I should suit convent walls far better than this Eva, whom Heaven itself seems to have created to be the delight of every man’s heart. We will see what she herself decides.”

Then she recognised Sir Boemund Altrosen in the congregation and pursued her train of thought. “He is a noble man, and whoever thus makes himself miserable about me I ought to try to cure. Perhaps I will yet do so.”



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Similar reflections occupied her mind until she saw Heinz Schorlin kneeling, half concealed by a pillar, behind Boemund Altrosen. He had learned from Biberli at what hour the consecration would take place, and his honest heart bade him attend the service for the dead woman who had so much to forgive him.

The Ortlieb sisters did not see him, but Cordula unconsciously shook her head as she gazed. Was this grave man, so absorbed in devotion that he did not vouchsafe those who surrounded him even a single glance, the Heinz whose delightful gaiety had captivated her heart? The linden, with foliage withered by the autumn blasts, was more like the same tree in the spring when the birds were singing in its boughs, than yonder absorbed supplicant resembled the bold Heinz of a few days ago. The old mocker, Chamberlain Wiesenthau, was right when he told her and her father that morning that the gay Swiss had been transformed by the miracle which had befallen him, like the Saul of holy writ, in the twinkling of an eye, into a Paul. The calendar-makers were already preparing to assign a day to St. Schorlin.

But she ought not to have joined in the boisterous laugh with which her father rewarded the old slanderer's news. No! The knight's experience must have made a deeper impression than the others suspected.

Perhaps little Eva's love would result in her seeking with the sisters of St. Clare, and Heinz with the Franciscans, peace and a loftier passion. She was certainly to be pitied if love had taken as firm a hold upon her heart as Cordula thought she had perceived.

Again her kind heart throbbed with tender sympathy, and when the sisters left the sedan chairs which had brought them back to the house, and Cordula met Eva in the corridor, she held out her hand with frank cordiality, saying, "Clasp it trustingly, girl. True, you do not value it much, but it is offered to no one to whom Cordula does not mean kindly."

Eva, taken by surprise, obeyed her request. How frank and kindly her grey eyes were! Cordula herself must be so, too, and, obeying a hasty impulse, she nodded with friendly warmth; then, as if ashamed of her change of mood, hurried past her up the stairs.

The following day had been appointed for the mass for the dead in St. Sebald's Church.

Els had told Eva that the countess had seen Heinz Schorlin at the consecration. The news pleased her, and she expressed her joy so animatedly and spoke so confidently of the knight's love that Els felt anxious. But she did not have courage to disturb her peace of mind, and her father's two sisters, the abbess, and Herr Pfinzing's wife, also said nothing to Eva concerning the future as they helped Els to arrange the dead woman's clothing, which was to be given to the poor, decide to what persons or charitable institutions it should be sent, and listened to her account of the facts that formed the foundation of the slanders against her, which were being more loudly and universally discussed throughout the city.



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Eva felt painfully how incapable of rendering assistance the others considered her, and her pride forbade her to urge it upon them. Even her Aunt Kunigunde scarcely asked her a question. It seemed to the abbess that the right hour for a decisive enquiry had not yet come, and wise Aunt Christine never talked with her younger niece upon religious subjects unless she herself requested her to do so.

The mass for the dead was to be celebrated at an unusually early hour, for another, which would be attended by the whole city and all the distinguished persons, knights, and nobles who had come to the Reichstag, was to begin four hours before noon. This was for Prince Hartmann, who had been snatched away so prematurely.

The Ortliebs, with all their kindred and servants, the members of the Council with their wives and daughters, and many burghers and burgher women, assembled soon after sunrise in St. Sebald's Church.

Those present were almost lost in the spacious, lofty interior with its three naves. At first there was little appearance of devotion, for the early arrivals had many things to ask and whisper to one another. The city architect lowered his loud voice very little as he discussed with a brother in the craft from Cologne in what way the house of God, which originally had been built in the Byzantine style, could be at least partly adapted to the French pointed arch which was used with such remarkable success in Germany, at Cologne and Marburg. They discussed the eastern choir, which needed complete rebuilding, the missing steeples, and the effect of the pointed arch which harmonised so admirably with the German cast of character, and did not cease until the music began. Now the great number of those present showed how much love the dead woman had sowed and reaped. The sisters, when they first looked around them, saw with grateful joy the father of the young man who had fallen in the duel with Wolff, old Herr Berthold Vorchtel, his wife, and Ursula. On the other hand, the pew adorned with the Eysvogel coat of arms was still empty. This wounded Els deeply; but she uttered a sigh of relief when—the introitus had just begun—at least one member of the haughty family to which she felt allied through Wolff appeared, Isabella Siebenburg, her lover's sister. It was kind in her to come notwithstanding the absence of the others, and even her own husband. Els would return it to her and her twins.

The music, whose heart-stirring notes accompanied the solemn service, deeply moved the souls of both sisters; but when, after the Gloria in excelsis Deo, the Cum Sancto Spiritu pealed forth, Eva, who, absorbed in devotion, had long since ceased to gaze around her, felt her sister's hand touch her arm and, following the direction of her glance, saw at some distance the man for whom her heart yearned, and the grave, devout knight yonder seemed far nearer to her than the gay companion who, in the mazes of the dance, had gazed so boldly into the faces of the men, so tenderly into those of the fair women. How fast her heart throbbed! how ardently she longed for the moment when he would raise his head and look across at her! But when he moved, it was only to follow the sacred service and with it Christ's sacrifice upon the cross.



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Then Eva reproached herself for depriving her dead mother, to the repose of whose soul this hour was dedicated, of her just due, and she strove with all her power to regain the spirit of devotion which she had lost. But her lover sat opposite and, though she lowered her eyes, her earnest endeavour to concentrate her thoughts was futile.

Her struggle was interrupted by the commencement of the Credo, and during this confession, which brings before the Christian in a fixed form what it is incumbent upon him to believe, the thought entered her mind of beseeching her whose faithful love had always guided her safely and for her good—the Queen of Heaven, to whom Heinz was as loyally devoted as she herself—that she might give her a sign whether she might continue to believe in his love and keep faith with him, or whether she should return to the path which led to a different form of happiness.

During the singing of the Credo the heavenly Helper, for whose aid she hoped, made known to her that if, before the end of the Sanctus, which immediately followed the Credo, Heinz looked over at her and returned her glance, she might deem it certain that the Holy Virgin would permit her to hope for his love. If he omitted to do so, then she would consider it decided that he renounced his earthly for his heavenly love, and try herself to give up the earthly one, in which, however, she believed she had recognised something divine. The Credo closed and died away, the resonant harmonies of the Sanctus filled the wide space, and the knight, with the same devout attention, followed the sacred service in which, in the imagination of believers, the bread and wine is transformed into the body and blood of Christ, and a significant, painless ceremony represents the Saviour's bloody death upon the cross.

Eva told herself that she ought to have followed with the same intentness as Heinz the mass celebrated for the soul of her own mother, but she could no longer succeed in doing so. Besides, she was denied the privilege of looking freely and often at him upon whose movements depended the fate of her life. Many glances were undoubtedly directed at her, the daughter of the dead woman in whose memory so many citizens had gathered; many, perhaps, had come solely to see the beautiful Es. Therefore propriety and modesty forbade her to watch Heinz. She only ventured to cast a stolen glance at him.

Every note of the Sanctus was familiar to her, and when it drew near the end Heinz retained the same position. The fairest hope of her life must be laid with the flowers in her mother's coffin.

Now the last bars of the Sanctus were commencing. He had scarcely had time to change his attitude since her last secret glance at him, yet she could not resist the temptation, though it was useless, of looking at him once more. She felt like the prisoner who sees the judge rise and does not know whether he intends to acquit or condemn him. The city lute-player who led the choir was just raising his hands again to let them fall finally at the close of the Sanctus, and as she turned her eyes from him in



the direction whence only too soon she was to be deprived of the fairest of rights, a burning blush suddenly crimsoned her cheeks. Heinz Schorlin's eyes had met hers with a full, clear gaze.



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Eva pressed her clasped hands, as if beseeching aid, upon her bosom, which rose and fell beneath them with passionate emotion; and No, she could not be mistaken; he had understood her, for his look expressed a wealth of sympathy, the ardent, sorrowful sympathy which only love knows. Then the eyes of both fell. When their glances met again, the hosanna of the choir rang out to both like a shout of welcome with which liberated Nature exultingly greets the awakening spring; and to the deeply agitated knight, who had resolved to fly from the world and its vain pleasures, the hosanna which poured its waves of sound towards him, whilst the eyes of the woman he loved met his for the second time, seemed to revive the waning joy of existence. The shout which had greeted the Saviour on his entry into Jerusalem reached the “called” man like a command from love to open wide the gate of the heart, and whether he willed it or not, love, amidst the solemn melody of the hosanna, made a new and joyous entrance into his grateful soul. But during the Benedictus he was already making the first attempt to resist this emotion; and whilst Eva, first offering thanks for the cheering decision, and then earnestly striving to enter with her whole soul into the sacred service, modestly denied herself the pleasure of looking across at her lover, Heinz was endeavouring to crush the hopes which had again mastered the soul resolved on renunciation.

Yet he found the conflict harder than he expected and as, at the close of the mass, the *Dona nobis pacem* (grant us peace) began, he joined beseechingly in the prayer.

It was not granted, for even during the high mass for the soul of his dearest friend, which also detained the Ortliebs in church, he sought Eva's glance only too often, but always in vain. Once only, when the *Dona nobis pacem* pealed forth again, this time for the prince, his eyes met those of the woman he loved.

The young Duchess Agnes noticed whither he looked so often, but when Countess Cordula knelt beside the Ortliebs, cordially returned every glance of the knight's, and once even nodded slightly to him, the young Bohemian believed the report that Heinz Schorlin and the countess were the same as betrothed, and it vexed her—nay, spoiled the whole of the day which had just begun.

When Heinz left the church Eva's image filled his heart and mind. He went directly from the sanctuary to his lodgings; but there neither Frau Barbara, his pretty young hostess, nor Biberli would believe their eyes or ears, when the former heard in the entry, the latter in the adjoining room, the lash of a scourge upon naked limbs, and loud groans. Both sounds were familiar to Barbel through her father, and to Biberli from the time of penance after his stay in Paris, and his own person.

Heinz Schorlin, certainly for the first time in his life, had scourged himself.

It was done by the advice of Father Benedictus but, although he followed the counsel so earnestly that for a long time large bloody stripes covered his back and shoulders, this remedy for sinful thoughts produced an effect exactly opposite to the one expected; for,



whenever the places where the scourge had struck him so severely smarted under his armour, they reminded him of her for whose sake he had raised his hand against himself, and the blissful glance from her eyes.



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CHAPTER IV.

During the days which succeeded the mass for the dead the Ortlieb mansion was very silent. The Burgrave von Zollern, who still gladly concealed in his castle the brave companion in arms to whom he had entrusted the imperial standard on the Marchfield, when his own strong arm needed rest, had permitted Herr Ernst, as the young man's future father-in-law, to visit him. Both were now in constant communication, as Els hoped, for the advantage of the Eysvogel business.

Biberli did not cease acting as messenger between her and her future bridegroom; nay, he could now devote the lion's share of his days to it; his master, for the first time since he had entered his service, had left him.

The Emperor had been informed of the great shock experienced by the young knight, but it was unnecessary; an eye far less keen would not have failed to note the change in Heinz Schorlin.

The noble man who, even as a sovereign, retained the warmth of heart which had characterised him in his youth as a count, sincerely loved his blithe, loyal, brave young countryman, whose father he had valued, whose mother he highly esteemed, and who had been the dearest friend of the son whom death had so early snatched from him.

He knew him thoroughly, and had watched his development with increasing warmth of sympathy, the more so as many a trait of character which he recognised in Heinz reminded him of his own nature and aspirations at his age.

At the court of Frederick II he too had not always walked in the paths of virtue but, like Heinz, he had never let this merge into licentiousness, and had maintained the chivalrous dignity of his station even more strictly than the former.

Neither had he at any time deviated from the sincere piety which he had brought from his home to the imperial court, and this was far more difficult in the train of the bold and intellectual Hohenstaufen, who was prone to blaspheme even the holiest things, than for Heinz. Finally he, too, had lapsed into the mood which threatened to lead the light-hearted Schorlin into a monastery.

The mighty impulse which, at that time, owing to the example and teachings of St. Francis in Italy, had taken possession of so many minds, also left its impress on his young soul, already agitated by sympathy with many an extravagant idea, many an opinion condemned by the Church. But ere he had taken even the first decisive step he was summoned home. His father had resolved to obtain on the sacred soil of Palestine the mercy of Heaven which was denied to the excommunicated Emperor, and desired his oldest son, Rudolph, to represent him at home.



Before his departure he confided to his noble son his aspirations for the grandeur and enlargement of his house, and the youth of twenty-one did not venture to tell the dignified, far-sighted man, whom his subjects rightly surnamed "the Wise," his ardent desire to live henceforth solely for the salvation of his endangered soul.



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The sense of duty inherited from father and mother, which both had imprinted deeply upon his soul, and also the ambition that had been sedulously fostered at the court of the Emperor Frederick, had given him courage to repress forever the wish with which he had left the Hohenstaufen court. The sacrifice was hard, but he made it willingly as soon as it became apparent to his reflective mind that not only his earthly but his heavenly Father had appointed the task of devoting the full wealth of his talents and the power of his will to the elevation of the house of Hapsburg.

The very next year he stood in the place of his father who fell at Ascalon, deeply lamented.

The arduous labour imposed by the management of his own great possessions, and the ceaseless endeavour to enlarge them, in accordance with the dead man's wishes, gave him no time to cherish the longing for the peace of the cloister.

After his election as King of Germany, which had long been neglected under the government of sham emperors, increased the burden of his duties the more seriously he took them, and the more difficult the Bohemian king Ottocar, especially, rendered it for him to maintain the crown he had won, the more eagerly he strove, particularly after the victory of Marchfield had secured his sovereignty, to increase the power of his house.

A binding duty, a difficult task, must also withhold Heinz Schorlin from the wish for whose fulfilment his fiery young soul now fervently longed, and which he knew was receiving powerful sustenance from a worthy and eloquent Minorite.

Rudolph's own brother had died in peace as canon of Basel and Strasbourg; his sister was happy in her convent as a modest Dominican; but the young knight over whose welfare he had promised his mother to watch, and whom he loved, was not fitted for the monastic life.

However earnest might be his intention—after the miracle which seemed to have been wrought specially for him—of renouncing the world, sooner or later the time must come when Heinz would long to return to it and the profession of arms, for which he was born and reared. But if he could not be deterred from entering the modest order of the mendicant monks, who proudly called poverty their beloved bride, and should become the head of a bishopric while young, he would inevitably be one of those fighting prelates who seemed to the Emperor—who disliked halfway measures—neither knight nor priest, and with whom he had had many a quarrel.

Opposition would merely have sharpened the young knight's desire; therefore his imperial patron had treated him as if he were ignorant of what was passing in his mind. Without circumlocution, he commanded him, at the head of several bodies of Frank, Swabian, and Swiss troopers, whom he placed at his orders, to attack the brothers



Siebenburg and their allies, and destroy their castle. If possible, he was to bring them alive before the imperial judgment seat, and recover for the Eysvogels the merchandise of which they had been robbed.



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When Heinz, after the Emperor Rudolph had mentioned the latter name, earnestly entreated him to prevent Wolff's persecution, the sovereign promised to fulfil the wish as soon as the proper time came. He himself desired to be gracious to the brave champion of Marchfield, who under great irritation had drawn his sword. But when Heinz also asked the Emperor to send his friend Count Gleichen with him, the request was refused. He must have the entire responsibility of the expedition which he commanded; for nothing except an important duty that no one would help him bear, gave promise of making him forget everything that usually engrossed his attention, and thus his new object of longing. Besides, if he returned victorious his fame and reward would be undivided.

The Hapsburg wished to try upon his young favourite the means which had availed to keep his own footsteps in the path which he desired to see Heinz follow: constant occupation associated with heavy responsibility, the success which brings with it the hope of future achievement and thereby rouses ambition.

The wisdom and kindness of heart of the Emperor Rudolph, whom the grey-haired ruler's friends called "Wisdom," had certainly chosen the right course for Heinz. But he who had always regarded every opportunity of drawing his sword for his master as a rare piece of good fortune, shrank in dismay from this, the most important and honourable charge that had ever been bestowed upon him. It drew him away from the new path in which he did not yet feel at home, because the love he could not abjure constantly thrust him into the world, into the midst of the life and tumult from which Heaven itself commanded him to turn aside.

The Minorite had scarcely been right in the assertion that only the first rounds of the ladder which leads to heavenly bliss were hard to climb.

How quickly he had set his foot on the first step; but each upward stride was followed by one that dragged him down-nay, it had seemed advisable wholly to renounce the effort to ascend them, when the monk expected him to sever the bond which united him to the Emperor, and to tell the sovereign that he had entered the service of a greater Master, who commanded him to fight with other weapons than the sword and lance.

Heinz had regarded this demand as a summons to turn traitor. It did not seem to be the call of the devout, experienced director of souls to the disciples, but the Guelph to the Ghibelline, for Ghibelline he meant to remain. Gratitude was a Christian virtue, too, and to refuse his service to the Emperor, who had been a father to him, to whom he had sworn fealty, and who had loaded him with benefits, could not be pleasing in the sight of any God. He could never become a Guelph, he told his venerable friend. The Emperor Rudolph was his beloved master, from whom he had received nothing but kindness. He might as well be required to refuse obedience to his own father.



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“What Guelph? What Ghibelline?” cried the Minorite in a tone of grave rebuke. “The question is submission to the Most High, or to the world and its claims. And why should not Heaven require, as you term it, that you should obey the Lord more willingly than your earthly father—you, whom the mercy of God summoned amidst thunder and lightning in the presence of thousands? When Francis, our beloved model, the son of Pier Bernardone, was threatened with his father’s curse if he did not turn back from the path which led to the highest goal, Francis restored all that he had received from him, except his last garment, and with the exclamation, ‘Our Father who art in heaven, not Pier Bernardone,’ he made the choice between his earthly and his heavenly Father. From the former he would have received in abundance everything that the heart of a child of the world desires—wealth, paternal love, and the blessing which is said to build houses on earth. But Francis preferred poverty and contempt, nay, even his father’s curse and the reproach of ingratitude, receiving in exchange possessions of a nobler nature and more lasting character. You have heard their names. To obtain them, means to share the bliss of heaven. And you”—he continued loudly, adopting for the first time a tone of authoritative severity—“if you really yearned for the greatest possessions, go to the fortress this very hour, and with the cry in your heart, though not on your lips, ‘Our Father who art in heaven, not my gracious master and benefactor Rudolph,’ inform the Emperor what higher Lord you have vowed to serve.”

This kindled a fierce conflict in Heinz Schorlin’s soul, which perhaps might have ended in favour of a new career and St. Francis, had not Biberli, ere he reached a conclusion, rushed into the room shouting: “Seitz Siebenburg, the Mustache, has joined his brothers, and the Knight of Absbach, with several others—von Hirsdorf, von Streitberg, and whatever their names may be—have made common cause with them! It is said that they also expected reinforcements from the Main, in order that the right to the road _____”

“Gossip, or positive news?” interrupted Heinz, drawing himself up to his full height with the cool composure which he attained most easily when any serious danger threatened him.

“As positive,” replied his follower eagerly, “as that Siebenburg is the greatest rascal in Germany. You will be robbed of your joust with him, for he’ll mount the block instead of the steed, just as you predicted. The ladies will drive him from the lists with pins and rods, to say nothing of the scourging by which knight and squire will silence him. Oh, my lord, if you only knew!”

“Well?” asked the knight anxiously.

Then Biberli, paying no further heed to his master’s orders never to mention the Ortlieb sisters again in his presence, burst forth indignantly: “It might move a stone to pity to know the wrong the monster has done Jungfrau Eva and her pure and virtuous sister,

the loyal betrothed bride of a brave man—and the abominable names bestowed on the young ladies, whom formerly young and old, hat in hand, called the beautiful Es.”



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Heinz stamped his foot on the floor and, half frantic, impetuously exclaimed, his blood boiling with honest indignation: "May the air he breathes destroy the slandering scoundrel! May I be flayed on the rack if——"

Here he was interrupted by a low exclamation of warning from the Minorite, who perceived in the knight's fierce oaths a lamentable relapse. Heinz himself felt ashamed of the ungodly imprecations; yet he could by no means succeed in regaining his former composure as, drawing a long breath, he continued: "And those city hypocrites, who call themselves Christians, and build costly cathedrals for the good of their souls, are not ashamed—yes, holy Father, it is true—basely to deny our Lord and Saviour, who is Love itself, and deemed even the Magdalen worthy of His mercy, and rub their hands in fiendish malignity when unpunished they can sully the white robe of innocence, and drag pious, lovely simplicity to the pillory."

"That is the very reason, my son," the monk interrupted soothingly, "that we disciples of the Saint of Assisi go forth to show the deluded what the Lord requires of them. Therefore leave behind you the dust of the world, which defiles both body and soul, join us, who did so before you, and help, as one of our order, to make those who are perishing in sin and dishonouring the name of Christ better and purer, genuine Christians. In this hour of stress lay the sword out of your hand, and leave the steed ——"

"I shall ride forth, rely upon it, holy Father," Heinz burst forth afresh. "With the sky-blue of the gracious Virgin, whom I love, on my shield and helmet, I will dash like the angel Michael amongst the Siebenburgs and their followers. And let me tell you, holy Father—you who were once a knight also—if the Mustache, weltering in his blood at my feet, prays for mercy, I'll teach him——"

"Son! son!" interrupted the monk again, this time raising his hands imploringly; but Heinz, paying no heed, exclaimed hoarsely:

"Where did you get this news?"

"From our Berne countryman at the fortress," replied the servant eagerly; "Brandenstein, Schweppermann, and Heidenab brought the tidings. The Emperor received them at the gate of the citadel, where he was keeping watch ere he mounted his steed. He heard him call to the messengers, 'So our Heinz Schorlin will have a hard nut to crack.'"

"Which he will crush after his own heart!" cried Heinz, with flashing eyes.

Then, forcing himself to be calm, he exclaimed in broken sentences, whilst Biberli was helping him put on his armour: "Your wish, reverend Father, is also mine. The world—the sooner I can rid myself of it the better; yet what you describe in the most alluring terms is the peace in your midst, I—I—Never, never will my heart be calm until——"

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Here he paused suddenly, struck his breast swiftly and repeatedly with his fists, and continued eagerly: "Here, Father Benedictus, here are old and strong demands, which you, too, must once have known ere you offered the other cheek to the foe. I know not what to call them, but until they are satisfied I shall never be yours. They must be fulfilled; then, if in battle and bloodshed I can also forget the love which ever rises again when I think I have given it the deathblow, if Heaven still desires poor, heartsick Heinz Schorlin, it shall have him."

The Minorite received the promise with a silent bend of the head. He felt that he might seriously endanger the fulfilment of his ardent wish to gain this soul for heaven if he urged Heinz further now. Patiently awaiting a more fitting season, he therefore contented himself with questioning him carelessly about the foe and his castles.

The day was hot, and as Biberli laced the gambeson—the thick, quilted undergarment over which was worn the heavy leather coat covered with scales and rings—the monk exclaimed: "When the duty which you believe you owe to the world has been fulfilled, you will gratefully learn, as one of our order, how pleasant it is to walk with liberated soul in our light-brown cowl."

But he ought to have repressed the remark, for Heinz cast a glance at him which expressed his astonishment at being so misunderstood, and answered with unyielding resolution: "If I long for anything in your order, reverend Father, it is not for easy tasks, but for the most difficult burden of all. Your summons to take our Redeemer's cross upon me pleases me better."

"And I, my son, believe that your words will be inscribed amongst those which are sure of reward," the monk answered; then with bowed head added "At that moment you were nearer the kingdom of heaven than the aged companion of St. Francis."

But perceiving how impatiently Heinz shrugged his shoulders, and convinced that it would be advisable to leave him to himself for a time, the old man blessed him with paternal affection and went his way. When the fiery youth had performed the task which now claimed all his powers, he hoped to find him more inclined to allow himself to be led farther along the path which he had entered.

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