

IN THE FIRE OF THE FORGE - COMPLETE

GEORG EBERS*

Volume 2.

CHAPTER V.

As her father had ordered the servants not to disturb the young girls, Els did not wake till the sun was high in the heavens. Eva's place at her side was empty. She had already left the room. For the first time it had been impossible to sleep even a few short moments, and when she heard from the neighbouring cloister the ringing of the little bell that summoned the nuns to prayers, she could stay in bed no longer.

Usually she liked to dress slowly, thinking meanwhile of many things which stirred her soul. Sometimes while the maid or Els braided her hair she could read a book of devotion which the abbess had given her. But this morning she had carried the clothes she needed into the next room on tiptoe, that she might not wake her sister, and urged Katterle, who helped her dress, to hurry.

She longed to see her aunt at the convent. While kneeling at the prie-dieu, she had reached the certainty that her patron saint had led Heinz Schorlin to her. He was her knight and she his lady, so he must render her obedience, and she would use it to estrange him from the vanity of the world and make him a champion of the holy cause of the Church of Christ, the victorious conqueror of her foes. Sky-blue, the Holy Virgin's colour, should be hers, and thus his also, and every victory gained by the knight with the sky-blue on his helmet, under St. Clare's protection, would then be hers.

Heinz Schorlin was already one of the boldest and strongest knights; her love must render him also one of the most godly. Yes, her love! If St. Francis had not disdained to make a wolf his brother, why might she not feel herself the loving sister of a youth who would obey her as a noble falcon did his mistress, and whom she would teach to pursue the right quarry? The abbess would not forbid such love, and the impulse that drew her so strongly to the convent was the longing to know how her aunt would

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receive her confession.

The night before when, after her conversation with Els, she began to pray, she had feared that she had fallen into the snare of earthly love, and dreaded the confession which she had to make to her aunt Kunigunde. Now she found that it was no fleshly bond which united her to the knight. Oh, no! As St. Francis had gone forth to console, to win souls for the Lord, to bring peace and exhort to earnest labour in the service of the Saviour, as his disciples had imitated him, and St. Clare had been untiring in working, in his spirit, among women, she, too, would obey the call which had come to her saint in Portiuncula, and prove herself for the first time, according to the Scripture, "a fisher of souls."

Now she gladly anticipated the meeting; for though her sister did not understand her, the abbess must know how to sympathise with what was passing in her mind. This expectation was fulfilled; for as soon as she was alone with her aunt she poured forth all her hopes and feelings without reserve, eagerly and joyfully extolling her good fortune that, through St. Clare, she had been enabled to find the noblest and most valiant knight, that she might win him for the Holy War under her saint's protection and to her honour.

The abbess, who knew women's hearts, had at first felt the same fear as Els; but she soon changed her opinion, and thought that she might be permitted to rejoice over the new emotion in her darling's breast.

No girl in love talked so openly and joyously of the conquest won, least of all would her truthful, excitable niece, whom she had drawn into her own path, speak thus of the man who disturbed her repose. No sensitive girl, unfamiliar with the world and scarcely beyond childhood, would decide with such steadfast firmness, so wholly free from every selfish wish, the future of the man dearest to her heart. No, no! Eva had already attained her new birth, and was not to be compared with other girls. She had already once reached that ecstatic rapture which followed only a long absorption in God and an active sympathy with the deep human love of the Saviour and the unspeakable sufferings which he had taken upon himself. Little was to be feared from earthly love for one who devoted herself with all the passion of her fervid nature to the divine Bridegroom. Among the many whom Kunigunde received into the convent as novices, she was most certainly "called." If she felt something which resembled love for the young knight—and she made no concealment of it—it was only the result of the sweet joy of winning for the Lord, the faith, and her saint a soul which seemed to her worthy of such grace.

Dear, highly gifted child!

She, the abbess Kunigunde, was willing it should be so, and that Eva should surpass herself. She should prove that genuine piety conquers even the yearning of a quickly throbbing heart.

True, she must keep her eyes open in order to prevent Satan, who is everywhere on the watch, from mingling in a game not wholly free from peril. But, on the other hand, the abbess intended to help her beloved niece to reap the reward of her piety.

It was scarcely to be doubted that Heinz Schorlin was fired with ardent love for Eva; but, for that very reason, he would be ready to yield her obedience, and therefore it was advisable to tell her exactly to what she must persuade him. She must win him to join the Order of Malta, and if the famous champion of Marchfield performed heroic deeds with the white cross on his black mantle, or in war on his red tunic, he, the Emperor's favourite, would be sure of a high position among the military members of the order.

The young girl listened eagerly, but the elderly abbess herself became excited while encouraging the young future "Sister" to her noble task. The days when, with the inmates of the convent, she had prayed that the Emperor Rudolph might fulfil the Pope's desire, and in a new crusade again wrest the Holy Land from the infidels, came back to her memory, and Heinz Schorlin, guided by the nuns of St. Clare, seemed the man to bring the fulfilment of this old and cherished wish.

It appeared like a leading of the saints and a sign from God that Heinz had been dubbed a knight, and commenced his glorious career at Lausanne while the Emperor Rudolph pledged himself to a new crusade.

She detained Eva so long that dinner was over at the Ortlieb mansion, and her impatient father would have sent for her had not the invalid mother urged him to let her remain.

True, she longed to have a talk with her darling, who for the first time in her life had attended a great entertainment, and doubtless it grieved her to think that Eva did not feel the necessity of pouring out her heart to her own mother rather than to any one else, and sharing with her all the new emotions which undoubtedly had thrilled it; but she knew her child, and would have considered it selfish to place any obstacle in the pathway to eternal salvation of the elect whom God summoned with so loud a voice. Formerly she would rather have seen the young girl, whose charms were developing into such rare beauty, wedded to some good man; but now she rejoiced in the idea that Eva was summoned to rule over the nuns in the neighbouring cloister some day as abbess, in the place of her sister-in-law Kunigunde. Her own days, she knew, were numbered, but where could her child more surely find the happiness she desired for her than with the beloved sisters of St. Clare, whose home she and her husband had helped to build?

Els had concealed from her parents what she fancied she had discovered, for any anxiety injured the invalid, and no one could anticipate how her irritable father might receive the information of her fear. On the other hand, she could confide her troubles without anxiety to Wolff, her

betrothed husband. He was wise, prudent, loved Eva like a sister, and in exchanging thoughts with him she always discovered the right course to pursue; but though she expected him so eagerly and confidently, he did not come.

When, in the afternoon, Eva returned home, her whole manner expressed such firm, cheerful composure that Els began to hope she might have been mistaken. The undemonstrative yet tender affection with which she met her mother, too, by no means harmonised with her fears.

How lovely the young girl looked as she sat on a low stool at the head of the invalid's couch and, with her mother's emaciated hand clasped in hers, told her all that she had seen and experienced the evening before! To please the beloved sufferer, she dwelt longer on the description of the gracious manner of the Emperor Rudolph and his sister to her and her father, the conversation with which the Burgrave had honoured her, and his son's invitation to dance. Then for the first time she mentioned Heinz Schorlin, whom she had found a godly knight, and finally spoke briefly of the distinguished foreign nobles and ladies whom he had pointed out and named.

All this reminded the mother of former days and, in spite of the warning of watchful Els not to talk too much, she did not cease questioning or recalling the time when she herself attended such festivals, and as one of the fairest maidens received much homage.

It had been a good day, for it was long since she had enjoyed so much quiet in her own home. The von Montforts, she told Eva, had set off early, with a great train of knights and servants, to ride to Radolzburg, the castle of the Burgrave von Zollern. Her father thought they would probably have a dance there, for the young sons of the Burgrave would act as hosts.

Eva asked carelessly who rode with Cordula this time to submit to her whims, but Els perceived by her sister's flushed cheeks and the tone of her voice what she desired to know, and answered as if by accident that Sir Heinz Schorlin certainly was not one of her companions, for he had ridden through the Frauenthor that afternoon in the train of the Emperor Rudolph and his Bohemian daughter-in-law.

Twilight was already beginning to gather, and Els could not see whether this news afforded Eva pleasure or annoyance, for her mother had taken too little heed of her weakness, and one of the attacks which the physician so urgently ordered her to avoid by caution commenced.

Els and the convent Sister Renata, who helped her nurse the invalid, were now completely absorbed in caring for her, but Eva turned away from the beloved sufferer—her sensitive nature could not endure the sight of her convulsions.

As soon as her mother again lay weak but quiet on the pillows which Els had rearranged for her, Eva obeyed her entreaty to go away, and went to her own chamber. When another attack drew her back to the invalid, a sign from her sister as she reached the threshold bade her keep away from the couch. Should it prove necessary, she whispered, she would call her. If Wolff came, Eva was to tell him that she could not leave her mother, but he must be sure to return early the next morning, as she had a great deal to say to him.

Eva then went to her father, who was dressing to attend a banquet at the house of Herr Berthold Vorchtel, the first Losunger—[Presiding Officer]—in the Council, from which he would be loath to absent himself for the very reason that his host's family had been hostile to him ever since the rumour of the betrothal of Wolff Eysvogel, whom the Vorchtels had regarded as their daughter Ursula's future husband.

Nevertheless, Herr Ernst would not have gone to the entertainment had his wife's condition given cause for anxiety. But he was familiar with these convulsions which, it is true, weakened the invalid, but produced no other results; so he permitted Eva to help him put the last touches to his dress, on which he lavished great care. Spick and span as if he were just out of a bandbox, the elderly man, before leaving the house, went once more to the sick-room, and Eva stood near as, after many questions and requests, he whispered something to Els which she did not hear. With excited curiosity she asked what he had said so secretly, but he only answered hurriedly, "The name of the Man in the Moon's dog," kissed her cheek, and ran downstairs.

At the foot he again turned to Eva and told her to send for him if her mother should grow worse, for these entertainments at the Vorchtels usually lasted a long time.

"Will the Eysvogels be there too?" asked the girl.

"Who knows," replied her father. "I shall be glad if Wolff comes."

The tone in which he uttered the name of his future son-in-law distinctly showed how little he desired to meet any other member of the family, and Eva said sympathisingly, "Then I hope you will have an opportunity to remember me to Wolff."

"Shall I say nothing to Ursel?" asked the father, pressing a good-night kiss upon the young girl's forehead.

"She would not care for it," was the reply. "It cannot be easy to forget a man like Wolff."

"I wish he had stuck to Ursel, and let Els alone," her father answered angrily. "It would have been better for both."

"Why, father," interrupted Eva reproachfully, "do not our lovers seem really created for each other?"

"If the Eysvogels were only of the same opinion," exclaimed Ernst Ortlieb, shrugging his shoulders with a faint sigh. "Whoever marries, child, weds not only a man or a woman; all their kindred, unhappily, must be taken into the bargain. However, Els did not lack earnest warning. When your time comes, girl, your father will be more careful."

Smiling tenderly, he passed his hand over the little cap which covered her thick, fair hair, and went out.

Eva returned to her room and sat down at the spinning-wheel in the bow window, where Katterle had just drawn the curtains closely and lighted the hanging lamp. But the distaff remained untouched, and her thoughts wandered swiftly to the evening before and the ball at the Town Hall. Heinz Schorlin's image rose more and more distinctly before her mind, and this pleased her, for she fancied that he wore on his helm the blue favour which she had chosen, and it led her to consider against what foe she should first send him in the service of his lady and the Holy Church.

CHAPTER VI.

Eva had gazed into vacancy a long time, and beheld a succession of pleasing pictures, in every one of which, Heinz Schorlin appeared. Once, in imagination, she placed a wreath on his helmet after a great victory over the infidels.

Why should not this vision become a reality? Doubtless it owed its origin to a memory, for Wolff Eysvogel had been fired with love for her sister while Els was winding laurel around his helmet.

After the Honourable Council had resolved that the youths belonging to noble families, who had fought in the battle of Marchfield and returned victorious, should be adorned with wreaths by the maidens of their choice, Fate had appointed her sister to crown Eysvogel.

At that time Wolff had but recently recovered from the severe wounds with which he had returned from the campaign. But while he knelt before Els and his eyes met hers, love had overmastered him so swiftly and powerfully, that at the end of a few days he determined to woo her.

Meanwhile his own family resolutely opposed his choice. The father declared that he had made an agreement with Berthold Vorchtel to marry him to his daughter Ursula, and withdrawal on his son's part would embarrass him. His grandmother, the arrogant old Countess Rotterbach,

agreed with him, and declared that Wolff ought to wed no one except a lady of the most aristocratic birth or an heiress like Ursula. Her daughter Rosalinde Eysvogel, as usual, was the echo of her mother.

Herr Ernst Ortlieb, too, would far rather have seen his Els marry into another home; but Wolff himself was a young man of such faultless honour, and the bride he had chosen was so eager to become his, that he deemed it a duty to forget the aversion inspired by the suitor's family.

As for Wolff, he had so firmly persisted in his resolve that his parents at last permitted him to ask for his darling's hand, but his father had made it a condition that the betrothal, on account of the youth of the lovers, should not be announced till after Wolff had returned from Milan, where he was to finish the studies commenced in Venice. True, everyone had supposed that they were completed long ago, but Eysvogel senior insisted upon his demand, and afterwards succeeded in deferring the announcement of the betrothal, until the resolute persistence of Wolff, who meanwhile had entered the great commercial house, and the wish of his own aged mother, a sensible woman, who from the first had approved her grandson's choice and to whom Herr Casper was obliged to show a certain degree of consideration, compelled him to give it publicity.

A few days later Herr Casper's brother died, and soon after his estimable old mother. He used these events as a pretext for longer delay, saying that both he and his wife needed at least six months' interval ere they could forget their mourning in a gay wedding festival. Besides, he would prefer not to have the marriage take place until after Wolff's election to the Council, which, in all probability, would occur after Walpurgis of the coming year.

Ernst Ortlieb had sullenly submitted to all this. Nothing but his love for his child and respect for Herr Casper's dead mother, who had taken Els to her heart like a beloved granddaughter, would have enabled him to conquer his hasty temper in his negotiations with the man whom he detested in his inmost soul, and not hurl back the consent so reluctantly granted to his son.

The friends who knew him admired the strength of will with which he governed his impetuous nature in this transaction. Some asserted that secret obligations compelled him to yield to the rich Eysvogel; for though the Ortlieb mercantile house was reputed wealthy, the business prudence of its head resulted in smaller profits, and people had not forgotten that it had suffered heavy losses during the terrible period of despotism which had preceded the Emperor Rudolph's accession to the throne.

The insecurity of the high-roads had injured every merchant, but in trying to find some explanation for Herr Ortlieb's submission the attacks which had cost him one and another train of wares were regarded as specially disastrous.

Finally, the dowry which Els was to bring bore no comparison to the large sums Ernst Ortlieb had lavished upon the erection of the St. Clare Convent, and hence it was inferred that the wealth of the firm had sustained considerable losses. This found ready credence, owing to the retired life led by the Ortliebs,—whose house had formerly been one of the most hospitable in the city,—ever since the wife had become an invalid and Eva had grown up with an aversion to the world. Few took the trouble to inquire into the very apparent causes for the change.

Yet this view of the matter was opposed by many-nay, when the conversation turned upon these subjects, Herr Berthold Vorchtel, perhaps the richest and most distinguished man in Nuremberg, who rented the imperial taxes, made comments from which, had it not been so difficult to believe, people might have inferred that Casper Eysvogel was indebted to Ernst Ortlieb rather than the latter to him.

Yet the cautious, prudent man never explained the foundation of his opinion, for he very rarely mentioned either of the two firms; yet prior to the battle of Marchfield he had believed that his own daughter Ursula and Wolff Eysvogel would sooner or later wed. Herr Casper, the young man's father, had strengthened this expectation. He himself and his wife esteemed Wolff, and his "Ursel" had shown plainly enough that she preferred him to the other friends of her elder brother Ulrich.

When he returned home the two met like brother and sister, and the parents of Ursula Vorchtel had expected Wolff's proposal until the day on which the wreaths were bestowed had made them poorer by a favourite wish and destroyed the fairest hope of their daughter Ursula.

The worthy merchant, it is true, deemed love a beautiful thing, but in Nuremberg it was the parents who chose wives and husbands for their sons and daughters; yet, after marriage, love took possession of the newly wedded pair. A transgression of this ancient custom was very rare, and even though Wolff's heart was fired with love for Els Ortlieb, his father, Herr Vorchtel thought, should have refused his consent to the betrothal, especially as he had already treated Ursel as his future daughter. Some compulsion must have been imposed upon him when he permitted his son to choose a wife other than the one selected.

But what could render one merchant dependent upon another except business obligations?—and Berthold Vorchtel was sharp-sighted. He knew the heavy draft which Herr Casper had made upon the confidence reposed in the old firm, and thought he had perceived that the great splendour displayed by the women of the Eysvogel family, the liberality with which Herr Casper had aided his impoverished noble relatives, and the lavish expenditure of his son-in-law, the debt-laden Sir Seitz Siebenburg, drew too heavily upon the revenues of the ancient house.

Even now Casper Eysvogel's whole conduct proved how unwelcome was his son's choice. To him, Ursula's father, he still intimated on many an occasion that he had by no means resigned every hope of becoming, through his son, more nearly allied to his family, for a betrothal was not a wedding.

Berthold Vorchtel, however, was not the man to enter into such double-dealing, although he saw plainly enough how matters stood with his poor child. She had confided her feelings to no one; yet, in spite of Ursula's reserved nature, even a stranger could perceive that something clouded her happiness. Besides, she had persistently refused the distinguished suitors who sought the wealthy Herr Berthold's pretty daughter, and only very recently had promised her parents, of her own free will, to give up her opposition to marriage.

Ever since the betrothal, to the sincere sorrow of Els, she had studiously avoided Wolff's future bride, who had been one of her dearest friends; and Ulrich, Herr Vorchtel's oldest son, took his sister's part, and at every opportunity showed Wolff—who from a child, and also in the battle of Marchfield, had been a favourite comrade—that he bore him a grudge, and considered his betrothal to any one except Ursula an act of shameful perfidy.

The fair-minded father did not approve of his son's conduct, for his wife had learned from her daughter that Wolff had never spoken to her of love, or promised marriage.

Therefore, whenever Herr Berthold Vorchtel met Els's father—and this often happened in the Council—he treated him with marked respect, and when there was an entertainment in his house sent him an invitation, as in former years, which Ernst Urtlieb accepted, unless something of importance prevented.

But though the elder Vorchtel was powerless to change his children's conduct, he never wearied of representing to his son how unjust and dangerous were the attacks with which, on every occasion, he irritated Wolff, whose strength and skill in fencing were almost unequalled in Nuremberg. In fact, the latter would long since have challenged his former friend had he not been so conscious of his own superiority, and shrunk from the thought of bringing fresh sorrow upon Ursula and her parents, whom he still remembered with friendly regard.

Eva was fond of her future brother-in-law, and it had not escaped her notice that of late something troubled him.

What was it?

She thoughtfully gave the wheel a push, and as it turned swiftly she remembered the Swiss dance the evening before, and suddenly clenched her small right hand and dealt the palm of her left a light blow.

She fancied that she had discovered the cause of Wolff's depression, for she again saw distinctly before her his sister Isabella's husband, Sir Seitz Siebenburg, as he swung Countess Cordula around so recklessly that her skirt, adorned with glittering jewels, fluttered far out from her figure. In the room adjacent to the hall he had flung himself upon his knees before the countess, and Eva fancied she again beheld his big, red face, with its long, thick, yellow mustache, whose ends projected on both sides in a fashion worn by few men of his rank. The expression of the watery blue eyes, with which he stared Cordula in the face, were those of a drunkard.

To-day he had followed her to the Kadolzburg, and probably meant to spend the night there. So Wolff had ample reason to be anxious about his sister and her peace of mind. That must be it!

Perhaps he would yet come that evening, to give Els at least a greeting from the street. How late was it?

She hastily tried to draw the curtains aside from the window, but this was not accomplished as quickly as she expected—they had been care fully fastened with pins. Eva noticed it, and suddenly remembered her father's whispered words to Els.

They were undoubtedly about the window. According to the calendar, the moon would be full that day, and she knew very well that it had a strange influence upon her. True, within the past year it appeared to have lost its power; but formerly, especially when she had devoted herself very earnestly to religious exercises, she had often, without knowing how or why, left her bed and wandered about, not only in her chamber but through the house. Once she had climbed to the dovecot in the courtyard, and another time had mounted to the garret where, she did not know in what way, she had been awakened. When she looked around, the moon was shining into the spacious room, and showed her that she was perched on one of the highest beams in the network of rafters which, joined with the utmost skill, supported the roof. Below her yawned a deep gulf, and as she looked down into it she was seized with such terror that she uttered a loud shriek for help, and did not recover her calmness until the old housekeeper, Martsche, who had started from her bed in alarm, brought her father to her.

She had been taken down with the utmost care. No one was permitted to help except white-haired Nickel, the old head packer, who often let a whole day pass without opening his lips; for Herr Ernst seemed to lay great stress upon keeping the moon's influence on Eva a secret. There was indeed something uncanny about this night-walking, for even now it seemed incomprehensible how she had reached the beam, which was at least the height of three men above the floor. A fall might have cost her life, and her father was right in trying to prevent a repetition of such nocturnal excursions. This time Els had helped him.

How faithfully she cared for them all!

Yes, she had barred out even the faintest glimmer. Eva smiled as she saw the numerous pins with which her sister had fastened the curtain, and an irresistible longing seized her to see once more the wonderful light that promoted the growth of the hair if cut during its increase, and also exerted so strange an influence upon her.

She must look up at the moon!

Swiftly and skilfully, as if aided by invisible hands, her dainty fingers opened curtain and window.

Drawing a deep breath, with an emotion of pleasure which she had not experienced for a long time, she gazed at the linden before the house steeped in silvery radiance, and upward to the pure disk of the full moon sailing in the cloudless sky. How beautiful and still the night was! How delightful it would be to walk up and down the garden, with her aunt the abbess, with Els, and perhaps—she felt the blood crimson her cheeks—with Heinz Schorlin!

Where was he now?

Undoubtedly with the Emperor and his ladies, perhaps at the side of the Bohemian princess, the young Duchess Agnes, who yesterday had so plainly showed her pleasure in his society.

Just then the watch, marching from the Marienthurn to the Frauenthor, gave her vagrant thoughts a new turn. The city guard was soon followed by a troop of horse, which probably belonged to the Emperor's train.

It was delightful to gaze, at this late hour, into the moonlit street, and she wondered that she had never enjoyed it before. True, it would have been still pleasanter had Els borne her company; and, besides, she longed to tell her the new explanation she had found for Wolff's altered manner.

Perhaps her mother was asleep, and she could come with her.

How still the house was!

Cautiously opening the door of the sick-room, she glanced in. Els was standing at the head of the bed, supporting her mother with her strong young arms, while Sister Renata pushed the cushions between the sufferer's back and the bedstead.

The old difficulty of breathing had evidently attacked her again.

Yes, yes, the dim light of the lamp was shining on her pale face, and the large sunken eyes were gazing with imploring anguish at the image of the Virgin on the opposite wall.

How gladly Eva would have afforded her relief! She looked with a faint sense of envy at her sister, whose skilful, careful hands did everything to the satisfaction of the beloved sufferer, while in nursing she failed only too often in giving the right touch. But she could pray—implore the aid of her saint very fervently; nay, she was more familiar with her, and might hope that she would fulfil a heartfelt wish of hers more quickly than for her sister. It would not do to call Els to the window. She closed the door gently, returned to her chamber, knelt and implored St. Clare, with all the fervour of her heart, to grant her mother a good night. Then she again drew the curtains closely over the window, and went to call Katterle to help her undress.

But the maid was just entering with fresh water. What was the matter with her?

Her hand trembled as she braided her young mistress's hair and sometimes, with a faint sigh, she stopped the movement of the comb.

Her silence could be easily explained; for Eva had often forbidden Katterle to talk, when she disturbed her meditation. Yet the girl must have had some special burden on her mind, for when Eva had gone to bed she could not resolve to leave the room, but remained standing on the threshold in evident embarrassment.

Eva encouraged her to speak, and Katterle, so confused that she often hesitated for words and pulled at her ribbons till she was in danger of tearing them from her white apron, stammered that she did not come on her own account, but for another person. It was well known in the household that her betrothed husband, the true and steadfast Walther Biberli, served a godly knight, her countryman.

"I know it," said Eva with apparent composure, "and your Biberli has commissioned you to bear me the respectful greeting of Sir Heinz Schorlin."

The girl looked at her young mistress in surprise. She had been prepared for a sharp rebuke, and had yielded to her lover's entreaties to undertake this service amid tears, and with great anxiety; for if her act should be betrayed, she would lose, amid bitter reproaches, the place she so greatly prized. Yet Biberli's power over her and her faith in him were so great that she would have followed him into a lion's den; and it had scarcely seemed a more desirable venture to carry a love-greeting to the pious maiden who held men in such disfavour, and could burst into passionate anger as suddenly as her father.

And now?

Eva had expected such a message. It seemed like a miracle to Katterle.

With a sigh of relief, and a hasty thanksgiving to her patron saint, she at once began to praise the virtue and piety of the servant as well as his lord; but Eva again interrupted, and asked what Sir Heinz Schorlin desired.

Katterle, with new-born confidence, repeated, as if it were some trivial request, the words Biberli had impressed upon her mind.

"By virtue of the right of every good and devout knight to ask his lady for her colour, Sir Heinz Schorlin, with all due reverence, humbly prays you to name yours; for how could he hold up his head before you and all the knights if he were denied the privilege of wearing it in your honour, in war as well as in peace?"

Here her mistress again interrupted with a positive "I know," and, still more emboldened, Katterle continued the ex-schoolmaster's lesson to the end:

"His lord, my lover says, will wait here beneath the window, in all reverence, though it should be till morning, until you show him your sweet face. No, don't interrupt me yet, Mistress Eva, for you must know that Sir Heinz's lady mother committed her dear son to my Biberli's care, that he might guard him from injury and illness. But since his master met you, he has been tottering about as though he had received a spear-thrust, and as the knight confessed to his faithful servitor that no leech could help him until you permitted him to open his heart to you and show you with what humble devotion—"

But here the maid was interrupted in a manner very different from her expectations, for Eva had raised herself on her pillows and, almost unable to control her voice in the excess of her wrath, exclaimed:

"The master who presumes to seek through his servant— And by what right does the knight dare thus insolently— But no! Who knows what modest wish was transformed in your mouth to so unprecedented a demand? He desired to see my face? He wanted to speak to me in person, to confess I know not what? From you—you, Katterle, the maid—the knight expects—"

Here she struck her little hand angrily against the wood of the bedstead and, panting for breath, continued:

"I'll show him!— Yet no! What I have to answer no one else— From me, from me alone, he shall learn without delay. There is paper in yonder chest, on the very top; bring it to me, with pen and ink."

Katterle silently hurried to obey this order, but Eva pressed her hand

upon her heaving bosom, and gazed silently into vacancy.

The manservant and the maid whom Heinz Schorlin had made his messengers certainly could have no conception of the bond that united her to him; even her own sister had misunderstood it. He should now learn that Eva Ortlieb knew what beseeemed her! But she, too, longed for another meeting, and this conduct rendered it necessary.

The sooner they two had a conversation, the better. She could confidently venture to invite him to the meeting which she had in view; her aunt, the abbess, had promised to stand by her side, if she needed her, in her intercourse with the knight.

But her colour?

Katterle had long since laid the paper and writing materials before her, but she still pondered. At last, with a smile of satisfaction, she seized the pen. The manner in which she intended to mention the colour should show him the nature of the bond which united them.

She was mistress of the pen, for in the convent she had copied the gospels, the psalms, and other portions of the Scriptures, yet her hand trembled as she committed the following lines to the paper:

"I am angered—nay, even grieved—that you, a godly knight, who knows the reverence due to a lady, have ventured to await my greeting in front of my father's house. If you are a true knight, you must be aware that you voluntarily promised to obey my every glance. I can rely upon this pledge, and since I find it necessary to talk with you, I invite you to an interview—when and where, my maid, who is betrothed to your servant, shall inform him. A friend, who has your welfare at heart as well as mine, will be with me. It must be soon, with the permission of St. Clare, who, since you have chosen her for your patron saint, looks down upon you as well as on me.

"As for my colour, I know not what to name; the baubles associated with earthly love are unfamiliar to me. But blue is the colour of the pure heaven and its noble queen, the gracious Virgin. If you make this colour yours and fight for it, I shall rejoice, and am willing to name it mine."

At the bottom of the little note she wrote only her Christian name "Eva," and when she read it over she found that it contained, in apt and seemly phrases, everything that she desired to say to the knight.

While folding the paper and considering how she could fasten it, as there was no wax at hand, she thought of the narrow ribbons with which Els tied together, in sets of half a dozen, the fine kerchiefs worn over the neck and bosom, when they came from the wash. They were sky-blue, and nothing could be more suitable for the purpose.

Katterle brought one from the top of the chest. Eva wound it swiftly around the little roll, and the maid hastily left the room, sure of the gratitude of the true and steadfast Biberli.

When Eva was again alone, she at first thought that she might rejoice over her hasty act; but on asking herself what Els would say, she felt certain that she would disapprove of it and, becoming disconcerted, began to imagine what consequences it might entail.

The advice which her father had recently given Wolff, never to let any important letter pass out of his hands until at least one night had elapsed, returned to her memory, and from that instant the little note burdened her soul like a hundred-pound weight.

She would fain have started up to get it back again, and a strong attraction drew her towards the window to ascertain whether Heinz Schorlin had really come and was awaiting her greeting.

Perhaps Katterle had not yet delivered the note. What if she were still standing at the door of the house to wait for Biberli? If, to be absolutely certain, she should just glance out, that would not be looking for the knight, and she availed herself of the excuse without delay.

In an instant she sprang from her bed and gently drew the curtain aside. The street was perfectly still. The linden and the neighbouring houses cast dark, sharply outlined shadows upon the light pavement, and from the convent garden the song of the nightingale echoed down the quiet moonlit street.

Katterle had probably already given the note to Heinz Schorlin who, obedient to his lady's command, as beseemed a knight, had gone away. This soothed her anxiety, and with a sigh she went back to bed.

But the longing to look out into the street again was so strong that she yielded to the temptation; yet, ere she reached the window, she summoned the strength of will which was peculiar to her and, lying down, once more closed her lids, with the firm resolve to see and hear nothing. As she had not shut her eyes the night before and, from dread of the ball, had slept very little during the preceding one, she soon, though the moon was shining in through the parted curtains, lapsed into a condition midway between sleep and waking. Extreme fatigue had deadened consciousness, yet she fancied that at times she heard the sound of footsteps on the pavement outside, and the deep voices of men.

Nor was what she heard in her half-dozing state, which was soon followed by the sound slumber of youth, any delusion of the senses.

CHAPTER VII.

The moon found something in front of the Ortlieb house worth looking at. Rarely had she lighted with purer, brighter radiance the pathway of the mortals who excited her curiosity, than that of the two handsome young men who, at a moderate interval of time, passed through the Frauenthor, and finally entered the courtyard of the Ortlieb residence almost at the same instant.

Luna first saw them pace silently to and fro, and delighted in the resentful glances they cast at each other. This joy increased as the one in the long coat, embroidered on the shoulder with birds, and then the other, whose court costume well became his lithe, powerful limbs, sat down, each on one of the chains connecting the granite posts between the street and the courtyard.

The very tall one, who looked grave and anxious, was Wolff Eysvogel; the other, somewhat shorter, who swung gaily to and fro on the chain as if it afforded him much amusement, Heinz Schorlin.

Both frequently glanced up at the lighted bow-window and the smaller one on the second story, behind which Eva lay half asleep. This was the first meeting of the two men.

Wolff, aware of his excellent right to remain on this-spot, would have shown the annoying intruder his displeasure long before, had he not supposed that the other, whom at the first glance he recognised as a knight, was one of Countess Cordula von Montfort's admirers. Yet he soon became unable to control his anger and impatience. Yielding to a hasty impulse, he left the chain, but as he approached the stranger the latter gave his swaying seat a swifter motion and, without vouchsafing him either greeting or introductory remark, said carelessly, "This is a lovely night."

"I am of the same opinion," replied Wolff curtly. "But I would like to ask, sir, what induced you to choose the courtyard of this house to enjoy it?"

"Induced?" asked the Swiss in astonishment; then, looking the other in the face with defiant sharpness, he added scornfully:

"I am warming the chain because it suits me to do so."

"You are allowed the pleasure," returned Wolff in an irritated tone; "nay, I can understand that night birds of your sort find no better amusement. Still, it seems to me that a knight who wishes to keep iron hot might attain his object better in another way."

"Why, of course," cried Heinz Schorlin, springing swiftly to his feet with rare elasticity. "It gives a pleasant warmth when blade strikes blade or the hot blood wets them. I am no friend to darkness, and it seems to me, sir, as if we were standing in each other's light here."

"There our opinions concur for the second time this lovely night," quietly replied the patrician's son, conscious of his unusual strength and skill in fencing, with a slight touch of scorn. "Like you, I am always ready to cross blades with another; only, the public street is hardly the fitting place for it."

"May the plague take you!" muttered the Swiss in assent to Wolff's opinion. "Besides, sir, who ever grasps iron so swiftly is worth a parley. To ask whether you are of knightly lineage would be useless trouble, and should it come to a genuine sword-dance.

"You will find a partner in me at any time," was the reply, "as I, who wear my ancient escutcheon with good right, would gladly give you a crimson memento of this hour—though you were but the son of a cobbler. But first let us ascertain—for I, too, dislike darkness—whether we are really standing in each other's light. With all due respect for your fancy for warming chains, it would be wise, ere Sir Red Coat—[The executioner]—puts his round our ankles for disturbing the peace, to have a sensible talk."

"Try it, for aught I care," responded Heinz Schorlin cheerily. "Unluckily for me, I live in a state of perpetual feud with good sense. One thing, however, seems certain without any serious reflection: the attraction which draws me here, as well as you, will not enter the cloister as a monk, but as a little nun, wears no beard, but braids her hair. Briefly, then, if you are here for Countess Cordula von Montfort's sake, your errand is vain; she will sleep at Kadolzburg to-night."

"May her slumber be sweet!" replied Wolff calmly. "She is as near to me as yonder moon."

"That gives the matter a more serious aspect," cried the knight angrily. "You or I. What is your lady's name?"

"That, to my mind, is asking too much," replied Wolff firmly.

"And the law of love gives you the right to withhold an answer. But, sir, we must nevertheless learn for the sake of what fairest fair we have each foregone sleep."

"Then tell me, by your favour, your lady's colour," Wolff asked the Swiss.

The latter laughed gaily: "I am still putting that question to my saint."

Then, noticing Wolff's shake of the head, he went on in a more serious tone: "If you will have a little patience, I hope I may be able to tell you, ere we part."

This assurance also seemed to Wolff an enigma. Who in the wide world would come from under the respectable Ortlieb roof, at this hour, to tell a stranger anything whatsoever concerning one of its daughters? Neither could have given him the right to regard her as his lady, and steal at night, like a marten, around the house which contained his dearest treasure. This obscurity was an offence to Wolff Eysvogel, and he was not the man to submit to it. Yonder insolent fellow should learn, to his hurt, that he had made a blunder.

But scarcely had he begun to explain to Heinz that he claimed the right to protect both the daughters of this house, the younger as well as the older, since they had no brother, when the knight interrupted:

"Oho! There are two of them, and she, too, spoke of a sister. So, if it comes to sharing, sir, we need not emulate the judgment of Solomon. Let us see! The colour is uncertain, but to every Christian mortal a name clings as closely as a shadow and, if I mention the initial letter of the one which adorns my lady, I believe I shall commit no offence that a court of love could condemn. The initial, which I like because it is daintily rounded and not too difficult to write—mark it well—is 'E.'"

Wolff Eysvogel started slightly and gripped the dagger in his belt, but instantly withdrew his hand and answered with mingled amusement and indignation: "Thanks for your good will, Sir Knight, but this, too, brings us no nearer our goal; the E is the initial of both the Ortlieb sisters. The elder who, as you may know, is my betrothed bride, bears the name of Elizabeth, or Els, as we say in Nuremberg."

"And the younger," cried Heinz joyously, "honours with her gracious innocence the name of her through whom sin came into the world."

"But you, Sir Knight," exclaimed Wolff fiercely, "would do better not to name sin and Eva Ortlieb in the same breath. If you are of a different opinion—"

"Then," interrupted the Swiss, "we come back to warming the iron."

"As you say," cried Wolff resolutely. "In spite of the peace of the country, I will be at your service at any time. As you see, I went out unarmed, and it would not be well done to cross swords here."

"Certainly not," Heinz assented. "But many days and nights will follow this moonlight one, and that you may have little difficulty in finding me whenever you desire, know that my name is Heinrich—or to more intimate friends, among whom you might easily be numbered if we don't deprive each other of the pleasure of meeting again under the sun—Heinz Schorlin."

"Schorlin?" asked Wolff in surprise. "Then you are the knight who, when a beardless boy, cut down on the Marchfield the Bohemian whose lance had slain the Emperor's charger, the Swiss who aided him to mount the steed of Ramsweg of Thurgau—your uncle, if I am not mistaken—and then took the wild ride to bring up the tall Capeller, with his troops, who so gloriously decided the day."

"And," laughed Heinz, "who was finally borne off the field as dead before the fulfilment of his darling wish to redden Swiss steel with royal Bohemian blood. This closed the chronicle, Herr—what shall I call you?"

"Wolff Eysvogel, of Nuremberg," replied the other.

"Aha! A son of the rich merchant where the Duke of Gulich found quarters?" cried the Swiss, lifting his cap bordered with fine miniver. "May confusion seize me! If I were not my father's son, I wouldn't mind changing places with you. It must make the neck uncommonly stiff, methinks, to have a knightly escutcheon on door and breast, and yet be able to fling florins and zecchins broadcast without offending the devil by an empty purse. If you don't happen to know how such a thing looks, I can show you."

"Yet rumour says," observed Wolff, "that the Emperor is gracious to you, and knows how to fill it again."

"If one doesn't go too far," replied Heinz, "and my royal master, who lacks spending money himself only too often, doesn't keep his word that it was done for the last time. I heard that yesterday morning, and thought that the golden blessing which preceded it would last the dear saints only knew how long. But ere the cock had crowed even once this morning the last florin had vanished. Dice, Herr Wolff Eysvogel—dice!"

"Then I would keep my hands off them," said the other meaningly.

"If the Old Nick or some one else did not always guide them back! Did you, a rich man's son, never try what the dice would do for you?"

"Yes, Sir Knight. It was at Venice, where I was pursuing my studies, and tried my luck at gambling on many a merry evening with other sons of mercantile families from Nuremberg, Augsburg, and Cologne."

"And your feathers were generously plucked?"

"By no means. I usually left a winner. But after they fleeced a dear friend from Ulm, and he robbed his master, I dropped dice."

"And you did so as easily as if it were a short fast after an abundant meal?"

"It was little more difficult," Wolff asserted. "My father would have gladly seen me outdo my countrymen, and sent me more money than I needed. Why should I deprive honest fellows who had less?"

"That's just the difficulty," cried his companion eagerly. "It was easy for you to renounce games of chance because your winnings only added more to the rest, and you did not wish to pluck poorer partners. But I! A poor devil like me cannot maintain armour-bearer, servants, and steeds out of what the dear little mother at home in her faithful care can spare from crops and interest. How could we succeed in making a fair appearance at court and in the tournament if it were not for the dice? And then, when I lose, I again become but the poor knight the saints made me; when I win, on the contrary, I am the great and wealthy lord I would have been born had the Lord permitted me to choose my own cradle. Besides, those who lose through me are mainly dukes, counts, and gentlemen with rich fiefs and fat bourgs, whom losing doubtless benefits, as bleeding relieves a sick man. What suits the soldier does not befit the merchant. We live wholly amid risks and wagers. Every battle, every skirmish is a game whose stake is life. Whoever reflects long is sure to lose. If I could only describe, Herr Eysvogel, what it is to dash headlong upon the foe!"

"I could imagine that vividly enough," Wolff eagerly interposed. "I, too, have broken many a lance in the lists and shed blood enough."

"What a dunce I am!" cried Heinz in amazement, pressing his hand upon his brow. "That's why your face was so familiar! By my saint! I am no knight if I did not see you then, before the battle waxed hot. It was close beside your Burgrave Frederick, who held aloft the imperial banner."

"Probably," replied Wolff in a tone of assent. "He sometimes entrusted the standard to me, when it grew too heavy for his powerful arm, because I was the tallest and the strongest of our Nuremberg band. But, unluckily, I could not render this service long. A scimitar gashed my head. The larger part of the little scar is hidden under my hair."

"The little scar!" repeated Heinz gaily. "It was wide enough, at any rate, for the greatest soul to slip through it. A scar on the head from a wound received four years ago, and yet distinctly visible in the moonlight!"

"It should serve as a warning," replied Wolff, glancing anxiously up the street. "If the patrol, or any nocturnal reveller should catch sight of us, it would be ill for the fair fame of the Ortlieb sisters, for everybody knows that only one—Els's betrothed lover—has a right to await a greeting here at so late an hour. So follow me into the shadow of the linden, I entreat you; for yonder—surely you see it too—a figure is gliding towards us."

Heinz Schorlin's laugh rang out like a bell as he whispered to the Nuremberg patrician: "That figure is familiar to me, and neither we nor our ladies need fear any evil from it. Excuse me moment, and I'll wager twenty gold florins against yonder linden leaf that, ere the moonlight has left the curbstone, I can tell you my lady's colour."

As he spoke he hastened towards the figure, now, standing motionless within the shadow of the door post beside the lofty entrance.

Wolff Eysvogel remained alone, gazing thoughtfully upon the ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

The silent wanderer above had expected to behold a scene very unlike an interview between two men. The latter required neither her purest, fullest light, nor the shadow of a blossoming linden.

Now Luna saw the young Nuremberg merchant gaze after the Swiss with an expression of such deep anxiety and pain upon his manly features that she felt the utmost pity for him. He did not look upward as usual to the window of his beautiful Els, but either fixed his eyes upon the spot where his new acquaintance was conversing with another person, or bent them anxiously upon the ground.

As Wolff thought of Heinz Schorlin, it seemed as if Fate had thrown him into the way of the Swiss that he might feel with twofold anguish the thorns besetting his own life path. The young knight was proffered the rose without the thorn. What cares had he? The present threw into his lap its fairest blessings, and when he looked into the future he beheld only the cheering buds of hope.

Yet this favourite of fortune had expressed a desire to change places with him. The thought that many others, too, would be glad to step into his shoes tortured Wolff's honest heart as though he himself were to blame for the delusion of these short-sighted folk.

Apart from his strength and health, his well-formed body, his noble birth, his faith in the love of his betrothed bride—at this hour he forgot how much these things were—he found nothing in his lot which seemed worth desiring.

He might not even rejoice in his stainless honesty with the same perfect confidence as in his betrothal.

Yes, he had cared for noble old Berthold Vorchtel's daughter as if she

were his sister. He had even found pleasure in the thought that Ursula was destined to become his wife, yet no word either of love or allusion to future marriage had been exchanged between them. He had felt free, and had a right to consider himself so, when love for Els Ortlieb overwhelmed him so swiftly and powerfully.

Yet Ursula and her oldest brother treated him as if he had been guilty of base disloyalty. His pure conscience, however, enabled him to endure this more easily than the other burden, of which he became aware on the long-anticipated day when his father made him a partner in the old firm and gave him an insight into the condition of the property and the course of the business.

Then he had learned the heavy losses which had been sustained recently, and the sad disparity existing between the great display by which his father and mother, as well as his grandmother, the countess, maintained the appearance of their former princely wealth, and the balances of the last few years.

When he had just boasted to the reckless young knight that he had given up gaming, he told but half the truth, for though since his period of study in Venice, and later in Milan, he had not touched dice, he had been forced to consent to a series of enterprises undertaken by his father, whose stakes were far different from the gambling of the knights and nobles at the Green Shield or in the camp.

Yet he intended to bind the fate of the woman he loved to his own, for Els, spite of the opposition of his family, would have been already indissolubly united to him, had not one failure after another destroyed his courage to take her hand. Finally, he deemed it advisable to await the result of the last great enterprise, now on the eve of decision. It might compensate for many of the losses of recent years. Should it be favourable, the heaviest burden would be lifted from his soul; in the opposite case the old house would be shaken to its foundations. Yet even its fall would have been easier for him to endure than this cruel uncertainty, to which was added the torturing anxiety of bearing the responsibility of things for which he was not to blame, and of which, moreover, he was even denied a clear view. Yet he felt absolutely certain that his father was concealing many things, perhaps the worst, and often felt as if he were walking in the darkness over a mouldering bridge. Ah, if it could only be propped up, and then rebuilt! But if it must give way, he hoped the catastrophe would come soon. He knew that he possessed the strength to build a new home for Els and himself. Even were it small and modest, it should be erected on a firm foundation and afford a safe abode for its inmates.

What did the young, joyous-hearted fellow who was wooing Eva know of such cares? Fate had placed him on the sunny side of life, where everything flourished, and set him, Wolff, in the shade, where grass and flowers

died.

There is a magic in fame which the young soul cannot easily escape, and the name of Heinz Schorlin was indeed honoured and on every lip. The imagination associated with it the cheerful nature which, like a loyal comrade, goes hand in hand with success, deserved and undeserved good fortune, woman's favour, doughty deeds, the highest and strongest traits of character.

An atmosphere like sunshine, which melts all opposition, emanated from Heinz. Wolff had experienced it himself. He had seriously intended to make the insolent intruder feel his strong arm, but since he had learned the identity of the Swiss his acts and nature appeared in a new light. His insolence had gained the aspect of self-confidence which did not lack justification, and when a valiant knight talked to him so frankly, like a younger brother to an older and wiser one, it seemed to the lonely man who, of late, completely absorbed in the course of business, had held aloof from the sports, banquets, and diversions of the companions of his own age, that he had experienced something unusually pleasant. How tender and affectionate it sounded when Heinz alluded to the "little mother" at home! He, Wolff, on the contrary, could think only with a shade of bitterness of the weak woman to whom he owed his existence, and whom filial duty and earnest resolution alike commanded him to love, yet who made it so difficult for him to regard her with anything save anxiety or secret disapproval.

Perhaps the greatest advantage which the Swiss possessed over him was his manner of speaking of his family. How could it ever have entered Wolff Eysvogel's mind to call the tall, stiff woman, who was the feeble echo of her extravagant, arrogant mother, and who rustled towards him, even in the early morning, adorned with feathers and robed in rich brocade, his "dear little mother"?

Whoever spoke in the warm, loving tones that fell from the lips of Sir Heinz when he mentioned his relatives at home certainly could have no evil nature. No one need fear, though his usual mode of speech was so wanton, that he would trifle with a pure, innocent creature like Eva.

How Heinz had succeeded in winning so speedily the devout child, who was so averse to the idle coquetries of the companions of her own age, seemed incomprehensible, but he had no time to investigate now.

He must go, for he had long been burning with impatience to depart. The declaration of peace had taken effect only a few hours before, and the long waggon trains from Italy, of which he had told Els yesterday, were still delayed. The freight of spices and Levantine goods, Milan velvets, silks, and fine Florentine cloths, which they were bringing from the city of St. Mark, represented a large fortune. If it arrived in time, the profits would cover a great portion of the losses of the past two years, and the house would again be secure. If the worst should befall, how

would his family submit to deprivation, perhaps even to penury? He had less fear of his grandmother's outbursts of wrath, but what would become of his feeble mother, who was as dependent as a child on her own mother? Yet he loved her; he felt deeply troubled by the thought of the severe humiliation which menaced her. His sister Isabella, too, was dear to him, in spite of her husband, the reckless Sir Seitz Siebenburg, in whose hands the gold paid from the coffers of the firm melted away, yet who was burdened with a mountain of debts.

Wolff had left orders at home to have his horse saddled. He had intended only to wave a greeting to his Els and then ride to Neumarkt, or, if necessary, as far as Ingolstadt, to meet the wains.

A word of farewell to the new acquaintance, who was probably destined to be his brother-in-law, and then—But just at that moment Heinz approached, and in reply to Wolff's low question "And your lady's colour?" he answered joyously, pointing to the breast of his doublet: "I am carrying the messenger which promises to inform me, here on my heart. In the darkness it was silent; but the bright moonlight yonder will loose its tongue, unless the characters here are too unlike those of the prayer-book."

Drawing out Eva's little roll as he spoke, he approached a brightly lighted spot, pointed to the ribbon which fastened it, and exclaimed: "Doubtless she used her own colour to tie it. Blue, the pure, exquisite blue of her eyes! I thought so Forget-me-not blue! The most beautiful of colours. You must pardon my impatience!"

He was about to begin to read the lines; but Wolff stopped him by pointing to the Ortlieb residence and to two drunken soldiers who came out of the tavern "For Thirsty Troopers," and walked, singing and staggering, up the opposite side of the street. Then, extending his hand to Heinz in farewell, he asked in a low tone, pointing to Biberli's figure just emerging from the shade, who was the messenger of love who served him so admirably.

"My shadow," replied the knight. "I loosed him from my heels and bade him stand there. But no offence, Herr Wolff Eysvogel; you'll make the queer fellow's acquaintance if, like myself, it would be agreeable to you to meet often, not only on iron chains, but on friendly terms with each other."

"Nothing would please me more," replied the other. "But how in the world could it happen that this well-guarded fortress surrendered to you after so short a resistance?"

"Heinz Schorlin rides swiftly," he interrupted; but Wolff exclaimed:

"A swift ride awaits me, too, though of a different kind. When I return, I shall expect you to tell me how you won our 'little saint,' my sister-

in-law Eva. The two beautiful Ortlieb 'Es' are one in the eyes of the townsfolk, so we also will be often named in the same breath, and shall do well to feel brotherly regard for each other. There shall be no fault on my part. Farewell, till we meet again, an' it please God in and not outside of our ladies' dwelling."

While speaking he clasped the knight's hand with so firm a grasp that it seemed as if he wished to force him to feel its pressure a long time, and hastened through the Frauenthor.

Heinz Schorlin gazed thoughtfully after him a short time, then beckoned to Biberli and, though the interval required for him to reach his master's side was very brief, it was sufficient for the bold young lover, tortured by his ardent longing, to form another idea.

"Look yonder, Biberli!" he exclaimed. "The holy-water basin on the door-post, the escutcheon on the lintel above, the helmet, which would probably bear my weight. From there I can reach the window-sill with my hand, and once I have grasped it, I need only make one bold spring and, hurrah! I'm on it."

"May our patron saint have mercy on us!" cried the servant in horror. "You can get there as easily as you can spring on your two feet over two horses; but the coming down would certainly be a long distance lower than you would fancy—into the 'Hole,' as they call the prison here, and, moreover, though probably not until some time later, straight to the flames of hell; for you would have committed a great sin against a noble maiden rich in every virtue, who deemed you worthy of her love. And, besides, there are two Es. They occupy the same room, and the house is full of men and maid servants."

"Pedagogue!" said the knight, peevishly.

"Ay, that was Biberli's calling once," replied the servant, "and, for the sake of your lady mother at home, I wish I were one still, and you, Sir Heinz, would have to obey me like an obedient pupil. You are well aware that I rarely use her sacred name to influence you, but I do so now; and if you cherish her in your heart and do not wish to swoop down on the innocent little dove like a destroying hawk, turn your back upon this place, where we have already lingered too long."

But this well-meant warning seemed to have had brief influence upon the person to whom it was addressed. Suddenly, with a joyous: "There she is!" he snatched his cap from his head and waved a greeting to the window.

But in a few minutes he replaced it with a petulant gesture of the hand, saying sullenly: "Vanished! She dared not grant me a greeting, because she caught sight of you."

"Let us thank and praise a kind Providence for it," said his servitor with a sigh of relief, "since our Lord and Saviour assumed the form of a servant, that of a scarecrow, in which he has done admirable service, is far too noble and distinguished for Biberli."

As he spoke he walked on before the knight, and pointing to the tavern beside the Frauenturm whose sign bore the words "For Thirsty Troopers," he added: "A green bush at the door. That means, unless the host is a rogue, a cask fresh broached. I wonder whether my tongue is cleaving to my palate from dread of your over-hasty courage, or whether it is really so terribly sultry here!"

"At any rate," Heinz interrupted, "a cup of wine will harm neither of us; for I myself feel how oppressive the air is. Besides, it is light in the tavern, and who knows what the little note will tell me."

Meanwhile they passed the end of St. Klarengasse and went up to the green bush, which projected from the end of a pole far out into the street.

Soldiers in the pay of the city, and men-at-arms in the employ of the Emperor and the princes who had come to attend the Reichstag, were sitting over their wine in the tavern. From the ceiling hung two crossed iron triangles, forming a six-pointed star. The tallow candles burning low in their sockets, which it contained, and some pitch-pans in the corners, diffused but a dim light through the long apartment.

Master and man found an empty table apart from the other guests, in a niche midway down the rear wall.

Without heeding the brawling and swearing, the rude songs and disorderly shouts, the drumming of clenched fists upon the oak tables, the wild laughter of drunken soldiers, the giggling and screeching of bar-maids, and the scolding and imperious commands of the host, they proved that the green bush had not lied, for the wine really did come from a freshly opened cask just brought up from the cellar. But as the niche was illumined only by the tiny oil lamp burning beneath the image of the Virgin, bedizened with flowers and gold and silver tinsel, fastened against the wall, Biberli asked the weary bar-maid for a brighter light.

When the girl withdrew he sighed heavily, saying: "O my lord, if you only knew! Even now, when we are again among men and the wine has refreshed me, I feel as if rats were gnawing at my soul. Conscience, my lord-conscience!"

"You, too, are usually quite ready to play the elf in the rose-garden of love," replied Heinz gaily. "Moreover, I shall soon need a T and an S embroidered on my own doublet, for—Why don't they bring the light? Another cup of wine, the note, and then with renewed vigour we'll go back again."

"For God's sake," interrupted Biberli, "do not speak, do not even think, of the bold deed you suggested! Doesn't it seem like a miracle that not one of the many Ortlieb and Montfort servants crossed your path? Even such a child of good luck as yourself can scarcely expect a second one the same evening. And if there is not, and you go back under the window, you will be recognised, perhaps even seized, and then—O my lord, consider this!—then you will bear throughout your life the reproach of having brought shame and bitter sorrow upon a maiden whom you yourself know is lovely, devout, and pure. And I, too, who serve you loyally in your lady mother's behalf, as well as the poor maid who, to pleasure me, interceded for you with her mistress, will run the risk of our lives if you are caught climbing into the window or committing any similar offence; for in this city they are prompt with the stocks, the stone collar, the rack, and the tearing of the tongue from the mouth whenever any one is detected playing the part of go-between in affairs of love."

"Usually, old fellow," replied Heinz in a tone of faint reproach, "we considered it a matter of course that, though we took the most daring risks in such things, we were certain not to be caught. Yet, to be frank, some incomprehensible burden weighs upon my soul. My feelings are confused and strange. I would rather tear the crown from the head of yonder image of the Virgin than do aught to this sweet innocence for which she could not thank me."

Here he paused, for the bar-maid brought a two-branched candelabrum, in which burned two tallow candles.

Heinz instantly opened the little roll.

How delicate were the characters it contained! His heart's beloved had committed them to the paper with her own hand, and the knight's blood surged hotly through his veins as he gazed at them. It seemed as though he held in his hand a portion of herself and, obeying a hasty impulse, he kissed the letter.

Then he eagerly began to study the writing; he had never seen anything so delicate and peculiar in form.

The deciphering of the first lines in which, it is true, she called him a godly knight, but also informed him that his boldness had angered her, caused him much difficulty, and Biberli was often obliged to help.

Would she have rebuffed him so ungraciously with her lips as with the pen? Was it possible that, on account of a request which every lover ventured to address to his lady, she would withdraw the favour which rendered him so happy? Oh, yes, for innocence is delicate and sensitive. She ought to have repelled him thus. He was secretly rejoiced to see the sweet modesty which had so charmed him again proved. He must know what the rest of the letter contained, and the ex-schoolmaster was at hand to give the information at once.

True, the hastily written sentences presented some difficulties even for Biberli, but after glancing through the whole letter, he exclaimed with a satisfied smile: "Just as I expected! At the first look one might think that the devout little lady was wholly unlike the rest of her sex, but on examining more closely she proves as much like any other beautiful girl as two peas. With good reason and prudent caution she forbids the languishing knight to remain beneath her window, yet she will risk a pleasant little interview in some safe nook. That is wise for so young a girl, and at the same time natural and womanly. I don't know why you knit your brows. Since the first Eve came from a crooked rib, all her daughters prefer devious ways. But first hear what she writes." Then, without heeding his master's gloomy face, he began to read the note aloud.

Heinz listened intently, and after he had heard that the lady of his love did not desire to meet him alone, but only under the protection of a friend and her saint, when he heard her name her colour, it is true, but also express the expectation that, as a godly knight, he would fight for her sake in honour of the gracious Virgin, his face brightened.

During Biberli's scoffing comments he had felt as if a tempest had hurled her pure image in the dust. But now that he knew what she asked of him, it returned as a matter of course to its old place and, with a sigh of relief, he felt that he need not be ashamed of the emotions which this wonderful young creature had awakened in his soul. She had opened her pious heart like a trusting sister to an older brother, and what he had seen there was something unusual—things which had appeared sacred to him even when a child. Since he took leave of her in the ball-room he had felt as though Heaven had loaned this, its darling, to earth for but a brief space, and her brocade robe must conceal angel wings. Should it surprise him that the pure innocence which filled her whole being was expressed also in her letter, if she summoned him, not to idle love-dalliance but to a covenant of souls, a mutual conflict for what was highest and most sacred? Such a thing was incomprehensible to Biberli; but notwithstanding her letter—nay, even on its account—he longed still more ardently to lead her home to his mother and see her receive the blessing of the woman whom he so deeply honoured.

He had Eva's letter read for the second and the third time. But when Biberli paused, and in a few brief sentences cast fresh doubts upon the writer, Heinz angrily stopped him. "The longing of the godly heart of a pure maiden—mark this well—has naught in common with that diabolical delight in secret love-dalliance for which others yearn. My wish to force my way to her was sinful, and it was punished severely enough, for during your rude scoffs I felt as though you had set fire to the house over my head. But from this I perceive in what a sacred, inviolable spot her image had found a place. True, it is denied you to follow the lofty, heavenward aspiration of a pure soul—"

"O my lord," interrupted the servitor with hands uplifted in defence, "who besought you not to measure this innocent daughter of a decorous household, who was scarcely beyond childhood, by the standard you applied to others? Who entreated you to spare her fair fame? And if you deem the stuff of which the servant is made too coarse to understand what moves so pure a soul, you do Biberli injustice, for, by my patron saint, though duty commanded me to interpose doubts and scruples between you and a passion from which could scarcely spring aught that would bring joy to your mother's heart I, too, asked myself the question why, in these days, a devout maiden should not long to try her skill in conversion upon a valiant knight who served her. Ever since St. Francis of Assisi appeared in Italy, barefooted monks and grey-robed nuns, who follow him, Franciscans and Sisters of St. Clare stream hither as water flows into a mill-race when the sluice-gates are opened. With what edification we, too, listened to the old Minorite whom we picked up by the wayside, at the tavern where we usually found pleasure in nothing but drinking, gambling, shouting, and singing! Besides, I know from my sweetheart with what exemplary devotion the lovely Eva follows St. Clare."

"Who is now and will remain my patron saint also, old Biber," interrupted Heinz with joyful emotion, as he laid his hand gratefully on his follower's shoulder; then rising and beckoning to the bar-maid, added: "The stuff of which you are made, old comrade, is inferior to no man's. Only now and then the pedagogue plays you a trick. Had you uttered your real opinion in the first place, the wine would have tasted better to us both. Let Eva try the work of conversion on me! What, save my lady's love, is more to me than our holy faith? It must indeed be a delight to take the field for the Church and against her foes!" While speaking, he paid the reckoning and went out with Biberli.

The moon was now pouring her silver beams, with full radiance, over the quiet street, the linden in front of the Ortlieb house, and its lofty gable roof. Only a single room in the spacious mansion was still lighted, the bow-windowed one occupied by the two sisters.

Heinz, without heeding Biberli's renewed protest, looked upward, silently imploring Eva's pardon for having misjudged her even a moment. His gaze rested devoutly on the open window, behind which a curtain was stirring. Was it the night breeze that almost imperceptibly raised and lowered it, or was her own dear self concealed behind it?

Just at that moment he suddenly felt his servant's hand on his arm, and as he followed his horror-stricken gaze, a chill ran through his own veins. From the heavy door of the house, which stood half open, a white-robed figure emerged with the solemn, noiseless footfall of a ghost, and advanced across the courtyard towards him.

Was it a restless spirit risen from its grave at the midnight hour, which must be close at hand? Through his brain, like a flash of lightning, darted the thought that Eva had spoken to him of her invalid mother. Had

she died? Was her wandering soul approaching him to drive him from the threshold of the house which hid her endangered child?

But no!

The figure had stopped before the door and now, raising its head, gazed with wide eyes upward at the moon, and—he was not mistaken—it was no spectre of darkness; it was she for whom every pulse of his heart throbbed—Eva!

No human creature had ever seemed to him so divinely fair as she in her long white night-robe, over which fell the thick waves of her light hair. The horror which had seized him yielded to the most ardent yearning. Pressing his hand upon his throbbing heart, he watched her every movement. He longed to go forward to meet her, yet a supernatural spell seemed to paralyse his energy. He would sooner have dared clasp in his arms the image of a beautiful Madonna than this embodiment of pure, helpless, gracious innocence.

Now she herself drew nearer, but he felt as if his will was broken, and with timid awe he drew back one step, and then another, till the chain stopped him.

Just at that moment she paused, stretched out her white arm with a beckoning gesture, and again turned towards the house, Heinz following because he could not help it, her sign drew him after her with magnetic power.

Now Eva entered the dimly lighted corridor, and again her uplifted hand seemed to invite him to follow. Then—the impetuous throbbing of his heart almost stifled him—she set her little white foot on the first step of the stairs and led the way up to the first landing, where she paused, lifting her face to the open window, through which the moonbeams streamed into the hall, flooding her head, her figure, and every surrounding object with their soft light.

Heinz followed step by step. It seemed as if the wild surges of a sea were roaring in his ears, and glittering sparks were dancing before his yearning, watchful eyes.

How he loved her! How intense was the longing which drew him after her! And yet another emotion stirred in his heart with still greater power—grief, sincere grief, which pierced his in, most soul, that she could have beckoned to him, permitted him to follow her, granted him what he would never have ventured to ask. Nay, when he set his foot on the first step, it seemed as if the temple which contained his holiest treasure fell crashing around him, and an inner voice cried loudly: "Away, away from here! Would you exchange the purest and loftiest things for what tomorrow will fill you with grief and loathing?" it continued to admonish. "You will relinquish what is dearest and most sacred to secure

what is ready to rush into your arms on all the high-roads.

"Hence, hence, you poor, deluded mortal, ere it is too late!"

But even had he known it was the fair fiend Venus herself moving before him under the guise of Eva, the spell of her unutterable beauty would have constrained him to follow her, though the goal were the Horselberg, death, and hell.

On the second landing she again stood still and, leaning against a pillar, raised her arms and extended them towards the moon, in whose silvery light they gleamed like marble. Heinz saw her lips move, heard his own name fall from them, and all self-control vanished.

"Eva!" he cried with passionate fervor, holding out his arms to clasp her; but, ere he even touched her, a shriek of despairing anguish echoed loudly back from the walls.

The sound of her own name had broken the threads with which the mysterious power of the moonlight had drawn her from her couch, down through the house, out of doors, and again back to the stairs.

Sleep vanished with the dream which she had shared with him and, shuddering, she perceived where she was, saw the knight before her, became conscious that she had left her chamber in her night-robe, with disordered hair and bare feet; and, frantic with horror at the thought of the resistless might with which a mysterious force constrained her to obey it against her own will, deeply wounded by the painful feeling that she had been led so far across the bounds of maidenly modesty, hurt and angered by the boldness of the man before her, who had dared to follow her into her parents' house, she again raised her voice, this time to call her from whom she was accustomed to seek and find help in every situation in life.

"Els! Els!" rang up the stairs; and the next moment Els, who had already heard Eva's first scream, sprang down the few steps to her sister's side.

One glance at the trembling girl in her nightrobe, and at the moonlight which still bathed her in its rays, told Els what had drawn Eva to the stairs.

The knight must have slipped into the house and found her there. She knew him and, before Heinz had time to collect his thoughts, she said soothingly to her sister, who threw her arms around her as though seeking protection, "Go up to your room, child!—Help her, Katterle. I'll come directly."

While Eva, leaning on the maid's arm, mounted the stairs with trembling knees, Els turned to the Swiss and said in a grave, resolute tone: "If you are worthy of your escutcheon, Sir Knight, you will not now fly like

a coward from this house across whose threshold you stole with shameful insolence, but await me here until I return. You shall not be detained long. But, to guard yourself and another from misinterpretation, you must hear me.”

Heinz nodded assent in silence, as if still under the spell of what he had recently experienced. But, ere he reached the entry below, Martsche, the old housekeeper, and Endres, the aged head packer, came towards him, just as they had risen from their beds, the former with a petticoat flung round her shoulders, the latter wrapped in a horse-blanket.

Eva’s shriek had waked both, but Els enjoined silence on everyone and, after telling them to go back to bed, said briefly that Eva in her somnambulism had this time gone out into the street and been brought back by the knight. Finally, she again said to Heinz, ”Presently!” and then went to her sister.

CHAPTER IX.

When Biberli bade farewell to his sweetheart, who gave him Eva’s little note, he had arranged to meet her again in an hour or, if his duties detained him longer, in two; but after the ”true and steadfast” fellow left her, her heart throbbed more and more anxiously, for the wrong she had done in acting as messenger between the young daughter of her employers and a stranger knight was indeed hard to forgive.

Instead of waiting in the kitchen or entry for her lover’s return, as she had intended, she had gone to the image of the Virgin at the gate of the Convent of St. Clare, before which she had often found consolation, especially when homesick yearning for the mountains of her native Switzerland pressed upon her too sorely. This time also it had been gracious to her, for after she had prayed very devoutly and vowed to give a candle to the Mother of God, as well as to St. Clare, she fancied that the image smiled upon her and promised that she should go unpunished.

On her return the knight had just followed Eva into the house, and Biberli pursued his master as far as the stairs. Here Katterle met her lover, but, when she learned what was occurring, she became greatly enraged and incensed by the base interpretation which the servant placed upon Eva’s going out into the street and, terrified by the danger into which the knight threatened to plunge them all, she forgot the patience and submission she was accustomed to show the true and steadfast Biberli. But—resolved to protect her young mistress from the presumptuous knight—scarcely had she angrily cried shame upon her lover for this base suspicion, protesting that Eva had never gone to seek a knight but, as she had often done on bright moonlight nights, walked in her sleep down

the stairs and out of doors, when the young girl's shriek of terror summoned her to her aid.

Biberli looked after her sullenly, meanwhile execrating bitterly enough the wild love which had robbed his master of reason and threatened to hurl him, Biberli, and even the innocent Katterle, whose brave defence of her mistress had especially pleased him, into serious misfortune.

When old Endres appeared he had slipped behind a wall formed of bales heaped one above another, and did not stir until the entry was quiet again.

To his amazement he had then found his master standing beside the door of the house, but his question—which, it is true, was not wholly devoid of a shade of sarcasm—whether the knight was waiting for the return of his sleep-walking sweetheart, was so harshly rebuffed that he deemed it advisable to keep silence for a time.

Though Heinz Schorlin had perceived that he had followed an unconscious somnambulist, he was not yet capable of calmly reflecting upon what had occurred or of regarding the future with prudence. He knew one thing only: the fear was idle that the lovely creature whose image, surrounded by a halo of light, still hovered before him like a vision from a higher, more beautiful world, was an unworthy person who, with a face of angelic innocence, transgressed the laws of custom and modesty. Her shriek of terror, her horror at seeing him, and the cry for help which had brought her sister to her aid and roused the servants from their sleep, gave him the right to esteem her as highly as ever; and this conviction fanned into such a blaze the feeling of happiness which love had awakened and his foolish distrust had already begun to stifle, that he was firmly resolved, cost what it might, to make Eva his own.

After he had reached this determination he began to reflect more quietly. What cared he for liberty and a rapid advance in the career upon which he had entered, if only his future life was beautified by her love!

If he were required to woo her in the usual form, he would do so. And what a charming yet resolute creature was the other E, who, in her anxiety about her sister, had crossed his path with such grave, firm dignity! She was Wolff Eysvogel's betrothed bride, and it seemed to him a very pleasant thing to call the young man, whom he had so quickly learned to esteem, his brother-in-law.

If the father refused his daughter to him, he would leave Nuremberg and ride to the Rhine, where Hartmann, the Emperor Rudolph's son, whom he loved like a younger brother, was now living. Heinz had instructed the lad of eighteen in the use of the lance and the sword, and Hartmann had sent him word the day before that the Rhine was beautiful, but without him he but half enjoyed even the pleasantest things. He needed him. Hundreds of other knights and squires could break in the new horses for

the Emperor and the young Bohemian princess, though perhaps not quite so skilfully. Hartmann would understand him and persuade his imperial father to aid him in his suit. The warmhearted youth could not bear to see him sorrowful, and without Eva there was no longer joy or happiness.

He was roused from these thoughts and dreams by his own name called in a low tone.

Katterle had gone with Eva to the chamber, whither the older sister followed them. Tenderly embracing the weeping girl, she had kissed her wet eyes and whispered in an agitated voice, with which, however, blended a great deal of affectionate mischief: "The wolf who forced his way into the house does not seem quite so harmless as mine, whom I have succeeded in taming very tolerably. Go to mother now, darling. I'll be back directly."

"What do you intend to do?" asked Eva timidly, still unable, under the influence of her strange experiences, to regain her self-control.

"To look around the house," replied her sister, beckoning to Katterle to accompany her.

In the entry she questioned the maid with stern decision, and the trembling girl owned, amid her tears, that Eva had sent a little note to the knight in reply to his request that she would name her colour, and whatever else her anxious mistress desired hastily to learn.

After a threatening "We will discuss your outrageous conduct later," Els hurried down-stairs, and found in the entry the man whose pleasure in the pursuit of the innocent child whom she protected she meant to spoil. But though she expressed her indignation to the knight with the utmost harshness, he besought a hearing with so much respect and in such seemingly words, that she requested him, in a gentler tone, to speak freely. But scarcely had he begun to relate how Eva, at the ball, had filled his heart with the purest love, when the trampling of horses' hoofs, which had come nearer and nearer to the house, suddenly ceased, and Biberli, who had gone into the court-yard, came hurrying back, exclaiming in a tone of warning, "The von Montforts!"

At the same moment two men-servants threw back both leaves of the door, torchlight mingled with the moonbeams in the courtyard, and the next instant a goodly number of knights and gentlemen entered the hall.

Biberli was not mistaken. The von Montforts had returned home, instead of spending the night at Kadolzburg, and neither Els nor the Swiss had the time or disposition to seek concealment.

The intruders were preceded by men-servants, whose torches lighted the long, lofty storehouse brilliantly. It seemed to Els as if her heart stopped beating and she felt her cheeks blanch.

Here she beheld Count von Montfort's bronzed face, the countenance of a sportsman and reveller; yonder the frank, handsome features of the young Burgrave, Eitelfritz von Zollern, framed by the hood of the Knights of St. John, drawn up during the night-ride; there the pale, noble visage of the quiet knight Boemund Altrosen, far famed for his prowess with lance and sword; beyond, the scarred, martial countenance of Count Casper Schlick, set in a mass of tangled brown locks; and then the watery, blue eyes of Sir Seitz Siebenburg, the husband of her future sister-in-law Isabella.

They had pressed in, talking eagerly, laughing, and rejoicing that the wild night ride proposed by Cordula von Montfort, which had led over dark forest paths, lighted only by a stray moonbeam, and often across fields and ditches and through streams, had ended without mischance to man or beast.

Now they all crowded around the countess, Seitz Siebenburg bending towards her with such zeal that the ends of his huge mustache brushed the plumes in her cap, and Boemund Altrosen, who had just been gazing into the flushed face of the daring girl with the warm joy of true love, cast a look of menace at him.

Els, too, greatly disliked "the Mustache," as her future brother-in-law was called because the huge ornament on his upper lip made him conspicuous among the beardless knights. She was aware that he returned the feeling, and had left no means untried to incite Wolff Eysvogel's parents to oppose his betrothal. Now he was one of the first to notice her and, after whispering with a malicious smile to the countess and those nearest to him, he looked at her so malevolently that she could easily guess what interpretation he was trying to put upon her nocturnal meeting with the Swiss in the eyes of his companions.

Her cheeks flamed with wrath, and like a flash of lightning came the thought of the pleasure it would afford this wanton company, whose greatest delight was to gloat over the errors of their neighbours, if the knight who had brought her into this suspicious situation, or she herself, should confess that not she, but the devout Eva, had attracted Heinz hither. What a satisfaction it would be to this reckless throng to tell such a tale of a young girl of whom the Burgravine von Zollern had said the evening before to their Uncle Pfinzing, that purity and piety had chosen Eva's lovely face for a mirror!

What if Heinz Schorlin, to save her, Els, from evil report, should confess that she was here only to rebuke his insolent intrusion into a decorous household?

This must be prevented, and Heinz seemed to understand her; for after their eyes had met, his glance of helpless enquiry told her that he would leave her to find an escape from this labyrinth.

The merry party, who now perceived that they had interrupted the nocturnal tryst of lovers, did not instantly know what to do and, as one looked enquiringly at another, an embarrassed silence followed their noisy jollity.

But the hush did not last long, and its interruption at first seemed to Els to bode the worst result; it was a peal of gay, reckless laughter, ringing from the lips of the very Cordula von Montfort, into whose eyes, as the only one of her own sex who was present, Els had just gazed with a look imploring aid.

Had Eva's aversion to the countess been justified, and was she about to take advantage of her unpleasant position to jeer at her?

Had the two quarreled at the ball the night before, and did Cordula now perceive an opportunity to punish the younger sister by the humiliation of the older one?

Yet her laugh sounded by no means spiteful—rather, very gay and natural. The pleasant grey eyes sparkled with the most genuine mirth, and she clapped her little hands so joyously that the falcon's chain on the gauntlet of her riding glove rattled.

And what was this?

No one looks at a person whom one desires to wound with an expression of such cheerful encouragement as the look with which Cordula now gazed at Els and Heinz Schorlin, who stood by her side. True, they were at first extremely perplexed by the words she now shouted to those around her in a tone of loud exultation, as though announcing a victory; but from the beginning they felt that there was no evil purpose in them. Soon they even caught the real meaning of the countess's statement, and Els was ashamed of having feared any injury from the girl whose defender she had always been.

"Won, Sir Knight—cleverly won!" was her first sentence to Heinz.

Then, turning to Els, she asked with no less animation: "And you, my fair maid and very strict housemate, who has won the wager now? Do you still believe it is an inconceivable thought that the modest daughter of a decorous Nuremberg race, entitled to enter the lists of a tourney, would grant a young knight a midnight meeting?" And addressing her companions, she continued, in an explanatory yet still playful tone: "She was ready to wager the beautiful brown locks which she now hides modestly under a kerchief, and even her betrothed lover's ring. It should be mine if I succeeded in leading her to commit such an abominable deed. But I was content, if I won the wager, with a smaller forfeit; yet now that I have gained it, Jungfrau Ortlieb, you must pay!"

The whole company listened in astonishment to this speech, which no one understood, but the countess, nodding mischievously to her nearest neighbours, went on:

”How bewildered you all look! It might tempt me to satisfy your curiosity less speedily, but, after the delightful entertainment you gave us, my Lord Burgrave, one becomes merciful. So you shall hear how I, as wise as the serpent, craftily forced this haughty knight”—she tapped Heinz Schorlin’s arm with her riding whip—”and you, too, Jungfrau Ortlieb, whose pardon I now entreat, to help me win the bet. No offence, noble sirs! But this bet was what compelled me to drag you all from Kadolzburg and its charms so early, and induce you to attend me on the reckless ride through the moonlit night. Now accept the thanks of a lady whose heart is grateful; for your obedience helped me win the wager. Look yonder at my handsome, submissive knight, Sir Heinz Schorlin, so rich in every virtue. I commanded, him, on pain of my anger, to meet me at midnight at the entrance of our quarters—that is, the entry of the Ortlieb mansion; and to this modest and happy betrothed bride (may she pardon the madcap!) I represented how it troubled me and wounded my timid delicacy to enter so late at night, accompanied only by gentlemen, the house which so hospitably sheltered us, and go to my sleeping room, though I should not fear the Sultan and his mamelukes, if with this in my hand”—she motioned to her riding whip—”and my dear father at my side, I stood on my own feet which, though by no means small, are well-shod and resolute. Yet, as we are apt to measure others by our own standard, the timid, decorous girl believed me, and poor Cordula, who indeed brought only her maids and no female guardian, and therefore must dispense with being received on her return by a lady capable of commanding respect, did not appeal in vain to the charitable feelings of her beautiful housemate. She promised faithfully to come down into the entry, when the horses approached, to receive the poor lamb, surrounded by lynxes, wild-cats, foxes, and wolves, and lead it into the safe fold—if one can call this stately house by such a name. Both Sir Heinz Schorlin and Jungfrau Elizabeth Ortlieb kept their word and joined each other here—to their extreme amazement, I should suppose, as to my knowledge they never met before—to receive me, and thus had an interview which, however loudly they may contradict it, I call a nocturnal meeting. But my wager, fair child, is won, and tomorrow you will deliver to me the exquisite carved ivory casket, while I shall keep my bracelet.”

Here she paused, paying no heed to the merry threats, exclamations of amazement, and laughter of her companions.

But while her father, striking his broad chest, cried again and again, with rapturous delight, ”A paragon of a woman!” and Seitz Siebenburg, in bitter disappointment, whispered, ”The fourteen saintly helpers in time of need might learn from you how to draw from the clamps what is not worth rescue and probably despaired of escape,” she was trying to give time to recover more composure her young hostess, to whom she was sincerely attached, and who, she felt sure, could have met Heinz

Schorlin, who perhaps had come hither on her own account, only by some cruel chance. So she added in a quieter tone: "And now, Jungfrau Ortlieb, in sober earnest I will ask your protection and guidance through the dark house, and meanwhile you shall tell me how Sir Heinz greeted you and what passed between you, either good or bad, during the time of waiting."

Els summoned up her courage and answered loud enough to be heard by all present: "We were speaking of you, Countess Cordula, and the knight said:

"I ventured to remark, Countess," said Heinz, interrupting the new ally, "that though you might understand how to show a poor knight his folly, no kinder heart than yours throbbed under any bodice in Switzerland, Swabia, or France." Cordula struck him lightly on the shoulder with her riding whip, saying with a laugh: "Who permits you to peep under women's bodices through so wide a tract of country, you scamp? Had I been in Jungfrau Ortlieb's place I should have punished your entry into a respectable house:

"Oh, my dear Countess," Heinz interrupted, and his words bore so distinctly the stamp of truth and actual experience that even Sir Seitz Siebenburg was puzzled, "though I am always disposed to be grateful to you, I cannot feel a sense of obligation for this lady's reception of me, even to the most gracious benefactress. For, by my patron saint, she forbade me the house as if I were a thief and a burglar."

"And she was right!" exclaimed the countess. "I would have treated you still more harshly. Only you would have spared yourself many a sharp word had you confessed at once that it was I who summoned you here. I'll talk with you tomorrow, and am I not right, Jungfrau Els you won't make him suffer for losing the wager, but exercise your domestic authority after a more gentle fashion?"

While speaking, she looked at Els with a glance so full of meaning that the young girl's cheeks crimsoned, and the longing to put an end to this deceitful game became almost uncontrollable. The thought of Eva alone sealed her lips.

IN THE FIRE OF THE FORGE

A ROMANCE OF OLD NUREMBERG

By Georg Ebers

Volume 3.

CHAPTER X.

One person only besides Sir Seitz Siebenburg had not been deceived—the young knight Boemund Altrosen, whose love for Cordula was genuine, and who, by its unerring instinct, felt that she had invented her tale and for a purpose which did honour to her kindness of heart. So his calm black eyes rested upon the woman he loved with proud delight, while Seitz Siebenburg twisted his mustache fiercely. Not a look or movement of either of the two girls had escaped his notice, and Cordula's bold interference in behalf of the reckless Swiss knight, who now seemed to have ensnared his future sister-in-law also, increased the envy and jealousy which tortured him until he was forced to exert the utmost self-restraint in order not to tell the countess to her face that he, at least, was far from being deceived by such a fable. Yet he succeeded in controlling himself. But as he forced his lips to silence he gazed with the most open scorn at the bales of merchandise heaped around him. He would show the others that, though the husband of a merchant's daughter, he retained the prejudices of his knightly rank.

But no one heeded the disagreeable fellow, who had no intimate friends in the group. Most of the company were pressing round Heinz Schorlin with jests and questions, but bluff Count von Montfort warmly clasped Els's hand, while he apologised for the bold jest of his young daughter who, in spite of her recklessness, meant kindly.

Nothing could have been more unwelcome to a girl in so unpleasant a situation than this delay. She longed most ardently to get away but, ere she succeeded in escaping from the friendly old noble, two gentlemen hastily entered the brightly lighted entry, at sight of whom her heart seemed to stop beating.

The old count, who noticed her blanched face, released her, asking sympathisingly what troubled her, but Els did not hear him.

When she felt him loose her hand she would fain have fled up the stairs to her mother and sister, to avoid the discussions which must now follow. But she knew into what violent outbursts of sudden anger her usually prudent father could be hurried if there was no one at hand to warn him.

There he stood in the doorway, his stern, gloomy expression forming a strange contrast to the merry party who had entered in such a jovial mood.

His companion, Herr Casper Eysvogel, had already noticed his future daughter-in-law, recognised her by an amazed shrug of the shoulders which was anything but a friendly greeting, and now eyed the excited revellers with a look as grave and repellent as that of the owner of the house. Herr Casper's unusual height permitted him to gaze over the heads of the

party though, with the exception of Count von Montfort, they were all tall, nay, remarkably tall men, and the delicacy of his clear-cut, pallid, beardless face had never seemed to Els handsomer or more sinister. True, he was the father of her Wolff, but the son resembled this cold-hearted man only in his unusual stature, and a chill ran through her veins as she felt the stately old merchant's blue eyes, still keen and glittering, rest upon her.

On the day of her betrothal she had rushed into his arms with a warm and grateful heart, and he had kissed her, as custom dictated; but it was done in a strange way—his thin, well-cut lips had barely brushed her brow. Then he stepped back and turned to his wife with the low command, "It is your turn now, Rosalinde." Her future mother-in-law rose quickly, and doubtless intended to embrace her affectionately, but a loud cough from her own mother seemed to check her, for ere she opened her arms to Els she turned to her and excused her act by the words, "He wishes it." Yet Els was finally clasped in Frau Rosalinde's arms and kissed more warmly than—from what had previously occurred—she had expected.

Wolff's grandmother, old Countess Rotterbach, who rarely left the huge gilt armchair in her daughter's sitting-room, had watched the whole scene with a scornful smile; then, thrusting her prominent chin still farther forward, she said to her daughter, loud enough for Els to hear, "This into the bargain?"

All these things returned to the young girl's memory as she gazed at the cold, statuesque face of her lover's father. It seemed as if he held his tall, noble figure more haughtily erect than usual, and that his plain dark garments were of richer material and more faultless cut than ever; nay, she even fancied that, like the lion, which crouches and strains every muscle ere it springs upon its victim, he was summoning all his pride and sternness to crush her.

Els was innocent; nay, the motive which had brought her here to defend her sister could not fail to be approved by every well-disposed person, and certainly not last by her father, and it would have suited her truthful nature to contradict openly Countess Cordula's friendly falsehood had not her dread of fatally exposing Eva imposed silence.

How her father's cheeks glowed already! With increasing anxiety, she attributed it to the indignation which overpowered him, yet he was only heated by the haste with which, accompanied by his future son-in-law's father, he had rushed here from the Frauenthor as fast as his feet would carry him. Casper Eysvogel had also attended the Vorchtel entertainment and accompanied Ernst Ortlieb into the street to discuss some business matters.

He intended to persuade him to advance the capital for which he had just vainly asked Herr Vorchtel. He stood in most urgent need for the next few days of this great sum, of which his son and business partner must

have no knowledge, and at first Wolff Eysvogel's future father-in-law saw no reason to refuse. But Herr Ernst was a cautious man, and when his companion imposed the condition that his son should be kept in ignorance of the loan, he was puzzled. He wished to learn why the business partner should not know what must be recorded in the books of the house; but Casper Eysvogel needed this capital to silence the Jew Pfefferkorn, from whom he had secretly borrowed large sums to conceal the heavy losses sustained in Venice the year before at the gaming table.

At first courteously, then with rising anger, he evaded the questions of the business man, and his manner of doing so, with the little contradictions in which the arrogant man, unaccustomed to falsehood, involved himself, showed Herr Ernst that all was not as it should be.

By the time they reached the Frauenthor, he had told Casper Eysvogel positively that he would not fulfil the request until Wolff was informed of the matter.

Then the sorely pressed man perceived that nothing but a frank confession could lead him to his goal. But what an advantage it would give his companion, what a humiliation it would impose upon himself! He could not force his lips to utter it, but resolved to venture a last essay by appealing to the father, instead of to the business man; and therefore, with the haughty, condescending manner natural to him, he asked Herr Ernst, as if it were his final word, whether he had considered that his refusal of a request, which twenty other men would deem it an honour to fulfil, might give their relations a form very undesirable both to his daughter and himself?

"No, I did not suppose that a necessity," replied his companion firmly, and then added in an irritated tone: "But if you need the loan so much that you require for your son a father-in-law who will advance it to you more readily, why, then, Herr Casper—"

Here he paused abruptly. A flood of light streamed into the street from the doorway of the Ortlieb house. It must be a fire, and with the startled cry, "St. Florian aid us! my entry is burning!" he rushed forward with his companion to the endangered house so quickly that the torchbearers, who even in this bright night did good service in the narrow streets, whose lofty houses barred out the moonlight, could scarcely follow.

Thus Herr Ernst, far more anxious about his invalid, helpless wife than his imperilled wares, soon reached his own door. His companion crossed the threshold close behind him, sullen, deeply incensed, and determined to order his son to choose between his love and favour and the daughter of this unfriendly man, whom only a sudden accident had prevented from breaking the betrothal.

The sight of so many torches blazing here was an exasperating spectacle

to Ernst Ortlieb, who with wise caution and love of order insisted that nothing but lanterns should be used to light his house, which contained inflammable wares of great value; but other things disturbed his composure, already wavering, to an even greater degree.

What was his Els doing at this hour among these gentlemen, all of whom were strangers?

Without heeding them or the countess, he was hastening towards her to obtain a solution of this enigma, but the young Burgrave Eitelfritz von Zollern, the Knight of Altrosen, Cordula von Montfort, and others barred his way by greeting him and eagerly entreating him to pardon their intrusion at so late an hour.

Having no alternative, he curtly assented, and was somewhat soothed as he saw old Count von Montfort, who was still standing beside Els, engaged in an animated conversation with her. His daughter's presence was probably due to that of the guests quartered in his home, especially Cordula, whom, since she disturbed the peace of his quiet household night after night, he regarded as the personification of restlessness and reckless freedom. He would have preferred to pass her unnoticed, but she had clung to his arm and was trying, with coaxing graciousness, to soften his indignation by gaily relating how she had come here and what had detained her and her companions. But Ernst Ortlieb, who would usually have been very susceptible to such an advance from a young and aristocratic lady, could not now succeed in smoothing his brow. In his excitement he was not even able to grasp the meaning of the story she related merrily, though with well-feigned contrition. While listening to her with one ear, he was straining the other to catch what Sir Seitz Siebenburg was saying to his father-in-law, Casper Eysvogel.

He gathered from Countess Cordula's account that she had succeeded in playing some bold prank in connection with Els and the Swiss knight Heinz Schorlin, and the words "the Mustache" was whispering to his father-in-law—the direction of his glance betrayed it—also referred to Els and the Swiss. But the less Herr Ernst heard of this conversation the more painfully it excited his already perturbed spirit.

Suddenly his pleasant features, which, on account of the lady at his side, he had hitherto forced to wear a gracious aspect, assumed an expression which filled the reckless countess with grave anxiety, and urged the terrified Els, who had not turned her eyes from him, to a hasty resolution. That was her father's look when on the point of an outbreak of fury, and at this hour, surrounded by these people, he must not allow himself to yield to rage; he must maintain a tolerable degree of composure.

Without heeding the young Burgrave Eitelfritz or Sir Boemund Altrosen, who were just approaching her, she forced her way nearer to her father, He still maintained his self-control, but already the veins on his brow

had swollen and his short figure was rigidly erect. The cause of his excitement—she had noticed it—was some word uttered by Seitz Siebenburg. Her father was the only person who had understood it, but she was not mistaken in the conjecture that it referred to her and the Swiss knight, and she believed it to be base and spiteful.

In fact, after his father-in-law had told him that Ernst Ortlieb thought his house was on fire, "the Mustache," in reply to Herr Casper's enquiry how his son's betrothed bride happened to be there, answered scornfully: "Els? She did not hasten hither, like the old man, to put the fire out, but because one flame was not enough for her. Wolff must know it to-morrow. By day the slender little flame of honourable betrothed love flickers for him; by night it blazes more brightly for yonder Swiss scoundrel. And the young lady chooses for the scene of this toying with fire the easily ignited warehouse of her own father!"

"I will secure mine against such risks," Casper Eysvogel answered; then, casting a contemptuous glance at Els and a wrathful one at the Swiss knight, he added with angry resolution: "It is not yet too late. So long as I am myself no one shall bring peril and disgrace upon my house and my son."

Then Herr Ernst had suddenly become aware of the suspicion with which his beautiful, brave, self-sacrificing child was regarded. Pale as death, he struggled for composure, and when his eyes met the imploring gaze of the basely defamed girl, he said to himself that he must maintain his self-control in order not to afford the frivolous revellers who surrounded him an entertaining spectacle.

Wolff was dear to him, but before he would have led his Els to the house where the miserable "Mustache" lived, and whose head was the coldhearted, gloomy man whose words had just struck him like a poisoned arrow, he, whom the Lord had bereft of his beloved, gallant son, would have been ready to deprive himself of his daughters also and take both to the convent. Eva longed to go, and Els might find there a new and beautiful happiness, like his sister, the Abbess Kunigunde. In the Eysvogel house, never!

During these hasty reflections Els extended her hand toward him, and the shining gold circlet which her lover had placed on her ring finger glittered in the torchlight. A thought darted through his brain with the speed of lightning, and without hesitation he drew the ring from the hand of his astonished daughter, whispering curtly, yet tenderly, in reply to her anxious cry, "What are you doing?"

"Trust me, child."

Then hastily approaching Casper Eysvogel, he beckoned to him to move a little aside from the group.

The other followed, believing that Herr Ernst would now promise the sum requested, yet firmly resolved, much as he needed it, to refuse.

Ernst Ortlieb, however, made no allusion to business matters, but with a swift gesture handed him the ring which united their two children. Then, after a rapid glance around had assured him that no one had followed them, he whispered to Herr Casper: "Tell your Wolff that he was, and would have remained, dear to us; but my daughter seems to me too good for his father's house and for kindred who fear that she will bring injury and shame upon them. Your wish is fulfilled. I hereby break the betrothal."

"And, in so doing, you only anticipate the step which I intended to take with more cogent motives," replied Casper Eysvogel with cool composure, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously. "The city will judge to-morrow which of the two parties was compelled to sever a bond sacred in the sight of God and men. Unfortunately, it is impossible for me to give your daughter the good opinion you cherish of my son."

Drawing his stately figure to its full height as he spoke, he gazed at his diminutive adversary with a look of haughty contempt and, without vouchsafing a word in farewell, turned his back upon him.

Repressed fury was seething in Ernst Ortlieb's breast, and he would scarcely have succeeded in controlling himself longer but for the consolation afforded by the thought that every tie was sundered between his daughter and this cold, arrogant, unjust man and his haughty, evil disposed kindred. But when he again looked for the daughter on whom his hasty act had doubtless inflicted a severe blow, she was no longer visible.

Directly after he took the ring she had glided silently, unnoticed by most of the company, up the stairs to the second story. Cordula von Montfort told him this in a low tone.

Els had made no answer to her questions, but her imploring, tearful eyes pierced the young countess to the heart. Her quick ear had caught Siebenburg's malicious words and Casper Eysvogel's harsh response and, with deep pity, she felt how keenly the poor girl must suffer.

The happiness of a whole life destroyed without any fault of her own! From their first meeting Els had seemed to her incapable of any careless error, and she had merely tried, by her bold, interference, to protect her from the gossip of evil tongues. But Heinz Schorlin had just approached and whispered that, by his knightly honour, Els was a total stranger to him, and he only wished he might find his own dear sister at home as pure and free from any fault.

Poor child! But the countess knew who had frustrated her intervention in

behalf of Els. It was Sir Seitz Siebenburg, "the Mustache," whose officious homage, at first amusing, had long since become repulsive. Her heart shrank from the thought that, merely from vain pleasure in having a throng of admirers, she had given this scoundrel more than one glance of encouragement. The riding whip fairly quivered in her right hand as, after informing Ernst Ortlieb where Els had gone, she warned the gentlemen that it was time to depart, and Seitz Siebenburg submissively, yet as familiarly as if he had a right to her special favour, held out his hand in farewell.

But Countess Cordula withdrew hers with visible dislike, saying in a tone of chilling repulse: "Remember me to your wife, Sir Knight. Tell her to take care that her twin sons resemble their father as little as possible."

"Then you want to have two ardent admirers the less?" asked Siebenburg gaily, supposing that the countess's remark was a jest.

But when she did not, as he expected, give these insulting words an interpretation favourable to him, but merely shrugged her shoulders scornfully, he added, glancing fiercely at the Swiss knight:

"True, you would doubtless be better pleased should the boys grow up to resemble the lucky Sir Heinz Schorlin, for whose sake you proved yourself the inventor of tales more marvellous, if not more credible, than the most skilful travelling minstrel."

"Perhaps so," replied the countess with contemptuous brevity. "But I should be satisfied if the twins—and this agrees with my first wish should grow up honest men. If you should pay me the honour of a visit during the next few days, Sir Seitz, I could not receive it."

With these words she turned away, paying no further heed to him, though he called her name aloud, as if half frantic.

CHAPTER XI.

It was after midnight when the servants closed the heavy door of the Ortlieb mansion. The late guests had left it, mounted their horses, and ridden away together through the Frauenthor into the city.

The moon no longer lighted their way. A sultry wind had swept from the southwest masses of grey clouds, which constantly grew denser and darker. Heinz Schorlin did not notice it, but his follower, Biberli, called his attention to the rising storm and entreated him to choose the nearest road to the city. To remain outside the gate in such darkness would be

uncomfortable, nay, perhaps not without peril, but the knight merely flung him the peevish answer, "So much the better," and, to Biberli's surprise, turned into St. Klarengasse, which brought him by no means nearer to his distant lodgings in the Bindergasse.

It was unfortunate to be warmly devoted to a master who had no fear, whom he was obliged to serve as a messenger of love, and who now probably scarcely knew himself whither this love would lead him.

But true and steadfast Biberli would really have followed Sir Heinz, not only in a dangerous nocturnal ramble, but through all the terrors of hell. So he only glanced down at his long, lean legs, which would be exposed here to the bites of the dogs, with whom he stood on especially bad terms, raised his long robe higher, as the paths over which they must pass were of doubtful cleanliness, and deemed it a good omen when his foot struck against a stout stick, which his patron saint had perhaps thrown in his way as a weapon. Its possession was somewhat soothing, it is true, yet he did not regain the pleasant consciousness of peace in which his soul had rejoiced a few short hours before.

He knew what to expect from the irritable mood into which recent events appeared to have thrown his master. Heinz usually soon forgot any such trivial disappointment, but the difficulty threatening himself and Katterle was far worse—nay, might even assume terrible proportions.

These alarming thoughts made him sigh so deeply that Heinz turned towards him.

He would gladly have relieved his own troubled breast in the same way. Never before had the soul of this light-hearted child of good fortune served as the arena for so fierce a struggle of contending emotions.

He loved Eva, and the image of her white, supernaturally beautiful figure, flooded by the moonlight, still stood before him as distinctly as when, after her disappearance, he had resolved to plead his suit for her to her sister; but the usually reckless fellow asked himself, shuddering, what would have happened had he obeyed Eva's summons and been found with her, as he had just been surprised with her sister. She was not wholly free from guilt, for her note had really contained an invitation to a meeting; yet she escaped. But his needless impetuosity and her sudden appearance before the house had placed her modest, charming sister, the betrothed bride of the gallant fellow who had fought with him in the Marchfield, in danger of being misunderstood and despised. If the finger of scorn were pointed at her, if a stain rested on her fair fame, the austere Wolff Eysvogel would hardly desire to make her his wife, and then this also would be his fault.

His kind, honest heart suffered keenly under these self-accusations, the first which he had ever heeded.

Hitherto the volatile young fellow, who had often gaily risked his life in battle and his last penny at the gaming table, had never thought of seriously examining his own soul, battling by his own strength of will against some secret longing and shunning its cause. On the contrary, from childhood he had accustomed himself to rely on the protection and aid of the Virgin and the saints; and when they passed the image with the ever-burning lamp, where Katterle had just sought and found consolation, he implored it not to let his bold intrusion into the home of the maiden he loved bring evil upon her and her sister. He also vowed to the convent and its saint—which, come what might, should also be his—a rich gift whenever the Emperor or the gaming table again filled his purse.

The thought of being burdened his whole life long with the reproach of having made two such charming, innocent creatures miserable seemed unendurable. He would gladly have given gold and blood to remove it.

It was too late that day, but he resolved to go to the confessional on the morrow, for absolution had always relieved and lightened his heart. But how trivial his errors had been! True, the wrong he had now committed was not a mortal sin, and would hardly impose a severe penance upon him, yet it burdened him like the most infamous crime. He did not understand himself, and often wondered why he, reckless Heinz, thus made a mountain out of a molehill. Yet when, after this reflection, he uttered a sigh of relief, it seemed as if a voice within commanded him not to think lightly of what had passed, for on that evening he had ceased to bestow pleasure on every one, and instead of, as usual, being helpful and agreeable, he had plunged others who had done him no wrong—nay, perhaps a whole household, whose daughter had given him the first love of her young heart—into misery and disgrace. Had he considered the consequences of his act, he would still be merry Heinz. Then he remembered how, when a boy, playing with other lads high up among the mountains just as it was beginning to thaw, he had hurled the work they had finished with so much toil, a snow man, down the slope, rejoicing with his playfellows over its swift descent towards the valley, until they noticed with what frightful speed its bulk increased as it sped over its snowy road, till at last, like a terrible avalanche, it swept away a herdsman's hut—fortunately an empty one. Now, also, his heedlessness had set in motion a mass which constantly rolled onward, and how terrible might be the harm it would do!

If Hartmann, the Emperor's son, were only there! He confided everything to him, for he was sure of his silence. Both his duty as a knight and his conscience forbade him to relate his experiences and ask counsel from any one else.

He was still absorbed in these gloomy thoughts when, just before reaching the Walch, he heard Biberli's deep sigh. Here, behind and beside the frames of the cloth weavers, stood the tents before which the followers and soldiers of the princes and dignitaries who had come to the Reichstag were still sitting around the camp fire, carousing and laughing.

Any interruption was welcome to him, and to Biberli it seemed like a deliverance to be permitted to use his poor endangered tongue, for his master had asked what grief oppressed him.

"If you desired to know what trouble did not burden my soul I could find a speedier answer," replied Biberli piteously. "Oh, this night, my lord! What has it not brought upon us and others! Look at the black clouds rising in the south. They are like the dark days impending over us poor mortals."

Then he confided to Heinz his fears for himself and Katterle. The knight's assurance that he would intercede for him and, if necessary, even appeal to the Emperor's favour, somewhat cheered his servitor's drooping spirits, it is true, but by no means restored his composure, and his tone was lugubrious enough as he went on:

"And the poor innocent girl in the Ortlieb house! Your little lady, my lord, broke the bread she must now eat herself, but the other, the older E."

"I know," interrupted the knight sorrowfully. "But if the gracious Virgin aids us, they will continue to believe in the wager Cordula von Montfort—"

"She! she!" Biberli exclaimed, enthusiastically waving his stick aloft. "The Lord created her in a good hour. Such a heart! Such friendly kindness! And to think that she interposed so graciously for you—you, Sir Heinz, to whom she showed the favour of combing your locks, as if you were already her promised husband, and who afterwards, for another's sake, left her at the ball as if she wore a fern cap and had become invisible. I saw the whole from the musician's gallery. True, the somnambulist is marvellously beautiful."

But the knight interrupted him by exclaiming so vehemently: "Silence!" that he paused.

Both walked on without speaking for some distance ere Heinz began again:

"Even though I live to grow old and grey, never shall I behold aught more beautiful than the vision of that white-robed girlish figure on the stairs."

True and steadfast Biberli sighed faintly. Love for Eva Ortlieb held his master as if in a vise; but a Schorlin seemed to him far too good a match for a Nuremberg maiden who had grown up among sacks of pepper and chests of goods and, moreover, was a somnambulist. He looked higher for his Heinz, and had already found the right match for him. So, turning to him again, he said earnestly:

"Drive the bewitching vision from your mind, Sir Heinz. You don't know—but I could tell you some tales about women who walk in their sleep by moonlight."

"Well?" asked Heinz eagerly.

"As a maiden," Biberli continued impressively, with the pious intention of guarding his master from injury, "the somnambulist merely runs the risk of falling from the roof, or whatever accident may happen to a sleepwalker; but if she enters the estate of holy matrimony, the evil power which has dominion over her sooner or later transforms her at midnight into a troll, which seizes her husband's throat in his sleep and strangles him."

"Nursery tales!" cried Heinz angrily, but Biberli answered calmly:

"It can make no difference to you what occurs in the case of such possessed women, for henceforward the Ortlieb house will be closed against you. And—begging your pardon—it is fortunate. For, my lord, the horse mounted by the first Schorlin—the chaplain showed it to you in the picture—came from the ark in which Noah saved it with the other animals from the deluge, and the first Lady Schorlin whom the family chronicles mention was a countess. Your ancestresses came from citadels and castles; no Schorlin ever yet brought his bride from a tradesman's house. You, the proudest of them all, will scarcely think of making such an error, though it is true—"

"Ernst Ortlieb, spite of his trade, is a man of knightly lineage, to whom the king of arms opens the lists at every tournament!" exclaimed Heinz indignantly.

"In the combat with blunt weapons," replied Biberli contemptuously.

"Nay, for the jousts and single combat," cried Heinz excitedly. "The Emperor Frederick himself dubbed Herr Ernst a knight."

"You know best," replied Biberli modestly. But his coat of arms, like his entry, smells of cloves and pepper. Here is another, however, who, like your first ancestress, has a countess's title, and who has a right—My name isn't Biberli if your lady mother at home would not be more than happy were I to inform her that the Countess von Montfort and the darling of her heart, which you are:

"The name of Montfort and what goes with it," Heinz interrupted, "would surely please those at home. But the rest! Where could a girl be found who, setting aside Cordula's kind heart, would be so great a contrast to my mother in every respect?"

"Stormy mornings merge into quiet days," said the servant. "Everything depends, my lord, upon the heart of which you speak so slightly—the

heart and, even above that, upon the blood. 'Help is needed there,' cried the kind heart just now, and then the blood did its 'devoir'. The act followed the desire as the sound follows the blow of the hammer, the thunder the flash of lightning. Well for the castle that is ruled by such a mistress! I am only the servant, and respect commands me to curb my tongue; but to-day I had news from home through the Provost Werner, of Lucerne, whom I knew at Stansstadt. I meant to tell you of it over the wine at the Thirsty Troopers, but that accursed note and the misfortune which followed prevented. It will not make either of us more cheerful, but whoever is ordered by the leech to drink gall and wormwood does wisely to swallow the dose at one gulp. Do you wish to empty the cup now?"

The knight nodded assent, and Biberli went on. "Home affairs are not going as they ought. Though your uncle's hair is already grey, the knightly blood in his veins makes him grasp the sword too quickly. The quarrel about the bridge-toll has broken out again more violently than ever. The townsfolk drove off our cattle as security and, by way of punishment, your uncle seized the goods of their merchants, and they came to blows. True, the Schorlin retainers forced back the men from town with bloody heads, but if the feud lasts much longer we cannot hold out, for the others have the money, and since the war cry has sounded less frequently there has been no lack of men at arms who will serve any one who pays. Besides, the townsfolk can appeal to the treaty of peace, and if your uncle continues to seize the merchant's wares they will apply to the imperial magistrate, and then:

"Then," cried Heinz eagerly, "then the time will have come for me to leave the court and return home to look after my rights."

"A single arm, no matter how strong it may be, can avail nothing there, my lord," Biberli protested earnestly. "Your Uncle Ramsweg has scarcely his peer as a leader, but even were it not so you could not bring yourself to send the old man home and put yourself in his place. Besides, it would be as unwise as it is unjust. What is lacking at home is money to pay the town what it demands for the use of the bridge, or to increase the number of your men, and therefore:

"Well?" asked Heinz eagerly.

"Therefore seek the Countess von Montfort, who favours you above every one else," was the reply; "for with her all you need will be yours without effort. Her dowry will suffice to settle twenty such bridge dues, and if it should come to a fray, the brave huntress will ride to the field at your side with helmet and spear. Which of the four Fs did Countess Cordula von Montfort ever lack?"

"The four Fs?" asked Heinz, listening intently. "The Fs," explained the ex-pedagogue, "are the four letters which marriageable knights should consider. They are: Family, figure, favour, and fortune. But hold your

cap on! What a hot blast this is, as if the storm were coming straight from the jaws of hell. And the dust! Where did all these withered leaves come from in the month of June? They are whirling about as if the foliage had already fallen. There are big raindrops driving into my face too B-r-r! You need all four Fs. No rain will wash a single one of them away, and I hope it won't efface the least word of my speech either. What, according to human foresight, could be lacking to secure the fairest happiness, if you and the countess—"

"Love," replied Heinz Schorlin curtly.

"That will come of itself," cried Biberli, as if sure of what he was saying, "if the bride is Countess Cordula."

"Possibly," answered the knight, "but the heart must not be filled by another's image."

Here he paused, for in the darkness he had stumbled into the ditch by the road.

The whirlwind which preceded the bursting of the storm blew such clouds of dust and everything it contained into their faces that it was difficult to advance. But Biberli was glad, for he had not yet found a fitting answer. He struggled silently on beside his master against the wind, until it suddenly subsided, and a violent storm of rain streamed in big warm drops on the thirsty earth and the belated pedestrians. Then, spite of Heinz's protestations, Biberli hurriedly snatched the long robe embroidered with the St from his shoulders and threw it over his master, declaring that his shirt was as safe from injury as his skin, but the rain would ruin the knight's delicate embroidered doublet.

Then he drew over his head the hood which hung from his coat, and meanwhile must have decided upon an answer, for as soon as they moved on he began again: "You must drive your love for the beautiful sleepwalker out of your mind. Try to do so, my dear, dear master, for the sake of your lady mother, your young sister who will soon be old enough to marry, our light-hearted Maria, and the good old castle. For your own happiness, your lofty career, which began so gloriously, you must hear me! O master, my dear master, tear from your heart the image of the little Nuremberg witch, tempting though it is, I admit. The wound will bleed for a brief time, but after so much mirthful pleasure a fleeting disappointment in love, I should think, would not be too hard to bear if it will be speedily followed by the fairest and most enduring happiness."

Here a flash of lightning, which illumined the hospital door close before them, and made every surrounding object as bright as day, interrupted the affectionate entreaty of the faithful fellow, and at the same time a tremendous peal of thunder crashed and rattled through the air.

Master and servant crossed themselves, but Heinz exclaimed:

"That struck the tower yonder. A little farther to the left, and all doubts and misgivings would have been ended."

"You can say that!" exclaimed Biberli reproachfully while passing with his master through the gate which had just been opened for an imperial messenger. "And you dare to make such a speech in the midst of this heavenly wrath! For the sake of a pair of lovely eyes you are ready to execrate a life which the saints have so blessed with every gift that thousands and tens of thousands would not give it up from sheer gratitude and joy, even if it were not a blasphemous crime!"

Again the lightning and thunder drowned his words. Biberli's heart trembled, and muttering prayers beseeching protection from the avenging hand above, he walked swiftly onward till they reached the Corn Market. Here they were again stopped, for, notwithstanding the late hour, a throng of people, shouting and wailing, was just pouring from the Ledergasse into the square, headed by a night watchman provided with spear, horn, and lantern, a bailiff, torchbearers, and some police officers, who were vainly trying to silence the loudest outcries.

Again a brilliant flash of lightning pierced the black mass of clouds, and Heinz, shuddering, pointed to the crowd and asked, "Do you suppose the lightning killed the man whom they are carrying yonder?"

"Let me see," replied Biberli, among whose small vices curiosity was by no means the least. He must have understood news gathering thoroughly, for he soon returned and informed Heinz, who had sought shelter from the rain under the broad bow window of a lofty house, that the bearers were just carrying to his parents' home a young man whose thread of life had been suddenly severed by a stab through the breast in a duel. After the witnesses had taken the corpse to the leech Otto, in the Ledergasse, and the latter said that the youth was dead, they had quickly dispersed, fearing a severe punishment on account of the breach of the peace. The murdered man was Ulrich Vorchtel, the oldest son of the wealthy Berthold Vorchel, who collected the imperial taxes.

Again Heinz shuddered. He had seen the unfortunate young man the day before yesterday at the fencing school, and yesterday, full of overflowing mirth, at the dance, and knew that he, too, had fought in the battle of Marchfield. His foe must have been master of the art of wielding the sword, for the dead man had been a skilful fencer, and was tall and stalwart in figure.

When the servant ended his story Heinz stood still in the darkness for a time, silently listening. The bells had begun to ring, the blast of the watchman's horn blended with the wailing notes summoning aid, and in two places—near the Thiergartenthor and the Frauenthor—the sky was crimsoned by the reflection of a conflagration, probably kindled by some flash of lightning, which flickered over the clouds, alternately rising

and falling, sometimes deeper and anon paler in hue. Throngs of people, shouting "Fire!" pressed from the cross streets into the square. The stillness of the night was over.

When Heinz again turned to Biberli he said in a hollow tone:

"If the earth should swallow up Nuremberg tonight it would not surprise me. But over yonder—look, Biber, the Duke of Pomerania's quarters in the Green Shield are still lighted. I'll wager that they are yet at the gaming table. A plague upon it! I would be there, too, if my purse allowed. I feel as if yonder dead man and his coffin were burdening my soul. If it was really good fortune in love that snatched the zecchins from my purse yesterday:

"Then," cried Biberli eagerly, "to-night is the very time, ere Countess Cordula teaches you to forget what troubles you, to win them back. The gold for the first stake is at your disposal."

"From the Duke of Pomerania, you think?" asked Heinz; then, in a quick, resolute tone, added: "No! Often as the duke has offered me his purse, I never borrow from my peers when the prospect of repayment looks so uncertain."

"Gently, my lord," returned Biberli, slapping his belt importantly. "Here is what you need for the stake as your own property. No miracles have been wrought for us, only I forgot. But look! There are the black clouds rolling northward over the castle. That was a frightful storm! But a spendthrift doesn't keep house long—and the thunder has not yet followed that last flash of lightning. There is plenty of uproar without it. It's hard work to hear one's self speak amid all the ringing, trumpeting, yelling, and shrieking. It seems as if they expected to put out the fire with noise. The fathers of the city can attend to that. It doesn't appear to disturb the duke and his guests at their dice; and here, my lord, are fifty florins which, I think, will do for the beginning."

Biberli handed the knight a little bag containing this sum, and when Heinz asked in perplexity where he obtained it, the ex-schoolmaster answered gaily: "They came just in the nick of time. I received them from Suss, the jockey, while you were out riding this afternoon."

"For the black?" Heinz enquired.

"Certainly, my lord. It's a pity about the splendid stallion. But, as you know, he has the staggers, and when I struck him on the coronet he stood as if rooted to the earth, and the equerry, who was there, said that the disease was proved. So the Jew silently submitted, let the horse be led away, and paid back what we gave him. Fifty heavy florins! More than enough for a beginning. If I may advise you, count on the two and the five when fixed numbers are to be thrown or hit. Why? Because

you must turn your ill luck in love to advantage: and those from whom it comes are the two beautiful Ortlieb Es, as Nuremberg folk call the ladies Els and Eva. That makes the two. But E is the fifth letter in the alphabet, so I should choose the five. If Biberli did not put things together shrewdly—”

”He would be as oversharpe as he has often been already,” Heinz interrupted, but he patted Biberli’s wet arm as he spoke, and added kindly ”Yet every day proves that my Biberli is a true and steadfast fellow; but where in the wide world did you, a schoolmaster, gain instruction in the art of throwing the dice?”

”While we were studying in Paris, with my dead foster brother,” replied the servant with evident emotion. ”But now go up, my lord, before the fire alarm, and I know not what else, makes the people upstairs separate. The iron must be forged during this wild night. Only a few drops of rain are falling. You can cross the street dry even without my long garment.”

While speaking he divested the knight of his robe, and continued eagerly: ”Now, my lord, from the coffin, or let us say rather the leaden weight, which oppresses your soul, let a bolt be melted that will strike misfortune to the heart. Glittering gold has a cheering colour.”

”Stop! stop!” Heinz interrupted positively. ”No good wishes on the eve of hunting or gaming.

”But if I come bounding down the stairs of the Green Shield with a purse as heavy as my heart is just now—why, Biberli, success puts a new face on many things, and yours shall again look at me without anxiety.”

CHAPTER XII.

The thunderclouds had gathered in the blackest masses above the Frauenthor and the Ortlieb mansion. Ere the storm burst the oppressive atmosphere had burdened the hearts within as heavily as it weighed outside upon tree, bush, and all animated creation.

In the servants’ rooms under the roof the maids slept quietly and dreamlessly; and the men, with their mouths wide open, snored after the labour of the day, unconscious of what was passing outside in the sky or the events within which had destroyed the peace of their master and his family.

The only bed unoccupied was the one in the little room next to the stairs leading to the garret, which was occupied by Katterle. The Swiss, kneeling before it with her face buried in the coarse linen pillow case,

alternately sobbed, prayed, and cursed herself and her recklessness.

When the gale, which preceded the thunderstorm, blew leaves and straws in through the open window she started violently, imagining that Herr Ortlieb had come to call her to account and her trial was to begin. The barber's widow, whom she had seen a few days before in the pillory, with a stone around her neck, because she had allowed a cloth weaver's heedless daughter to come to her lodging with a handsome trumpeter who belonged to the city musicians, rose before her mental vision. How the poor thing had trembled and moaned after the executioner's assistant hung the heavy stone around her neck! Then, driven frantic by the jeers and insults of the people, the missiles flung by the street boys, and the unbearable burden, she could control herself no longer but, pouring forth a flood of curses, thrust out her tongue at her tormentors.

What a spectacle! But ere she, Katterle, would submit to such disgrace she would bid farewell to life with all its joys; and even to the countryman to whom her heart clung, and who, spite of his well-proven truth and steadfastness, had brought misery upon her.

Now the memory of the hateful word which she, too, had called to the barber's widow weighed heavily on her heart. Never, never again would she be arrogant to a neighbour who had fallen into misfortune.

This vow, and many others, she made to St. Clare; then her thoughts wandered to the city moat, to the Pegnitz, the Fischbach, and all the other streams in and near Nuremberg, where it was possible to drown and thus escape the terrible disgrace which threatened her. But in so doing she had doubtless committed a heavy sin; for while recalling the Dutzen Pond, from whose dark surface she had often gathered white water lilies after passing through the Frauenthor into the open fields, and wondering in what part of its reedy shore her design could be most easily executed, a brilliant flash of lightning blazed through her room, and at the same time a peal of thunder shook the old mansion to its foundations.

That was meant for her and her wicked thoughts. No! For the sake of escaping disgrace here on earth, she dared not trifle with eternal salvation and the hope of seeing her dead mother in the other world.

The remembrance of that dear mother, who had laboured so earnestly to train her in every good path, soothed her. Surely she was looking down upon her and knew that she had remained upright and honest, that she had not defrauded her employers of even a pin, and that the little fault which was to be so grievously punished had been committed solely out of love for her countryman, who in his truth and steadfastness meant honestly by her. What Biberli requested her to do could be no heavy sin.

But the powers above seemed to be of a different opinion; for again a dazzling glare of light illumined the room, and the crash and rattle of the thunder of the angry heavens accompanied it with a deafening din.

Katterle shrieked aloud; it seemed as if the gates of hell had opened before her, or the destruction of the world had begun.

Frantic with terror, she sprang back from the window, through which the raindrops were already sprinkling her face. They cooled her flushed cheeks and brought her back to reality. The offence she had just committed was no trivial one. She, whom Herr Ortlieb, with entire confidence, had placed in the service of the fair young girl whose invalid mother could not care for her, had permitted herself to be induced to persuade Eva, who was scarcely beyond childhood, to a rendezvous with a man whom she represented to the inexperienced maiden as a godly, virtuous knight, though she knew from Biberli how far the latter surpassed his master in fidelity and steadfastness.

"Lead us not into temptation!" How often she had repeated the words in the Lord's Prayer, and now she herself had become the serpent that tempted into sin the innocent child whom duty should have commanded her to guard.

No, no! The guilt for which she was threatened with punishment was by no means small, and even if her earthly judge did not call her to account, she would go to confession to-morrow and honestly perform the penance imposed.

Moved by these thoughts, she gazed across the courtyard to the convent. Just at that moment the lightning again flashed, the thunder pealed, and she covered her face with her hands. When she lowered her arms she saw on the roof of the nuns' granary, which adjoined the cow-stable, a slender column of smoke, followed by a narrow tongue of flame, which grew steadily brighter.

The lightning had set it on fire.

Sympathy for the danger and losses of others forced her own grief and anxiety into the background and, without pausing to think, she slipped on her shoes, snatched her shawl from the chest, and ran downstairs, shouting: "The lightning has struck! The convent is burning!"

Just at that moment the door of the chamber occupied by the two sisters opened, and Ernst Ortlieb, with tangled hair and pallid cheeks, came toward her.

Within the room the dim light of the little lamp and the fiery glare of the lightning illumined tear-stained, agitated faces.

After Heinz Schorlin had called to her, and Els had hurried to her aid, Eva, clad in her long, plain night robe, and barefooted, just as she had risen from her couch, followed the maid to her room. What must the knight, who but yesterday, she knew, had looked up to her as to a saint, think of her now?

She felt as if she were disgraced, stained with shame. Yet it was through no fault of her own, and overwhelmed by the terrible conviction that mysterious, supernatural powers, against which resistance was hopeless, were playing a cruel game with her, she had felt as if the stormy sea were tossing her in a rudderless boat on its angry surges.

Unable to seek consolation in prayer, as usual, she had given herself up to dull despair, but only for a short time. Els had soon returned, and the firm, quiet manner with which her prudent, helpful friend and sister met her, and even tried to raise her drooping courage by a jest ere she sent her to their mother's sick room, had fallen on her soul like refreshing dew; not because Els promised to act for her—on the contrary, what she intended to do roused her to resistance.

She had been far too guilty and oppressed to oppose her, yet indignation concerning the sharp words which Els had uttered about the knight, and her intention of forbidding him the house, perhaps forever, had stimulated her like strong acid wine.

Not until after her sister had left her did she become capable of clearly understanding what she had felt during her period of somnambulism.

While her mother, thanks to a narcotic, slept soundly, breathing quietly, and in the entry below something, she knew not what, perhaps due to her father's return, was occurring, she sat thinking, pondering, while an impetuous throng of rebellious wishes raised their voices, alternately asking and denying, in her agitated breast.

How she had happened to rise from her couch and go out had vanished utterly from her memory, but she was still perfectly conscious of her feelings during the night walk. If hitherto she had yearned to drain heavenly bliss from the chalice of faith, during her wanderings through the house she had longed for nothing save to drink her fill from the cup of earthly joy. Ardent kisses, of which she had forbidden herself even to think, she awaited with blissful delight. Her timorous heart, held in check by virgin modesty, accustomed to desire nothing save what she could have confessed to her sister and the abbess, seemed as if it had cast off every fetter and boldly resolved to risk the most daring deeds. The somnambulist had longed for the moment when, after Heinz Schorlin's confession that he loved her, she could throw her arms around his neck with rapturous gratitude.

If, while awake, she had desired only to speak to him of her saint and of his duty to overthrow the foes of the Church, she had wished while gazing at the moon from the stairs, and in front of the house door, to whisper sweet words of love, listen to his, and in so doing forget herself, the world, and everything which did not belong to him, to her, and their love.

And she remembered this longing and yearning in a way very unlike a mere dream. It seemed rather as if, while the moon was attracting her by its magic power, something, which had long slumbered in the depths of her soul, had waked to life; something, from which formerly, ere her heart and mind had been able rightly to understand it, she had shrunk with pious horror, had assumed a tangible form.

Now she dreaded this newly recognised sinful part of her own nature, which she had imagined a pure vessel that had room only for what was noble, sacred, and innocent.

She, too—she knew it now—was only a girl like those on whose desire for love she had looked down with arrogant contempt, no bride of heaven or saint.

She had not yet taken the veil, and it was fortunate, for what would have become of her had she not discovered until after her profession this part of her nature, which she thought every true nun, if she possessed it, must discard, like the hair which was shorn from her head, before taking the vow of the order.

During this self-inspection it became more and more evident that she was not one person, but two in one—a twofold nature with a single body and two distinct souls; and this conviction caused her as much pain as if the cut which had produced the separation were still bleeding.

Just at that moment her eyes fell upon the image of the Virgin opposite, and the usual impulse to lift her soul in prayer took possession of her even more powerfully than a short time before.

With fervent warmth she besought her to release her from this newly awakened nature, which surely could not be pleasing in the sight of Heaven, and let her once more become what she was before the unfortunate ramble in the moonlight.

But the composure she needed for prayer was soon destroyed, for the image of the knight rose before her again and again, and it seemed as if her own name, which he had called with such ardent longing, once more rang in her ears.

Whoever thus raises his voice in appeal to another loves that person. Heinz Schorlin's love was great and sincere and, instead of heeding the inner voice that warned her to return to prayer, she cried defiantly, "I will not!"

She could not yet part from the man for whom her heart throbbed with such passionate yearning, who was so brave and godly, so ardently devoted to her.

True, it had been peacefully beautiful to dream herself into the bright

glory of heaven, yet the stormy rapture she had felt while thinking of him and his love seemed richer and greater. She could not, would not part from him.

Then she remembered her sister's intention of driving Heinz-Eva already called the knight by that name in her soliloquy—from her presence, and the thought that she might perhaps wound him so keenly that knightly honour would forbid his return alarmed and incensed her.

What right had Els to distrust him? A godly knight played no base game with the chosen lady of, his heart, and that, yes, that she certainly was, since she had named her colour to him. Nothing should separate them. She needed him for her happiness as much as she did light and air. Hitherto she had longed for bliss in another world, but she was so young she probably had a long life before her, and what could existence on earth offer if robbed of the hope of his possession?

The newly awakened part of her nature demanded its rights. It would never again allow itself to be forced into the old slumber.

If her sister came back and boasted of having driven away the dangerous animal forever, she would show her that she had a different opinion of the knight, and would permit no one to interpose between them. But, while still pondering over this plan, the door of the sick-room was softly opened and her father beckoned to her to follow him.

Silently leading the way through the dusky corridor, no longer illumined by the moonlight, he entered his daughter's room before her. The lamp, still burning there, revealed the agitated face of her sister who, resting her chin on her hand, sat on the stool beside the spinning wheel.

Eva's courage, which had blazed up so brightly, instantly fell again.

"Good heavens! What has happened?" she cried in terror; but her father answered in a hollow tone:

"For the sake of your noble sister, to whom I pledged my word, I will force myself to remain calm. But look at her! Her poor heart must be like a graveyard, for she was doomed to bury what she held dearest. And who," he continued furiously, so carried away by grief and indignation as to be unmindful of his promise to maintain his composure, "who is to blame for it all, save you and your boundless imprudence?"

Eva, with uplifted hands, tried to explain how, unconscious of her acts, she had walked in her sleep down the stairs and out of the house, but he imperiously cut her short with:

"Silence! I know all. My daughter gave a worthless tempter the right to expect the worst from her. You, whom we deemed the ornament of this house, whose purity hitherto was stainless, are to blame if people

passing on the street point at it! Alas! alas! Our honour, our ancient, unsullied name!”

Groaning aloud, the father struck his brow with his clenched hand; but when Els rose and passed her arm around his shoulders to speak words of consolation, Eva, who hitherto had vainly struggled for words, could endure no more.

”Whoever says that of me, my father,” she exclaimed with flashing eyes; scarcely able to control her voice, ”has opened his ears to slander; and whoever terms Heinz Schorlin a worthless tempter, is blinded by a delusion, and I call him to his face, even were it my own father, to whom I owe gratitude and respect—”

But here she stopped and extended her arms to keep off the deeply angered man, for he had started forward with quivering lips, and—she perceived it clearly—was already under the spell of one of the terrible fits of fury which might lead him to the most unprecedented deeds. Els, however, had clung to him and, while holding him back with all her strength, cried out in a tone of keen reproach, ”Is this the way you keep your promise?”

Then, lowering her voice, she continued with loving entreaty: ”My dear, dear father, can you doubt that she was asleep, unconscious of her acts, when she did what has brought so much misery upon us?”

And, interrupting herself, she added eagerly in a tone of the firmest conviction: ”No, no, neither shame nor misery has yet touched you, my father, nor the poor child yonder. The suspicion of evil rests on me, and me alone, and if any one here must be wretched it is I.”

Then Herr Ernst, regaining his self-control, drew back from Eva, but the latter, as if fairly frantic, exclaimed: ”Do you want to drive me out of my senses by your mysterious words and accusations? What, in the name of all the saints, has happened that can plunge my Els into misery and shame?”

”Into misery and shame,” repeated her father in a hollow tone, throwing himself into a chair, where he sat motionless, with his face buried in his hands, while Els told her sister what had occurred when she went down into the entry to speak to the knight.

Eva listened to her story, fairly gasping for breath. For one brief moment she cherished the suspicion that Cordula had not acted from pure sympathy, but to impose upon Heinz Schorlin a debt of gratitude which would bind him to her more firmly. Yet when she heard that her father had given back his daughter’s ring to Herr Casper Eysvogel and broken his child’s betrothal she thought of nothing save her sister’s grief and, sobbing aloud, threw herself into Els’s arms.

The girls held each other in a close embrace until the first flash of

lightning and peal of thunder interrupted the conversation.

The father and daughters had been so deeply agitated that they had not heard the storm rising outside, and the outbreak of the tempest surprised them. The peal of thunder, which so swiftly followed the lightning, also startled them and when, soon after, a second one shook the house with its crashing, rattling roar, Herr Ernst went out to wake the chief packer. But old Endres was already keeping watch among the wares entrusted to him and when, after a brief absence, the master of the house returned, he found Eva again clasped in her sister's arms, and saw the latter kissing her brow and eyes as she tenderly strove to comfort her.

But Eva seemed deaf to her soothing words. Els, her faithful Els, was no longer the betrothed bride of her Wolff; her great, beautiful happiness was destroyed forever. On the morrow all Nuremberg would learn that Herr Casper had broken his son's betrothal pledge, because his bride, for the sake of a tempter, Sir Heinz Schorlin, had failed to keep her troth with him.

How deeply all this pierced Eva's heart! how terrible was the torture of the thought that she was the cause of this frightful misfortune! Dissolved in an agony of tears, she entreated the poor girl to forgive her; and Els did so willingly, and in a way that touched her father to the very depths of his heart. How good the girls must be who, spite of the sore suffering which one had brought upon the other, were still so loving and loyal!

Convinced that Eva, too, had done nothing worthy of punishment, he went towards them to clasp both in his arms, but ere he could do so the clap of thunder which had frightened Katterle so terribly shook the whole room. "St. Clare, aid us!" cried Eva, crossing herself and falling upon her knees; but Els rushed to the window, opened it, and looked down the street. Nothing was visible there save a faint red glow on the distant northern horizon, and two mailed soldiers who were riding into the city at a rapid trot. They had been sent from the stables in the Marienthurm to keep order in case a fire should break out. Several men with hooks and poles followed, also hurrying to the Frauenthor.

In reply to the question where the fire was and where they going, they answered: "To the Fischbach, to help. Flames have burst out apparently under the fortress at the Thiergartenthor."

The long-drawn call for help from the warder's horn, which came at the same moment, proved that the men were right.

Herr Ernst hastened out of the room just as Katterle's shriek, "The lightning struck! the convent is burning!" rung from the upper step of the stairs.

He had already pronounced her sentence, and the sight of her roused his

wrath again so vehemently that, spite of the urgent peril, he shouted to her that, whatever claimed his attention now, she certainly should not escape the most severe punishment for her shameful conduct.

Then he ordered old Endres and two of the menservants to watch the sleeping-room of his invalid wife, that in case anything should happen the helpless woman might be instantly borne to a place of safety.

Ere he himself went to the scene of the conflagration he hurried back to his daughters.

While the girls were giving him his hat and cloak he told them where the fire had broken out, and this caused another detention of the anxious master of the house, for Eva seized her shoes and stockings and, kicking her little slippers from her feet, declared that she, too, would not remain absent from the place when her dear nuns were in danger. But her father commanded her to stay with her mother and sister, and went to the door, turning back once more on the threshold to his daughters with the anxious entreaty: "Think of your mother!"

Another peal of thunder drowned the sound of his footsteps hurrying down the stairs. When Els, who had watched her father from the window a short time, went back to her sister, Eva dried her eyes and cheeks, saying: "Perhaps he is right; but whenever my heart urges me to obey any warm impulse, obstacles are put in my way. What a weak nonentity is the daughter of an honourable Nuremberg family!"

Els heard this complaint with astonishment. Was this her Eva, her "little saint," who yesterday had desired nothing more ardently than with humble obedience, far from the tumult of the world, to become worthy of her Heavenly Bridegroom, and in the quiet peace of the convent raise her soul to God? What had so changed the girl in these few hours? Even the most worldly-minded of her friends would have taken such an impeachment ill.

But she had no time now to appeal to the conscience of her misguided sister. Love and duty summoned her to her mother's couch. And then! The child had become aware of her love, and was she, Els, who had been parted from Wolff by her own father, and yet did not mean to give him up, justified in advising her sister to cast aside her love and the hope of future happiness with and through the man to whom she had given her heart?

What miracles love wrought! If in a single night it had transformed the devout future Bride of Heaven into an ardently loving woman, it could accomplish the impossible for her also.

While Eva was gazing out of the window Els returned to her mother. She was still asleep and, without permitting either curiosity or longing to divert her from her duty, Els kept her place beside the couch of the

beloved invalid, spite of the fire alarm which, though somewhat subdued, was heard in the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

Eva was standing at the open window. The violence of the storm seemed exhausted. The clouds were rolling northward, and the thunder followed the flashes of lightning at longer and longer intervals. Peace was restored to the heavens, but the crowd and noise in the city and the street constantly increased.

The iron tongues of the alarm bells had never swung so violently, the warder's horn had never made the air quiver with such resonant appeals for aid.

Nor did the metallic voices above call for help in vain, for while a roseate glow tinged the linden in front of her window and the houses on the opposite side of the street with the hues of dawn, the crowds thronging from the Frauenthor to St. Klarengasse grew denser and denser.

The convent was not visible from her chamber, but the acrid odor of the smoke and the loud voices which reached her ear from that direction proved that the fire was no trivial one. While she was seeking out the spot from which Heinz must have looked up to her window, the Ortlieb menservants, with some of the Montfort retainers, came out of the house with pails and ladders.

A female figure glided into the dark street after them. A black shawl concealed her head and the upper part of her figure, and she held a bundle in her hand.

It must be Katterle.

Where was she going at this hour? As she was carrying the package, she could scarcely intend to help in putting out the fire. Was she stealing away from fear of punishment? Poor thing! Even the maid was hurled into misfortune through her guilt.

It pierced her very heart. But while she called to Katterle to stop her, something else, which engrossed her still more, diverted her attention—the loud voice of Countess Cordula reached her from the street door. With whom was she talking? Did the girl, who ventured upon so many things which ill-beseemed a modest maiden, intend to join the men? Eva forgot that she, too, would have hurried to the nuns had not her father prevented it. The countess was already standing in the courtyard.

After Eva had given her a hasty glance she again looked for the maid, but Katterle had already vanished in the darkness. This grieved her; she had neglected something which might have saved the girl, to whom she was warmly attached, from some imprudent act. But while attracted by the strange appearance of the countess she had forgotten the other.

Cordula had probably just left her couch, for she wore only a plain dress tucked up very high, short boots, which she probably used in hunting, and a shawl crossed over her bosom; another was wound round her head in the fashion of the peasant women who brought their goods to market on cold winter days. No farmer's wife could be more simply clad, and yet—Eva was forced to admit it—there was something aristocratic in her firm bearing.

Her companions were her father's chaplain and the equerry who had grown grey in his service. Both were trying to dissuade her. The former pointed to a troop of women who were following the chief of police and some city constables, and said warningly: "Those are all wanton queans, whom the law of this city compels to lend their aid in putting out fires. How would it beseech your rank to join these who shame their sex— No, no! It would be said to-morrow that the ornament of the house of Montfort had—"

"That Countess Cordula had used her hands in extinguishing the fire," she interrupted with gay self-confidence. "Is there any disgrace in that? Must my noble birth debar me from being numbered among those who help their neighbours so far as lies in their power? If any good is accomplished here, those poor women yonder will make it no worse by their aid. If people here believe that they do, it will give me double pleasure to ennoble it by working with them. Putting out the flames will not degrade me, and will make the women better. So, forward! See how the fire is blazing yonder! Help is needed there and, thank Heaven, I am no weakling. Besides, there are women who want assistance and, to women in peril, the most welcome aid is woman's."

The old equerry, his eyes glittering with tears, nodded assent, and led the way into the street; but the countess, instead of following instantly, glanced back for the page who was to carry the bandages which she had learned to use among her retainers at home. The agile boy did not delay her long; but while his mistress was looking to see that he had forgotten nothing of importance, he perceived at the window Eva, whose beauty had long since fired his young heart, and cast a languishing glance at her. Then Cordula also noticed her and called a pleasant greeting. Eva was on the point of answering in the same tone, when she remembered that Cordula had spoken of Heinz Schorlin in the presence of others as if he were awaiting her in all submission. Anger surged hotly in her breast, and she drew back into the room as if she had not heard the salutation.

The countess perceived it, and shrugged her shoulders pityingly.

Eva, dissatisfied with herself, continued to gaze down into the street long after the crowds of people flocking from the city had concealed Cordula from her eyes. It seemed as though she would never again succeed in anything that would bring contentment. Never had she felt so weak, so ill-tempered, so devoid of self-reliance. Yet she could not, as usual, seek consolation with her saint. There was so much here below to divert her attention.

The roseate glow on the linden had become a crimson glare, the flickering light on the opposite walls a dazzling illumination. The wind, now blowing from the west, bore from St. Klarengasse burning objects which scattered sparks around them—bundles of hay caught by the flames—from the convent barn to the Marienthurm opposite, and into the street. Besides, the noise above and behind, before and below her, grew louder and louder. The ringing of the bells and the blare of trumpets from the steeples continued, and with this constant ringing, pealing, and crashing from above, mingled the high, clear voices of the choir of nuns in the convent, beseeching in fervent litanies the help of their patron saint. True, the singing was often drowned by the noise from the street, for the fire marshals and quartermasters had been informed in time, and watchmen, soldiers in the pay of the city, men from the hospital, and the abandoned women (required by law to help put out the fires) came in little groups, while bailiffs and servants of the Council, barbers (who were obliged to lend their aid, but whose surgical skill could find little employment here), members of the Council, priests and monks arrived singly. The street also echoed with the trampling of many steeds, for mounted troopers in coats of mail first dashed by to aid the bailiffs in maintaining order, then the inspector of water works, with his chief subordinate, trotted along to St. Klarengasse on the clumsy horses placed at their disposal by the Council in case of fire. He was followed by the millers, with brass fire engines. While their well-fed nags drew on sledges, with little noise, through the mire of the streets now softened by the rain, the heavy wooden water barrels needed in the work of extinguishing the flames, there was a loud rattling and clanking as the carts appeared on which the men from the Public Works building were bringing large and small ladders, hooks and levers, pails and torches, to the scene of the conflagration.

Besides those who were constrained by the law, many others desired to aid the popular Sisters of St. Clare and thereby earn a reward from God. A brewer had furnished his powerful stallions to convey to the scene of action, with their tools, the eight masons whose duty it was to use their skill in extinguishing the flames. All sorts of people—men and women—followed, yelling and shrieking, to seek their own profit during the work of rescue. But the bailiffs kept a sharp eye on them, and made way when the commander of the German knights, with several companions on whose black mantles the white cross gleamed, appeared on horseback, and at last old Herr Berthold Vorchtel trotted up on his noble grey, which was known to the whole city. He still had a firm seat in the saddle, but his head

was bowed, and whoever knew that only one hour before the corpse of his oldest son, slain in a duel, had been brought home, admired the aged magistrate's strength of will. As First Losunger and commander in chief he was the head of the Council, and therefore of the city also. Duty had commanded him to mount his steed, but how pale and haggard was his shrewd face, usually so animated!

Just in front of the Ortlieb mansion the commander of the German knights rode to his side, and Eva saw how warmly he shook him by the hand, as if he desired to show the old man very cordially his deep sympathy in some sore trouble which had assailed him.

Ever since Wolff's betrothal to Els had been announced the Vorchtels had ceased to be on terms of intimacy with the Ortliebs; but old Herr Berthold, though he himself had probably regarded young Eysvogel as his "Ursel's" future husband, had always treated Eva kindly, and she was not mistaken—tears were glittering on his cheeks in the torchlight. The sight touched the young girl's inmost heart. How eagerly she desired to know what had befallen the Vorchtels, and to give the old man some token of sympathy! What could have caused him so much sorrow? Only a few hours before her father had returned from a gay entertainment at his house. It could scarcely concern Herr Berthold's wife, his daughter Ursula, or either of his two vigorous sons. Perhaps death had only bereft him of some more distant, though beloved relative, yet surely she would have known that, for the Ortliebs were connected by marriage both with the old gentleman and his wife.

Tortured by a presentiment of evil, Eva gazed after him, and also watched for Heinz Schorlin among the people in the street. Must not anxiety for her bring him hither, if he learned how near her house the fire was burning?

Whenever a helmet or knight's baret appeared above the crowd she thought that he was coming. Once she believed that she had certainly recognised him, for a tall young man of knightly bearing appeared, not mounted, but on foot, and stopped opposite to the Ortlieb house. That must be he! But when he looked up to her window, the reflection of the fire showed that the man who had made her heart beat so quickly was indeed a young and handsome knight, but by no means the person for whom she had mistaken him. It was Boemund Altrosen, famed as victor in many a tournament, who when a boy had often been at the house of her uncle, Herr Pfinzing. There was no mistaking his coal-black, waving locks. It was said that the dark-blue sleeve of a woman's robe which he wore on his helmet in the jousts belonged to the Countess von Montfort. She was his lady, for whom he had won so many victories.

Heinz Schorlin had mentioned him at the ball as his friend, and told her that the gallant knight would vainly strive to win the reckless countess. Perhaps he was now looking at the house so intently on Cordula's account. Or had Heinz, his friend, sent him to watch over her while he was

possibly detained by the Emperor?

But, no; he had just gone nearer to the house to question a man in the von Montfort livery, and the reply now led him to move on towards the convent.

Were the tears which filled Eva's eyes caused by the smoke that poured from the fire more and more densely into the street, or to disappointment and bitter anguish?

The danger which threatened her aunt and her beloved nuns also increased her excitement. True, the sisters themselves seemed to feel safe, for snatches of their singing were still audible amid the ringing of the bells and the blare of the trumpets, but the fire must have been very hard to extinguish. This was proved by the bright glow on the linden tree and the shouts of command which, though unintelligible, rose above every other sound.

The street below was becoming less crowded. Most of those who had left their beds to render aid had already reached the scene of the conflagration. Only a few stragglers still passed through the open gate towards the Marienthurm. Among them were horsemen, and Eva's heart again throbbed more quickly, but only for a short time. Heinz Schorlin was far taller than the man who had again deceived her, and his way would hardly have been lighted by two mounted torch bearers. Soon her rosy lips even parted in a smile, for the sturdy little man on the big, strong-boned Vinzgau steed, whom she now saw distinctly, was her dearest relative, her godfather, the kind, shrewd, imperial magistrate, Berthold Pfinzing, the husband of her father's sister, good Aunt Christine.

If he looked up he would tell her about old Herr Vorchtel. Nor did he ride past his darling's house without a glance at her window, and when he saw Eva beckon he ordered the servants to keep back, and stopped behind the chains.

After he had briefly greeted his niece and she had enquired what had befallen the Vorchtels, he asked anxiously: "Then you know nothing yet? And Els—has it been kept from her, too?"

"What, in the name of all the saints?" asked Eva, with increasing alarm.

Then Herr Pfinzing, who saw that the door of the house was open, asked her to come down. Eva was soon standing beside her godfather's big bay, and while patting the smooth neck of the splendid animal he said hurriedly, in a low tone: "It's fortunate that it happened so. You can break it gradually to your sister, child. To-night Summon up your courage, for there are things which even a man—To make the story short, then: Tonight Wolff Eysvogel and young Vorchtel quarreled, or rather Ulrich irritated your Wolff so cruelly that he drew his sword—"

"Wolff!" shrieked Eva, whose hand had already dropped from the horse. "Wolff! He is so terribly strong, and if he drew his sword in anger—"

"He dealt his foe one powerful thrust," replied the imperial magistrate with an expressive gesture. "The sword pierced him through. But I must go on Only this one thing more: Ulrich was borne back to his parents as a corpse. And Wolff Where is he hiding? May the saints long be the only ones who know! A quarrel with such a result under the Emperor's eyes, now when peace has just been declared throughout the land! Who knows what sentence will be pronounced if the bailiffs show themselves shrewder this time than usual! My office compelled me to set the pack upon him. That is the reason I am so late. Tell Els as cautiously as possible."

He bowed gallantly and trotted on, but Eva, as if hunted by enemies, rushed up the staircase, threw herself on her knees before the prie dieu, and sobbed aloud.

Young Vorchtel had undoubtedly heard of the events in the entry, taunted Wolff with his betrothed bride's nocturnal interview with a knight, and thus roused the strong man to fury. How terrible it all was! How could she bear it! Her thoughtlessness had cost a human life, robbed parents of their son! Through her fault her sister's betrothed husband, whom she also loved, was in danger of being placed under ban, perhaps even of being led to the executioner's block!

She had no thought of any other motive which might have induced the hot-blooded young men to cross swords and, firmly convinced that her luckless letter had drawn Heinz Schorlin to the house and thus led to all these terrible things, she vainly struggled for composure.

Sometimes she beheld in imagination the despairing Els; sometimes the aged Vorchtels, grieving themselves to death; sometimes Wolff, outlawed, hiding like a hunted deer in the recesses of the forest; sometimes the maid, fleeing with her little bundle into the darkness of the night; sometimes the burning convent; and at intervals also Heinz Schorlin, as he knelt before her and raised his clasped hands with passionate entreaty.

But she repelled every thought of him as a sin, and even repressed the impulse to look out into the street to seek him. Her sole duty now was to pray to her patron saint and the Mother of God in behalf of her sister, whom she had hurled into misfortune, and her poor heart bleeding from such deep wounds; but the consolation which usually followed the mere uplifting of her soul in prayer did not come, and it could not be otherwise, for amid her continual looking into her own heart and listening to what went on around her no real devotion was possible.

Although she constantly made fresh efforts to collect her thoughts, and continued to kneel with clasped hands before the prie dieu, not a hoof-

beat, not a single loud voice, escaped her ear. Even the alternate deepening and paling of the reflection of the fire, which streamed through the window, attracted her attention, and the ringing of bells and braying of trumpets, which still continued, maintained the agitation in her soul.

Yet prayer was the sole atonement she could make for the wrong she had done her sister; so she did not cease her endeavours to plead for her to the Great Helper above, but her efforts were futile. Yet even when she heard voices close by the house, among which she distinguished Countess Cordula's and—if she was not mistaken—her father's, she resisted the impulse to rise from her knees.

At last the vain struggle was ended by an interruption from without. After unusually loud voices exclaiming and questioning had reached her from the entry, the door of her chamber suddenly opened and old Martsche looked in. The housekeeper was seeking something; but when she found the devout child on her knees she did not wish to disturb her, and contented herself with the evidence of her eyes. But Eva stopped her, and learned that she was searching for Katterle, who could neither be found in her room, or anywhere else. Herr Ortlieb had brought Countess von Montfort home severely burned, and there were all sorts of things for the maid to do.

Eva clung shuddering to the back of the prie dieu, for the certainty that the unfortunate girl had really fled was like strewing salt on her wounds.

When Martsche left her and Els entered, her excitement had risen to such a pitch that she flung herself before her, as if frantic and, clinging to her knees, heaping self-accusations upon herself with passionate impetuosity, she pleaded, amid her sobs, for pardon and mercy.

Meanwhile Els had been informed by her father of her lover's fatal deed, and as soon as she perceived what tortured her sister she relieved her, with loving words of explanation, from the reproach of being the cause of this misfortune also, for the quarrel had taken place so early that no tidings of the meeting in the entry could have reached young Vorchtel when he became involved in the fray with Wolff.

Nor was it solely to soothe Eva that she assured her that, deeply as she mourned the death of the hapless Ulrich and his parents' grief, Wolff's deed could not diminish either her love or her hope of becoming his.

Eva listened to this statement with sparkling eyes. The love in her sister's heart was as immovably firm as the ancient stones of her native stronghold, which defied every storm, and on which even the destroying, kindling lightning could inflict no injury. This made her doubly dear, and from the depths of dull despair her soul, ever prone to soar upwards, rose swiftly to the heights of hopeful exaltation.

When Els at last entreated her to go to rest without her, she willingly consented, for her mother was comfortable, and Sister Renata was watching at her bedside.

Eva kept her promise, after Els, who wanted to see the Countess von Montfort, had satisfied her concerning the welfare of the nuns and promised to go to rest herself as soon as possible.

The stopping of the alarm bells proved that the fire was under control. Even its reflection had disappeared, but the eastern sky was beginning to be suffused with a faint tinge of rose colour.

When her sister left her Eva herself drew the curtains before the window, and sleep soon ended her thoughts and yearnings, her grief and her hope.

CHAPTER XIV.

Countess Cordula von Montfort's room faced the east and looked out into the garden. The sun of the June morning had just risen, filling it with cheerful light.

The invalid's maid had wished to deny Els admittance, but the countess called eagerly to her, and then ordered the windows to be opened, because she never felt comfortable unless it was light around her and she could breathe God's pure air.

The morning breeze bore the smoke which still rose from the fire in another direction, and thus a refreshing air really entered the room from the garden, for the thunderstorm had refreshed all nature, and flower beds and grass, bush and tree, exhaled a fresh odour of earth and leafage which it was a delight to breathe.

The leech Otto, to whom the severely wounded Ulrich Vorchtel had been carried, had just left the countess. The burns on her hands and arms had been bandaged—nay, the old gentleman had cut out the scorched portions of her tresses with his own hand. Cordula's energetic action had made the famous surgeon deem her worthy of such care. He had also advised her to seek the nursing of the oldest daughter of her host, whose invalid wife he was attending, and she had gladly assented; for Els had attracted her from their first meeting, and she was accustomed to begin the day at sunrise.

"How does it happen that you neither weep nor even hang your head after all the sorrow which last night brought you?" asked Cordula, as the Nuremberg maiden sat down beside her bed. "You are a stranger to the

Swiss knight, and when we surprised you with him you had not come to a meeting—I know that full well. But if so true and warm a love unites you to young Eysvogel, how does it happen that your joyous courage is so little damped by his father’s denial and his own unhappy deed, which at this time could scarcely escape punishment? You do not seem frivolous, and yet—”

”Yet,” replied Els with a pleasant smile, ”many things have made a deeper impression. We are not all alike, Countess, yet there is much in your nature which must render it easy for you to understand me; for, Countess—”

”Call me Cordula,” interrupted the girl in a tone of friendly entreaty. ”Why should I deny that I am fond of you? and at the risk of making you vain, I will betray—”

”Well?” asked Els eagerly.

”That the splendid old leech described you to me exactly as I had imagined you,” was the reply. You were one of those, he said, whose mere presence beside a sick-bed was as good as medicine, and so you are; and, dear Jungfrau Els, this salutary medicine benefits me.”

”If I am to dispense with the ’Countess,’” replied the other, ”you must spare me the ’Jungfrau.’ Nursing you will give me all the more pleasure on account of the warm gratitude—”

”Never mind that,” interrupted Cordula. ”But please look at the bandage, beneath which the flesh burns and aches more than is necessary, and then go on with your explanation.”

Els examined the countess’s arm, and then applied a household remedy whose use she had learned from the wife of Herr Pfinzing, her Aunt Christine, who was familiar with the healing art. It relieved the pain, and when Cordula told her so, Els went on with her explanation. ”When all these blows fell upon me, they at first seemed, indeed, unprecedented and scarcely possible to endure. When afterwards my Wolff’s unhappy deed was added, I felt as though I were standing in a dense, dark mist, where each step forwards must lead me into a stifling morass or over a precipice. Then I began to reflect upon what had happened, as is my custom; I separated, in my thoughts, the evil menacing in the future from the good, and had scarcely made a little progress in this way when morass and abyss lost their terrors; both, I found, could be left to take care of themselves, since neither Wolff nor I lack love and good will, and we possess some degree of prudence and caution.”

”Yes, this thinking and considering!” cried the countess, with a faint sigh. ”It succeeds in my case, too, only, unluckily, I usually don’t begin until it is too late and the folly has been committed.”

"Then, henceforth, you must reverse the process," answered Els cheerily. But directly after she changed her tone, which sounded serious enough as she added: "The sorrow of the poor Vorchtels and the grief my betrothed husband must endure, because the dead man was once a dear friend, certainly casts a dark shadow upon many things; but you, who love the chase, must surely be familiar with the misty autumn mornings to which I allude. Everything, far and near, is covered by a thick veil, yet one feels that there is bright sunshine behind it. Suddenly the mist scatters—"

"And mountain and forest, land and water, lie before us in the radiant sunlight!" cried the countess. "How well I know such scenes! And how I should rejoice if a favourable wind would sweep the grey mist away for you right speedily! Only—indeed, I am not disposed to look on the dark side—only, perhaps you do not know how resolute the Emperor is that the peace of the country shall be maintained. If your lover allowed himself to be carried away—"

"This was not the first time," Els eagerly interrupted, "that young Vorchtel tried to anger him in the presence of others; and he believed that he was justified in bearing a grudge against his former friend—it was considered a settled thing that Wolff and his sister Ursula were to marry."

"Until," Cordula broke in, "he gazed into your bright eyes."

"How could you know that?" asked Els in confusion.

"Because, in love and hate, as well as in reckoning, two and three follow one," laughed the countess. "As for your Wolff, in particular, I will gladly believe, with you, that he can succeed in clearing himself before the judges. But with regard to old Eysvogel, who looks as though, if he met our dear Lord Himself, he would think first which of the two was the richer, your future brother-in-law Siebenburg, that disagreeable 'Mustache,' and his poor wife, who sits at home grieving over her dissolute husband—what gratitude you can expect from such kindred—"

"None," replied Els sadly. Yet a mischievous smile hovered around her lips as, bending over the invalid, she added in a whisper: "But the good I expect from all the evil is, that we and the Eysvogels will be separated as if by wall and moat. They will never cross them, but Wolff would find the way back to me, though we were parted by an ocean, and mountains towering to the sky divided—"

"This confidence, indeed, maintains the courage," said the countess, and with a faint sigh she added: "Whatever evil may befall you, many might envy you."

"Then love has conquered you also?" Els began; but Cordula answered evasively:

"Let that pass, dear Jungfrau. Perhaps love treats me as a mother deals with a froward child, because I asked too much of her. My life has become an endless battue. Much game of all kinds is thus driven out to be shot, but the sportsman finds true pleasure only in tracking the single heathcock, the solitary chamois. Yet, no," and in her eagerness she flung her bandaged hand so high into the air that she groaned with pain and was forced to keep silence. When able to speak once more, still tortured by severe suffering, she exclaimed angrily: "No, I want neither driving nor stalking. What do I care for the prey? I am a woman, too. I would fain be the poor persecuted game, which the hunter pursues at the risk of breaking his bones and neck. It must be delightful; one would willingly bear the pain of a wound for its sake. I don't mean these pitiful burns, but a deep and deadly one."

"You ought to have spared yourself these," said Els in a tone of affectionate warning. "Consider what you are to your father, and how your suffering pains him! To risk a precious human life for the sake of a stupid brute—"

"They call it a sin, I know," Cordula burst forth. "And yet I would commit the same tomorrow at the risk of again—Oh, you cautious city people, you maidens with snow-white hands! What do you know of a girl like me? You cannot even imagine what my child life was; and yet it is told in a single word—motherless! I was never permitted to see her, to hear her dear, warning voice. She paid with her own life for giving me mine. My father? How kind he is! He meant to supply his dead wife's place by anticipating my every wish. Had I desired to feast my eyes on the castle in flames, it would, perhaps, now lie in ashes. So I became what I am. True—and this is something—I grew to be at least one person's joy—his. No, no, at home there are others also, though they dwell in wretched hovels, who would gladly welcome me back. But except these, who will ask about the reckless countess? I myself do not care to linger long when the mirror shows me my image. Do you wish to know what this has to do with the fire? Much; for otherwise I should scarcely have been wounded. The lightning had struck only the convent barn; the cow stable, when we arrived, was still safe, but the flames soon reached it also. Neither the nuns nor the men had thought of driving the cattle out. Poor city cattle! In the country the animals have more friendly care. When the work of rescue was at last commenced the cows naturally refused to leave their old home. Some prudent person had torn the door off the hinges that they might not stifle. Just in front of it stood a pretty red cow with a white star on her face. A calf was by her side, and the mother had already sunk on her knees and was licking it in mortal terror. I pitied the poor thing, and as Boemund Altrosen, the black-haired knight who entered your house with the rest after the ride to Kadolzburg, had just come there, I told him to save the calf. Of course he obeyed my wish, and as it struggled he dragged it out of the stable with his strong arms. The building was already blazing, and the thatched roof threatened to fall in. Just at that moment the old cow looked at me

so piteously and uttered such a mournful bellow that it touched me to the heart. My eyes rested on the calf, and a voice within whispered that it would be motherless, like me, and miss during the first part of its life God's best gift. But since, as you have heard, I act before I think, I went myself—I no longer know how—into the burning stable. It was hard to breathe in the dense smoke, and fiery sparks scorched my shawl and my hair, but I was conscious of one thought: You must save the helpless little creature's mother! So I called and lured her, as I do at home, where all the cows are fond of me, but it was useless; and just as I perceived this the thatched roof fell in, and I should probably have perished had not Altrosen this time carried my own by no means light figure out of the stable instead of the calf."

"And you?" asked Els eagerly.

"I submitted," replied the countess.

"No, no," urged Els. "Your heart throbbed faster with grateful joy, for you saw the desire of your soul fulfilled. A hunter, and one of the noblest of them all, risked his life in the pursuit of your love. O Countess Cordula, I remember that knight well, and if the dark-blue sleeve which he wore on his helm in the tournament was yours—"

"I believe it was," Cordula interrupted indifferently. "But, what was of more importance, when I opened my eyes again the cow was standing outside, licking her recovered calf."

"And the knight?" asked Els. "Whoever so heroically risks his life for his lady's wish should be sure of her gratitude."

"Boemund can rely on that," said Cordula positively. "At least, what he did this time for my sake weighs more heavily in the scale than the lances he has broken, his love songs, or the mute language of his longing eyes. Those are shafts which do not pierce my heart. How reproachfully you look at me! Let him take lessons from his friend Heinz Schorlin, and he may improve. Yes, the Swiss knight! He would be the man for me, spite of your involuntary meeting with him and your devout sister, for whom he forgot every one else, and me also, in the dancing hall. O Jungfrau Els, I have the hunter's eyes, which are keen-sighted! For his sake your beautiful Eva, with her saintly gaze, might easily forget to pray. It was not you, but she, who drew him to-night to your house. Had this thought entered my head downstairs in the entry I should probably, to be honest, have omitted my little fairy tale and let matters take their course. St. Clare ought to have protected her future votary. Besides, it pleases the arrogant little lady to show me as plainly as possible, on every occasion, that I am a horror to her. Let those who will accept such insults. My Christianity does not go far enough to offer her the right cheek too. And shall I tell you something? To spoil her game, I should be capable, in spite of all the life preservers in the world, of binding Schorlin to me in good earnest."

"Do not!" pleaded Els, raising her clasped hands beseechingly, and added, as if in explanation: "For the noble Boemund Altrosen's sake, do not."

"To promise that, my darling, is beyond my power," replied Cordula coolly, "because I myself do not know what I may do or leave undone tomorrow or the day after. I am like a beech leaf on the stream. Let us see where the current will carry it. It is certain," and she looked at her bandaged hands, "that my greatest beauty, my round arms, are disfigured. Scars adorn a man; on a woman they are ugly and repulsive. At a dance they can be hidden under tight sleeves, but how hot that would be in the 'Schwabeln' and 'Rai'! So I had better keep away from these foolish gaieties in future. A calf turns a countess out of a ballroom! What do you think of that? New things often happen."

Here she was interrupted; the housekeeper called Els. Sir Seitz Siebenburg, spite of the untimely hour, had come to speak to her about an important matter. Her father had gone to rest and sleep. The knight also enquired sympathisingly about Countess von Montfort and presented his respects.

"Of which I can make no use!" cried Cordula angrily. "Tell him so, Martsche."

As the housekeeper withdrew she exclaimed impatiently: "How it burns! The heat would be enough to convert the rescued calf into an appetising roast. I wish I could sleep off the pain of my foolish prank! The sunlight is beginning to be troublesome. I cannot bear it; it is blinding. Draw the curtain over the window."

Cordula's own maid hastened to obey the order. Els helped the countess turn on her pillows, and as in doing so she touched her arm, the sufferer cried angrily: "Who cares what hurts me? Not even you!"

Here she paused. The pleading glance which Els had cast at her must have pierced her soft heart, for her bosom suddenly heaved violently and, struggling to repress her sobs, she gasped, "I know you mean kindly, but I am not made of stone or iron either. I want to be alone and go to sleep."

She closed her eyes as she spoke and, when Els bent to kiss her, tears bedewed her cheeks.

Soon after Els went down into the entry to meet her lover's brother-in-law. He had refused to enter the empty sitting-room. The Countess von Montfort's unfriendly dismissal had vexed him sorely, yet it made no lasting impression. Other events had forced into the background the bitter attack of Cordula, for whom he had never felt any genuine regard.

The experiences of the last few hours had converted the carefully

bedizened gallant into a coarse fellow, whose outward appearance bore visible tokens of his mental depravity. The faultlessly cut garment was pushed awry on his powerful limbs and soiled on the breast with wine stains. The closely fitting steel chain armour, in which he had ridden out, now hung in large folds upon his powerful frame. The long mustache, which usually curled so arrogantly upwards, now drooped damp and limp over his mouth and chin, and his long reddish hair fell in dishevelled locks around his bloated face. His blue eyes, which usually sparkled so brightly, now looked dull and bleared, and there were white spots on his copper-coloured cheeks.

Since Countess Cordula gave him the insulting message to his wife he had undergone more than he usually experienced in the course of years.

"An accursed night!" he had exclaimed, in reply to the housekeeper's question concerning the cause of his disordered appearance.

Els, too, was startled by his looks and the hoarse sound of his voice. Nay, she even drew back from him, for his wandering glance made her fear that he was intoxicated.

Only a short time before, it is true, he had scarcely been able to stand erect, but the terrible news which had assailed him had quickly sobered him.

He had come at this unwontedly early hour to enquire whether the Ortliebs had heard anything of his brother-in-law Wolff. There was not a word of allusion to the broken betrothal.

In return for the promise that she would let the Eysvogels know as soon as she received any tidings of her lover, which Els gave unasked, Siebenburg, who had always treated her repellently or indifferently, thanked her so humbly that she was surprised. She did not know how to interpret it; nay, she anticipated nothing good when, with urgent cordiality, he entreated her to forget the unpleasant events of the preceding night, which she must attribute to a sudden fit of anger on Herr Casper's part. She was far too dear to all the members of the family for them to give her up so easily. What had occurred—she must admit that herself—might have induced even her best friend to misunderstand it. For one brief moment he, too, had been tempted to doubt her innocence. If she knew old Eysvogel's terrible situation she would certainly do everything in her power to persuade her father to receive him that morning, or—which would be still better—go to his office. The weal and woe of many persons were at stake, her own above all, since, as Wolff's betrothed bride, she belonged to him inseparably.

"Even without the ring?" interrupted Els bitterly; and when Siebenburg eagerly lamented that he had not brought it back, she answered proudly "Don't trouble yourself, Sir Seitz! I need this sacred pledge as little as the man who still wears mine. Tell your kinsfolk so. I will inform

my father of Herr Casper's wish; he is asleep now. Shall I guess aright in believing that the other disasters which have overtaken you are connected with the waggon trains Wolff so anxiously expected?"

Siebenburg, twirling his cap in confusion, assented to her question, adding that he knew nothing except that they were lost and, after repeating his entreaty that she would accomplish a meeting between the two old gentlemen, left her.

It would indeed have been painful for him to talk with Els, for a messenger had brought tidings that the waggons had been attacked and robbed, and the perpetrators of the deed were his own brothers and their cousin and accomplice Absbach. True, Seitz himself had had no share in the assault, yet he did not feel wholly blameless for what had occurred, since over the wine and cards he had boasted, in the presence of the robbers, of the costly wares which his father-in-law was expecting, and mentioned the road they would take.

Seitz Siebenburg's conscience was also burdened with something quite different.

Vexed and irritated by the countess's insulting rebuff, he had gone to the Green Shield to forget his annoyance at the gaming table in the Duke of Pomerania's quarters. He had fared ill. There was no lack of fiery Rhine wine supplied by the generous host; the sultry atmosphere caused by the rising thunderstorm increased his thirst and, half intoxicated, and incensed by the luck of Heinz Schorlin, in whom he saw the preferred lover of the lady who had so suddenly withdrawn her favour, he had been led on to stakes of unprecedented amount. At last he risked the lands, castle, and village which he possessed in Hersbruck as his wife's dower. Moreover, he was aware of having said things which, though he could not recall them to memory in detail, had roused the indignation of many of those who were present. The remarks referred principally to the Ortlieb sisters.

Amid the wild uproar prevailing around the gaming table that night the duel which had cost young Vorchtel his life was not mentioned until the last dice had been thrown. In the discussion the victor's betrothed bride had been named, and Siebenburg clearly remembered that he had spoken of the breaking of his brother-in-law's engagement, and connected it with accusations which involved him in a quarrel with several of the guests, among them Heinz Schorlin.

Similar occurrences were frequent, and he was brave, strong, and skilful enough to cope with any one, even the dreaded Swiss; only he was vexed and troubled because he had disputed with the man to whom he had lost his property. Besides, his father-in-law had so earnestly enjoined it upon him to put no obstacle in the way of his desire to make peace with the Ortliebs that he was obliged to bow his stiff neck to them.

The arrogant knight's position was critical, and real inward dignity was unknown to him. Yet he would rather have been dragged with his brothers to the executioner's block than humbled himself before the Swiss. But he must talk with him for the sake of his twin sons, whose heritage he had so shamefully gambled away. True, the utmost he intended was the confession that, while intoxicated, he had staked his property at the gaming table and said things which he regretted. Heinz Schorlin's generosity was well known. Perhaps he might offer some acceptable arrangement ere the notary conveyed his estate to him. He did not yet feel that he could stoop so low as to receive a gift from this young upstart.

If his father-in-law, who supported him, was really ruined, as he had just asserted, he would indeed be plunged into beggary, with his wife, whose stately figure constantly rose before him, with a look of mute reproach, his beautiful twin boys, and his load of debt.

The gigantic man felt physically crushed by the terrible blows of fate which had fallen upon him during this last wakeful night. He would fain have gone to the nearest tavern and there left it to the wine to bring forgetfulness. To drink, drink constantly, and in the intervals sleep with his head resting on his arms, seemed the most tempting prospect. But he was obliged to return to the Eysvogels. There was too much at stake. Besides, he longed to see the twins who resembled him so closely, and of whom Countess Cordula had said that she hoped they would not be like their father.