

# CORNELIA BAKER

THE COURT  
JESTER

Cornelia Baker

**The Court Jester**

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# The Court Jester

## CHAPTER I LE GLORIEUX HEARS GOOD NEWS

The old duchess was talking of the past, while behind her chair Le Glorieux was silently and joyously turning handsprings. I wish I might give him another name, for that one is certainly a mouthful, but as he really lived, and that was what he was called, we must manage it as best we can.

You may think, and with reason, that turning handsprings was not a respectful thing to do when a lady, and above all a duchess, was talking. But Le Glorieux was the court jester, the fool, who when Charles the Bold, son of the duchess, was living, was wont to make his master laugh. Therefore his conduct and conversation as a rule were not what one could expect of a sedate and dignified member of society.

In the presence of his late master, Le Glorieux could have turned handsprings in plain view, but the dowager duchess was old and querulous and resented such performances. She was the widow of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, and she looked very much like a fairy godmother in her quaint costume of the time of Charles the Seventh. She had been lady in waiting at the court of the French king, and she still clung to the high headdress, towering some twenty inches above her brow, and its long veil, which seemed to be boiling in filmy folds, like foam, from its pointed top. By her side was an ebony crutch, not for the purpose of turning pumpkins into coaches for the convenience of neglected Cinderellas, but to support the weight of the owner when she cared to move about; for rheumatism, which was up and doing even so long ago as the fifteenth century, had no more respect for a duchess than for a scullery maid, and had spitefully attacked her Grace of Burgundy.

The windows were veiled by heavy curtains that excluded the sunshine, and the only light in the long dim room came from the brazier at the feet of the duchess, who required artificial heat even in this warm autumn weather. Outside – Le Glorieux knew – the birds were singing and the butterflies were dipping in and out among the roses nodding in the soft breeze; but to-day the beauties of nature did not attract him so strongly as did the unusual degree of excitement going on in the castle. The Lady Clotilde had been sent for by her cousin, the young Duchess Anne of Brittany, and so, bag and baggage and servants, she was to set out on the following morning. Throughout the castle was felt the buzz and bustle of preparation, maids running in and out, and pages spinning up and down the staircases, for the Lady Clotilde liked to keep everybody busy. Le Glorieux longed to see what was going on, for, though a grown man, he possessed the heart of a rollicking boy and was highly entertained by a hubbub.

There had been plenty of diversion while Charles the Bold was living, a fact of which you will be convinced when you read your history of France, and he had once taken Le Glorieux with him to the wars, where the latter had shown himself to be brave and fearless, and when Charles was not planning campaigns against the neighboring countries, or engaged in carrying out his plans, he liked, while sipping the red or the white wine of his province, to listen to the drolleries of his jester. In those days, you see, there were no newspapers, no printed jokes, and it was necessary for even a fierce and warlike duke to laugh at times. But after the duke's death nobody cared much for the jester's jokes, and his principal duty seemed to be to listen to the dowager duchess talk, and as she was in the habit of repeating the same story a good many times a day, her conversation was usually extremely wearisome.

"Yes," said she, holding her wax-like hands out to the brazier and rubbing them thoughtfully, "I remember it as well as if it had happened yesterday. I do not know whether I ever mentioned to you,

Le Glorieux, that I was lady in waiting to her Highness, Marguerite of Scotland, then Dauphiness of France?"

With the agility of a cat the jester, who at this moment was standing on his head, regained his feet and stood respectfully before her Grace. "Never, Cousin," replied he gravely; "or at least not more than five thousand times."

"I thought not," she returned, for being somewhat deaf she had not caught the latter part of the sentence. "Yes, I was in the train of that dear and beauteous lady whom I loved so much that I still wear the costume chosen by her, this cap and veil and these shoes."

The old lady thrust out a foot shod in a shoe having a sharp point as long again as her foot, remarking contentedly, "This is a fine style of a shoe, do you not think so, Le Glorieux?"

"Yes, Cousin, and one calculated to encourage an ambitious great toe that is anxious to keep on growing," replied the fool, whose own shoes were pointed, but in a style far less exaggerated than those of her Grace.

"As I was saying," she went on, "I remember it as well as if it had happened yesterday. The dauphiness was fond of learning, and she composed verses of no small merit. I too caught the contagion and composed verses. I wish that I could remember some of them to repeat to you."

"Do not trouble yourself, Cousin," said the jester hastily; "I am nothing but a fool, you know, and I must deny myself many pleasures."

"At the court," she resumed, "lived at the time the great poet Alain Chartier, who was a wonderfully gifted man, though very plain. One day when the dauphiness and her ladies – I was among them, Le Glorieux – were crossing the courtyard we found Alain Chartier asleep on a bench. Much to our surprise her Highness gathered up her long train so that its rustle would not awaken him, and tripping softly toward the sleeping poet she kissed him on the lips. Yes, Le Glorieux, that great princess consort of the dauphin – afterward Louis the Eleventh – deigned to kiss a humble poet with her own lips! Was it not wonderful?"

"Not so wonderful as if she had tried to kiss him with somebody else's lips," replied the fool, adding, "but it was unfair to Chartier."

"Why unfair?"

"Because she had no right to take him unawares and unarmed."

Her Grace frowned darkly as she replied, "Le Glorieux, you are nothing but a fool and you can not understand what an honor it was for a humble poet to be kissed by a great princess. But one of the courtiers said, 'Madame, why did you kiss that extremely unprepossessing man?' The dauphiness replied, 'I did not kiss the man –'"

"How could she say that," broke in the jester, "when you all saw her do it?"

"Do not interrupt me, Fool. The dauphiness said, 'I did not kiss the man –'"

"That is what you said before," interrupted the fool again, "and I say she must have been a very silly little woman."

"Fool, do you not know that you are daring to criticise a princess of Scotland, daughter of James the Second of that country?"

"I do not care if she was the daughter of his present Majesty, Henry the Seventh of England; it was foolish of her to try to make people doubt the evidence of their own eyes."

"Will you let me finish, you great gawk?" Then raising her voice and speaking very rapidly the duchess went on, "The dauphiness said, 'I did not kiss the man, but that precious mouth from which has come so many noble and virtuous words.'"

"I call that a very slipshod way to get out of it," replied the fool. "Let us take an example. Suppose I had gone to the court of France and had cut off the late king's head. The soldiers arrest me and I say, 'I did not kill the man, I simply sliced off that head which has hatched up so many horrible schemes.' Would they apologize and let me go? Not a bit of it!"

"But this, you see, was figurative."

"I do not care what you call it. She kissed his lips, did she not?"

"Yes."

"And was not the man behind them at the time?"

"Of course, but you see – "

"Then there is nothing more to say about it," went on the fool.

The duchess reflected seriously for a moment and then seemed to arrive at the conclusion that it would not pay her to continue the argument. Besides, she was somewhat muddled herself. She continued, "Was it a wonder that so gracious a lady should have been misunderstood at such a court? And she died mysteriously, Le Glorieux, when she was but one-and-twenty, and in her illness she said, 'Fie upon this life; let no one talk more of it to me!'"

"I am not surprised that she felt that way," said the jester. "Now that Louis is dead, they say that he was not cruel, but firm. For my part, I do not like the kind of firmness that wants to hang or drown half the people in the kingdom, though it may be that I am too particular."

"Yes, I remember that day as well as if it had been yesterday," went on the duchess, with her dull eyes fixed dreamily upon the red coals of the brazier, and the fool again glided behind her chair and resumed the handsprings.

At last, attracted in the midst of her recollections by the incessant ringing of the little bells on the jester's cap, which his lively motions kept a-tinkle, the old lady craned her neck and glancing behind her chair caught him in the very act of standing on his head!

Indignant at his inattention and forgetting the license accorded court fools, she seized her crutch and hit him a swift rap across the calves of the legs which caused him to reverse himself with a howl.

"How dare you treat me with such disrespect, and not only me, but the gracious princess of whom I was talking!" she cried angrily. "You shall leave the court. I have no need of a fool!" Then a sudden and pleasant thought seemed to come into her mind, for she said, "I know what I will do. I feel that I should send Anne of Brittany a present, and I was going to send her an emerald. I will not part with the gem; I will send you, Le Glorieux, instead, with a letter saying that I am presenting her with the most precious possession of the late Duke of Burgundy, to cheer her in the various trials brought about by the reign of one so young. Yes, that will be fine, and I shall keep the emerald. You may leave me, Fool, and prepare for your departure while I think over the wording of my letter."

Le Glorieux was so overcome with joy at this sudden and unexpected turn of affairs that he forgot his abused calves, and his feet scarce touched the steps as he mounted to his little tower chamber, for you must know that a fool was a kind of slave, and although having many privileges within the palace, was not allowed to leave it even for a night without special permission.

On the landing of the staircase stood a boy of eleven or twelve years of age, looking sadly out of the mullioned window. He was a pretty youth and he wore a fine suit, to say nothing of a cap with a curling plume, but he did not look happy.

"Cheer up, Antoine," said the jester, slapping him on the back; "better days are in store for me."

"What will your better days avail me?" asked the boy, with a shrug.

"Well answered," said the jester reflectively. "Yet when things are going well with us we are surprised that the world does not smile with us, while we expect it to boohoo when we are sad. But I have been given permission to go to Brittany. Think of that! Try to overcome your indifference, and think what a joy it will be to me to live where I shall no longer hear the story of the princess who kissed the poet. And she has just hit me a blow on the legs that has raised lumps as big as plovers' eggs. Did it with her crutch, too!"

"She struck me across the shoulders with it because I could not find her needle, and she held the needle in her fingers all the time," said the page mournfully.

"Knowing her little ways, you should have looked in her fingers first," said the fool, adding blithely, "but she will never strike me again, because I am going away."

"You need not continually flaunt that in my face," returned the boy, in an injured tone, continuing with the mournful pleasure that many of us take in predicting misfortune for people whom we envy; "there may be worse things in store for you than to be struck by an ill-natured woman. I heard of a youth who went to a strange court with great glee and the very next day both of his ears were cut off."

"I do not think I should like a thing of that kind to happen to me," said the fool gravely. "Of course, the loss of my ears would never be noticed, because my cap covers them, but at the same time I think I should miss them myself, having always had them, you know. But I do not think you quite understand just why I am going away. Our mistress is sending me as a present, a pretty, dainty present, to the young Duchess of Brittany, and you know it would not be good taste to ill-treat a present."

"You are a strange present to send to a young lady," remarked the page sourly. "I warrant she will not be overjoyed with her packet when it meets her gaze."

"Oh, yes she will," returned Le Glorieux easily. "You see it is necessary for her to be cheered, for not only have there been frequent turmoils in her duchy, but there has been a perfect fever of excitement about her matrimonial arrangements from the day she was born. First they wanted her to marry one of the little princes of England afterward smothered by his affectionate Uncle Richard; then it was the Infante of Spain, and though it now seems settled that she is to marry Maximilian of Austria, still she must be nervous and unsettled. At any rate, our mistress wants to do something gracious, and being more than a trifle close, and not wishing to send a valuable jewel, she sends me in the care of the Lady Clotilde as the most valuable jewel of her possession."

"Oh, Le Glorieux, take me with you!" pleaded Antoine, forgetting his sarcasm in his anxiety to share his friend's good fortune. "If you only will I shall be your debtor for life."

"That would be impossible, my lad. You must remain here to find her Grace's needle when she drops it, and to lead the life of a nice, tame pussy-cat."

"I will not!" cried the boy, dashing the tears from his bright eyes. "My father, who, as you know, died in battle, never intended that I should grow up thus tamely. Take me with you, oh, Le Glorieux, do!"

"I should like to," replied the jester thoughtfully. "You could ride beside me and you should fetch your lute and you could sing to me along the way to make the birds ashamed of themselves. But even if you should run away, the Lady Clotilde would not let you go with us, for you know what she is. If she were a peasant woman she would be called sour and disagreeable, but being a great lady she is simply dignified and firm."

But there are times when we are enabled to get that for which we very much wish, and it so happened that the Lady Clotilde wanted the boy in her suite and begged him of the duchess, who willingly acquiesced, for caring not at all for his musical talent and his handsome face, he was no more to her than any other page.

So there were not two lighter hearts in the good duchy of Burgundy than were those of the page and the jester as they set about making their preparations for departure. They were pleased to leave the court where life had grown so monotonous, and they were delighted that they were to go in each other's company, for though there was a difference of some fifteen years in their respective ages, Le Glorieux and Antoine were very fond of each other.



## CHAPTER II

### A FESTIVAL AT THE INN

The following morning bright and early the procession rode briskly out of the castle courtyard. The Lady Clotilde traveled in her litter and was attended by her maids and her men-servants and her guards on mules, the guards being necessary, for it was dangerous for those possessing money and jewels to travel unless they were protected from the outlaws who infested mountain and forest.

At the rear of the company rode Le Glorieux on a steed he always preferred when riding abroad. This was a donkey which the fool had named Pittacus after one of the seven wise men of Greece, for he declared the little animal was very wise, though no one as yet had discovered the fact. On the jester's wrist was perched Pandora, his hawk, for he vowed that no man with a proper degree of self-respect would be seen in public without his hawk, which was true, the fashion of the time having so decreed. Pandora wore a cunning little red leather hood with some bells attached to it, and, to keep her from escaping from him, a cord attached to her leg was fastened to the jester's arm.

Antoine, whose lute was slung to his shoulder by a blue ribband, was mounted upon a small gray mule and rode beside his comrade, the two whistling and singing and making so merry together that more than once the Lady Clotilde put her head out between the curtains of her litter and, with a very severe face and a harsh voice, bade them be quiet.

History tells us that Edward the Second of England had a jester who amused his royal master simply by riding before him and frequently falling off his horse, so it is no wonder that a boy of the age of Antoine should have been kept in a continuous state of merriment caused by the antics of his friend. You doubtless have been to the circus, and you know what a very funny fellow a clown can be, and how the boys and girls in the audience are inclined to laugh every time he opens his mouth, and how even the grown people are not ashamed to smile at his drolleries. Then imagine the bliss experienced by Antoine in riding with a real clown who performed, not because he was expected to do so and was paid for it, but because he was anxious to have a good time.

Sometimes the jester rode with his face toward the donkey's tail, at others he lay flat on the animal's back, to the intense indignation of Pittacus and Pandora, neither of whom could appreciate that sort of thing. Then sometimes the boy and the fool broke into song together, and if the birds were not exactly "ashamed of themselves," as Le Glorieux had predicted they would be, they must have been very much astonished, to say the least.

This mode of travel was not so swift as one may find in France to-day, but it had its advantages, for the scenery could be more thoroughly enjoyed when every bird and every flower could be leisurely surveyed instead of passing the car window like a flash, leaving upon the mind no impression whatever.

After a journey of some days they entered Brittany, and stopped at nightfall at an old inn situated on a cliff above the Loire, which smoothly ripples its way to the Bay of Biscay.

The arrival of the Lady Clotilde and her party created a certain degree of agitation throughout the inn, for an empress could not have been more exacting in her demands than this lady, who always seemed to think that she was created first and the rest of the world added as an afterthought.

Soon afterward there came a middle-aged woman and a little girl apparently of about twelve years of age, who caused no commotion whatever, for they were unattended and plainly clad. The Lady Clotilde, looking out of her window, pronounced the woman to be an ordinary person, and, supposing the little girl to be the woman's child, did not waste even a glance upon her, but began to give quick, sharp commands regarding her own supper, which was brought to her hot and fragrant with appetizing odors, and with which, strange to say, she found no fault.

But in the great kitchen of the inn that night there was a joyful celebration. The innkeeper's baby daughter had been christened that day and this was the feast which followed it. Mine host had invited Le Glorieux and Antoine to join him and his friends in the celebration of the occasion, and, after the guests of the house had been served, a long table, uncovered and made of rough unplanned wood, was spread with all the good things the hostelry afforded. There was roast pig stuffed with chopped meat and aromatic herbs, and there were meat pasties and ragouts, to say nothing of sugared cakes and various other dainties. There was no coffee, for that was about a hundred and fifty years before that now popular beverage was used in Europe, but there was the wine of the country, which, being pure and honestly made, was less dangerous than the wine of to-day. Another feature was lacking which now is so familiar; the air at the close of the meal was not contaminated with the odor of pipes and cigars, for Sir Walter Raleigh, who brought tobacco from savagery to civilization, was not even born, and the mainland of the New World was still waiting for Columbus.

Le Glorieux in his fantastic costume of striped yellow and green, and his queer cap with its points sticking out on either side and adorned with bells, was an object of much interest, for it was the first time these people had ever seen such a costume. To-day the portraits of the celebrated people of the world are familiar to all who have pennies to invest in newspapers, and had there been at that time the same facilities for spreading the news that there are to-day, Le Glorieux, with his sayings and doings, particularly in the campaign with his late master, would have been written up again and again, and the public, you may be sure, would have known his face as well as those of its own father and mother.

The innkeeper, his family, and friends all wore what to us would seem like comic opera costumes: mine host, fat and rosy, wore his holiday suit of a gorgeous color, and all the men were similarly attired, while the women wore pink, or blue, or green bodices with short skirts of a different color. On their heads they wore flat white linen caps fitting close, and with tails to them like mantles floating down their backs, the costume being completed by a high collar flaring out from the shoulders.

The fairest of the women was the pale, pretty young mother, who cast many proud glances at the rude wooden cradle in the corner where lay the real heroine of the occasion, and, to her, the most important person in the company.

Considered the most distinguished of the guests, Le Glorieux was given a seat at the head of the table, where he immediately began to make himself at home, not only with the viands, but with the company, keeping up a continuous chatter and convulsing his audience with his merry jokes.

"I should like to know the name of the woman who came shortly after our arrival," he said after a while, turning to his host, who replied, "I do not know her name; her garb is plain, yet she seems to be one who is accustomed to the best of everything, for she insisted upon having two of my largest rooms for herself and the child, showing that she had the means to pay for them. She is on her way to the shrine of Saint Roch in the forest beyond, to be relieved of a migraine that torments her morning, noon, and night."

"And the blessed Saint Roch will cure her," said the innkeeper's mother confidently; "no one goes in pain from his shrine."

Le Glorieux had noticed the shrine as they came along. The good saint, who is supposed to lend a kindly hearing to those who are suffering from physical ailments, was carved in rock above a clear spring. He was represented as a young man with his robe lifted to show a plague spot on his leg, and by his side was the dog which brought bread to him when he was starving. When the readers of this story travel abroad they will see pictures of Saint Roch painted by Rubens, Guido, Tintoretto, and other great masters.

"I have heard my mother say that when the plague was in many parts of Europe it never came near Brittany because of Saint Roch," remarked a young woman.

"I should think not," observed Le Glorieux; "curing the plague is what he prides himself upon, and it is not reasonable to suppose that he would allow it to rage under his very nose."

"From the tinkle of your bells," said a foppish young man at the jester's left, a youth who had grown a little envious of the attention paid to Le Glorieux, "I should say that you are a fool."

"And from the tinkle of your tongue, I have been suspecting the same thing of you," retorted the other quickly.

"No man may say that of me!" said the foppish youth, springing to his feet and drawing his dagger from its sheath, while the jester drew his sword.

"Shame upon you, Nicole, to begin a brawl upon such an occasion," said the innkeeper, rising and putting his hand upon his friend's arm, while some of the women gave little shrieks of fear, though at this period the clash of swords and daggers was not an unusual sound, and such a scene was liable to happen in almost any company.

"Our host is right," said Le Glorieux, replacing his sword in its sheath with a decided clank. "Such a fray is not only disrespectful to the ladies, but it will give an opportunity for that lovely pig to get cold before we have a chance to finish it. I will just say, however, that if this young man is anxious to fight me I am ready to meet him in some quiet spot at any moment that may be convenient to him." And the jester resumed his seat at the table.

"The woman who came to-day is not the mother of that child," remarked the innkeeper, anxious to change the subject.

"Did she tell you so?" asked his mother.

"No, but I have eyes. The woman is of the ordinary walks of life, a German, I should say, while the little girl is an aristocrat, and if I am not very much mistaken she is French."

"But she is clothed no better than the woman," argued his mother. "An aristocrat would not travel without attendants and dress in such poor style, and –"

An exclamation from some one on the opposite side of the table arrested her words, for standing in the doorway was the child of whom they were speaking. She was a pretty little maiden with large blue eyes, whose long lashes made them appear black, and her hair, which hung in half curling masses below her waist, was of a reddish gold. She was dressed in a dark blue gown of coarse woolen material, with a close-fitting cap of the same. She seemed not at all abashed at thus entering where she had not been invited, saying in a clear sweet voice, "May I stay here for a while? Cunegunda put me to bed and then retired herself, for she is so tormented by migraine that she did not sit by me for a time, as she usually does. I could not sleep on account of all this racket, so I dressed myself and came down and would like to remain for a little while, if I may."

"I am sorry we disturbed your rest, my little lady," replied the innkeeper respectfully. "I will change your room, if you wish."

"No," said the little girl, "I do not want you to do that. I am going to stay up as long as you do if you will let me. I want to see what this kind of an entertainment is like."

"Then I will make a place at the table," returned he.

"Thank you, no," she returned, with dignity. "I have had all that I require. I will just sit here by the window and look on."

"That you may and welcome," said the innkeeper heartily, "and in order that you may do so to the greatest advantage, I am going to place you here," and lifting her lightly he placed her on the deep window seat, which was some distance from the floor. "And now you may not only look at us, but at this pretty bird as well."

The casement of the window, which swung like a door, was opened on the inside, and perched on top of it where her master had placed her, sulkily ruffling her feathers as though strongly disapproving of her surroundings, was Pandora.

"You have never been so close to a fine hooded bird before, I warrant," said the innkeeper.

"I have birds of my own, and they are all hooded," replied the child indifferently.

The people seated at the table glanced significantly at each other as if to ask, "Is she bragging, or is she of a higher rank than she pretends to be?" for middle-class folk did not possess hooded birds.

"To whom does this one belong?" asked the child.

"To that gentleman seated at the head of the table," was the reply.

She looked at him thoughtfully and then at the bird. "I wonder how a hawk likes belonging to a fool," she said.

Everybody laughed, Le Glorieux loudest of all. "No matter how wise a fool may appear, his cap and bells will always betray him," he said. "Yes, my friends, as you no doubt have suspected, I am a court jester. I belonged to Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy, and now I am being sent as a present to her Grace, the young Duchess of Brittany."

"I have suspected your identity all along," said a fat friar seated at the other end of the table. "I was at Beauvais during the siege and I heard of you there. You are Le Glorieux."

The jester rose and made an extravagant bow. "At your service," said he. "Yes," he continued, taking his place again, "I was at the siege of Beauvais. I saw the young maid Jeanne Fourquet, in imitation of the Maid of Orleans, fight like a witch with her little ax, for which she was named Jeanne Hachette, and when a tall Burgundian was scaling the walls and was planting his banner, she pushed him over into the ditch and waving her flag shouted, 'Victory!' I am not boring anybody by talking about the past, am I?" asked the fool suddenly.

"On the contrary," said the host, "it is more interesting than a tale of gnomes and pixies."

"You see," explained Le Glorieux, "I have lived so long at court, where the past is raked out and talked over and over, that I am afraid to relate anything that happened longer ago than the day before yesterday."

"If it please you, continue," said one of the company. "We are humble folk living in a quiet village, and we know but little of what happens in the great world outside."

So Le Glorieux continued, keeping the company chilled with awe or shaking with laughter, according to the nature of the incident he happened to be relating. It may be that some of the incidents he related never occurred outside of his own brain, but one at least of his anecdotes may be found in history.

"It was after the siege of Beauvais," said he, "that Cousin Charles came nearer to giving me a cuff on the jaw than ever happened before or afterward. He was quite boastful, was Charles, and with considerable pomp he was conducting some ambassadors through the arsenal. He stopped short in one of the rooms and swelling himself up said, 'This room contains the keys of all the cities of France.' Then I began to fumble in my pockets and to search all over the room. 'Now, donkey, for what are you looking so anxiously?' asked he. I replied, 'I am looking for the key of Beauvais,' and that made him turn as red as your doublet, mine host, for we had not been victorious at Beauvais."

"But you were very brave there, although a mere youth," remarked the friar, "and I should advise our young friend here to think twice before he meets you out, as you have invited him to do."

"Oh, we will let that pass, if he is willing," said Le Glorieux good-naturedly, an arrangement with which the young man, who was not especially brave, was very glad to agree.

"And now," said the jester, "I am reminded that there is one thing that I have forgotten, and that is to ask the name that you have given to that blessed baby."

"That you will be glad to hear," said the host, rubbing his hands delightedly. "The good wife too is a Burgundian, and nothing would do but that we should name the little one for the Duchess Mary. Heaven rest her soul!" he continued reverently.

It happened that this was the one theme that could render Le Glorieux sad. He had worshiped the young Duchess Mary, who had ruled the province after the death of her father, Charles the Bold – worshiped her as a faithful dog loves his kind mistress. He had seen her betrothed at Ghent to the Archduke Maximilian of Austria, also styled King of the Romans, and when a few years later news

had come of her death, caused by a fall from her horse, the jester had known the first real grief of his life.

"Yes," said the mother of the baby. "Her name is Mary, and may she be as good and beautiful as the poor young duchess, cut off in the bloom of her life."

The jester rose, and going to the cradle took in his own the little baby hand curled like a crumpled rose-leaf. "Mary, namesake of an angel, I salute you," said he, pressing the tiny fingers to his lips.

"No matter how well the children of the poor young duchess are cared for, they will miss the love of their mother, for there is nothing like it," said the innkeeper's wife. "One of them, the Lady Marguerite of Hapsburg, is to be Queen of France," she added proudly.

"I was so fortunate as to witness that betrothal," said the friar, helping himself to another piece of the pasty.

"You did!" cried Le Glorieux. "I would give a year of my life to see Mary's little child. Tell us about it, good friar."

The child in the window, who had at first sat carelessly swinging her little feet, had now drawn them up to the sill, and turning sidewise and with her hands clasped about her knees, was listening intently.

"It was eight years ago that the betrothal took place, if you will remember," began the friar in the satisfied tone of one who feels that what he is about to tell will be vastly interesting to his audience. "I was riding my mule to the city of Amboise on business for my order.

"At Herdin, which is near that city, I saw a great concourse of people, and being under a vow of silence for that day, I could ask no questions, but drew up with the crowd to see what was going on. The air was wild with the acclamations of the people, and *gens d'armes* were stalking about to make the crowd stand back so that the road might be left unobstructed.

"Then from the city came a glittering procession of ladies and gentlemen and archers. At the head of it rode a boy, whom from his dress and the deference paid him, I immediately recognized as the Dauphin of France, so soon to be king. He was about twelve at the time, but he looked younger, being undersized. He wore a robe of crimson satin lined with black velvet, and his black horse was richly caparisoned. Crossing the bridge the boy paused, for, slowly advancing from the opposite direction, was another procession equally imposing, headed by a litter, silk-curtained and surmounted by a crown. And then I knew that I was to witness an event which was to go down in history, for I knew this was the expected ceremonial of the betrothal of the little Lady Marguerite of Hapsburg, daughter of the Archduke of Austria, to the Dauphin of France.

"The young dauphin saluted the ladies and changed his robe for one of cloth of gold. Then from the litter was lifted a tiny girl between three and four years of age, the little archduchess, whose hair glistened like gold in the sunlight. A tall and elegantly-dressed lady accompanied her to the boy's side, and the prothonotary asked in a loud voice if Charles of France would take Marguerite of Austria for his bride. The boy answered 'Yes' in a loud, clear voice, and a similar question was put to the little archduchess, who, after a whispered word from the lady at her side, uttered a faint 'Yes.'

"And when I rode on to Amboise I found the city gay with festoons of brilliantly-colored cloth, and in the market place there was a fountain which gave forth both white and red wine."

"The dear little princess!" said the innkeeper's wife. "Though she is to be Queen of France, I pity her, thus to be betrothed without a word of choice in the matter."

"The good God has not divided happiness so unevenly as some might suppose," observed the friar, "for in some things the peasant woman enjoys more liberty than the queen."

"The dear little Lady Marguerite was taken from her own country and all her kin that she might grow up in a foreign court and be a true French woman," said one of the women. "And she was beautiful, did you say, Brother Sebastian?"

"I did not have a good view of her face, but I should say that she was very fair to look upon," he replied.

"Pretty she had a right to be," said Le Glorieux. "Her mother was as beautiful as the morning, and her father, when I saw him, looked like a glorious knight descended from the clouds. He was mounted on a chestnut horse; he was clad in silver armor and his head was bound by a circlet of precious stones. His smile was so kind and his face so handsome that he won all hearts."

"Look! That child is about to fall out of the window!" cried the friar, for the little one was gazing at the speaker with her soul in her eyes, and the better to see him, was sitting on the very edge of the window-sill in a way that indeed suggested a possible fall. Seeing all eyes turned upon her she drew herself back and clasped her hands about her knees as before.

"And now," said the innkeeper, "I notice that a young gentleman of the company has a lute, and I am sure we should all enjoy a song." He looked at Antoine, who, though silent, had been very much engaged with the good things set before him.

"You are right, mine host," said Le Glorieux. "My comrade sings in such a way that I am sure the nightingales outside will cease to trill from pure envy."

Musicians, and indeed all people who are capable of entertaining others, have fits of diffidence at the most unexpected moments, and although he was in the habit of singing for the ladies of the Burgundian court, who knew far more about music than these people could possibly understand, it seemed to Antoine that if he could unseen escape by the door, and run away into the woods, or sink through the floor, it would be the greatest boon that could happen to him. Not being able to efface himself in any way, he resorted to a fib, and said that he would be most happy to oblige them, but that a string of his lute was broken, and that he had no other with which to replace it.

Le Glorieux strode to the corner of the room and took up the lute where the boy had placed it before supper. It was an instrument resembling a modern mandolin with a crooked neck, as if it had once been strangled, and becoming convulsed in the effort to breathe, had remained petrified in that position.

The jester held the instrument out at arm's length, saying, "It is strange, but even a lute can not remain disabled in the neighborhood of the good Saint Roch. Here are all the strings in a perfectly sound condition, and fairly quivering with anxiety to be played on."

A fib, like a murder, will "out" sooner or later, and realizing this fact, Antoine said nothing more, but striking a few chords began to sing, though in a quavering voice.

"See here, Antoine," said his friend, stopping him, "I have praised your voice and I am not going to have you sing like a frog that is choking to death in a pond. Open your mouth and let your words out instead of keeping them prisoners behind your teeth."

The boy was very angry at being thus derided, and his voice rang loud and flute-like in an old chanson of Burgundy, to which his audience listened with great pleasure, the innkeeper's wife remarking at its close that it was one she often had sung in her childhood.

"Let him sing some more songs of Burgundy," said the child in the window, speaking for the first time since she had made the remark about the hawk.

Antoine complied, and in the middle of the second song the company was surprised by the entrance of a large woman clad in a loose robe and a nightcap, who, without a word of apology, crossed the room to the window and waving her arms with their wide, flowing sleeves, which in this position gave her the appearance of a large bird that is about to fly, poured out a torrent of words in a strange language, then, swooping upon the little girl, swept her from the window and held her imprisoned in her wing-like arms.

The child replied in the same language and in a voice of indignation, but the woman was about to carry her from the room, when the little one struggled to the floor, and taking a piece of money from a small purse at her girdle, she crossed the floor and laid it on baby Mary's breast. Then turning with a brief "Good night" to the others, she followed her grotesque attendant from the room.

"Now I wonder," said Le Glorieux, "if that woman is kidnapping the child?"

"I think not," said the innkeeper. "That was the woman who came with her to the inn, though she did not look like herself in that garb."

"To come before a large company in her nightcap like that was disgraceful," said one of the women.

"She was too agitated to think of her appearance," said the friar. "I think she was very much annoyed at the little one for coming down here alone."

"As if we were ogres to swallow her!" cried the innkeeper's mother indignantly.

"She has given our little one a fine present," said the baby's mother, examining the coin by the rush light. "Husband, it is gold!"

"That child is not an ordinary person; I have said so all along," said the host, with conviction.

Then a lively discussion followed, some of the women, and indeed some of the men also, declaring that the authorities should be notified and the matter investigated in order to find if the child were being carried off and away from her home in an unlawful manner.

"My friends," said Le Glorieux, "perhaps the advice of a fool is worth nothing, but such as it is you are welcome to it. I always have found that when in doubt as to what course to pursue, you will be convinced that the best plan is to go ahead and attend strictly to your own affairs. That beautiful child knows just why she is here, and it is not against her will, for she had ample time to tell us her troubles and to ask our aid if she cared to do so before that old bird of prey swooped down upon her. So let us go to bed and to sleep, for some of us, at least this boy and myself, must be up bright and early and away before the dew is off the grass."

And so the guests departed to their several homes or to their rooms in the inn, while the host blew out the lights, closed the lattice, and secured the door. And the nightingales sang on undisturbed.

## CHAPTER III

### AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

As the Lady Clotilde and her train were about to ride away the next morning, Le Glorieux said to Antoine, "I think I will go back to the shrine of Saint Roch. You may wait for me. It is only a little way and we can soon overtake the others."

"But why do you wish to visit the shrine?" asked the boy.

"I want to say a little prayer for the gout."

"I never heard you complain of the gout."

"And small wonder, for I have not a sign of it."

"Then why do you want to pray to be cured of a malady which you never had?"

"I am afraid that I may have it," said the fool. "Brittany is a very rich country; the Duchess Anne is the greatest heiress in Christendom, and of course there is to be found at her court everything that the appetite craves, and some day all this may bring on the gout. There is nothing like taking things in time, and it may be a good while before I shall again be so near the good saint."

"Very well," said Antoine, "go, if you like, and I will wait by the roadside for you."

So Le Glorieux rode back to the shrine, which was some half a mile out of his way, and remained for a good while, for he remembered a number of other maladies that might attack him in the future, and he thought it was well to be on the safe side by beseeching the saint to keep them all at a respectful distance.

Finishing his orisons at last, he rode forward with as brisk a pace as Pittacus was willing to carry him, but to his surprise and indignation Antoine was not waiting for him, nor was he able to overtake the others. There was nothing to do, therefore, but to ride on alone to the city of Rennes, where the court of Brittany was then staying, and where he hoped to arrive before nightfall.

But Le Glorieux missed the company of his comrade, upon whom he resolved to be revenged for thus leaving him in the lurch, and he rode along turning over his wrongs in his mind with a mien far less gay than he was wont to present.

He found as the day began to grow older and the clock of his appetite pointed to the time to refresh himself, that the only meal obtainable was a crust of black bread and a cup of goat's milk procured at a peasant's hut along the way.

"I prayed to be defended from gout," reflected the fool, "but I hope Saint Roch does not intend to keep the disease at bay by allowing me only coarse, plain food. Would it not be a terrible thing if he should put it into the Lady Anne's mind that feeding a jester well spoils his wit?"

As the afternoon was warm, Le Glorieux said, "Pandora, you look sleepy; Pittacus, I am sure that you need a little rest, while I am drowsy. I will just take a small nap under this tree."

So, after securing the donkey to the tree, and allowing Pandora to perch on his saddle, with her cord attached to a ring at the back of it, Le Glorieux stretched himself on the ground, and soon was asleep.

A very sound sleeper, he remained wrapped in the unconsciousness of slumber until the sun was seeking his bed in the west, when he woke suddenly with a start, thinking that Antoine was calling him to get up in the morning. First rubbing his eyes to get the sleep out of them, the jester began to look around for his donkey, for, greatly to his surprise and dismay, Pittacus no longer stood where his master had tied him, both steed and hawk having vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed them up. And still worse was to come, for a silk purse worn at his belt, which contained all of his worldly wealth, had disappeared with his other property.

"Robbed!" groaned Le Glorieux, sinking to the ground and clasping his hands convulsively about his knees. "On a strange soil, afoot, and without a coin to bless myself with. Sometimes I begin



to think that I am growing wise, and then it is borne in upon me that I am nothing but a fool after all, for what man in his senses would sleep beside the road in broad daylight, with all his possessions unguarded?"

He made up his mind that he had been the victim of a highwayman, which was the natural conclusion at which to arrive, though, strange to say, his sword had not been taken, and his pistol, which he had placed on the ground beside him, was still where he had left it.

"A coward," thought the fool, "to rob a man in his sleep, and not a bray from Pittacus, not a scream from Pandora, to give me warning! How kind I have been to those brutes, and they go with a stranger as cheerfully as if they were not leaving their best friend."

He remained for some time bemoaning his ill-luck, and then, reminded by the lateness of the hour that it was necessary to resume his journey, he set out disconsolately on foot.

After walking a short distance Le Glorieux beheld something, the sight of which amazed him quite as much as the discovery of the robbery had done, and made him wonder if he were still dreaming. Secured to a tree and contentedly munching a bunch of thistles which happily were within the range allowed by the length of his halter, was Pittacus! "But Pandora?" cried the jester, for the bird was not tied to the saddle and he feared that she had flown away.

A faint tinkle of bells called his attention to the tree, and there, tied to a limb, was Pandora, who seemed to be guarding her master's purse, which was fastened to a twig beneath her.

Le Glorieux stared with astonishment at finding his belongings in this strange manner. That any one should have taken, and repenting have returned them, he could not believe, and there was but one explanation of the occurrence that seemed at all reasonable.

It was an age in which witches, fairies, and all sorts of supernatural beings were believed to exist, and the fool had no doubt that a witch had played this trick upon him. She would not need a donkey, for everybody knew that when a witch wished to change her usual mode of traveling, she could in the twinkling of an eye turn a bundle of faggots into a horse, which would do very well until she wished to cross water, when it would resume its original form. At any rate, Pittacus was no sort of a mount for a witch, not being sufficiently swift for those lively ladies. A witch could change almost anything into a hawk, so she would not need Pandora, and as to his purse, what use would money be to a creature who could have anything she wanted without the trouble of paying for it? Yes, a witch had done this just from pure mischief and a desire to meddle with something which did not in the least concern her.

Le Glorieux put his purse inside his doublet, determined that the next person who took it from him, whether witch or highwayman, must fight to get it. Then taking the bird on his wrist he said, "Pandora, you might, yes, you might have given just one little shriek to let me know what was going on. But why do I reproach you, when no doubt *she* cast a spell over you to keep you from making a sound?"

Then he remembered that with night coming on this was not a safe locality in which to remain, for if witches could cut such capers in broad daylight, what might they not do under cover of darkness, when they are supposed to carry out their choicest and most fantastic schemes? So he hurriedly mounted and sped along the road as rapidly as the donkey could travel.

It was not a pleasant ride through the murky twilight and the gathering gloom of the forest, which he now had entered. The limbs of a dead tree seemed to be long gray arms reaching out to seize him, while to his ears, strained to catch the slightest sound, the crackle of the leaves in the breeze was the smothered laughter of certain ladies supposed to ride on broomsticks, who were amusing themselves at the jester's expense.

It was some time after dark when he saw a number of lights dotting the gloom before him, and he knew that he was approaching Rennes. Greatly cheered by the sight, he put spurs to Pittacus, and in a short time arrived at the gates of the palace and galloped into the courtyard with all the assurance of a guest who is expected.

As Le Glorieux dismounted a small figure came running out to meet him. It was Antoine, who exclaimed, "Oh, Le Glorieux, how rejoiced I am that you have arrived in safety!"

"If harm had befallen me I should have borne it alone," returned the jester coldly, "as you did not wait for me as you promised to do."

"I – I – wanted to hurry," stammered the boy.

"Well, you *did* hurry, and you were here long before me, and I hope you are satisfied. Small difference does it make to you that those wretched witches played me such a scurvy trick. They might have turned me into a salamander for all you would have cared."

And without waiting for a reply the jester stalked away.

The various homes of the dukes of Brittany were sumptuous abodes, and Francis the Second, the last of them, was a noble of great wealth who spent his money freely, and was fond of beautifying his surroundings. Le Glorieux walked through spacious apartments that were decorated, gilded, and carved, and hung with richest tapestries, but he trod the polished floors with the air of one who was perfectly at home in a palace, and accustomed to luxurious surroundings. This was indeed the case, as he had gone as a page to the court of Burgundy. He was so happy to be where all was bright and cheerful and to have escaped from the dangers of the forest, that he did not mind the severe scathing given him for his tardiness by the Lady Clotilde.

The young Duchess of Brittany was in the long salon surrounded by the ladies and gentlemen of her court. She was one of the most interesting personages of Europe at that time, for, as has already been said, her father's death had left her the richest heiress in Christendom, the owner of a province that France had been trying by hook or by crook to gain possession of for the last five hundred years; a young maiden whose hand had already been sought by the heirs to the crowns of England, France, Austria, and Spain, although she was but fifteen years of age.

The young readers of this story whose parents bear all their burdens for them will find it difficult to understand the position of the little duchess. Her father had idolized her and had stood between her and all care, but at his death, three years before the time when we first meet her, she found herself at the head of a government with many weighty matters awaiting her decision, with a man she detested waiting to marry her, with clever statesmen plotting against her, and great nations threatening war. But now matters had taken a better turn; she had refused to marry the detested man, France had withdrawn its troops from Breton soil, and once more peace smiled upon the land.

The Lady Anne was tall for a girl of her age; she was very fair, and her cheeks glowed with the bloom of health; her nose was straight, and when she smiled her mouth was particularly attractive, the expression of her face being always very pleasing. Her gown of soft dark silken material was more simple than those worn by some of her ladies, and on her brown hair she wore a kind of close cap made entirely of pearls.

"And you are Le Glorieux, sent by our cousin of Burgundy?" she said, after the jester had made his obeisance.

"Yes, Cousin Anne. Her Grace of Burgundy wished to send you something very precious, for she entertains a great amount of respect and love for you. She had a big emerald which Uncle Philip had taken from a Frenchman, who had taken it from a Spaniard, who had taken it from a Moor, which she was going to send you, but she said, 'No, that is not my most precious possession. The jewel of my heart is Le Glorieux, who scintillates day and night; he shall be presented to the most beautiful and the wisest of rulers.'"

The duchess laughed as she said, "Never did I expect to own so large a jewel. Our cousin of Burgundy is most kind."

Passing the Lady Clotilde as he moved behind the chair of the duchess, Le Glorieux whispered to the former, "At least we shall not be bored by reminiscences here, for her Grace is too young to have had any past. Cousin Clotilde, did you ever hear of the princess who kissed the poet?"

The Lady Clotilde thought jokes a great waste of time, and she rarely saw the point to one when she heard it, but now she actually smiled, an act so unusual with this good lady that the jester afterward declared to Antoine that the muscles of her face creaked, being rusty from disuse.

Time for the rich of the fifteenth century was divided quite differently from what it is to-day. At dawn the watchman blew a horn to announce the approach of day, after which the servants and retainers about the castle began their serious duties, while the heads of the family dressed, said their prayers, and attended mass in their own chapel.

At ten o'clock dinner was ready, and after remaining at table as long as possible, the gentlemen adjourned to the courtyard to play tennis, a game which is hundreds of years old. Supper was at four, after which the lords and ladies of the manor were ready to be amused at whatever form of divertisement that presented itself.

The duchess and her ladies had been playing at cards called "*tarots*," from their checkered backs, a game for which the Lady Anne, at least to-night, did not seem to care, for she threw the cards about carelessly and appeared to be thinking of something else.

She seemed to be relieved and to give a ready assent when a page announced that there were certain performers below who craved the honor of playing before her Grace, the Duchess of Brittany. Theaters as we now have them were then unknown, and strolling players traveled over the country doing their various tricks at inns or in the houses of the rich, where they were paid according to the generosity of the audience. During the day they performed in courtyards, but to-night they appeared in the grand salon, the assembled company moving to one end of it to give greater room.

First came a man with a performing monkey, whose antics excited roars of laughter, followed by a *jongleuse*, or female juggler, who won a great deal of admiration by her dexterity in whirling a little drum about on the very tips of her fingers. Then came a man who could turn a number of somersaults without touching his hands to the floor, which would seem to have been a dangerous feat to attempt, for before each performance he was careful to make the sign of the cross.

This ended the program of the players, and Le Glorieux, who had watched them from his place on the floor, where, sprawling with his elbow resting on a cushion, he was making himself as comfortable as possible, was now anxious to have Antoine appear, for he knew that in his way the boy was far more talented than any who had to-night performed before the court. So, with the permission of the duchess, he went to fetch Antoine.

"Now, my young friend," said he, taking the boy by the ear, "I want you to do us both credit. No choking and squeaking to-night, if you please."

"You do not know what it is to be seized with a panic," retorted Antoine sulkily. "Very easy it is for you, who have the impudence to flout kings, to talk thus to one who is frightened of strangers."

"Fie!" exclaimed Le Glorieux. "Do not think of what the people think of you; think of what you think of them, and you will have no trouble," which, although a sentence having a good many "thinks" in it, is not a bad rule to follow when performing in public.

Antoine seemed to heed his friend's advice, for he began a lively air so inspiring that the duchess kept time with her small fingers on the arm of her chair, while Le Glorieux sprang up and danced in a series of glides and whirls, with his fantastic figure reflected in the polished floor.

A good while before the period of which I am telling you there were *trouveres* and *troubadours* who used to compose songs while they were singing them. Antoine, being a born musician, often did the same thing when he was in the humor for it, and that, too with considerable success.

He now began a weird little accompaniment suggesting the sighing of the wind through the woods, and then followed the woeful tale of witches who stole a knight's purse and horse and hawk, and later transformed the knight himself into a dancing dervish who kept on whirling and whirling for ever. There was a twinkle of mischief in the boy's eyes as he sang, and although the company thrilled deliciously at the blood-curdling passages, Le Glorieux knew quite well who was meant by the bewitched knight.

When the song was finished the fool stalked forward and picked up the singer by the back of the neck as a mother cat lifts her kittens. "I understand it all now," said he. "Cousin Anne, I thought the witches had played me a trick this afternoon, but it was this little villain, who evidently skulked along behind me, awaiting his opportunity to do me some mischief!"

"I am sure her Grace will not be interested in your private matters," said the Lady Clotilde coldly.

But the duchess was young enough to be interested in nonsense, and she demanded the whole story, Antoine explaining his part of it by saying that he had been waiting all day to be revenged upon his comrade because the latter had insisted upon his singing at the inn on the previous night. "But I did not know, your Highness, that he would sleep so long, else I should not have gone away and left him there. I was very unhappy about him when night came on and he had not yet arrived."

Just as Antoine had finished speaking, a servant came to announce the coming of some of her Grace's soldiers, saying that the captain of her troop desired an audience, which was granted at once.

An officer now entered, a dark-browed man with a somewhat forbidding face, who, after bending the knee to the duchess and saluting the company, began his story in the satisfied tone of one who feels that he has been quick to see his duty and has done it rather better than most people would have managed it in his place.

He said that he had stopped that morning at an inn for some refreshments, and that the innkeeper had shown him a gold piece given his child the night before by a little girl whose costume did not warrant the gift, and that the latter had seemed so much superior in station to the woman with whom she was traveling that he could not help fearing that the child was being unlawfully conveyed away.

Later the officer and his men had overtaken the mysterious couple, and after putting some questions the officer was convinced that the woman had been sent to Brittany by the French, for she had become very much confused when he questioned her, and implored him to allow her to go on her way unmolested. Her words and manner excited his suspicions still further, and without more ado he had taken them both prisoners, and had brought them to the palace with him. The woman was a foreigner, she said, but she acknowledged that she had lived for years in France, and he did not hesitate to say that he believed her to be a spy.

The Lady Anne, so far from being gratified by this intelligence, looked very much annoyed. "We are no longer at war with France," she said coldly. "It would have been better to have believed the woman's account of herself and let the two go on their way."

Considerably dismayed at thus being reproved where he had expected to be commended, the officer could not forbear to reply that France had broken her word with Brittany in the past, and who could tell but that she might be planning some new piece of treachery?

"Let the prisoners appear before me," said the duchess, and after some little delay the prisoners were brought in, and Le Glorieux and Antoine beheld – as the former, at least, had suspected – the same woman and child who had stopped at the inn on the previous night.

The woman was pale and frightened, and she sobbed bitterly as she knelt at the feet of her Grace of Brittany. The child too was pale, but she stood silent, with her small hands clasped before her, not offering to kneel, as did her companion.

"Oh, gracious lady, give us permission to go on our way at dawn to-morrow!" imploded the woman. "We have been brought out of our way by your soldiers, and if we do not reach home soon I do not know what will happen," and she concluded with another burst of tears.

"You should be German by your accent," said the duchess kindly. "Calm yourself and tell me your name and why you have come to Brittany."

The woman hesitated, and the child said quietly, "Tell her Grace your name; there is no reason why you should not do so."

"Cunegunda Leutner; I am an Austrian, your Grace," was the reply.

"Then she is a subject of your own, after all, Cousin Anne, since you are to marry the Archduke of Austria, *Poco Danari*," interposed Le Glorieux, who was not afraid to rush in where angels fear to tread.

The little duchess blushed crimson at this speech. Perhaps she was annoyed to hear the name *Poco Danari*, which means poverty-stricken, applied to her lover, and which had been given to Maximilian of Austria because his rich old father was too stingy to allow him necessary funds. Whatever the cause, she seemed about to administer a rebuke to the fool, then controlling herself turned again to the woman.

"And the girl, is she your child?"

"No, your Grace, but I have cared for her from the day she was born."

"What brought you to Brittany?"

"For the reason I told your Grace's soldiers. I visited the shrine of Saint Roch, the blessed saint whose fame for healing all maladies is known far and wide."

"You do not look like an invalid," remarked the duchess, surveying the stout figure and round face of the speaker.

"It is the migraine, your Grace, a pain which has troubled me day and night, and which leeches tell me is liable to reach the heart. Oh, dear and gracious lady, I should not care for myself; life is not so precious that I should want to cling to it; it is for this little one that I want to live, and for that reason I have taken this long journey to implore the blessed saint to cure me, that my life may be spared until she no longer needs me."

"Is the child an orphan?"

"Her mother is dead, your Grace. Her mother bade me always to be a friend to her, and I promised."

"Her father is married to a woman who is unkind to her?"

"He – he – is about to be married, your Grace," stammered the woman.

"Cousin Anne," again interrupted the jester, "this woman is telling the truth about the visit to the shrine of Saint Roch. I saw her and the child going there this morning just as I was coming away after a long prayer to be relieved of the gout, which I never have had, but which may overtake me like a thief in the night."

Every one smiled at this remark save the duchess, who again turned to the Austrian. "Why did you bring the child with you upon a journey fraught with discomfort, if not with danger?"

"Because, your Grace, I have sworn never to leave her, and never a night of her life has she slept without my first smoothing the coverlid over her little body."

"What is her name? Who is she?"

The Austrian was silent a moment. "If it please your Grace, there are reasons which forbid a reply to that question," she said slowly.

"But I insist upon a reply," said the Duchess Anne, with a touch of that firmness which made her appear older than her years.

The prisoner bent her head still lower as she replied in tones of emotion, "Gracious lady, so well beloved by your subjects, show us a little of that kindness you vouchsafe to others. We ask no favor but to be allowed to depart early to-morrow morning. It is *necessary* for us to go. I know not what will happen if we are longer delayed. Believe me, I am speaking the truth."

"Truly," said the young duchess gently, "we each have a right to the secret of our hearts." After a moment's reflection she said, "You shall go within five days at most, and in a company that will insure your protection. Until your departure you shall be made as comfortable as possible, and you shall not leave my domains empty-handed. This much at least I owe you for the discomfort you have suffered through my overzealous soldiers."

To remain as a guest in this splendid abode, and to receive a sum of money at the end of the visit, to say nothing of a safe conduct home, would not by most people be considered a hardship,

but the woman looked as if she had received a blow. "Oh, lady," she moaned, "your Grace means to be kind, but let us go to-morrow. Not an hour longer must we wait. Even now our absence may be discovered."

"Discovered?" said the Lady Anne. "Why should a pious journey require so much secrecy? But guard your secret if you like. You shall depart within five days, as I have said; it may be a little earlier; it will not be longer than that time."

"Alas," cried the woman, turning wildly to the child and seeming to forget all caution, "what will *she* say when she finds that we are away? Cold and revengeful as her father, she may send me to my death!"

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked the duchess wonderingly. "Who has the power to punish so severely a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Roch?"

Overcome by her emotion, the woman made no reply, but the child now stepped forward and said in a voice that all might hear, "The Duchess of Brittany has no right to keep me here against my will! I shall depart when I please. My rank is higher than yours. You ask my name? You shall know it, happen what will. I am the granddaughter of an emperor; I am the future Queen of France. *I am Marguerite of Hapsburg!*"

An earthquake shaking the palace from turret to donjon keep would not have caused a greater degree of surprise, for there was something in the manner, the tone, and the expression of the child that left no room for doubt. Her exquisitely-poised head was thrown proudly back, and though her full red lips quivered slightly, her eyes were dry and bright.

Strange to say, the fool of the company was the first to gain his self-possession. With a swift, gliding step he advanced toward the little lady, and kneeling he pressed her hand to his lips. "Mary's little child!" he exclaimed with a half sob.

"You said last night that you would give a year of your life to see the daughter of Mary of Burgundy, and now your wish is granted for naught," said Marguerite, smiling.

The Lady Anne now came forward, and clasping the princess in her arms kissed her on both cheeks. "The little lady whom of all others I have most desired to see!" she said. "Happily sheltered in the arms of my own dear father I heard of you, a tiny child away from your parents and in a strange country. And once I sent you a doll. I dare say you have forgotten it," she went on, half laughing. "It was a fashion model that had been sent to my grandmother, who was going to live at the court of France in the time of Charles the Seventh, and it was one of my dearest possessions. It wore a high pointed cap with a long flowing veil, and it had long pointed shoes."

"It must have looked like the old Duchess of Burgundy," remarked Le Glorieux, who was again his old impudent self. "Did it talk of the princess who kissed the poet, Cousin Anne?"

"It was dressed in the mode of the princess who kissed the poet," she returned, laughing. "Do you remember it, Lady Marguerite?"

"Yes, Lady Anne, and I have it still. Since the day you sent it I always have remembered you in my prayers. With it came a little chain set with pearls, but I liked the doll best."

Just here the jester began to laugh immoderately, slapping his knees and stamping at the same time, while every one else smiled in sympathy.

"What do you find so very amusing, Fool?" asked the Lady Anne.

He replied, "Some things that happen in royal families are so very funny that they would make Pandora, my hawk, laugh, though she is such a sulky little brute. Once explained to Pittacus, my donkey, and he would smile until every tooth in his head could be seen. You asked if this child's father was married to a woman who was unkind to her, and her nurse said he was about to be married. And you, Cousin Anne, ha! ha! you are to be the cruel stepmother!"

There was no denying the fact that the Lady Anne was about to be the stepmother of the Lady Marguerite, for Maximilian, who was still young and handsome, was shortly to marry the young Duchess of Brittany.

But again the duchess seemed to be embarrassed, and she turned her back to Le Glorieux as she said, "My dear Lady Marguerite, I will not keep you here a moment when you must be overcome with fatigue. I will send you to your apartments, where supper shall be served you, and then when you have retired and are resting I will come and talk to you, if I may."

The princess, so far from being conducted to the plain but comfortable quarters which would have been hers had her identity remained a secret, was now shown all the deference accorded a person of rank. Pages, maids, and even ladies of high degree, rushed about to make her comfortable, a delicious supper was served, and she lay down to rest beneath the gold-embroidered canopy of a couch even more sumptuous than her own bed in the palace of Amboise.

Cunegunda, who had been given a room next to that of her young mistress, after smoothing the silken coverlid over her young charge, satisfied that nothing dreadful was going to happen to-night, at least, had retired, and was sleeping the sleep of the fatigued when the Lady Anne entered the apartment of her young guest.

The duchess had changed her gown for a long robe of dark blue silk trimmed in fur, with a little cap of the same, and in this plainer garb she seemed younger and less stately than in the earlier part of the evening.

The princess, with her bright hair flowing over the cushions against which she leaned, seemed pathetically young, and it is a singular fact that about these two children revolved the most important events in the history of Europe at that time, events which drove great statesmen to their wits' end, and changed the map of France for all time.

Sitting on the edge of the bed the Lady Anne took the hand Marguerite stretched out to her, and stroking it gently, said simply, "And now tell me all about it. I long to know why France so lightly guards a princess intrusted to her keeping."

"It was as Cunegunda told you," was the reply. "She was suffering and the leeches frightened her. She always has been my nurse. When I was a baby, and, by the desire of our subjects, was sent with my brother to live in Flanders, my beautiful young mother – whom I can not remember – made Cunegunda promise never to leave me, for she knew that my nurse loved me, and love can not be bought. My mother, as you know, was killed when hunting, but Cunegunda never forgot her promise. She came to France with me, and though there are with me Lady Ravenstein and others of my father's court, I feel that none of them is so fond of me as she, for I know that if necessary she would give her life for mine. Anne of Beaujeu, Duchess of Bourbon and sister to the king, is like King Louis, her father, and she would not scruple to take a cruel revenge should she feel so inclined. We both dislike her very much, and that is why we are anxious to return before she hears of our absence."

"Did no one know that you had left the palace of Amboise?" asked the duchess.

"Only a few of the servants, who were bribed to keep silence. The Duchess of Bourbon lately has been away, and I have seen but little of her. Some of the other ladies have been ill, and one of them is about to be married. Cunegunda gave it out that I had been attacked by some contagious childish malady, I do not know what, and this kept them away from my apartments, and we stole out early one morning and mounting our mules came away."

"Were you not afraid to go on a journey without any one of authority in your train, and with no one to guard you from highwaymen?"

"No, Lady Anne. Cunegunda loves me, you know, and she was better than any one of rank. She made a little stuff gown for me, and she said that traveling alone and unattended we should attract no attention, and could go on our way unmolested.

"I have been quite happy during the trip, for it was all so new and so strange to me, and it was so pleasant not to be surrounded by people who were always watching me. But it was my fault that we excited suspicion. I went down to the inn kitchen to see what the common people do when they are having a festival, and I felt that I must give a gold piece to the baby who had been named Mary

in memory of my dear mother. It appears that ordinary people do not give away so much money, and that is what made the company at the inn suspicious."

"And no wonder, you innocent little girl," returned the Lady Anne, smiling. "A person of the station represented by your dress would have given, if anything, just the smallest piece of silver which is fastened to a bit of leather to keep it from being lost."

"I am afraid," went on the princess, "of the consequences of our trip to Cunegunda if our absence should be discovered, and as we have been away longer than we had planned, I fear that even those who were bribed to keep silence will think that something has happened to us, and will feel it their duty to report our absence. Cunegunda is afraid of this, and she is terrified when she thinks of Anne of Beaujeu. But as we shall go to-morrow morning, perhaps we shall be in Amboise before we have been missed."

"Indeed, you are not going to-morrow morning, my dear little sister and cousin," said Anne, using the term employed by royalties when addressing each other.

"Then I am afraid that we shall have a great deal of trouble when we do return," said the princess coldly. "Of course we can not help ourselves; we must remain here if you command it, but I can not see how it will benefit you to make us stay against our will. I had hoped that it would be different when you had been told who you were detaining; I am sorry now that I revealed our secret."

She turned her head slightly, and a tear rolled over her temple and dropped into the meshes of her bright hair.

The duchess thrust her arm under the child's head, and clasping her affectionately said, "Do you think, foolish little one, that I am keeping you here for spite? Within a few days you shall set out for Amboise with an escort that even a queen would not disdain."

"It would avail us nothing to return in royal style if we were to be punished sorely at the end of the journey," returned Marguerite dryly.

"You shall not be punished. I already have sent a messenger to the King of France explaining your absence, stating that you are in my keeping, and that you will return in safety."

"The King? Oh, the King would not care. But it is not he who rules France at present; it is his sister, Anne of Beaujeu."

"Let it be Anne of Beaujeu, then," cried the young duchess. "I promise that not one of your golden hairs shall be touched, and that your faithful nurse shall not be harmed in the least."

She rose as she spoke and looked down upon her guest with a proud smile. "France will hardly refuse a request made just now by Anne of Brittany," she said.

"I feel that you will do what you promise, though I do not quite understand," returned Marguerite with a sigh of relief.

For a few moments Anne remained silent, playing with the gilt cords that looped back the curtains of the bed. Then she said, "You evidently do not know that since our recent conflict with France a treaty has been signed whereby I am allowed safe conduct to join the King of the Romans, your father, in Austria. I may sail from St. Malo or go through France, as I choose. I shall take the latter route, and you and your attendant shall go with my suite to the nearest point to Amboise, where you can travel the remainder of the way in safety. Even before I knew your rank I did not like to think of a dainty little creature like you traveling over the country with none to guard you but a woman of the people, and I was going to let you make the journey under my protection. But now you shall ride by my side on the prettiest palfrey in my stables, or in one of my litters if you prefer it." And she gave Marguerite a light kiss on the brow.

"Oh, I am so glad that you are going to marry my father!" cried the princess, with sparkling eyes. "He sent me his portrait by the Austrian ambassador, and he is as beautiful as a knight of the Holy Grail. If I were not the heiress of Burgundy and Flanders, but only a little peasant girl, I could live under my father's roof as other children do. But this happiness is not to be granted me, for it is arranged that I am to be Queen of France."



"Those in whose veins courses royal blood may not do as their hearts dictate," said Anne thoughtfully. "But let us talk no more to-night, for it is time for those bright eyes to be closed in sleep."  
The two girls embraced affectionately; then the duchess left the room.

## CHAPTER IV

### BROKEN PROMISES

After meeting "little Mademoiselle of Austria," as Marguerite was called in the court of Brittany, both Le Glorieux and Antoine felt that they would like to be in her service, and that it was to her, the daughter of their own Mary of Burgundy, to whom they owed their loyalty.

The morning after her arrival the princess sent for Le Glorieux and Antoine to come to her. The Duchess Anne had seen to it that her guest should be clad in a costume befitting her rank, and the coarse gown of the peasant child had been discarded for ever.

Marguerite asked the two comrades a great many questions about the province of Burgundy, and the jester told her many incidents of her mother's girlhood. She listened to Antoine's Burgundian songs with great delight, and she expressed a wish that both jester and musician might accompany her to Amboise, though she said she would not be so selfish as to deprive the Duchess of Brittany of two such merry-makers.

Cunegunda, however, was not happy at the court of Brittany. "I wish that we had been permitted to continue our journey as we began it," she said. "I am convinced that it would have been far better for both of us."

"I am not afraid," replied her mistress calmly. "The Lady Anne has promised that we shall return in safety, and she will not break her word." But Cunegunda's round rosy face remained thoughtful and sad.

"Something tells me that things are not right," said she. "I seem to feel it in the air. Everything is going too well for us. Here is your little Highness treated like a very queen with everything done to amuse you, and both of us so comfortable in this beautiful palace that I feel that it is all too good to be true."

The next afternoon Le Glorieux, who, as has been said, being a jester was privileged to go where he liked, rushed into the apartments of the princess with the remark, "Our Duchess of Brittany soon to be married is listening to a strange man by the oriel window in the grand corridor."

"A jest upon such a subject does not amuse me in the least," replied the Lady Marguerite reprovingly.

"By the mass! nor does it amuse me, for from the few words I caught I am sure it means something quite serious for you, little Cousin."

"Please explain your meaning."

The jester replied, "I was looking at those suits of armor, in the corridor, worn by the ancient Dukes of Brittany. I was counting the dents made in the helmets and corselets by mace and battle-ax, and wondering if it paid to fight so fiercely, since, after all, the time would come when the bravest would be as dead as anybody else, when I heard the tinkle of ladies' voices, and who should come into the corridor but Cousin Anne and Clotilde."

"I slipped behind the armor of a giant duke and stood waiting to see what was going to happen, for the duchess was as white as Dame Cunegunda's cap and the countenance of Clotilde was screwed into an expression I never had seen it wear in all the years I have revelled in the joy of her acquaintance. They waited for a few moments, then the door at the other end of the corridor was opened and two gentlemen entered."

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