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Louise de la Ramee Bimb

THE NURNBERG STOVE

August lived in a little town called Hall. Hall is a favorite name for several towns in Austria and in Germany; but this one especial little Hall, in the Upper Innthal, is one of the most charming Old-World places that I know, and August, for his part, did not know any other. It has the green meadows and the great mountains all about it, and the gray-green glacier-fed water rushes by it. It has paved streets and enchanting little shops that have all latticed panes and iron gratings to them; it has a very grand old Gothic church, that has the noblest blendings of light and shadow, and marble tombs of dead knights, and a look of infinite strength and repose as a church should have. Then there is the Muntze Tower, black and white, rising out of greenery, and looking down on a long wooden bridge and the broad rapid river; and there is an old schloss which has been made into a guardhouse, with battlements and frescos and heraldic devices in gold and colors, and a man-at-arms carved in stone standing life-size in his niche and bearing his date 1530. A little farther on, but close at hand, is a cloister with beautiful marble columns and tombs, and a colossal wood-carved Calvary, and beside that a small and very

rich chapel; indeed, so full is the little town of the undisturbed past, that to walk in it is like opening a missal of the Middle Ages, all emblazoned and illuminated with saints and warriors, and it is so clean, and so still, and so noble, by reason of its monuments and its historic color, that I marvel much no one has ever cared to sing its praises. The old pious, heroic life of an age at once more restful and more brave than ours still leaves its spirit there, and then there is the girdle of the mountains all around, and that alone means strength, peace, majesty.

In this little town a few years ago August Strehla lived with his people in the stone-paved, irregular square where the grand church stands.

He was a small boy of nine years at that time,—a chubby-faced little man with rosy cheeks, big hazel eyes, and clusters of curls the brown of ripe nuts. His mother was dead, his father was poor, and there were many mouths at home to feed. In this country the winters are long and very cold; the whole land lies wrapped in snow for many months; and this night that he was trotting home, with a jug of beer in his numb red hands, was terribly cold and dreary. The good burghers of Hall had shut their double shutters, and the few lamps there were flickered dully behind their quaint, old-fashioned iron casings. The mountains indeed were beautiful, all snow-white under the stars that are so big in frost. Hardly any one was astir; a few good souls wending home from vespers, a tired post-boy, who blew a shrill blast from his tasseled horn as he pulled up his sledge before a hostelry,

and little August hugging his jug of beer to his ragged sheepskin coat, were all who were abroad, for the snow fell heavily and the good folks of Hall go early to their beds. He could not run, or he would have spilled the beer; he was half frozen and a little frightened, but he kept up his courage by saying over and over again to himself, "I shall soon be at home with dear Hirschvogel."

He went on through the streets, past the stone man-at-arms of the guardhouse, and so into the place where the great church was, and where near it stood his father Karl Strehla's house, with a sculptured Bethlehem over the doorway, and the Pilgrimage of the Three Kings painted on its wall. He had been sent on a long errand outside the gates in the afternoon, over the frozen fields and the broad white snow, and had been belated, and had thought he had heard the wolves behind him at every step, and had reached the town in a great state of terror, thankful with all his little panting heart to see the oil lamp burning under the first house shrine. But he had not forgotten to call for the beer, and he carried it carefully now, though his hands were so numb that he was afraid they would let the jug down every moment.

The snow outlined with white every gable and cornice of the beautiful old wooden houses; the moonlight shone on the gilded signs, the lambs, the grapes, the eagles, and all the quaint devices that hung before the doors; covered lamps burned before the Nativities and Crucifixions painted on the walls or let into the woodwork; here and there, where a shutter had not been closed, a ruddy fire-light lit up a homely interior, with a noisy band

of children clustering round the house-mother and a big brown loaf, or some gossips spinning and listening to the cobbler's or the barber's story of a neighbor, while the oil wicks glimmered, and the hearth logs blazed, and the chestnuts sputtered in their iron roasting pot. Little August saw all these things, as he saw everything with his two big bright eyes, that had such curious lights and shadows in them; but he went needfully on his way for the sake of the beer which a single slip of the foot would make him spill. At his knock and call the solid oak door, four centuries old if one, flew open, and the boy darted in with his beer and shouted with all the force of mirthful lungs: "Oh, dear Hirschvogel, but for the thought of you I should have died!"

It was a large barren room into which he rushed with so much pleasure, and the bricks were bare and uneven. It had a walnut- wood press, handsome and very old, a broad deal table, and several wooden stools, for all its furniture; but at the top of the chamber, sending out warmth and color together as the lamp shed its rays upon it, was a tower of porcelain, burnished with all the hues of a king's peacock and a queen's jewels, and surmounted with armed figures, and shields, and flowers of heraldry, and a great golden crown upon the highest summit of all.

It was a stove of 1532, and on it were the letters H. R. H., for it was in every portion the handwork of the great potter of Nurnberg, Augustin Hirschvogel, who put his mark thus, as all the world knows.

The stove, no doubt, had stood in palaces and been made for princes, had warmed the crimson stockings of cardinals and the gold-broidered shoes of archduchesses, had glowed in presence-chambers and lent its carbon to help kindle sharp brains in anxious councils of state; no one knew what it had seen or done or been fashioned for; but it was a right royal thing. Yet perhaps it had never been more useful than it was now in this poor, desolate room, sending down heat and comfort into the troop of children tumbled together on a wolfskin at its feet, who received frozen August among them with loud shouts of joy.

"Oh, dear Hirschvogel, I am so cold, so cold!" said August, kissing its gilded lion's claws. "Is father not in, Dorothea?"

"No, dear. He is late."

Dorothea was a girl of seventeen, dark-haired and serious, and with a sweet sad face, for she had had many cares laid on her shoulders, even whilst still a mere baby. She was the eldest of the Strehla family; and there were ten of them in all. Next to her there came Jan and Karl and Otho, big lads, gaining a little for their own living; and then came August, who went up in the summer to the high alps with the farmers' cattle, but in winter could do nothing to fill his own little platter and pot; and then all the little ones, who could only open their mouths to be fed like young birds,—Albrecht and Hilda, and Waldo and Christof, and last of all little three-year-old Ermengilda, with eyes like forget-me- nots, whose birth had cost them the life of their mother.

They were of that mixed race, half Austrian, half Italian,

so common in the Tyrol; some of the children were white and golden as lilies, others were brown and brilliant as fresh fallen chestnuts. The father was a good man, but weak and weary with so many to find for and so little to do it with. He worked at the salt furnaces, and by that gained a few florins; people said he would have worked better and kept his family more easily if he had not loved his pipe and a draught of ale too well; but this had only been said of him after his wife's death, when trouble and perplexity had begun to dull a brain never too vigorous, and to enfeeble further a character already too yielding. As it was, the wolf often bayed at the door of the Strehla household, without a wolf from the mountains coming down.

Dorothea was one of those maidens who almost work miracles, so far can their industry and care and intelligence make a home sweet and wholesome and a single loaf seem to swell into twenty. The children were always clean and happy, and the table was seldom without its big pot of soup once a day. Still, very poor they were, and Dorothea's heart ached with shame, for she knew that their father's debts were many for flour and meat and clothing. Of fuel to feed the big stove they had always enough without cost, for their mother's father was alive, and sold wood and fir cones and coke, and never grudged them to his grandchildren, though he grumbled at Strehla's improvidence and hapless, dreamy ways.

"Father says we are never to wait for him; we will have supper, now you have come home, dear," said Dorothea, who, however

she might fret her soul in secret as she knitted their hose and mended their shirts, never let her anxieties cast a gloom on the children; only to August she did speak a little sometimes, because he was so thoughtful and so tender of her always, and knew as well as she did that there were troubles about money,—though these troubles were vague to them both, and the debtors were patient and kindly, being neighbors all in the old twisting streets between the guardhouse and the river.

Supper was a huge bowl of soup, with big slices of brown bread swimming in it and some onions bobbing up and down; the bowl was soon emptied by ten wooden spoons, and then the three eldest boys slipped off to bed, being tired with their rough bodily labor in the snow all day, and Dorothea drew her spinning-wheel by the stove and set it whirring, and the little ones got August down upon the old worn wolfskin and clamored to him for a picture or a story. For August was the artist of the family.

He had a piece of planed deal that his father had given him, and some sticks of charcoal, and he would draw a hundred things he had seen in the day, sweeping each out with his elbow when the children had seen enough of it, and sketching another in its stead,—faces and dogs' heads, and men in sledges, and old women in their furs, and pine trees, and cocks and hens, and all sorts of animals, and now and then—very reverently—a Madonna and Child. It was all very rough, for there was no one to teach him anything. But it was all lifelike, and kept the whole troop of children shrieking with laughter, or watching breathless,

with wide open, wondering, awed eyes.

They were all so happy; what did they care for the snow outside? Their little bodies were warm, and their hearts merry; even Dorothea, troubled about the bread for the morrow, laughed as she spun; and August, with all his soul in his work, and little rosy Ermengilda's cheek on his shoulder, glowing after his frozen afternoon, cried out loud, smiling, as he looked up at the stove that was shedding its heat down on them all:—

"Oh, dear Hirschvogel! you are almost as great and good as the sun! No; you are greater and better, I think, because he goes away nobody knows where all these long, dark, cold hours, and does not care how people die for want of him; but you—you are always ready; just a little bit of wood to feed you, and you will make a summer for us all the winter through!"

The grand old stove seemed to smile through all its iridescent surface at the praises of the child. No doubt the stove, though it had known three centuries and more, had known but very little gratitude.

It was one of those magnificent stoves in enameled faience which so excited the jealousy of the other potters of Nurnberg that in a body they demanded of the magistracy that Augustin Hirschvogel should be forbidden to make any more of them,—the magistracy, happily, proving of a broader mind, and having no sympathy with the wish of the artisans to cripple their greater fellow.

It was of great height and breadth, with all the majolica luster

which Hirschvogel learned to give to his enamels when he was making love to the young Venetian girl whom he afterwards married. There was the statue of a king at each corner, modeled with as much force and splendor as his friend Albrecht Durer could have given unto them on copperplate or canvas. The body of the stove itself was divided into panels, which had the Ages of Man painted on them in polychrome; the borders of the panels had roses and holly and laurel and other foliage, and German mottoes in black letter of odd Old World moralizing, such as the old Teutons, and the Dutch after them, love to have on their chimney-places and their drinking cups, their dishes and flagons. The whole was burnished with gilding in many parts, and was radiant everywhere with that brilliant coloring of which the Hirschvogel family, painters on glass and great in chemistry, as they were, were all masters.

The stove was a very grand thing, as I say; possibly Hirschvogel had made it for some mighty lord of the Tyrol at that time when he was an imperial guest at Innspruck, and fashioned so many things for the Schloss Amras and beautiful Philippine Welser, the burgher's daughter, who gained an archduke's heart by her beauty and the right to wear his honors by her wit. Nothing was known of the stove at this latter day in Hall. The grandfather Strehla, who had been a master-mason, had dug it up out of some ruins where he was building, and, finding it without a flaw, had taken it home, and only thought it worth finding because it was such a good one to burn. That was now sixty years past, and ever

since then the stove had stood in the big, desolate, empty room, warming three generations of the Strehla family, and having seen nothing prettier, perhaps, in all its many years than the children tumbled now in a cluster like gathered flowers at its feet. For the Strehla children, born to nothing else, were all born with beauty; white or brown, they were equally lovely to look upon, and when they went into the church to Mass, with their curling locks and their clasped hands, they stood under the grim statues like cherubs flown down off some fresco.

"Tell us a story, August," they cried in chorus, when they had seen charcoal pictures till they were tired; and August did as he did every night pretty nearly—looked up at the stove and told them what he imagined of the many adventures and joys and sorrows of the human being who figured on the panels from his cradle to his grave.

To the children the stove was a household god. In summer they laid a mat of fresh moss all round it, and dressed it up with green boughs and the numberless beautiful wild flowers of the Tyrol country. In winter all their joys centered in it, and scampering home from school over the ice and snow they were happy, knowing that they would soon be cracking nuts or roasting chestnuts in the broad ardent glow of its noble tower, which rose eight feet high above them with all its spires and pinnacles and crowns.

Once a traveling peddler had told them that the letters on it meant Augustin Hirschvogel, and that Hirschvogel had been a

great German potter and painter, like his father before him, in the art- sanctified city of Nurnberg, and had made many such stoves, that were all miracles of beauty and of workmanship, putting all his heart and his soul and his faith into his labors, as the men of those earlier ages did, and thinking but little of gold or praise.

An old trader, too, who sold curiosities not far from the church, had told August a little more about the brave family of Hirschvogel, whose houses can be seen in Nuremberg to this day; of old Veit, the first of them, who painted the Gothic windows of St. Sebald with the marriage of the margravine; of his sons and of his grand-sons, potters, painters, engravers all, and chief of them great Augustin, the Luca della Robbia of the North. And August's imagination, always quick, had made a living personage out of these few records, and saw Hirschvogel as though he were in the flesh walking up and down the Maximilian-Strass in his visit to Innspruck, and maturing beautiful things in his brain as he stood on the bridge and gazed on the emerald green flood of the Inn.

So the stove had got to be called Hirschvogel in the family, as if it were a living creature, and little August was very proud because he had been named after that famous old dead German who had had the genius to make so glorious a thing. All the children loved the stove, but with August the love of it was a passion; and in his secret heart he used to say to himself, "When I am a man, I will make just such things too, and then I will set Hirschvogel in a beautiful room in a house that I will build myself

in Innspruck just outside the gates, where the chestnuts are, by the river; that is what I will do when I am a man."

For August, a salt baker's son and a little cow-keeper when he was anything, was a dreamer of dreams, and when he was upon the high alps with his cattle, with the stillness and the sky around him, was quite certain that he would live for greater things than driving the herds up when the springtide came among the blue sea of gentians, or toiling down in the town with wood and with timber as his father and grandfather did every day of their lives. He was a strong and healthy little fellow, fed on the free mountain air, and he was very happy, and loved his family devotedly, and was as active as a squirrel and as playful as a hare; but he kept his thoughts to himself, and some of them went a very long way for a little boy who was only one among many, and to whom nobody had ever paid any attention except to teach him his letters and tell him to fear God. August in winter was only a little, hungry schoolboy, trotting to be catechised by the priest, or to bring the loaves from the bakehouse, or to carry his father's boots to the cobbler; and in summer he was only one of hundreds of cowboys, who drove the poor, half-blind, blinking, stumbling cattle, ringing their throat bells, out into the sweet intoxication of the sudden sunlight, and lived up with them in the heights among the Alpine roses, with only the clouds and the snow summits near. But he was always thinking, thinking, thinking, for all that; and under his little sheepskin winter coat and his rough hempen summer shirt his heart had as much courage in it as Hofer's ever

had,– great Hofer, who is a household word in all the Innthal, and whom August always reverently remembered when he went to the city of Innspruck and ran out by the foaming water mill and under the wooded height of Berg Isel.

August lay now in the warmth of the stove and told the children stories, his own little brown face growing red with excitement as his imagination glowed to fever heat. That human being on the panels, who was drawn there as a baby in a cradle, as a boy playing among flowers, as a lover sighing under a casement, as a soldier in the midst of strife, as a father with children round him, as a weary, old, blind man on crutches, and, lastly, as a ransomed soul raised up by angels, had always had the most intense interest for August, and he had made, not one history for him, but a thousand; he seldom told them the same tale twice. He had never seen a storybook in his life; his primer and his Mass book were all the volumes he had. But nature had given him Fancy, and she is a good fairy that makes up for the want of very many things! only, alas! her wings are so very soon broken, poor thing! and then she is of no use at all.

"It is time for you all to go to bed, children," said Dorothea, looking up from her spinning. "Father is very late to-night; you must not sit up for him."

"Oh, five minutes more, dear Dorothea!" they pleaded; and little rosy and golden Ermengilda climbed up into her lap. "Hirschvogel is so warm, the beds are never so warm as he. Cannot you tell us another tale, August?"

"No," cried August, whose face had lost its light, now that his story had come to an end, and who sat serious, with his hands clasped on his knees, gazing on to the luminous arabesques of the stove.

"It is only a week to Christmas," he said suddenly.

"Grandmother's big cakes!" chuckled little Christof, who was five years old, and thought Christmas meant a big cake and nothing else.

"What will Santa Claus find for 'Gilda if she be good?" murmured Dorothea over the child's sunny head; for, however hard poverty might pinch, it could never pinch so tightly that Dorothea would not find some wooden toy and some rosy apples to put in her little sister's socks.

"Father Max has promised me a big goose, because I saved the calf's life in June," said August; it was the twentieth time he had told them so that month, he was so proud of it.

"And Aunt Maila will be sure to send us wine and honey and a barrel of flour; she always does," said Albrecht. Their Aunt Maila had a chalet and a little farm over on the green slopes towards Dorp Ampas.

"I shall go up into the woods and get Hirschvogel's crown," said August; they always crowned Hirschvogel for Christmas with pine boughs and ivy and mountain berries. The heat soon withered the crown; but it was part of the religion of the day to them, as much so as it was to cross themselves in church and raise their voices in the "O Salutaris Hostia."

And they fell chatting of all they would do on the Christ-night, and one little voice piped loud against another's, and they were as happy as though their stockings would be full of golden purses and jeweled toys, and the big goose in the soup pot seemed to them such a meal as kings would envy.

In the midst of their chatter and laughter a blast of frozen air and a spray of driven snow struck like ice through the room, and reached them even in the warmth of the old wolfskins and the great stove. It was the door which had opened and let in the cold; it was their father who had come home.

The younger children ran joyous to meet him. Dorothea pushed the one wooden armchair of the room to the stove, and August flew to set the jug of beer on a little round table, and fill a long clay pipe; for their father was good to them all, and seldom raised his voice in anger, and they had been trained by the mother they had loved to dutifulness and obedience and a watchful affection.

To-night Karl Strehla responded very wearily to the young ones' welcome, and came to the wooden chair with a tired step and sat down heavily, not noticing either pipe or beer.

"Are you not well, dear father?" his daughter asked him.

"I am well enough," he answered dully, and sat there with his head bent, letting the lighted pipe grow cold.

He was a fair, tall man, gray before his time, and bowed with labor.

"Take the children to bed," he said suddenly, at last, and

Dorothea obeyed. August stayed behind, curled before the stove; at nine years old, and when one earns money in the summer from the farmers, one is not altogether a child any more, at least in one's own estimation.

August did not heed his father's silence; he was used to it. Karl Strehla was a man of few words, and, being of weakly health, was usually too tired at the end of the day to do more than drink his beer and sleep. August lay on the wolfskin, dreamy and comfortable, looking up through his drooping eyelids at the golden coronets on the crest of the great stove, and wondering for the millionth time whom it had been made for, and what grand places and scenes it had known.

Dorothea came down from putting the little ones in their beds; the cuckoo clock in the corner struck eight; she looked to her father and the untouched pipe, then sat down to her spinning, saying nothing. She thought he had been drinking in some tavern; it had been often so with him of late.

There was a long silence; the cuckoo called the quarter twice; August dropped to sleep, his curls falling over his face; Dorothea's wheel hummed like a cat.

Suddenly Karl Strehla struck his hand on the table, sending the pipe on the ground.

"I have sold Hirschvogel," he said; and his voice was husky and ashamed in his throat. The spinning wheel stopped. August sprang erect out of his sleep.

"Sold Hirschvogel!" If their father had dashed the holy

crucifix on the floor at their feet and spat on it, they could not have shuddered under the horror of a greater blasphemy.

"I have sold Hirschvogel!" said Karl Strehla in the same husky, dogged voice. "I have sold it to a traveling trader in such things for two hundred florins. What would you?—I owe double that. He saw it this morning when you were all out. He will pack it and take it to Munich to-morrow."

Dorothea gave a low, shrill cry:—

"Oh, father!—the children—in midwinter!"

She turned white as the snow without; her words died away in her throat.

August stood, half blind with sleep, staring with dazed eyes as his cattle stared at the sun when they came out from their winter's prison.

"It is not true! It is not true!" he muttered. "You are jesting, father?"

Strehla broke into a dreary laugh.

"It is true. Would you like to know what is true too?—that the bread you eat, and the meat you put in this pot, and the roof you have over your heads, are none of them paid for, have been none of them paid for for months and months; if it had not been for your grandfather, I should have been in prison all summer and autumn; and he is out of patience and will do no more now. There is no work to be had; the masters go to younger men; they say I work ill; it may be so. Who can keep his head above water with ten hungry children dragging him down? When your mother

lived it was different. Boy, you stare at me as if I were a mad dog! You have made a god of yon china thing. Well—it goes; goes to-morrow. Two hundred florins, that is something. It will keep me out of prison for a little, and with the spring things may turn—"

August stood like a creature paralyzed. His eyes were wide open, fastened on his father's with terror and incredulous horror; his face had grown as white as his sister's; his chest heaved with tearless sobs.

"It is not true! It is not true!" he echoed stupidly. It seemed to him that the very skies must fall, and the earth perish, if they could take away Hirschvogel. They might as soon talk of tearing down God's sun out of the heavens.

"You will find it true," said his father doggedly, and angered because he was in his own soul bitterly ashamed to have bartered away the heirloom and treasure of his race and the comfort and health-giver of his young children." You will find it true. The dealer has paid me half the money to-night, and will pay me the other half to-morrow, when he packs it up and takes it away to Munich. No doubt it is worth a great deal more,—at least I suppose so, as he gives that,—but beggars cannot be choosers. The little black stove in the kitchen will warm you all just as well. Who would keep a gilded, painted thing in a poor house like this, when one can make two hundred florins by it? Dorothea, you never sobbed more when your mother died. What is it, when all is said?– a bit of hardware much too grand-looking for such a room as this. If all the Strehlas had not been born fools, it would have

been sold a century ago, when it was dug up out of the ground. It is a stove for a museum, the trader said when he saw it. To a museum let it go."

August gave a shrill shriek like a hare's when it is caught for its death, and threw himself on his knees at his father's feet.

"Oh, father, father!" he cried convulsively, his hands closing on Strehla's knees, and his uplifted face blanched and distorted with terror. "Oh, father, dear father, you cannot mean what you say? Send IT away—our life, our sun, our joy, our comfort? We shall all die in the dark and the cold. Sell ME rather. Sell me to any trade or any pain you like; I will not mind. But Hirschvogel!—it is like selling the very cross off the altar! You must be in jest. You could not do such a thing—you could not!—you who have always been gentle and good, and who have sat in the warmth here year after year with our mother. It is not a piece of hardware, as you say; it is a living thing, for a great man's thoughts and fancies have put life into it, and it loves us though we are only poor little children, and we love it with all our hearts and souls, and up in heaven I am sure the dead Hirschvogel knows! Oh, listen; I will go and try and get work to-morrow! I will ask them to let me cut ice or make the paths through the snow. There must be something I could do, and I will beg the people we owe money to to wait; they are all neighbors, they will be patient. But sell Hirschvogel!—oh, never! never! never! Give the florins back to the vile man. Tell him it would be like selling the shroud out of mother's coffin, or the golden curls off Ermengilda's head! Oh,

father, dear father! do hear me, for pity's sake!"

Strehla was moved by the boy's anguish. He loved his children, though he was often weary of them, and their pain was pain to him. But besides emotion, and stronger than emotion, was the anger that August roused in him; he hated and despised himself for the barter of the heirloom of his race, and every word of the child stung him with a stinging sense of shame.

And he spoke in his wrath rather than in his sorrow.

"You are a little fool," he said harshly, as they had never heard him speak. "You rave like a play-actor. Get up and go to bed. The stove is sold. There is no more to be said. Children like you have nothing to do with such matters. The stove is sold, and goes to Munich to-morrow. What is it to you? Be thankful I can get bread for you. Get on your legs I say, and go to bed."

Strehla took up the jug of ale as he paused, and drained it slowly as a man who had no cares.

August sprang to his feet and threw his hair back off his face; the blood rushed into his cheeks, making them scarlet; his great soft eyes flamed alight with furious passion.

"You DARE not!" he cried aloud, "you dare not sell it, I say! It is not yours alone; it is ours—"

Strehla flung the emptied jug on the bricks with a force that shivered it to atoms, and, rising to his feet, struck his son a blow that felled him to the floor. It was the first time in all his life that he had ever raised his hand against any one of his children.

Then he took the oil lamp that stood at his elbow and stumbled

off to his own chamber with a cloud before his eyes.

"What has happened?" said August a little while later, as he opened his eyes and saw Dorothea weeping above him on the wolfskin before the stove. He had been struck backward, and his head had fallen on the hard bricks where the wolfskin did not reach. He sat up a moment, with his face bent upon his hands.

"I remember now," he said, very low, under his breath.

Dorothea showered kisses on him, while her tears fell like rain.

"But, oh, dear, how could you speak so to father?" she murmured. "It was very wrong."

"No, I was right," said August; and his little mouth, that hitherto had only curled in laughter, curved downward with a fixed and bitter seriousness. "How dare he? How dare he?" he muttered, with his head sunk in his hands. "It is not his alone. It belongs to us all. It is as much yours and mine as it is his."

Dorothea could only sob in answer. She was too frightened to speak. The authority of their parents in the house had never in her remembrance been questioned.

"Are you hurt by the fall, dear August?" she murmured at length, for he looked to her so pale and strange.

"Yes—no. I do not know. What does it matter?"

He sat up upon the wolfskin with passionate pain upon his face; all his soul was in rebellion, and he was only a child and was powerless.

"It is a sin; it is a theft; it is an infamy," he said slowly, his eyes

fastened on the gilded feet of Hirschvogel.

"Oh, August, do not say such things of father!" sobbed his sister. "Whatever he does, WE ought to think it right."

August laughed aloud.

"Is it right that he should spend his money in drink?—that he should let orders lie unexecuted?—that he should do his work so ill that no one cares to employ him?—that he should live on grandfather's charity, and then dare sell a thing that is ours every whit as much as it is his? To sell Hirschvogel! Oh, dear God! I would sooner sell my soul!"

"August!" cried Dorothea with piteous entreaty. He terrified her; she could not recognize her little, gay, gentle brother in those fierce and blasphemous words.

August laughed aloud again; then all at once his laughter broke down into bitterest weeping. He threw himself forward on the stove, covering it with kisses, and sobbing as though his heart would burst from his bosom.

What could he do? Nothing, nothing, nothing!

"August, dear August," whispered Dorothea piteously, and trembling all over,—for she was a very gentle girl, and fierce feeling terrified her,—"August, do not lie there. Come to bed; it is quite late. In the morning you will be calmer. It is horrible indeed, and we shall die of cold, at least the little ones; but if it be father's will—"

"Let me alone," said August through his teeth, striving to still the storm of sobs that shook him from head to foot. "Let me

alone. In the morning!—how can you speak of the morning"

"Come to bed, dear," sighed his sister. "Oh, August, do not lie and look like that! you frighten me. Do come to bed."

"I shall stay here."

"Here! all night!"

"They might take it in the night. Besides, to leave it NOW!"

"But it is cold! the fire is out."

"It will never be warm any more, nor shall we."

All his childhood had gone out of him, all his gleeful, careless, sunny temper had gone with it; he spoke sullenly and wearily, choking down the great sobs in his chest. To him it was as if the end of the world had come.

His sister lingered by him while striving to persuade him to go to his place in the little crowded bedchamber with Albrecht and Waldo and Christof. But it was in vain. "I shall stay here," was all he answered her. And he stayed—all the night long.

The lamps went out; the rats came and ran across the floor; as the hours crept on through midnight and past, the cold intensified and the air of the room grew like ice. August did not move; he lay with his face downward on the golden and rainbow-hued pedestal of the household treasure, which henceforth was to be cold forevermore, an exiled thing in a foreign city, in a far-off land.

Whilst yet it was dark his three elder brothers came down the stairs and let themselves out, each bearing his lantern and going to his work in stone yard and timber yard and at the salt works.

They did not notice him; they did not know what had happened.

A little later his sister came down with a light in her hand to make ready the house ere morning should break.

She stole up to him and laid her hand on his shoulder timidly.

"Dear August, you must be frozen. August, do look up! do speak!"

August raised his eyes with a wild, feverish, sullen look in them that she had never seen there. His face was ashen white; his lips were like fire. He had not slept all night; but his passionate sobs had given way to delirious waking dreams and numb senseless trances, which had alternated one on another all through the freezing, lonely, horrible hours.

"It will never be warm again," he muttered, "never again!"

Dorothea clasped him with trembling hands. "August! do you not know me?" she cried in an agony. "I am Dorothea. Wake up, dear— wake up! It is morning, only so dark!"

August shuddered all over.

"The morning!" he echoed.

He slowly rose up on to his feet.

"I will go to grandfather," he said very low. "He is always good; perhaps he could save it."

Loud blows with the heavy iron knocker of the house-door drowned his words. A strange voice called aloud through the keyhole:—

"Let me in! Quick!—there is no time to lose! More snow like this, and the roads will all be blocked. Let me in! Do you hear?

I am come to take the great stove."

August sprang erect, his fists doubled, his eyes blazing.

"You shall never touch it!" he screamed; "you shall never touch it!"

"Who shall prevent us?" laughed a big man who was a Bavarian, amused at the fierce little figure fronting him.

"I!" said August. "You shall never have it! you shall kill me first!"

"Strehla," said the big man as August's father entered the room, "you have got a little mad dog here; muzzle him."

One way and another they did muzzle him. He fought like a little demon, and hit out right and left, and one of his blows gave the Bavarian a black eye. But he was soon mastered by four grown men, and his father flung him with no light hand out from the door of the back entrance, and the buyers of the stately and beautiful stove set to work to pack it heedfully and carry it away.

When Dorothea stole out to look for August, he was nowhere in sight. She went back to little 'Gilda, who was ailing, and sobbed over the child, whilst the others stood looking on, dimly understanding that with Hirschvogel was going all the warmth of their bodies, all the light of their hearth.

Even their father now was sorry and ashamed; but two hundred florins seemed a big sum to him, and, after all, he thought the children could warm themselves quite as well at the black iron stove in the kitchen. Besides, whether he regretted it now or not, the work of the Nurnberg potter was sold irrevocably,

and he had to stand still and see the men from Munich wrap it in manifold wrappings and bear it out into the snowy air to where an ox cart stood in waiting for it.

In another moment Hirschvogel was gone—gone forever and aye.

August had stood still for a time, leaning, sick and faint from the violence that had been used to him, against the back wall of the house. The wall looked on a court where a well was, and the backs of other houses, and beyond them the spire of the Muntze Tower and the peaks of the mountains.

Into the court an old neighbor hobbled for water, and, seeing the boy, said to him:—

"Child, is it true your father is selling the big painted stove?"

August nodded his head, then burst into a passion of tears.

"Well, for sure he is a fool," said the neighbor. "Heaven forgive me for calling him so before his own child! but the stove was worth a mint of money. I do remember in my young days, in old Anton's time (that was your great-grand-father, my lad), a stranger from Vienna saw it, and said that it was worth its weight in gold."

August's sobs went on their broken, impetuous course.

"I loved it! I loved it!" he moaned. "I do not care what its value was. I loved it! I LOVED IT!"

"You little simpleton!" said the old man, kindly. "But you are wiser than your father, when all's said. If sell it he must, he should have taken it to good Herr Steiner over at Spritz, who would have

given him honest value. But no doubt they took him over his beer —ay, ay! but if I were you I would do better than cry. I would go after it."

August raised his head, the tears raining down his cheeks.

"Go after it when you are bigger," said the neighbor, with a good- natured wish to cheer him up a little. "The world is a small thing after all: I was a traveling clockmaker once upon a time, and I know that your stove will be safe enough whoever gets it; anything that can be sold for a round sum is always wrapped up in cotton wool by everybody. Ay, ay, don't cry so much; you will see your stove again some day."

Then the old man hobbled away to draw his brazen pail full of water at the well.

August remained leaning against the wall; his head was buzzing, and his heart fluttering with the new idea which had presented itself to his mind. "Go after it," had said the old man. He thought, "Why not go with it?" He loved it better than any one, even better than Dorothea; and he shrank from the thought of meeting his father again, his father who had sold Hirschvogel.

He was by this time in that state of exaltation in which the impossible looks quite natural and commonplace. His tears were still wet on his pale cheeks, but they had ceased to fall. He ran out of the courtyard by a little gate, and across to the huge Gothic porch of the church. From there he could watch unseen his father's house door, at which were always hanging some blue-and- gray pitchers, such as are common and so picturesque in

Austria, for a part of the house was let to a man who dealt in pottery.

He hid himself in the grand portico, which he had so often passed through to go to mass or complin within, and presently his heart gave a great leap, for he saw the straw-enwrapped stove brought out and laid with infinite care on the bullock dray. Two of the Bavarian men mounted beside it, and the sleigh-wagon slowly crept over the snow of the place—snow crisp and hard as stone. The noble old minister looked its grandest and most solemn, with its dark gray stone and its vast archways, and its porch that was itself as big as many a church, and its strange gargoyles and lamp-irons black against the snow on its roof and on the pavement; but for once August had no eyes for it: he only watched for his old friend. Then he, a little unnoticeable figure enough, like a score of other boys in Hall, crept, unseen by any of his brothers or sisters, out of the porch and over the shelving uneven square, and followed in the wake of the dray.

Its course lay towards the station of the railway, which is close to the salt works, whose smoke at times sullies this part of clean little Hall, though it does not do very much damage. From Hall the iron road runs northward through glorious country to Salzburg, Vienna, Prague, Buda, and southward over the Brenner into Italy. Was Hirschvogel going north or south? This at least he would soon know.

August had often hung about the little station, watching the trains come and go and dive into the heart of the hills and vanish.

No one said anything to him for idling about; people are kind-hearted and easy of temper in this pleasant land, and children and dogs are both happy there. He heard the Bavarians arguing and vociferating a great deal, and learned that they meant to go too and wanted to go with the great stove itself. But this they could not do, for neither could the stove go by a passenger train nor they themselves go in a goods train. So at length they insured their precious burden for a large sum, and consented to send it by a luggage train which was to pass through Hall in half an hour. The swift trains seldom deign to notice the existence of Hall at all.

August heard, and a desperate resolve made itself up in his little mind. Where Hirschvogel went would he go. He gave one terrible thought to Dorothea—poor, gentle Dorothea!—sitting in the cold at home, then set to work to execute his project. How he managed it he never knew very clearly himself; but certain it is that when the goods train from the north, that had come all the way from Linz on the Danube, moved out of Hall, August was hidden behind the stove in the great covered truck, and wedged, unseen and undreamt of by any human creature, amidst the cases of wood- carving, of clocks and clock-work, of Vienna toys, of Turkish carpets, of Russian skins, of Hungarian wines, which shared the same abode as did his swathed and bound Hirschvogel. No doubt he was very naughty, but it never occurred to him that he was so: his whole mind and soul were absorbed in the one entrancing idea, to follow his beloved friend and fire-king.

It was very dark in the closed truck, which had only a little

window above the door; and it was crowded, and had a strong smell in it from the Russian hides and the hams that were in it. But August was not frightened; he was close to Hirschvogel, and presently he meant to be closer still; for he meant to do nothing less than get inside Hirschvogel itself. Being a shrewd little boy, and having had, by great luck, two silver groschen in his breeches pocket, which he had earned the day before by chopping wood, he had bought some bread and sausage at the station of a woman there who knew him, and who thought he was going out to his Uncle Joachim's chalet above Jenbach. This he had with him, and this he ate in the darkness and the lumbering, pounding, thundering noise which made him giddy, as never had he been in a train of any kind before. Still he ate, having had no breakfast, and being a child, and half a German, and not knowing at all how or when he ever would eat again.

When he had eaten, not as much as he wanted, but as much as he thought was prudent (for who could say when he would be able to buy anything more?), he set to work like a little mouse to make a hole in the withes of straw and hay which enveloped the stove. If it had been put in a packing-case, he would have been defeated at the onset. As it was, he gnawed, and nibbled, and pulled, and pushed, just as a mouse would have done, making his hole where he guessed that the opening of the stove was—the opening through which he had so often thrust the big oak logs to feed it. No one disturbed him; the heavy train went lumbering on and on, and he saw nothing at all of the beautiful mountains,

and shining waters, and great forests through which he was being carried. He was hard at work getting through the straw and hay and twisted ropes; and get through them at last he did, and found the door of the stove, which he knew so well, and which was quite large enough for a child of his age to slip through, and it was this which he had counted upon doing. Slip through he did, as he had often done at home for fun, and curled himself up there to see if he could anyhow remain during many hours. He found that he could; air came in through the brass fretwork of the stove; and with admirable caution in such a little fellow he leaned out, drew the hay and straw together, and rearranged the ropes, so that no one could ever have dreamed a little mouse had been at them. Then he curled himself up again, this time more like a dormouse than anything else; and, being safe inside his dear Hirschvogel and intensely cold, he went fast asleep, as if he were in his own bed at home with Albrecht and Christof on either side of him. The train lumbered on, stopping often and long, as the habit of goods trains is, sweeping the snow away with its cow-switcher, and rumbling through the deep heart of the mountains, with its lamps aglow like the eyes of a dog in a night of frost.

The train rolled on in its heavy, slow fashion, and the child slept soundly for a long while. When he did awake, it was quite dark outside in the land; he could not see, and of course he was in absolute darkness; and for a while he was sorely frightened, and trembled terribly, and sobbed in a quiet, heartbroken fashion, thinking of them all at home. Poor Dorothea! how anxious she

would be! How she would run over the town and walk up to grandfather's at Dorf Ampas, and perhaps even send over to Jenbach, thinking he had taken refuge with Uncle Joachim! His conscience smote him for the sorrow he must be even then causing to his gentle sister; but it never occurred to him to try and go back. If he once were to lose sight of Hirschvogel, how could he ever hope to find it again? how could he ever know whither it had gone—north, south, east, or west? The old neighbor had said that the world was small; but August knew at least that it must have a great many places in it: that he had seen himself on the maps on his schoolhouse walls. Almost any other little boy would, I think, have been frightened out of his wits at the position in which he found himself; but August was brave, and he had a firm belief that God and Hirschvogel would take care of him. The master-potter of Nurnberg was always present to his mind, a kindly, benign, and gracious spirit, dwelling manifestly in that porcelain tower whereof he had been the maker.

A droll fancy, you say? But every child with a soul in him has quite as quaint fancies as this one was of August's.

So he got over his terror and his sobbing both, though he was so utterly in the dark. He did not feel cramped at all, because the stove was so large, and air he had in plenty, as it came through the fretwork running round the top. He was hungry again, and again nibbled with prudence at his loaf and his sausage. He could not at all tell the hour. Every time the train stopped and he heard the banging, stamping, shouting, and jangling of chains that went

on, his heart seemed to jump up into his mouth. If they should find him out! Sometimes porters came and took away this case and the other, a sack here, a bale there, now a big bag, now a dead chamois. Every time the men trampled near him, and swore at each other, and banged this and that to and fro, he was so frightened that his very breath seemed to stop. When they came to lift the stove out, would they find him? and if they did find him, would they kill him? That was what he kept thinking of all the way, all through the dark hours, which seemed without end. The goods trains are usually very slow, and are many days doing what a quick train does in a few hours. This one was quicker than most, because it was bearing goods to the King of Bavaria; still, it took all the short winter's day and the long winter's night and half another day to go over ground that the mail trains cover in a forenoon. It passed great armored Kufstein standing across the beautiful and solemn gorge, denying the right of way to all the foes of Austria. It passed twelve hours later, after lying by in out-of-the-way stations, pretty Rosenheim, that marks the border of Bavaria. And here the Nurnberg stove, with August inside it, was lifted out heedfully and set under a covered way. When it was lifted out, the boy had hard work to keep in his screams; he was tossed to and fro as the men lifted the huge thing, and the earthenware walls of his beloved fire-king were not cushions of down. However, though they swore and grumbled at the weight of it, they never suspected that a living child was inside it, and they carried it out on to the platform and set it down under the

roof of the goods shed. There it passed the rest of the night and all the next morning, and August was all the while within it.

The winds of early winter sweep bitterly over Rosenheim, and all the vast Bavarian plain was one white sheet of snow. If there had not been whole armies of men at work always clearing the iron rails of the snow, no trains could ever have run at all. Happily for August, the thick wrappings in which the stove was enveloped and the stoutness of its own make screened him from the cold, of which, else, he must have died—frozen. He had still some of his loaf, and a little—a very little—of his sausage. What he did begin to suffer from was thirst; and this frightened him almost more than anything else, for Dorothea had read aloud to them one night a story of the tortures some wrecked men had endured because they could not find any water but the salt sea. It was many hours since he had last taken a drink from the wooden spout of their old pump, which brought them the sparkling, ice-cold water of the hills.

But, fortunately for him, the stove, having been marked and registered as "fragile and valuable," was not treated quite like a mere bale of goods, and the Rosenheim station-master, who knew its consignees, resolved to send it on by a passenger train that would leave there at daybreak. And when this train went out, in it, among piles of luggage belonging to other travelers, to Vienna, Prague, Buda-Pest, Salzburg, was August, still undiscovered, still doubled up like a mole in the winter under the grass. Those words, "fragile and valuable," had made the

men lift Hirschvogel gently and with care. He had begun to get used to his prison, and a little used to the incessant pounding and jumbling and rattling and shaking with which modern travel is always accompanied, though modern invention does deem itself so mightily clever. All in the dark he was, and he was terribly thirsty; but he kept feeling the earthenware sides of the Nurnberg giant and saying, softly, "Take care of me; oh, take care of me, dear Hirschvogel!"

He did not say, "Take me back;" for, now that he was fairly out in the world, he wished to see a little of it. He began to think that they must have been all over the world in all this time that the rolling and roaring and hissing and jangling had been about his ears; shut up in the dark, he began to remember all the tales that had been told in Yule round the fire at his grandfather's good house at Dorf, of gnomes and elves and subterranean terrors, and the Erl King riding on the black horse of night, and—and—and he began to sob and to tremble again, and this time did scream outright. But the steam was screaming itself so loudly that no one, had there been any one nigh, would have heard him; and in another minute or so the train stopped with a jar and a jerk, and he in his cage could hear men crying aloud, "Munchen! Munchen!"

Then he knew enough of geography to know that he was in the heart of Bavaria. He had had an uncle killed in the Bayerischenwald by the Bavarian forest guards, when in the excitement of hunting a black bear he had overpassed the limits

of the Tyrol frontier.

That fate of his kinsman, a gallant young chamois hunter who had taught him to handle a trigger and load a muzzle, made the very name of Bavaria a terror to August.

"It is Bavaria! It is Bavaria!" he sobbed to the stove; but the stove said nothing to him; it had no fire in it. A stove can no more speak without fire than a man can see without light. Give it fire, and it will sing to you, tell tales to you, offer you in return all the sympathy you ask.

"It is Bavaria!" sobbed August; for it is always a name of dread augury to the Tyroleans, by reason of those bitter struggles and midnight shots and untimely deaths which come from those meetings of jager and hunter in the Bayerischenwald. But the train stopped; Munich was reached, and August, hot and cold by turns, and shaking like a little aspen leaf, felt himself once more carried out on the shoulders of men, rolled along on a truck, and finally set down, where he knew not, only he knew he was thirsty—so thirsty! If only he could have reached his hand out and scooped up a little snow!

He thought he had been moved on this truck many miles, but in truth the stove had been only taken from the railway station to a shop in the Marienplatz. Fortunately, the stove was always set upright on its four gilded feet, an injunction to that effect having been affixed to its written label, and on its gilded feet it stood now in the small dark curiosity shop of one Hans Rhilfer.

"I shall not unpack it till Anton comes," he heard a man's voice

say; and then he heard a key grate in a lock, and by the unbroken stillness that ensued he concluded he was alone, and ventured to peep through the straw and hay. What he saw was a small square room filled with pots and pans, pictures, carvings, old blue jugs, old steel armor, shields, daggers, Chinese idols, Vienna china, Turkish rugs, and all the art lumber and fabricated rubbish of a bric-a-brac dealer's. It seemed a wonderful place to him; but, oh! was there one drop of water in it all? That was his single thought; for his tongue was parching, and his throat felt on fire, and his chest began to be dry and choked as with dust.

There was not a drop of water, but there was a lattice window grated, and beyond the window was a wide stone ledge covered with snow. August cast one look at the locked door, darted out of his hiding-place, ran and opened the window, crammed the snow into his mouth again and again, and then flew back into the stove, drew the hay and straw over the place he entered by, tied the cords, and shut the brass door down on himself. He had brought some big icicles in with him, and by them his thirst was finally, if only temporarily, quenched. Then he sat still in the bottom of the stove, listening intently, wide awake, and once more recovering his natural boldness.

The thought of Dorothea kept nipping his heart and his conscience with a hard squeeze now and then; but he thought to himself, "If I can take her back Hirschvogel, then how pleased she will be, and how little 'Gilda will clap her hands!" He was not at all selfish in his love for Hirschvogel: he wanted it for them all

at home quite as much as for himself. There was at the bottom of his mind a kind of ache of shame that his father—his own father—should have stripped their hearth and sold their honor thus.

A robin had been perched upon a stone griffin sculptured on a house eave near. August had felt for the crumbs of his loaf in his pocket, and had thrown them to the little bird sitting so easily on the frozen snow.

In the darkness where he was he now heard a little song, made faint by the stove-wall and the window glass that was between him and it, but still distinct and exquisitely sweet. It was the robin, singing after feeding on the crumbs. August, as he heard, burst into tears. He thought of Dorothea, who every morning threw out some grain or some bread on the snow before the church. "What use is it going THERE," she said, "if we forget the sweetest creatures God has made?" Poor Dorothea! Poor, good, tender, much- burdened little soul! He thought of her till his tears ran like rain.

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