

GEORG EBERS

MARGERY (GRED): A TALE
OF OLD NUREMBERG.
VOLUME 08

Georg Ebers

**Margery (Gred): A Tale Of
Old Nuremberg. Volume 08**

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CHAPTER XIV

Our good hope of going forth with good-speed into the wide world to risk all for our lover and brother was not to be yet. We were fain to take patience; and if this seemed hard to us maidens, it was even worse for Kubbeling; the man was wont to wander free whither he would, and during these days of tarrying at the forest-lodge, first he lost his mirthful humor, and then he fell sick of a fever. For two long weeks had he to be abed, he, who, as he himself told, had never to this day needed any healing but such as the leech who medicined his beasts could give him. We awaited the tidings of him with much fear; and at this time we likewise knew not what to think of those gentlemen who heretofore had been such steadfast and faithful friends to us, inasmuch as that Doctor Holzschuher gave no sign, and soon after my grand-uncle's burying Uncle Christian and Master Pernhart had set forth for Augsburg on some privy matters of the town council. Yet we could do nought but submit, by reason that we knew that every good citizen thinks of the weal of the Commonwealth before all else.

Even our nearest of kin had laid our concerns on the shelf, while day and night alike it weighed on our souls, and we made ready for a long time to come of want and humble cheer. The Virgin be my witness that at that time I was ready and willing to give up many matters which we were forced to forego; howbeit, we found out that it was easier to eat bread without butter and no flesh meat, than to give up certain other matters. As for my jewels, which Cousin Maud would not sell, but pledged them to a goldsmith, I craved them not. Only a heart with a full great ruby which I had ever worn as being my Hans' first lovetoken, I would indeed have been fain to keep, yet whereas Master Kaden set a high price on the stone I suffered him to break it out, notwithstanding all that Cousin Maud and Ann might say, and kept only the gold case. It was hard likewise to send forth the serving-folk and turn a deaf ear to their lamenting. Most of the men, when they heard how matters stood, would gladly have stayed to serve us for a lesser wage, and each and all went about looking as if the hail had spoilt their harvest; only old Susan held her head higher than ever, by reason that we had chosen her to share our portion during the years of famine. Likewise we were glad to promise the old horse-keeper, who had served our father before us, that we would care for him all his days; he besought me eagerly that I would keep my own Hungarian palfrey, for, to his mind, a damsel of high degree with no saddle nor steed was as a bird that cannot rise on its wings. Howbeit, we found those who were glad to buy the horse, and never shall I forget the hour when for the last time I patted the smooth neck of my Bayard, the gift of my lost lover, and felt his shrewd little head leaning against my own. Uncle Tucher bought him for his daughter Bertha, and it was a comfort to me to think that she was a soft, kind hearted maid, whom I truly loved. All the silver gear likewise, which we had inherited, was pledged for money, and where it lay I knew not; yet of a truth the gifts of God taste better out of a silver spoon than out of a tin one. Cousin Maud, who would have no half measures, carried many matters of small worth to the pawn-broker; yet all this grieved us but lightly, although the sky hung dark over the town, by reason that other events at that time befell which gave us better cheer.

The Magister, as soon as he had tidings of our purpose, came with right good will to offer us his all, and declared his intent to share our simple way of life, and this was no more than we had looked for, albeit we steadfastly purposed only to take from him so much as he might easily make shift to spare. But it was indeed a joyful surprise when, one right dreary day, Heinz Trardorf, Herdegen's best-beloved companion in his youth, who had long kept far from the house, came to speak with us

of Herdegen's concerns. He had now followed his father, who was dead, as master in his trade, and was already so well thought of that the Council had trusted his skilled hands to build a new great organ for the Church of Saint Laurence. I knew full well, to be sure, that when Herdegen had come back from Paris in all his bravery, he had cared but little for Trardorf's fellowship; but I had marked, many a time in church, that his eyes were wont to rest full lovingly on me.

And now, when I gave him my hand and asked him what might be his will, at first he could scarce speak, albeit he was a man of substance to whom all folks would lift their hat. At last he made bold to tell me that he had heard tidings of the sum demanded to ransom Herdegen, and that he, inasmuch as that he dwelt in his own house and that his profits maintained him in more than abundance, could have no greater joy than to pay the moneys he had by inheritance to ransom my brother.

And as the good fellow spoke the tears stood in his eyes, and mine likewise were about to flow; and albeit Cousin Maud here broke in and, to hide how deeply her heart was touched, said, well-nigh harshly, that without doubt the day was not far off when he would have a wife and family, and might rue the deed by which he had parted with his estate, never perchance to see it more, I freely and gladly gave him my hand, and said to him that for my part his offering would be dearest to me of any, and that for sure Herdegen would be of the same mind. And a beam as of sunshine overspread his countenance, and while he shook my hand in silence I could see that he hardly refrained himself from betraying more. After this, I came to know from his good mother that this offer of moneys had cost him a great pang, but only for this cause: that he had loved me from his youth up, and his noble soul forbid him to pay court to me when he had in truth done me so great a service.

Still, and in despite of these gleams of light, I must ever remember those three weeks as a full gloomy and sorrowful time.

Kubbeling's eldest son and his churlish helpmate had fared forth to Venice instead of himself. They might not sail for the land of Egypt, and this chafed Uhlwurm sorely, by reason that he was sure in himself that he, far better than his master or than any man on earth, could do good service there to Ann, on whom his soul was set more than on any other of us.

Towards the end of the third week we rode forth to spend a few days again at the lodge, and there we found Young Kubbeling well nigh healed of his fever, and Eppelein's tongue ready to wag and to tell us of his many adventures without overmuch asking. Howbeit, save what concerned his own mishaps, he had little to say that we knew not already.

The Saracen pirate who had boarded the galleon from Genoa which was carrying him and his lord to Cyprus, had parted him from Herdegen and Sir Franz, and sold him for a slave in Egypt. There had he gone through many fortunes, till at last, in Alexandria, he had one day met Akusch. At that time my faithful squire's father was yet in good estate, and he forthwith bought Eppelein, who was then a chattel of the overseer of the market, to the end that the fellow might help his son in the search for Herdegen. This search they had diligently pursued, and had discovered my brother and Sir Franz together in the armory of the Sultan's Palace, in the fort over against Cairo, whither they had come after they had both worked at the oars in great misery for two years, on board a Saracen galley.

But then Herdegen had made proof, in some jousting among the young Mamelukes, of how well skilled he was with the sword, and thereby he had won such favor that they were fain to deliver sundry letters which he wrote to us, into the care of the Venice consul. Whereas he had no answer he had set it down to our lack of diligence at home, till at last he was put on the right track by Akusch, and it was plainly shown that those letters had never reached us, and that by Ursula's malice. To follow up these matters Akusch had afterwards betaken himself again to Alexandria; notwithstanding by this time his father had fallen on evil days. And behold, on the very evening after their return, as they were passing along by the side of the Venice Fondaco, whither they had gone to see the leech who attended the Consul—having heard that he was a German by birth—they were aware of a loud outcry hard by, and presently beheld a wounded man, whom they forthwith knew for Kunz.

At first they believed that their eyes deceived them; and that it should have been these two, of all men, who found their master's brother lying in his blood, I must ever deem a miracle. To be sure, any man from the West who was fain to seek another in the land of Egypt, must first make enquiry here at the Fondaco.

A few hours later Kunz was in bed and well tended in the house of Akusch's mother, and it was on their return to Cairo, to speak with my eldest brother of these matters, that Eppelein was witness to Ursula's vile betrayal and the vast demand of the Sultan. Then my brother, by the help of some who showed him favor, had that letter conveyed to Akusch of which Eppelein had been robbed hard by Pillenreuth. More than this the good fellow had not to tell.

As I, on my ride home through the wood, turned over in my mind who might be the wise and trusty friend to whom we could confide our case and our fears, if Kubbeling should leave us in the lurch, verily I found no reply. If indeed Cousin Gotz—that wise and steadfast wayfaring man, rich with a thousand experiences of outlandish life—if he were willing to make common cause with his Little Red-riding-hood, and the companion of his youth! But a terrible oath kept him far away, and where in the wide world might he be found?

Ann likewise had much to cause her heaviness, and I thanked the Saints that I was alone with Eppelein when he told me that his dear lord was sorely changed, albeit having seen him only from afar, he could scarce tell me wherein that change lay.

Thus we rode homewards in silence, through the evening dusk, and as we came in sight of the lights of the town all my doubting and wandering fears vanished on a sudden in wonderment as to who should be the first person we might meet within the gate, inasmuch as Cousin Maud had ever set us the unwise example of considering such a meeting as a sign, or token, or Augury.

Now, as soon as we had left the gate behind us, lo, a lantern was lifted, and we saw, by the light twinkling dimly through the horn, instead of old Hans Heimvogel's red, sottish face, a sweet and lovely maiden's; by reason that he had fallen into horrors, imagining that mice were rushing over him, so that his fair granddaughter Maria was doing duty for him. And I greeted her right graciously, inasmuch as Cousin Maud held it to be a good sign when a smiling maid should be the first to meet her as she came into the city gates.

As for Ann, she scarce marked that it was Maria; and when, after we were come home, I spoke of this token of good promise, she asked me how, in these evil days, I could find heart to think of such matters; and she sighed and cried: "Oh, Margery, indeed I am heavy at heart! For three long years have I taken patience and with a right good will. But the end, meseems, is further than ever, and he who should have helped us is disabled or ever he has stirred a finger, and even my lord Cardinal's home-coming is put off, albeit all men know that Herdegen is as a man in a den of lions—and I, my spirit sinks within me. And even my wise grandmother can give me no better counsel than to 'wait patiently' and yet again 'Wait' . . ."

Whereupon Susan, who had taken off from us our wet hoods, broke in with: "Aye, Mistress Ann, and that has ever from the days of Adam and Eve, been the best of all counsel. For life all through is but waiting for the end; and even when we have taken the last Sacrament and our eyes are dim in death then most of all must we take Patience, waiting for that we shall find beyond the grave. Here below! By my soul, I myself grew grey waiting in vain for one who long years ago gave me this ring. Others had better luck; yet if the priest had wed us, would that have made an end of Patience? I trow not! It might have been for weal or it might have been for woe. A wife may go to mass every day in the month. But is that an end of Patience? Will the storks bring her a babe or no? Will it be a boy or a maid? And if the little one should come, after the wife has told her beads till her fingers are sore, what will the waiting babe turn out? Such an one as Junker Herdegen grows up to be the delight of every eye and heart, and if that make less need of Patience meseems we know full well! And Mistress Waldstromer, out in the forest, a lady, she, of stern stuff, she could tell a tale; and I say, Mistress Ann, if old Dame Pernhart's answer sinks into your heart, God's blessing rest on it!—I am

waiting, as you are waiting. We each and all are waiting for one; if by the merciful help of the Saints he ever comes home, yet never dream, Mistress Ann, that Patience will be out of court."

And with such comfort as this the old woman hung our garments to dry while we bowed our heads and went up-stairs.

Up in the guest-chamber we heard loud voices, and as we went in a strange sight met our eyes. Uncle Christian and Doctor Holzscher were sitting face to face with Cousin Maud, and she was laughing so heartily that she could not control herself, but flung up her arms and then dropped them on her knees, for all the world as she had taught us children to play at a game of "Fly away, little birds."

When she marked my presence she forgot to greet me, and cried to me well nigh breathless:

"A drink of wine, Margery, and a morsel of bread. I am ready to split—I shall die of laughing!"

Then, when I heard my good Godfather Christian's hearty laughing, and saw that Master Holzscher had but just ceased, I was fain to laugh likewise, and even Ann, albeit she had but now been so sad, joined in. This lasted a long while till we learned the cause of such unwonted mirth; and this was of such a kind as to afford great comfort and new assurance, and we were bound to crave our good friends' pardon for having deemed them lacking in diligence. Master Holzscher had indeed made the best use of the time to move every well-to-do man in Nuremberg who had known our departed father, and the Abbots of the rich convents, and many more, to give of their substance as they were able, to redeem Herdegen from the power of the heathen; and the other twain had worked wonders likewise, in Augsburg.

But that which had moved Cousin Maud to mirth was that my Uncle Christian had related how that he and Master Pernhart, finding old Tetzl, Ursula's father, at Augsburg, had agreed together to make him pay a share towards Herdegen's ransom; and my godfather's face beamed again now, with contentment in every feature, as he told us by what means he had won the churlish old man over to the good cause.

Whereas the three good gentlemen had considered that all of Jost Tetzl's great possessions must presently fall to his daughter, and that it would be a deed pleasing to God to bring some chastisement on that traitorous quean, they had laid a plot against her father; and it was for that alone that Uncle Christian, who could ill endure the ride in the winter-season, had set forth, with Master Pernhart, for Augsburg. And there he had achieved a rare masterpiece of skill, painting Dame Ursula's reprobate malice in such strong colors to her father that Master Pernhart was in fear lest he should bring upon himself another fit. And he had furthermore sworn to lay the whole matter before the Emperor, with whom, as all men knew, he enjoyed much privilege, inasmuch as he had been as it were his host when his Majesty held his court at Nuremberg. Ursula, to be sure, was no subject now of his gracious Majesty's; yet would he, Christian Pfinzing, know no rest till the Emperor had compelled her father, Jost Tetzl, to cut off from her who had married an Italian, the possessions she counted on from a German city.

Thereupon Pernhart had spoken in calm but weighty words, threatening that his brother, the Cardinal, would visit the heaviest wrath of the Pope on the old man and his daughter, unless he were ready and willing to make amends and atonement for his child's accursed sin, whereby a Christian man had fallen into the hands of the godless heathen. And when at last they had conquered the churlish old man's hardness of heart and stiff-necked malice, they drove him to a strange bargain. Old Tetzl was steadfast in his intention to give up as little as he might of his daughter's inheritance, while his tormentors raised their demands, and claimed a hundred gulden and a hundred gulden more, up to many hundreds, which Tetzl was forced to yield; till at last he gave his bond, signed and sealed, to renounce all his daughter's estate, and to add thereto two thousand gulden of his own moneys, and to hold the sum in readiness to ransom Herdegen.

Thus, at one stroke, all our fears touching the moneys were at an end; and when the notary showed us the parchment roll on which each one had set down the sum he would give, we were struck

dumb; and when we reckoned it all together, the sum was far greater than that which had cost us so many sleepless nights.

By this time we scarce could read for tears, and our souls were so moved to thankfulness as we marked the large sums set forth against the names of the noble families and of the convent treasurers, that we had never felt so great a love for our good city and the dear, staunch friends who dwelt therein. Nay, and many simple folk had promised to pay somewhat of their modest store; and although my soul overflowed with thankful joy over the great sums to be given by our kith and kin, I rejoiced no less over the five pounds of farthings promised by a cordwainer, whom we had holpen some years ago when he had been sick and in debt.

And then was there hearty embracing and kissing, and the men, as was befitting after a deed so well done, craved to drink. Cousin Maud hastened with all zeal to do honor to friends and guests so dear; but as she reached the door she stood still as in doubt, and signed to me so that I perceived that somewhat had gone wrong. And so indeed it had, inasmuch as our silver vessels, down to the very least cup, had gone to the silversmith in pledge, and Uncle Tucher, the Councillor, who had bought my palfrey, had also been fain to have all our old wine, whereof many goodly rows of casks, and jars sealed with pitch, lay in our cellars. A few hams still hung in the chimney by good luck; and there were chickens and eggs in plenty; but of all else little enough, even of butter. When Cousin Maud set forth all this with a right lamentable face I could not refrain my mirth, and I promised her that if she could send up a few dainty dishes from the kitchen, I would make shift to please our beloved guests. That as for the wine, I would take that upon myself, and no Emperor need be ashamed of our Venice glasses. And herewith I sent her down stairs; but I then frankly confessed to our friends how matters stood; and when they had heard me, now laughing heartily, and now in amazement and shaking their heads, I enquired of Doctor Holzschuher, as a man of law, how I might deal with the wine, inasmuch as it had already found a purchaser? Hereupon arose much jocose argument and discussion, and at last the learned notary and doctor of laws declared that he held it to be his duty, as adviser to the Council and administrator of the Schopper estates, to taste and prove with all due caution whether the price promised by Tucher, and not yet paid down, were not all too little for the liquor, inasmuch as his clients, being but women-folk, had no skill in the good gifts of Bacchus, and could not know their value. To abstain from such testing he held would be a breach of duty, and whereas he did not trust his own skill alone, he must call upon Master Christian Pfinzing as a man of ripe experience, and Master Councillor Pernhart, who, as brother to a great prelate, had doubtless drunk much good liquor, in due form to proceed with him to the Schoppers' cellar, and there to mark those vessels or jars out of which the wine should be drawn for the testing. Moreover, to satisfy all the requirements of the case, a serving-man should be sent to call upon Master Tucher, as the purchaser, to be present in his own person at the ceremony. Inasmuch as it yet lacked two hours of midnight, he would, without doubt, be found in the gentlemen's tavern; and it might be enjoined on the messenger to add, that if Master Tucher were fain to bring with him one skilled in such matters to bear him witness on his part, such an one would be made right welcome at the Schopperhof.

Thus within a quarter of an hour the three worthy gentlemen, and Ann and I, were seated with the winejars before us, they having chosen for themselves of the best our cellar could afford; and when the meats which Cousin Maud sent up were set on the table, albeit there were but earthen plates and crocks, and no silver glittered on the snow-white cloth, yet God's good gifts lacked not their savor.

And presently Uncle Tucher came in, and with him, as his skilled witness, old Master Loffelholz; and when they likewise had sat down with us, and when we had bidden the Magister to join us, there was such hearty and joyful emptying of glasses and friendly discourse that Master Tucher declared that the happy spirit of our father, the singer, still dwelt within our walls. Howbeit, Ann had to do her duty as watcher over my uncle more often that evening than for a long time past.

In the course of that right joyful supper many weighty matters were discussed, and the gentlemen, meseemed, were greatly more troubled than Cousin Maud or I that we should so hastily

have parted with sundry matters which should not be lacking in a house of good family, but which, as we had learned by experience, were in no wise needful in life. And many a jesting word was spoken concerning our poor platters and dishes, and tin spoons, and empty stables. The bargain over the wine was declared to be null and void, and my cousin took heart to assure the gentlemen, in right seemly speech, that now again she was happy, when she knew that what she had set before such worshipful and welcome guests was indeed our own, and not another's.

By the time of their departing it was nearer to cockcrow than to midnight; and when, on the morrow, I went into the chamber in the morning, to look forth into the street, the sun was shining brightly in a blue sky. I minded me with silent thanksgiving of all the good cheer yestereve had brought us, and of the wisdom and faithfulness of our good friends. Many a wise and a witty word uttered over their wine came back to me then; and I was wondering to myself what new plot had been brewing between my godfather and Uncle Tucher, whereas I had marked them laying their heads together, when behold, the stable-lad from the Tuchers' coming down the street, leading my own dear bayhorse; and as I saw him closer I beheld that his mane and flowing tail were plaited up with fine red ribbons. He stood still in front of our door and, when I flew down to greet the faithful beast, the lad gave me a letter wherein nought was written save these Latin words in large letters: "AMICITIA FIDEI" which is to say: "Friendship to Fidelity."

Thus the pinch and sacrifice were on a sudden ended; and albeit a snow- storm ere long came down on us, yet the sunshine in my bosom was still as bright as though Spring had dawned there in the December season, and all care and fear were banished.

CHAPTER XV

It was noon. Master Peter could not come to table for a bad headache, and Cousin Maud scarce opened her lips. The sudden turn of matters had upset her balance, and so dazed her brain that she would answer at cross- purposes, and had ordered so many pats of butter from the farm wench as though she had cakes to bake for a whole convent full of sisters. Likewise a strange unrest kept her moving to and fro, and this was beginning to come upon me likewise, by reason that Ann came not, albeit in the morning she had promised to be here again at noon.

I was about to make ready to seek her, when I was stopped, first by a message from the forest bidding me, albeit I had scarce left the lodge, to return thither no later than on the morrow; and next by an unlooked- for guest, who had for long indeed been lost to sight. This was Lorenz Abenberger, the apothecary's son, erewhile a companion of Herdegen in his youth, and he who, after he had beguiled the other pueri to dig for treasure, had been turned out of the school. Since those days, when likewise he had cast nativities for us maidens, and many a time amused us with his magic arts, we had no knowledge of him but that, after his parents' death, he had ceased to ply the apothecary's trade, and had given himself up to the study of Alchemy. If folks spoke truth he had already discovered the philosopher's stone, or was nigh to doing so: but notwithstanding that many learned men, and among them the Magister had assured me, that such a thing was by no means beyond the skill of man, Lorenz Abenberger for certain had not attained his end, inasmuch as that, when he appeared in my presence, his aspect was rather that of a beggar than of a potent wise-head at whose behest lead and copper are transmuted into gold.

He had heard of the great sum needed for Herdegen's ransom, and he now came to assure me of the warm friendship he had ever cherished for his old school-mate, and that he had it in his power to create the means of releasing him from bondage. Then, marking that I gazed pitifully on his thread-bare, meagre, and by no means clean raiment, whence there came a sour, drug-like smell, he broke into a foul laugh and said that, to be sure, it would seem strange that so beggarly a figure should make bold to promise so great a treasure; howbeit, he stood to his word. So sure as night follows day, he could reach the goal for which he had consumed all his father's and mother's estate, nay all he had in the world, if he might but once have three pounds of pure gold to do whatsoever he would withal. If I would yield to his entreaties and be moved to grant what he needed, he was ready to pledge his body and soul to death and damnation, and sign the bond with his heart's blood, if by the end of the thirteenth day he had not found the red Lion, and through its aid 'Aurum potabile' and the panacea against every evil of body or soul. This would likewise give him the power of turning every mineral, even the most worthless, into pure gold, as easily as I might turn my spinning-wheel or say a Paternoster.

All this he poured forth with rolling eyes and panting breath, and that he spoke every word in sacred earnest none could doubt; and indeed the fervent, eager longing which appealed to my compassion and charity from every fibre of his being, might have moved me to bestow on him that which he craved, if I had possessed such wealth; but, as it was, I was forced to say him nay; and whereas at this minute Susan came in with the tidings that a man had come from the Pernharts', bidding me go forthwith to Ann, I threw over me my cloak and gave him to understand how matters stood with me, bidding him farewell with all gentleness yet of set purpose.

The blood mounted into his pale cheeks; he came close up to me, and set his teeth, and said wrathfully that I must and I should save him, and with him my own brother, if I did but clearly understand the sense and purpose of his entreaty. And he began with a flood of speech to tell me how near he was to his end, with a number of outlandish, magical words such as "the great Magisterium," "the Red Lion," "the Red Tincture," and the like, till meseemed my brain reeled with the sinful gibberish; notwithstanding, to this day I believe that in all truth he was nigh attaining his purpose;

and he might have done so at last were it not that, a short space after this, he was choked by the vapor from an alembic which burst.

But whence might I at that day procure the means to succor him?

Again and again I strove to check his fiery zeal, but in vain, till I told him plainly that I had not at my command three pounds of brass farthings, much less three pounds of gold, and that he must apply elsewhere and no longer keep me tarrying.

And I gave him my hand to bid him farewell; howbeit he seized it with both of his, and wrung and shook my arm till it ached; and being beside him self with rage, he admonished me with threatening words and gestures not to ruin his life's work, and him, and those dear to me, by my base avarice. When I had got over my first fear I snatched myself free from the miserable little man, and turned my back upon him; but he leaped in front of me, spread forth his arms to bar the doorway, and shrieked, foaming with fury:

"Away, away, down to the depths! Away with us all! Woe unto thee, mean, blind fool that thou art! Woe unto us all! Take away that hand! Verily even if my mouth were gagged, yet shouldst thou hear what is coming upon thee and all thy race! I could have hindered it, and I would have hindered it; but now it shall be fulfilled. Oh, it was not for nothing that we were young together! I read thy horoscope and that arrogant brawler thy brother's long ago, and when I interpret it to thee, if the blood does not curdle in thy veins. . . ."

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