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My Lady Rotha: A Romance

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
HERITZBURG

I never saw anything more remarkable than the change which the death of my lady's uncle, Count Tilly, in the spring of 1632, worked at Heritzburg. Until the day when that news reached us, we went on in our quiet corner as if there were no war. We heard, and some of us believed, that the Palatine Elector, a good Calvinist like ourselves, had made himself King of Bohemia in the Emperor's teeth; and shortly afterwards-which we were much more ready to believe-that he was footing it among the Dutchmen. We heard that the King of Denmark had taken up his cause, but taken little by the motion; and then that the King of Sweden had made it his own. But these things affected us little: they were like the pattering of the storm to a man hugging himself by the fireside. Through all we lay snug and warm, and kept Christmas and drank the Emperor's health. Even the great sack of Magdeburg, which was such an event as the world, I believe, will never see again, moved us less to fear than to pity; though the city lies something less than fifty leagues northeast of

us. The reason of this I am going to tell you.

Our town stands, as all men know, in a nook of the Thuringian Forest, facing south and west towards Hesse, of which my Lady Rotha, Countess of Heritzburg, holds it, though all the land about is Saxon, belonging either to Coburg, or Weimar, or Altenburg, or the upper Duchy. On the north and east the forest rises in rolling black ridges, with a grey crag shooting up spire-like here and there; so that from this quarter it was not wonderful that no sound of war reached us. Toward the south and west, where is the mouth of the valley, and whither our people point when they talk of the world, a spur of the mountain runs down on either side to the Werra, which used to be crossed at this point by a wooden bridge. But this bridge was swept away by floods in the winter of 1624, and never repaired as long as the war lasted. Henceforth to come to Heritzburg travellers had to cross in old Joachim's boat, or if the river was very low, tuck up and take the chances. Unless they came by forest paths over the mountains.

Such a position favoured peace. Our friends could not easily trouble us; our allies were under no temptation to quarter troops upon us. For our enemies, we feared them even less. Against them we had a rampart higher than the mountains and wider than the Werra, in the name of Tilly. In those days the name of the great Walloon, victor in thirty fights, was a word to conjure with from the Tyrol to the Elbe. Mothers used it to scare their children, priests to blast their foes. His courage, his cruelty, and his zeal for the Roman Catholic Church combined to make him

the terror of the Protestants, while his strange personality and mis-shapen form gave rise to a thousand legends, which men still tell by the fireside.

I think I see him now-as I did see him thrice in his lifetime-a meagre dwarfish man with a long face like a horse's face, and large whiskers. He dressed always in green satin, and wore a small high-peaked hat on his huge wrinkled forehead. A red feather drooped from it, and reached to his waist. At first sight one took him for a natural; for one of those strange monstrosities which princes keep to make them sport; but a single glance from his eyes sent simple men to their prayers, and cowed alike plain burgher and wild Croat. Few loved him, all feared him. I have heard it said that he had no shadow, but I can testify of my own knowledge and not merely for the honour of the family that this was false.

He was brother to my lady's mother, the Countess Juliana. At the time of the match my late lord was thought to have disparaged his blood by mating with a Flemish lady of no more than gentle family. But as Count Tilly rose in the world first to be commander of the Bavarian armies and later to be Generalissimo of the forces of the Empire and a knight of the Golden Fleece, we heard less and less of this. The sneer lost its force until we became glad, Calvinists though we were, to lie secure under his shadow; and even felt a shamed pride in his prowess.

When my lord died, early in the war, leaving the county of Heritzburg to his only child, the protection we derived in this way

grew more and more valuable. We of Heritzburg, and we only, lost nothing by the war, except a parcel of idle fellows, of whom more hereafter. Our cows came lowing to their stalls, our corn full weight to the granary. We slept more safely under the distaff than others under the sword; and all because my lady had the right to wear among her sixteen quarterings the coat of Tilly.

Some I know, but only since his death, have cried shame on us for accepting his protection. They profess to think that we should have shut our gates on the Butcher of Magdeburg, and bidden him do his worst. They say that the spirit of the old Protestants is dead within us, and that it is no wonder the cause lies languishing and Swedes alone fight single-eyed. But those who say these things have seldom, I notice, corn or cows: and moreover, as I have hinted, they kept a very still tongue while Tilly lived.

There is our late Burgomaster, Hofman, for instance, he is given to talking after that fashion; and, it is true, he has plenty, though not so much since my lady fined him. But I well remember the last time Tilly visited us. It was after the fall of Magdeburg, and there was a shadow on his grim countenance, which men said never left it again until the day when the cannon-shot struck him in the ford of the Lech, and they carried him to Ingolstadt to die. As he rode under the arch by the Red Hart people looked strangely at him-for it was difficult to forget what he had done-as if, but for the Croats in the camp across the river, they would have torn him from his horse. But who, I pray you, so polite that day as Master Hofman? Who but he was first to

hold the stirrup and cry, Hail? It was 'My Lord Count' this, and 'My Lord Count' that, until the door closed on the crooked little figure and the great gold spurs. And then it was the same with the captain of the escort. Faugh! I grow sick when I think of such men, and know that they were the first to turn round and make trouble when the time came, and the old grey wolf was dead. For my part I have always been my lady's man since I came out of the forest to serve her. It was enough for me that the Count was her guest and of her kin. But for flattering him and putting myself forward to do him honour, I left that to the Hofmans.

However, the gloom we saw on Tilly's face proved truly to be the shadow of coming misfortune; for three weeks after he left us, was fought the great battle of Breitenfeld. Men say that the energy and decision he had shown all his life forsook him there; that he hesitated and suffered himself to be led by others; and that so it was from the day of Magdeburg to his death. This may be true, I think, for he had the blood of women and children on his head; or it may be that at last he met a foeman worthy of his steel. But in either case the news of the Swede's victory rang through North Germany like a trumpet call. It broke with startling abruptness the spell of victory which had hitherto-for thirteen long years-graced the Emperor's flag and the Roman Church. In Hesse, to the west of us, where the Landgrave William had been the first of all German Princes to throw in his lot with the Swedes and defy the Emperor, it awoke such a shout of jubilation and vengeance as crossed even

the Werra; while from the Saxon lands to the east of us, which this victory saved from spoliation, and punishment, came an answering cry of thankfulness and joy. Even in Heritzburg it stirred our blood. It roused new thoughts and new ambitions. We were Protestants; we were of the north. Those who had fought and won were our brethren.

And this was right. Nor for a time did I see anything wrong or any sign of mischief brewing; though tongues in the town wagged more freely, as the cloud of war rolled ever southward and away from us. But six months later the news of Count Tilly's death reached us. Then, or it might be a fortnight afterwards-so long I think respect for my lady's loss and the new hatchment restrained the good-for-naughts-the trouble began. How it arose, and what shape it took, and how I came athwart it, I am going to tell you without further preface.

It was about the third Monday in May of that year, 1632. A broken lock in one of the rooms at the castle had baffled the skill of our smith, and about nightfall, thinking to take a cup of beer at the Red Hart on my way back, I went down to Peter the locksmith's in the town. His forge stands in the winding lane, which joins the High Street at the Red Hart, after running half round the town inside the wall; so that one errand was a fair excuse for the other. When I had given him his order and come out again, I found that what with the darkness of the lane and the blaze of his fire which had got into my eyes, I could not see a yard before me. A little fine rain was falling with a chilly east

wind, and the town seemed dead. The pavement felt greasy under foot, and gave out a rank smell. However, I thought of the cheery kitchen at the Red Hart and stumbled along as fast as I could, until turning a corner I came in sight of the lanthorn which hangs over the entrance to the lane.

I saw it, but short of it, something took and held my eye: a warm stream of light, which shone across the path, and fell brightly on the rough surface of the town-wall. It came from a small window on my left. I had to pass close beside this window, and out of curiosity I looked in. What I saw was so surprising that I stopped to look again.

The room inside was low and small and bare, with an earthen floor and no fireplace. On a ragged pallet in one corner lay an elderly man, to whose wasted face and pallid cheeks a long white moustache, which strayed over the coverlet, gave an air of incongruous fierceness. His bright eyes were fixed on the door as if he listened. A child, three or four years old, sat on the floor beside him, playing with a yellow cat.

It was neither of these figures, however, which held my gaze, but that of a young girl who knelt on the floor near the head of the bed. A little crucifix stood propped against the wall before her, and she had a string of beads in her hands. Her face was turned from me, but I felt that her lips moved. I had never seen a Romanist at prayer before, and I lingered a moment, thinking in the first place that she would have done better had she swung the shutter against the window; and in the next, that with her

dark hair hanging about her neck and her head bent devoutly, she looked so weak and fragile that the stoutest Protestant could not have found it in his heart to harm her.

Suddenly a noise, which dully reached me where I stood outside the casement, caused her to start in alarm, and turn her head. At the same moment the cat sprang away affrighted, and the man on the bed stirred and tried to rise. This breaking the spell, I stole quietly away and went round the corner to the door of the inn.

Though I had never considered the girl closely before, I knew who she was. Some eight months earlier, while Tilly, hard pressed by the King of Sweden, still stood at bay, keeping down Saxony with one hand, and Hesse with the other, the man on the pallet, Stephen Wort, a sergeant of jagers, had been wounded in a skirmish beyond the river. Why Tilly, who was used to seeing men die round him like flies in winter, gave a second thought to this man more than to others, I cannot say. But for some reason, when he visited us before Breitenfeld, he brought the wounded sergeant in his train, and when he went left him at the inn. Some said that the man had saved his life, others that the two were born on the same day and shared the same horoscope. More probably Tilly knew nothing of the man, and the captain of the escort was the active party. I imagine he had a kindness for Wort, and knowing that outside our little valley a wounded man of Tilly's army would find as short shrift as a hamstrung wolf, took occasion to leave him with us.

I thought of all this as I stood fumbling about the door for the great bell. The times were such that even inns shut their doors at night, and I had to wait and blow on my fingers-for no wind is colder than a May wind-until I was admitted. Inside, however, the blazing fire and cheerful kitchen with its show of gleaming pewter, and its great polished settles winking solemnly in the heat, made amends for all. I forgot the wounded man and his daughter and the fog outside. There were eight or nine men present, among them Hofman, who was then Burgomaster, Dietz, the town minister, and Klink our host.

They were people I met every day, and sometimes more than once a day, and they greeted me with a silent nod. The lad who waited brought me a cup of beer, and I said that the night was cold for the time of year. Some one assented, but the company in general sat silent, sagely sucking their lips, or exchanging glances which seemed to indicate a secret understanding.

I was not slow to see that this had to do with me and that my entrance had cut short some jest or story. I waited patiently to learn what it was, and presently I was enlightened. After a few minutes Klink the host rose from his seat. First looking from one to another of his neighbours, as if to assure himself of their sympathy, he stole quietly across the kitchen to a door which stood in one corner. Here he paused a moment listening, and then on a sudden struck the door a couple of blows, which made the pewters ring again.

'Hi! Within there!' he cried in his great voice. Are you

packing? Are you packing, wench? Because out you go to-morrow, pack or no pack! Out you go, do you hear?'

He stood a moment waiting for an answer, but seemed to get none; on which he came back to his seat, and chuckling fatly to himself, looked round on his neighbours for applause. One winked and another rubbed his calves. The greater number eyed the fire with a sly smile. For my part I was slow of apprehension. I did not understand but waited to hear more.

For five minutes we all sat silent, sucking our lips. Then Klink rose again with a knowing look, and crossed the kitchen on tiptoe with the same parade of caution as before. Bang!' He struck the door until it rattled on its hinges.

'Hi! You there!' he thundered. 'Do you hear, you jade? Are you packing? Are you packing, I say? Because pack or no pack, to-morrow you go! I am a man of my word.'

He did not wait this time for an answer, but came back to us with a self-satisfied grin on his face. He drank some beer-he was a big ponderous man with a red face and small pig's eyes-and pointed over his shoulders with the cup. 'Eh?' he said, raising his eye-brows.

'Good!' a man growled who sat opposite to him.

'Quite right!' said a second in the same tone. 'Popish baggage!'

Hofman said nothing, but nodded, with a sly glance at me. Dietz the Minister nodded curtly also, and looked hard at the fire. The rest laughed.

For my part I felt very little like laughing. When I considered

that this clumsy jest was being played at the expense of the poor girl, whom I had seen at her prayers, and that likely enough it was being played for the tenth time-when I reflected that these heavy fellows were sitting at their ease by this great fire watching the logs blaze and the ruddy light flicker up the chimney, while she sat in cold and discomfort, fearing every sound and trembling at every whisper, I could have found it in my heart to get up and say what I thought of it. And my speech would have astonished them. But I remembered, in time, that least said is soonest mended, and that after all words break no bones, and I did no more than sniff and shrug my shoulders.

Klink, however, chose to take offence in his stupid fashion. 'Eh?' he said. 'You are of another mind, Master Schwartz?'

'What is the good of talking like that,' I said, 'when you do not mean it?'

He puffed himself out, and after staring at me for a time, answered slowly: 'But what if I do mean it, Master Steward? What if I do mean it?'

'You don't,' I said. 'The man pays his way.'

I thought to end the matter with that. I soon found that it was not to be shelved so easily. For a moment indeed no one answered me. We are a slow speaking race, and love to have time to think. A minute had not elapsed, however, before one of the men who had spoken earlier took up the cudgels. 'Ay, he pays his way,' he said, thrusting his head forward. 'He pays his way, master; but how? Tell me that.'

I did not answer him.

'Out of the peasant's pocket!' the fellow replied slowly. 'Out of the plunder and booty of Magdeburg. With blood-money, master.'

'I ask no more than to meet one of his kind in the fields,' the man sitting next him, who had also spoken before, chimed in. 'With no one looking on, master. There would be one less wolf in the world then, I will answer for that. He pays his way? Oh, yes, he pays it here.'

I thought a shrug of the shoulders a sufficient answer. These two belonged to the company my lady had raised in the preceding year to serve with the Landgrave according to her tenure. They had come back to the town a week before this with money to spend; some people saying that they had deserted, and some that they had returned to raise volunteers. Either way I was not surprised to find them a little bit above themselves; for foreign service spoils the best, and these had never been anything but loiterers and vagrants, whom it angered me to see on a bench cheek by jowl with the Burgomaster. I thought to treat them with silent contempt, but I soon found that they did not stand alone.

The Minister was the first to come to their support. 'You forget that these people are Papists, Master Schwartz. Rank Roman Papists,' he said.

'So was Tilly!' I retorted, stung to anger. 'Yet you managed to do with him.'

'That was different,' he answered sourly; but he winced.

Then Hofman began on me. 'You see, Master Steward,' he said slowly, 'we are a Protestant town-we are a Protestant town. And it ill beseems us-it ill beseems us to harbour Papists. I have thought over that a long while. And now I think it is time to rid ourselves of them-to abate the nuisance in fact. You see we are a Protestant town, Master Schwartz. You forget that.'

'Then were we not a Protestant town,' I cried, jumping up in a rage, and forgetting all my discretion, 'when we entertained Count Tilly? When you held his stirrup, Burgomaster? and you, Master Dietz, uncovered to him? Were not these people Papists when they came here, and when you received them? But I will tell you what it is,' I continued, looking round scornfully, and giving my anger vent, for such meanness disgusted me. 'When there was a Bavarian army across the river, and you could get anything out of Tilly, you were ready to oblige him, and clean his boots. You could take in Romanists then, but now that he is dead and your side is uppermost, you grow scrupulous, Pah! I am ashamed of you! You are only fit to bully children and girls, and such like!' and I turned away to take up my iron-shod staff.

They were all very red in the face by this time, and the two soldiers were on their feet. But the Burgomaster restrained them. 'Fine words!' he said, puffing out his cheeks-'fine words! Dare say the girl can hear him. But let him be, let him be-let him have his say!'

'There is some else will have a say in the matter, Master Hofman!' I retorted warmly, as I turned to the door, 'and that is

my lady. I would advise you to think twice before you act. That is all!'

'Hoop-de-doo-dem-doo!' cried one in derision, and others echoed it. But I did not stay to hear; I turned a deaf ear to the uproar, wherein all seemed to be crying after me at once, and shrugging my shoulders I opened the door and went out.

The sudden change from the warm noisy kitchen to the cold night air sobered me in a moment. As I climbed the dark slippery street which rises to the foot of the castle steps, I began to wish that I had let the matter be. After all, what call had I to interfere, and make bad blood between myself and my neighbours? It was no business of mine. The three were Romanists. Doubtless the man had robbed and hectored in his time, and while his hand was strong; and now he suffered as others had suffered.

It was ten chances to one the Burgomaster would carry the matter to my lady in some shape or other, and the minister would back him up, and I should be reprimanded; or if the Countess saw with my eyes, and sent them off with a flea in their ears, then we should have all the rabble of the town who were at Klink's beck and call, going up and down making mischief, and crying, 'No Popery!' Either way I foresaw trouble, and wished that I had let the matter be, or better still had kept away that night from the Red Hart.

But then on a sudden there rose before me, as plainly as if I had still been looking through the window, a vision of the half-lit room looking on the lane, with the sick man on the pallet, and

the slender figure kneeling beside the bed. I saw the cat leap, saw again the girl's frightened gesture as she turned towards the door, and I grew almost as hot as I had been in the kitchen. 'The cowards!' I muttered-'the cowards! But I will be beforehand with them. I will go to my lady early and tell her all.'

You see I had my misgivings, but I little thought what that evening was really to bring forth, or that I had done that in the Red Hart kitchen which would alter all my life, and all my lady's life; and spreading still, as a little crack in ice will spread from bank to bank, would leave scarce a man in Heritzburg unchanged, and scarce a woman's fate untouched.

CHAPTER II.
THE COUNTESS ROTHA

My Lady Rotha, Countess of Heritzburg in her own right, was at this time twenty-five years old and unmarried. Her maiden state, which seems to call for explanation, I attribute to two things. Partly to the influence of her friend and companion Fraulein Anna Max of Utrecht, who was reputed in the castle to know seven languages, and to consider marriage a sacrifice; and partly to the Countess's own disposition, which led her to set a high value on the power and possessions that had descended to her from her father. Count Tilly's protection, which had exempted Heritzburg from the evils of the war, had rendered the support of a husband less necessary; and so she had been left to follow her own will in the matter, and was now little likely to surrender her independence unless her heart went with the gift.

Not that suitors were lacking, for my lady, besides her wealth, was possessed of the handsomest figure in the world, with beautiful features, and the most gracious and winning address ever known. I remember as if it were yesterday Prince Albert of Rammingen, a great match but an old man. He came in his chariot with a numerous retinue, and stayed long, taking it very hardly that my lady was not to be won; but after a while he went. His place was taken by Count Frederick, a brother of the

Margrave of Anspach, a young gentleman who had received his education in France, and was full of airs and graces, going sober to bed every night, and speaking German with a French accent. Him my lady soon sent about his business. The next was a more famous man, Count Thurn of Bohemia, he who began the war by throwing Slawata and Martinitz out of window in Prague, in '19, and paid for it by fifteen years of exile. He wore such an air of mystery, and had such tales to tell of flight and battle and hairbreadth escapes, that he was scarcely less an object of curiosity in the town than Tilly himself; but he knelt in vain. And in fine so it was with them all. My lady would have none of them, but kept her maiden state and governed Heritzburg and saw the years go by, content to all appearance with Fraulein Anna and her talk, which was all of Voetius and Beza and scores of other learned men, whose names I could never remember from one hour to another.

It was my duty to wait upon her every day after morning service, and receive her orders, and inform her of anything which I thought she ought to know. At that hour she was to be found in her parlour, a long room on the first floor of the castle, lighted by three deeply-recessed windows and hung with old tapestry worked by her great-grandmother in the dark days of the Emperor Charles, when the Count of Heritzburg shared the imprisonment of the good Landgrave of Hesse. A screen stood a little way within the door, and behind this it was my business to wait, until I was called.

On this morning, however, I had no patience to wait, and I made myself so objectionable by my constant coughing that at last she cried, with a cheerful laugh, 'What is it, Martin? Come and tell me. Has there been a fire in the forest? But it is not the right time of year for that.'

'No, my lady,' I said, going forward. Then out of shyness or sheer contradictoriness I found myself giving her the usual report of this and that and the other, but never a word of what was in my mind. She sat, according to her custom in summer, in the recess of the farthest window, while Fraulein Anna occupied a stool placed before a reading-desk. Behind the two the great window gave upon the valley. By merely turning the head either of them could look over the red roofs of Heritzburg to the green plain, which here was tolerably wide, and beyond that again to the dark line of forest, which in spring and autumn showed as blue to the eye as thick wood smoke.

While I spoke my lady toyed with a book she had been reading, and Fraulein Anna turned over the pages on the desk with an impatient hand, sometimes looking at my lady and sometimes tapping with her foot on the floor. She was plump and fair and short, dressing plainly, and always looking into the distance; whether because she thought much and on deep matters, or because, as the Countess's woman once told me, she could see nothing beyond the length of her arm, I cannot say. When I had finished my report, and paused, she looked up at my lady and said, 'Now, Rotha, are you ready?'

'Not quite, Anna,' my lady answered, smiling. 'Martin has not done yet.'

'He tells in ten minutes what another would in five,' Fraulein said crossly. 'But to finish?'

'Yes, Martin, what is it?' my lady assented. 'We have eaten all the pastry. The meat I am sure is yet to come.'

I saw that there was nothing else for it, and after all it was what I had come to do. 'Your excellency knows the Bavarian soldier and his daughter, who have been lodging these six months past at the Red Hart?' I said.

'To be sure.'

'Klink talks of turning them out,' I continued, feeling my face grow red I scarcely knew why.

'Is their money at an end?' the Countess asked shrewdly. She was a great woman of business.

'No,' I answered, 'but I dare say it is low.'

'Then what is the matter?' my lady continued, looking at me somewhat curiously.

'He says that they are Papists,' I answered. 'And it is true, as your excellency knows, but it is not for him to say it. The man will not be safe for an hour outside the walls, nor the girl much longer. And there is a small child besides. And they have no where else to go.'

My lady's face grew grave while I spoke. When I stopped she rose and stood fronting me, tapping on the reading-desk with her fingers. 'This must not be allowed, Martin,' she said firmly. 'You

were right to tell me.'

'Master Hofman and the Minister-'

'Yes,' she interposed, nodding quickly. 'Go to them. They will see Klink, and-'

'They are just pushing him on,' I said, with a groan.

'What!' she cried; and I remember to this day how her grey eyes flashed and how she threw back her head in generous amazement. 'Do you mean to say that this is being done in spite, Martin? That after escaping all the perils of this wretched war these men are so thankless as to turn on the first scape-goat that falls into their hands? It is not possible!'

'It looks like it, my lady,' I muttered, wondering whether I had not perhaps carried the matter too far.

'No, no,' she said, shaking her head, 'you must have made a mistake; but go to Klink. Go to Klink and tell him from me to keep the man for a week at least. I will be answerable for the cost, and we can consider in the meantime what to do. My cousin the Waldgrave Rupert visits me in a day or two, and I will consult him.'

Still I did not like to go without giving her a hint that she might meet with opposition, and I hesitated, considering how I might warn her without causing needless alarm or seeming to presume. Fraulein Anna, who had listened throughout with the greatest impatience, took advantage of the pause to interfere. 'Come, Rotha,' she said. 'Enough trifling. Let us go back to Voetius and our day's work.'

'My dear,' the Countess answered somewhat coldly, 'this is my day's work. I am trying to do it.'

'Your work is to improve and store your mind,' Fraulein Anna retorted with peevishness.

'True,' my lady said quietly; 'but for a purpose.'

'There can be no purpose higher than the acquirement of philosophy-and, religion,' Fraulein Anna said. Her last words sounded like an afterthought.

My lady shook her head. 'The duty of a Princess is to govern,' she said.

'How can she govern unless she has prepared her mind by study and thought?' Fraulein Anna asked triumphantly.

'I agree within limits,' my lady answered. 'But-'

'There is no *but!* Nor are there any limits that I see!' the other rejoined eagerly. 'Let me read to you out of Voetius himself. In his maxims-'

'Not this minute,' the Countess answered firmly. And thereby she interrupted not Fraulein Anna alone but a calculation on which, without any light from Voetius, I was engaged; namely, how long it would take a man to mow an acre of ground if he spent all his time in sharpening his scythe! Low matters of that kind however have nothing in common with philosophy I suppose; and my lady's voice soon brought me back to the point. 'What is it you want to say, Martin?' she asked. 'I see that you have something still on your mind.'

'I wish your excellency to be aware that there may be a good

deal of feeling in the town on this matter,' I said.

'You mean that I may make myself unpopular,' she answered.

That was what I did mean-that at the least. And I bowed.

My lady shook her head with a grave smile. 'I might give you an answer from Voetius, Martin,' she said; 'that they who govern are created to protect the weak against the strong. And if not, *cui bono?* But that, you may not understand. Shall I say then instead that I, and not Hofman or Dietz, am Countess of Heritzburg.'

'My lady,' I cried-and I could have knelt before her-'that is answer enough for me!'

'Then go,' she said, her face bright, 'and do as I told you.'

She turned away, and I made my reverence and went out and down the stairs and through the great court with my head high and my heart high also. I might not understand Voetius; but I understood that my lady was one, who in face of all and in spite of all, come Hofman or Dietz, come peace or war, would not blench, but stand by the right! And it did me good. He is a bad horse that will not jump when his rider's heart is right, and a bad servant that will not follow when his master goes before! I hummed a tune, I rattled my staff on the stones. I said to myself it was a thousand pities so gallant a spirit should be wasted on a woman: and then again I fancied that I could not have served a man as I knew I could and would serve her should time and the call ever put me to the test.

The castle at Heritzburg, rising abruptly above the roofs of the houses, is accessible from the town by a flight of steps cut in

the rock. On the other three sides the knob on which it stands is separated from the wooded hills to which it belongs by a narrow ravine, crossed in one place by a light horse-bridge made in modern days. This forms the chief entrance to the castle, but the road which leads to it from the town goes so far round that it is seldom used, the flight of steps I have mentioned leading at once and more conveniently from the end of the High Street. Half way down the High Street on the right hand side is the Market-place, a small paved square, shaded by tall wooden houses, and having a carved stone pump in the middle. A hundred paces beyond this on the same side is the Red Hart, standing just within the West Gate.

From one end of the town to the other is scarcely a step, and I was at the inn before the Countess's voice had ceased to sound in my ears. The door stood open, and I went in, expecting to find the kitchen empty or nearly so at that hour of the day. To my surprise, I found at least a dozen people in it, with as much noise and excitement going forward as if the yearly fair had been in progress. For a moment I was not observed. I had time to see who were present-Klink, the two soldiers who had put themselves forward the evening before, and half a score of idlers. Then the landlord's eye fell on me and he passed the word. A sudden silence followed and a dozen faces turned my way; so that the room, which was low in the roof with wide beetle-browed windows, seemed to lighten.

'Just in time, Master Schwartz!' cried one fellow. 'You, can

write, and we are about a petition! Perhaps you will draw it up for us.'

'A petition,' I said shortly, eyeing the fellow with contempt. 'What petition?'

'Against Papists!' he answered boldly.

'And favourers, aiders, and abettors!' exclaimed another in the background.

'Master Klink, Master Klink,' I said, trying to frown down the crowd, 'you would do well to have a care. These ragamuffins-'

'Have a care yourself, Master Jackanapes!' the same voice cried. 'This is a town meeting.'

'Town meeting!' I said, looking round contemptuously. 'Gaol-meeting, you mean, and likely to be a gaol-filling. But I do not speak to you; I leave that to the constable. For Master Klink, if he will take a word of advice, I will speak with him alone.'

They cried out to him not to speak to me. But Klink had still sense enough to know that he might be going too fast, and though they hooted and laughed at him-being for the most part people who had nothing to lose-he came out of the house with me and crossed the street that we might talk unheard. As civilly as I could I delivered my message; and as exactly, for I saw that the issue might be serious.

I was not surprised when he groaned, and in a kind of a tremor shook his hands. 'I am not my own master, Schwartz,' he said. 'And that is the truth.'

'You were your own master last night,' I retorted.

'These fellows are all for "No Popery."'

'Ay, and who gave them the cue?' I said sharply. 'It is not the first time that the fat burgher has raised the lean kine and been eaten by them. Nor will it be the last. It serves you right.'

'I am willing enough to do what my lady wishes,' he whimpered; 'but-'

'But you are not master of your own house, do you mean?' I exclaimed. 'Then fetch the constable. That is simple. Or the Burgomaster.'

'Hush!' he said, 'he is hotter than any one.'

'Then,' I answered flatly, 'he had better cool, and you too. That is all I have to say. And mark me, Klink,' I continued sternly, 'see that no harm happens to that girl or her father. They are in your house, and you have heard what my lady says. Let those ruffians interfere with them and you will be held to answer for it.'

'That is easy talking,' he muttered peevishly; 'but if I cannot help it?'

'You will have to help it!' I rejoined, losing my temper a little. 'You were fool enough, or I am much mistaken, to set a light to this stack, and now you will have to smother the flame, or pay for it. That is all, my friend. You have had fair warning. The rest is in your own hands.'

And with that I left him. He was a stupid man but a sly one too, and I doubted his sincerity, or I might have taken another way with him. In the end, doubtless, it would have been the same.

As I turned on my heel to go, the troop round the door raised a

kind of hoot; and this pursued me as I went up the street, bringing the blood to my cheeks and almost provoking me to return. I checked the impulse however, and strode on as if I did not hear; and by the time I reached the market-place the cry had ceased. Here however it began afresh; a number of loose fellows and lads who were loafing about the stalls crying 'No Popery!' and 'Popish Schwartz!' as I passed, in a way which showed that the thing was premeditated and that they had been lying in wait for me. I stopped and scowled at them, and for a moment they ceased. But the instant my back was turned the hooting began again-with an ugly savage note in it-and I had not got quite clear of the place when some one flung a bundle of carrots, which hit me sharply on the back. I swung round in a rage at that, and dashed hot foot into the middle of the stalls in the hope of catching the fellow. But I was too late; an old woman over whom I fell was the only sufferer. The rascals had fled down an alley, and, contenting myself with crying after them that they were a set of cowards, I set the old lady on her legs, and went on my way.

But I had my thoughts. Such an insult had not been offered to me since I first came to the town to serve my lady, and it filled me with indignation. It seemed, besides, not a thing to be sneezed at. I took it for a sign of change, of bad times coming. Moreover-and this troubled me as much as anything-I had recognised among the fellows in the square two more of the fifty men my lady had sent to serve with Hesse. There seemed ground for fearing that they had deserted in a body and come back and were in hiding.

If this were so, and the Burgomaster, instead of repressing them, encouraged their excesses, they were likely to prove a source of trouble and danger-real danger.

I paused on the steps leading up to the castle, in two minds whether I should not go to the Burgomaster and tell him plainly what I thought; for I felt the responsibility. My lady had no male protector, no higher servant than myself, and we had not a dozen capable men in the castle. The Landgrave of Hesse, our overlord, was away with the King of Sweden, and we could expect no immediate support from him. In the event of a riot in the town therefore-and I knew that, in the great Peasants' War of a century before, our town had been rebellious enough-we should be practically helpless. An hour and a little ill-fortune might place my lady in the hands of her mutinous subjects; and though the Landgrave would be certain sooner or later to chastise them, many things might happen in the interval.

In the end I went on up the steps, thinking that I had better leave Hofman alone, since I could not trust him, and should only by applying to him disclose our weakness. There was a way indeed which occurred to me as I reached the head of the stairs, but I had not taken two steps across the terrace, as we call that part of the court which overlooks the town, before it was immediately driven out again. Fraulein Max was walking up and down with a book, sunning herself. I think that she had been watching for me, for the moment I appeared she called to me.

I went up to her reluctantly. I was anxious, and in no mood

to listen to one of those learned disquisitions with which she would sometimes favour us, without any thought whether we understood her or no. But this I soon found was not what I had to fear. Her face wore a frown and her tone was peevish; but she closed her book, keeping her place in it with her finger.

'Master Martin,' she said, peering at me with her shortsighted eyes, 'you are a very foolish man, I think.'

'Fraulein!' I muttered in surprise. What did she mean?

'A very foolish one!' she repeated. 'Why are you disturbing your lady? Why do you not leave her to her studies and her peace instead of distracting her mind with these stories of a man and a girl? A man and a girl, and Papists! Piff! What are they to us? Don't you understand that your lady has higher work and something else to do? Go you and look after your man and girl.'

'But my lady's subjects, Fraulein-'

'Her subjects?' she replied, almost violently. 'Papists are no subjects. Or to what purpose the *Cujus Regio?* But what do you know of government? You have heard and you repeat.'

'But, Fraulein,' I said humbly, for her way of talking made me seem altogether in the wrong, and a monster of indiscretion, 'if my lady does not interfere, the man and the girl you speak of will suffer. That is clear.'

She snapped her fingers.

'Piff!' she cried, screwing up her eyes still more. 'What has that to do with us? Is there not suffering going on from one end of Germany to the other? Do not scores die every day, every hour?

Can we prevent it? No. Then why trouble us for this one little, little matter? It is theirs to suffer, and ours to think and read, and learn and write. We were at peace to do all this, and then you come with your man and girl, and the peace is gone!'

'But, Fraulein-'

'You do no good by saying Fraulein, Fraulein!' she replied. 'Look at things in the light of reason. Trouble us no more. That is what you have to do. What are this man and girl to you that you should endanger your mistress for their sakes?'

'They are nothing to me,' I answered.

'Then let them go!' she replied with suppressed passion. 'And undo your folly the best way you can, and the sooner the better! Chut! That when the mind is set on higher things it should be distracted by such mean and miserable objects! If they are nothing to you, why in heaven's name obtrude them on us?'

After that she would not hear another word, but dismissed me with a wave of her hand as if the thing were fully settled and over; burying herself in her book and turning away, while I went into the house with my tail between my legs and all my doubts and misgivings increased a hundredfold. For this which she had put into words was the very thought, the very way out of it, which had occurred to me! I had only to let the matter drop, I had only to leave these people to their fate, and the danger and difficulty were at once at an end. For a time my lady's authority might suffer perhaps; but at the proper season, when the Landgrave was at home and could help us, we might cheaply assert and confirm it.

All that day I went about in doubt what I should do; and night came without resolving my perplexities. At one moment I thought of my duty to my lady, and the calamities in which I might involve her. At another I pictured the girl I had seen praying by her father's bed-pictured her alone and defenceless, hourly insulted by Klink, and with terror and uncertainty looming each day larger before her eyes: or, worse still, abandoned to all the dangers which awaited her, in the event of the town refusing to give her shelter. Considering that I had seen her once only-to notice her-it was wonderful how clearly I remembered her.

CHAPTER III.
THE BURGOMASTER'S DEMAND

As it turned out, the other party took the burden of decision from my shoulders. When I came out of chapel next morning, I found Hofman on the terrace waiting for me, and with him Master Dietz wearing his Geneva gown and a sour face. They wished to see my lady. I said it was early yet, and tried to hold them in talk if only that I might learn what they would be at. But they repulsed my advances, said that they knew her excellency always transacted her business at this hour-which was perfectly true-and at last sent me to the parlour whether I would or no.

Under such circumstances I did not linger behind the screen, but advanced at once, and interrupting Fraulein Max, who had just begun to read aloud, while my lady worked, said that the Burgomaster desired the honour of an interview with the Countess.

The latter passed her needle once through the stuff, and then looked up. 'Do you know what he wants, Martin?' she said in a quiet tone.

I said I did not.

She bent her head and worked for a moment in silence. Then she sighed gently, and without looking up, nodded to me. 'Very well, I will see him here,' she said. 'But first send Grissel and

Gretchen to wait on me. Let Franz bring two stools and place them, and bid him and Ernst keep the door. My footstool also. And let the two Jacobs wait in the hall.'

I gave the orders and took on myself to place two extra lackeys in the hall that we might not seem to be short of men. Then I went to the Burgomaster, and attended him and Master Dietz to the parlour.

They bowed three times according to custom as they advanced, and my lady, taking one step forward, gave her hand to the Burgomaster to kiss. Then she stepped back and sat down, looking with a pleasant face at the Minister. 'I would fain apologise for troubling your excellency,' the Mayor began slowly and heavily. 'But the times are trying.'

'Your presence needs no apology, Master Hofman,' my lady answered, smiling frankly. 'It is your right to see me on behalf of the town at all times. It would grieve me much, if you did not sometimes exercise the privilege. And for Master Dietz, who may be able to assist us, I am glad to see him also.'

The Minister bowed low. The Burgomaster only puffed out his cheeks. Doubtless he felt that courage at the Red Hart and courage in my lady's parlour were two different things. But it was too late to retreat, for the Minister was there to report what passed; and after a glance at Dietz's face he proceeded. 'I am not here in a private capacity, if it please your excellency,' he said. 'And I beg your excellency to bear this in mind. I am here as Burgomaster, having on my mind the peace of the town; which

at present is endangered-very greatly, endangered,' he repeated pompously.

'I am sorry to hear that,' my lady answered.

'Nevertheless it is so,' he replied with a kind of obstinacy. 'Endangered by the presence of certain persons in the town, whose manners are not conformable. These persons are Papists, and the town, your excellency remembers, is a Protestant town.'

'Certainly I remember that,' my lady said gravely.

'Hence of this combination, your excellency will understand, comes a likelihood of evil,' he continued. 'On which, hearing you took an interest in these persons, however little deserved, it seemed to be my duty to lay the matter before you.'

'You have done very rightly,' the Countess answered quietly. 'Do I understand then, Master Hofman, that the Papists you complain of are conspiring to break the peace of the town?'

The Burgomaster gasped. He was too obtuse to see at once that my lady was playing with him. He only wondered how he had managed to convey so strange a notion to her mind. He hastened to set her right. 'No-oh, no,' he said. 'There is no fear of that. There are but three of them.'

'Are they presuming to perform their rites in public then?' my lady rejoined. 'If so, of course it cannot be permitted. It is against the law of the town.'

'No,' he answered, more slowly and more reluctantly as the drift of her questions began to dawn upon him. 'I do not know that that is so. I have not heard that it is so. But they are Papists.'

'Well, but with their consciences we have nothing to do!' she said more sharply. 'I confess, I fail as yet to see, Master Hofman, how they threaten the peace of the town.'

The Burgomaster stared. 'I do not know that they threaten it themselves,' he said slowly. 'But their presence stirs up the people, if your excellency understands; and may lead, if the matter goes on, to a riot or worse.'

'Ha! Now I comprehend!' my lady cried in a hearty tone. 'You fear your constables may fail to cope with the rabble?'

He admitted that that was so.

'And you desire such assistance as I can offer towards maintaining the law and protecting these persons; who have of course a right to protection?'

Master Hofman began to see whither he had been led, and glared at the Countess with his mouth wide open. But for the moment he could not find a word to say. Never did I see a man look more at a loss.

'Well, I must consider,' my lady resumed, her finger to her cheek. 'Rest assured, you shall be supported. Martin,' she continued, turning to me, 'let word be sent to the four foresters at Gatz to come down to the castle this evening. And send also to the charcoal-burners' camp. How many men should there be in it?'

'Some half-score, my lady,' I answered, adding two-thirds to the truth.

'Ah? And let the huntsman come down and bring a couple

of feeders. Doubtless with our own men, we shall be able to place a score or thirty at your disposal, Master Hofman, and stout fellows. These, with your constables and such of the peaceful burghers as you see fit to call to your assistance, should be sufficient to quell the disorderly.'

I could have laughed aloud, Master Hofman looked so confounded. Never man had an air of being more completely taken aback. By offering her help to put down any mob, the Countess had deprived him of the plea he had come to prefer; that he was afraid he could not answer for the safety of the Papists, and that therefore they must withdraw or be expelled. This he could no longer put forward, and consequently he was driven either to adopt my lady's line, or side openly with the party of disorder. I saw his heavy face turn a deep red, and his jaw fall, as he grasped the situation. His wits worked slowly; and had he been left to himself, I do not doubt that he would have allowed things to remain as they were, and taken the part assigned to him.

But Master Dietz, who had listened with a lengthening face, at this moment interposed. 'Will your excellency permit me to say a few words?' he said.

'I think the Burgomaster has made the matter clear,' my lady answered.

'Not in one respect,' the Minister rejoined. 'He has not informed your excellency that in the opinion of the majority of the burghers and inhabitants of this town the presence of these people is an offence and an eyesore.'

'It is legal,' my lady answered icily. 'I do not know what opinion has to do with it.'

'The opinion of the majority.'

'Sir!' my lady said, speaking abruptly and with heightened colour, 'in Heritzburg I am the majority, by your leave.'

He frowned and set his face hard, but his eyes sank before hers. 'Nevertheless your excellency will allow,' he said in a lower tone, 'that the opinion of grave and orderly men deserves consideration?'

'When it is on the side of law, every consideration,' the Countess answered, her eyes sparkling. 'But when it is ranged against three defenceless people in violation of the law, none. And more, Master Dietz,' she continued, her voice ringing with indignation, 'it is to check such opinion, and defend against it those who otherwise would have no defence, that I conceive I sit here. And by my faith I will do it!'

She uttered the last words with so much fire and with her beautiful face so full of feeling, that I started forward where I stood; and for a farthing would have flung Dietz through the window. The little Minister was of a stern and hard nature, however. The nobility of my lady's position was lost upon him. He feared her less than he would have feared a man under the same circumstances; and though he stood cowed, and silenced for the moment, he presently returned to the attack.

'Your excellency perhaps forgets,' he said with a dry cough, 'that the times are full of bloodshed and strife, though we at

Heritzburg have hitherto enjoyed peace. I suggest with respect therefore, is it prudent to run the risk of bringing these evils into the town for the sake of one or two Papists, whom it is only proposed to send elsewhere?'

My lady rose suddenly from her chair, and pointed with a finger, which trembled slightly, to the great window beside her. 'Step up here!' she said curtly.

Master Dietz, wondering greatly, stepped on to the daïs. Thence the red roofs of the town, some new and smart, and some stained and grey with lichens, and all the green valley stretching away to the dark line of wood, were visible, bathed in sunshine. The day was fine, the air clear, the smoke from the chimneys rose straight upward.

'Do you see?' she said.

The Minister bowed.

'Then take this for answer,' she replied. 'All that you see is mine to rule. It came to me by inheritance, and I prize the possession of it, though I am a woman, more highly than my life; for it came to me from Heaven and my fathers. But were it a hundred times as large, Master Dietz-were there a house for every brick that now stands there, and an acre for every furrow, and sheep as many as birds in the air, even then I would risk all, and double and treble all, rather than desert those whom my law defends, be they three, or thirty, or three hundred! Let that be your answer! And for the peace you speak of,' she continued, turning on a sudden and confronting us, her face aglow with

anger, 'the peace, I mean, which you have hitherto enjoyed, it should shame you to hear it mentioned! Have the Papists harried you? Have you suffered in life or limb, or property? No. And why? Because of my honoured uncle, a Papist! For shame! – for shame, I say! As it has been dealt out to you, go and do to others!'

But for the respect which held me in her presence, I could have cried 'Huzza!' to her speech; and I can tell you, it made Master Minister look as small as a mouse. He stepped down from the daïs with his face dark and his head trembling; and after that I never doubted that he was at the bottom of the movement against the Worts, though the ruffianly deserters I have mentioned supplied him with the tools, wanting which he might not have taken up the work. He stood a moment on the floor looking very black and grim, and with not a word to say, but I doubted he was not beaten. What line he would have taken, however, I cannot tell, for he had scarcely descended-my lady had not resumed her seat-when there rose from the court below a sudden babel of noise, the trampling of hoofs and feet on the pavement, and a confused murmur of voices. For a moment I looked at my lady and she at me. It struck me that that at which the Burgomaster had hinted was come to pass: that some of the town ragamuffins had dared to invade the castle. The same idea doubtless occurred to her, for she stepped, though without any appearance of alarm, to the window, which commanded a side view of the terrace. She looked out.

I, a little to her right, saw her smile: then in a moment she

turned. 'This could not be better,' she said, resuming in an instant her ordinary manner. I think she was a little ashamed, as people of quality are wont to be, of the feeling she had betrayed. 'I see some one below who will advise me, and who, if I am doing wrong, as you seem to fear, Master Burgomaster, will tell me of it. My cousin, the Waldgrave Rupert, whom I expected to-morrow, has arrived to-day. Be good enough to wait while I receive him, and I will then return to you.'

Bidding me have the two served with some refreshment, she stepped down from the daïs, and withdrew with Fraulein Max and her women, leaving the townsmen to discuss the new arrival with what appetite they might.

They liked it little, I fancy. In a moment their importance was gone, their consequence at an end. The name of the Waldgrave Rupert made them feel how small they were, despite their boasting, beside the youngest member of the family. The very swish of my lady's robe as she swept through the doorway flouted them, her departure was an offence; and this, following on the scolding they had received, produced a soreness and irritation in their minds, which ill-prepared them, I think, for the sequel.

I have sometimes thought that had I remained with them, and paid them some attentions, the end might have been different; but my duties called me elsewhere. The house was in a ferment; I was wanted here and there, both to give orders and to see them carried out. It was some time before I was at liberty even to go to the hall whither my lady had descended to receive her guest, and

where I found the two standing together on the hearth, under the great Red Hart which is the cognizance of the family.

I had not seen the Waldgrave Rupert-a cadet of the noble house of Weimar and my lady's cousin once removed-since his boyhood. I found him grown into a splendid man, as tall and almost as wide as myself; who used to be called in the old forest days before I entered my lady's service 'the strong man of Pippel.' As he stood on the hearth, fair-haired and ruddy-faced, with a noble carriage and a frank boyish smile, I had seldom looked on a handsomer youth. He fell short of my lady's age by two years; but as I looked from one to the other, they seemed so fitting a pair, the disparity went for nothing. He was young and strong, full of spirit and energy and fire. Surely, I thought, the right man has come at last!

In this belief I was more than confirmed when he came forward and greeted me pleasantly, vowing that he remembered me well. His voice and laugh seemed to fill the room; the very ring of his spurs on the stones gave assurance of power. I saw my lady look at him with an air of affectionate pride-she had seen him more lately than I had-as if his youth, and strength, and beauty already belonged to her. As for his smile, it was infectious. We grew in a moment brighter, younger, and more cheerful. The house which yesterday had seemed quiet and lonesome-we were a small family for so great a dwelling-took on a new air. The servants went about their tasks more quickly, the maids laughed behind doors. The place seemed in an hour transformed, as I

have seen a valley in the mountains changed on a sudden by the rising of the sun.

As a fact, when I had been in his presence five minutes, the Burgomaster and the Minister upstairs seemed as common and mean and insignificant a pair of fellows as any in Germany. I wondered that I could ever have feared them. The Countess had told him the story, and he asked me one or two questions about them, his tone high, and his head in the air. I answered him, and was for accompanying him upstairs, when he went to see them, with my lady by his side, and his whip slapping his great thigh boots until the staircase rang again. But my lady had an errand and sent me on it, and so I was not present at the end of this interview which I had myself brought about.

But I suppose that the scolding my lady had given them was no more than a flea-bite beside the rating the young Waldgrave inflicted! It was notorious for a score of leagues round, and he told them so in good round terms, that the Heritzburg land had been spared by friend and foe for Count Tilly's sake; for his sake and his alone-a Papist. How, then, he asked them, had they the face to do this dirty trick, and threaten my lady besides? With much more of the same kind, and hard words, not to say menaces; sparing neither Mayor nor Minister, so that they went off at last like whipped dogs or thieves that have seen the gallows.

Afterwards something was said; but at the time no one missed them. Except by myself, scarce a thought was given to them after they went out of the door. The house was all agog about the new-

comer; the still-room full of work and the chimneys smoking. The young lord was everywhere, and the maids were mad about him. I had my hands full, and every one in the house seemed to be in the same case. No one had time to look abroad.

Except Fraulein Anna Max, my lady's companion. I found her about four o'clock in the afternoon sitting alone in the hall. She had a book before her as usual, but on my entrance she pushed it away from her, and looked up at me, screwing up her eyes in the odd way peculiar to her.

'Well, Master Steward,' she said-and her voice sounded ill-natured, 'so the fire has been lit-but not by you.'

'The fire?' I answered, utterly at a loss for the moment.

'Ay,' she rejoined, with a bitter smile, 'the fire. Don't you hear it burning?'

'I hear nothing,' I said coldly.

'Go to the terrace, and perhaps you will!' she answered.

Her words filled me with a vague uneasiness, but I was too proud to go then or seem to heed them. An hour or two later, however, when the sun was half down, and the shadows of the chimneys lay far over the roofs, and the eastern woods were aglow, I went to the wall which bounds the terrace and looked down. The hum of the town came up to my ears as it has come up to that wall any time these hundred years. But was I mistaken, or did there mingle with it this evening a harsher note than usual, a rancorous murmur, as of angry voices; and something sterner, lower, and more menacing, the clamour of a great crowd?

CHAPTER IV.
THE FIRE ALIGHT

I laughed at my own fears when the morning came, and showed no change except that cheerful one, which our guest's presence had worked inside the castle. Below, today was as yesterday. The sun shone as brightly on the roofs, the smoke of the chimneys rose as peacefully in the air; the swallows circling round the eaves swung this way and that as swiftly and noiselessly as of old. The common sounds of everyday life, the clank of the pump in the market-place as the old crones drew water, and the cry of the wood-cutter hawking his stuff, alone broke the stillness. I sniffed the air, and smiling at Fraulein Anna's warning, went back into the house, where any fears which yet lingered in my mind took instant flight at sound of the Waldgrave's voice, so cheerful was it, so full of life and strength and confidence.

I do not know what it was in him, but something there was which carried us all the way he wished us to go. Did he laugh at the thought of danger; straightway we laughed too, and this though I knew Heritzburg and he did not. Did he speak scornfully of the burghers; forthwith they seemed to us a petty lot. When he strode up and down the terrace, showing us how a single gun placed here or there, or in the corner, would in an hour reduce the town; on the instant we deemed him a Tilly. When he

dubbed Hofman and Dietz, 'Old Fat and Lean,' the groom-boys, who could not be kept from his heels, sniggered, and had to be whipped back to the stables. In a word, he won us all. His youth, his gaiety, his confidence, were irresistible.

He dared even to scold my lady, saying that she had cosseted the townsfolk and brought this trouble on herself by pleasuring them; and she, who seemed to us the proudest of the proud, took it meekly, laughing in his face. It required no conjuror to perceive that he admired her, and would fain shine in her presence. That was to be expected. But about my mistress I was less certain, until after breakfast nothing would suit her but an immediate excursion to the White Maiden-the great grey spire which stands on the summit of the Oberwald. Then I knew that she had it in her mind to make the best figure she could; for though she talked of showing him game in that direction, and there was a grand parade of taking dogs, all the world knows that the other side of the valley is the better hunting-ground. I was left to guess that the White Maiden was chosen because all the wide Heritzburg land can be seen from its foot, and not corn and woodland, pasture and meadow only, but the gem of all-the town nestling babelike in the lap of the valley, with the grey towers rising like the face of some harsh nurse above it.

My lord jumped at the plan. Doubtless he liked the prospect of a ride through the forest by her side. When she raised some little demur, stepping in the way of her own proposal, as I have noticed women will, and said something about the safety of the

castle, if so many left it, he cried out eagerly that she need not fear.

'I will leave my people,' he said. 'Then you will feel quite sure that the place is safe. I will answer for them that they will hold your castle against Wallenstein himself.'

'But how many are with you?' my lady asked curiously; a little in mischief too, perhaps, for I think she knew.

His handsome face reddened and he looked rather foolish for a moment. 'Well, only four, as a fact,' he said. 'But they are perfect paladins, and as good as forty. In your defence, cousin, I would pit them against a score of the hardiest Swedes that ever followed the King.'

My lady laughed gaily.

'Well, for this day, I will trust them,' she said. 'Martin, order the grooms to saddle Pushka for me. And you, cousin, shall have the honour of mounting me. It is an age since I have had a frolic.'

Sometimes I doubt if my lady ever had such a frolic again. Happier days she saw, I think, and many and many of them, I hope; but such a day of careless sunny gaiety, spent in the May greenwood, with joy and youth riding by her, with old servants at her heels, and all the beauties of her inheritance spread before her in light and shadow, she never again enjoyed. We went by forest paths, which winding round the valley, passed through woodlands, where the horses sank fetlock-deep in moss, and the laughing voices of the riders died away among the distant trunks. Here were fairy rings deep-plunged in bracken,

and chalky bottoms whence springs rose bright as crystal, and dim aisles of beeches narrowing into darkness, where last year's leaves rustled ghostlike under foot, and the shadow of a squirrel startled the boldest. Once, emerging on the open down where the sun lay hot and bright, my lady gave her horse the rein, and for a mile or more we sped across the turf, with hoofs thundering on either hand, and bits jingling, and horses pulling, only to fall into a walk again with flushed cheeks and brighter eyes, on the edge of the farther wood. Thence another mile, athwart the steep hillside through dwarf oaks and huge blackthorn trees, brought us to the foot of the Maiden, and we drew rein and dismounted, and stood looking down on the vale of Heritzburg, while the grooms unpacked the dinner.

There is a niche in the great pillar, a man's height from the ground, in which one person may conveniently sit. The young Waldgrave spied it.

'Up to the throne, cousin!' he cried, and he helped her to it, sitting himself on the ledge at her feet, with his legs dangling. 'Why, there is the Werra!' he continued.

A large quantity of rain had fallen that spring, and the river which commonly runs low between its banks, was plainly visible, a silver streak crossing the distant mouth of the valley.

'Yes,' my lady answered. 'That is the Werra, and beyond it is, I suppose, the world.'

'Whither I must go back this day week,' he said, between sighing and smiling. 'Then, hey for the south and Nuremberg, the

good cause and the great King.'

'You have seen him?'

'Once only.'

'And is he so great a fighter?' my lady asked curiously.

'How can he fail to be when he and his men fight and pray alternately,' the Waldgrave answered; 'when there is no license in the camp, and a Swede thinks death the same as victory?'

'Where is he now?'

'At Munich, in Bavaria.'

'How it would have grieved my uncle,' my lady said, with a sigh.

'He died as he would have wished to die,' the Waldgrave answered gently. 'He believed in his cause, as the King of Sweden believes in his; and he died for it. What more can a man ask? But here is Franz with all sorts of good things. And I am afraid a feast of beauty, however perfect, does not prevent a man getting hungry.'

'That is a very pretty compliment to Heritzburg,' my lady said, laughing.

'Or its chatelaine!' I heard him murmur, with a tender look. But my lady only laughed again and called to me to come and name the hills, and tell my lord what land went with each of the three hamlets between which the lower valley is divided.

Doubtless that was but one of a hundred gallant things he said to her, and whereat she laughed, during the pleasant hour they whiled away at the foot of the pillar, basking in the warm

sunshine, and telling the valley farm by farm. For the day was perfect, the season spring. I lay on my side and dreamed my own dream under the trees, with the hum of insects in my ears. No one was in a hurry to rise, or set a term to such a time.

Still we had plenty of daylight before us when my lady mounted and turned her face homewards, thinking to reach the castle a little after five. But a hare got up as we crossed the open down, and showing good sport, as these long-legged mountain hares will, led us far out of our way, and caused us to spend nearly an hour in the chase. Then my lady spied a rare flower on the cliffside; and the young Waldgrave must needs get it for her. And so it wanted little of sunset when we came at last in sight of the bridge which spans the ravine at the back of the castle. I saw in the distance a lad seated on the parapet, apparently looking out for us, but I thought nothing of it. The descent was steep and we rode down slowly, my lady and the Waldgrave laughing and talking, and the rest of us sitting at our ease. Nor did the least thought of ill occur to my mind until I saw that the lad had jumped down from the wall and was running towards us waving his cap.

My lady, too, saw him.

'What is it, Martin?' she said, turning her head to speak to me.

I told her I would see, and trotted forward along the side of the path until I came within call. Then I cried sharply to the lad to know what it was. I saw something in his face which frightened me; and being frightened and blaming myself, I was ready to fall

on the first I met.

'The town!' he answered, panting up to my stirrup. 'There is fighting going on, Master Martin. They are pulling down Klink's house.'

'So, so,' I answered, for at the first sight of his face I had feared worse. 'Have you closed the gate at the head of the steps?'

'Yes,' he said, 'and my lord's men are guarding it.'

'Right!' I answered. And then my lady came up, and I had to break the news to her. Of course the young Waldgrave heard also, and I saw his eyes sparkle with pleasure.

'Ha! the rascals!' he cried. 'Now we will trounce them! Trust me, cousin, we will teach these boors such a lesson as they shall long remember. But what is it?' he continued, turning to my lady who had not spoken. 'The Queen of Heritzburg is not afraid of her rebellious subjects?'

My lady's eyes flashed. 'No, I am not afraid,' she said, with contempt. 'But Klink's house? Do you mean the Red Hart, Martin?'

I said I did.

She plucked her horse by the head, and stopped short under the arch of the gateway. I think I see her now bending from her saddle with the light on the woods behind her, and her face in shadow. 'Then those people are in danger!' she said, her voice quivering with excitement. 'Martin, take what men you have and go down into the town. Bring them off at all risks! See to it yourself. If harm come to them, I shall not forgive you easily.'

The Waldgrave sprang from his horse, and cried out that he would go. But my lady called to him to stay with her.

'Martin knows the streets, and you do not,' she said, sliding unassisted to the ground. 'But he shall take your men, if you do not object.'

We dismounted, in a confused medley of men and horses, in the stable court, which is small, and being surrounded by high buildings, was almost dark. The grooms left at home had gone to the front of the house to see the sight, and there was no one to receive us. I bade the five men who had ridden with us get their arms, and leaving the horses loose to be caught and cared for by the lad who had met us, I hastened after my lady and the Waldgrave, who had already disappeared under the arch which leads to the Terrace Court.

To pass through this was to pass from night to day, so startling was the change. From one end to the other the terrace was aglow with red light. The last level beams of the sun shone straight in our eyes as we emerged, and so blinded us, that I advanced, seeing nothing before me but a row of dark figures leaning over the parapet. If we could not see, however, we could hear. A hoarse murmur, unlike anything I had heard before, came up from the town, and rising and falling in waves of sound, now a mere whisper, and now a dull savage roar, caused the boldest to tremble. I heard my lady cry, 'Those poor people! Those poor people!' and saw her clench her hands in impotent anger; and that sight, or the sound-which seemed the more weirdly menacing as

the town lay in twilight below us, and we could make out no more than a few knots of women standing in the market-place-or it may be some memory of the helpless girl I had seen at Klink's, so worked upon me that I had got the gate unbarred and was standing at the head of the steps outside before I knew that I had stirred or given an order.

Some one thrust a half pike into my hand, and mechanically I counted out the men-four of the Waldgrave's and five, six, seven of our own. A strange voice-but it may have been my own-cried, 'Not by the High Street. Through the lane by the wall!' and the next moment we were down out of the sunlight and taking the rough steps three at a time. The High Street reached, we swung round in a body to the right, and plunging into Shoe Wynd, came to the locksmith's, and thence went on by the way I had gone that other evening.

The noise was less down in the streets. The houses intervened and deadened it. At some of the doors women were standing, listening and looking out with grey faces, but one and all fled in at our approach, which seemed to be the signal, wherever we came, for barring doors and shooting bolts; once a man took to his heels before us, and again near the locksmith's we encountered a woman bare-headed and carrying something in her arms. She almost ran into the midst of us, and at the last moment only avoided us by darting up the side-alley by the forge. Whether these people knew us for what we were, and so fled from us, or took us for a party of the rioters, it was impossible to say. The

narrow lanes were growing dark, night was falling on the town; only the over-hanging eaves showed clear and black against a pale sky. The way we had to go was short, but it seemed long to me; for a dozen times between the castle steps and Klink's house I thought of the poor girl at her prayers, and pictured what might be happening.

Yet we could not have been more than five minutes going from the steps to the corner beyond the forge, whence we could see Klink's side window. A red glare shone though it, and cleaving the dark mist which filled the alley fell ruddily on the town wall. It seemed to say that we were too late; and my heart sank at the sight. Nor at the sight only, for as we turned the corner, the hoarse murmur we had heard on the Terrace, and which even there had sounded ominous, swelled to an angry roar, made up of cries and cursing, with bursts of reckless cheering, and now and again a yell of pain. The street away before us, where the lane ran into it, was full of smoky light and upturned faces; but I took no heed of it, my business was with the window. I cried to the men behind me and hurried on till I stood before it, and clutching the bars-the glass was broken long ago-looked in.

The room was full of men. For a moment I could see nothing but heads and shoulders and grim faces, all crowded together, and all alike distorted by the lurid light shed by a couple of torches held close to the ceiling. Some of the men standing in such groups as the constant jostling permitted, were talking, or rather shouting to one another. Others were savagely forcing back

their fellows who wished to enter; while a full third were gathered with their faces all one way round the corner where I had seen the sick man. Here the light was strongest, and in this direction I gazed most anxiously. But the crowded figures intercepted all view; neither there nor anywhere else could I detect any sign of the girl or child. The men in that corner seemed to be gazing at something low down on the floor, something I could not see. A few were silent, more were shouting and gesticulating.

I stretched my hands through the bars, and grasping a man by the shoulders, dragged him to me. 'What is it?' I cried in his ear, heedless whether he knew me, or took me for one of the ruffians who were everywhere battling to get into the house-at the window we had anticipated some by a second only. 'What is it?' I repeated fiercely, resisting all his efforts to get free.

'Nothing!' he answered, glaring at me. 'The man is dead; cannot you see?'

'I can see nothing!' I retorted. 'Dead is he?'

'Ay, dead, and a good job too!' the rascal answered, making a fresh attempt to get away. 'Dead when we came in.'

'And the girl?'

'Gone, the Papist witch, on a broomstick!' he answered. 'Through the wall or the ceiling or the keyhole, or through this window; but only on a broomstick. The bars would skin a cat!'

I let him go and looked at the bars. They were an inch thick, and a very few inches apart. It seemed impossible that a child, much more a grown woman, could pass between them. As the

fellow said, there was barely room for a cat to pass.

Yet my mind clung to the bars. Klink might have hidden the girl, for without doubt he had neither foreseen nor meant anything like this. But something told me that she had gone by the window, and I turned from it with renewed hope.

It was time I did turn. The crowd had got wind of our presence and resented it. All who could not get into the house to slake their curiosity or anger, had pressed into the narrow alley where we stood, while the air rang with cries of 'No Popery! Down with the Papists!' When I turned I found my fellows hard put to it to keep their position. To retreat, close pressed as we were, seemed as difficult as to stand; but by making a resolute movement all together, we charged to the front for a moment, and then taking advantage of the interval, fell back as quickly as we could, facing round whenever it seemed that our followers were coming on too boldly for safety.

In this way, the knaves with me being stout and some of them used to the work, we retreated in good order and without hurt as far as the end of Shoe Wynd. Then I discovered to my dismay that a portion of the mob had made along the High Street and were waiting for us on the steep ascent where the wynd runs into the street.

Hitherto no harm had been done on either side, but we now found ourselves beset front and back, and to add to the confusion of the scene night had set in. The narrow wynd was as dark as pitch, save where the light of a chance torch showed crowded

forms and snarling faces, while the din and tumult were enough to daunt the boldest.

That moment, I confess, was one of the worst I have known. I felt my men waver; a little more and they might break and the mob deal with us as it would. On the other hand? I knew that to plunge, exposed to attack as we were from behind, into the mass of men who blocked the way to the steps, would be madness. We should be surrounded and trodden down. There were not perhaps fifty really dangerous fellows in the town; but a mob I have noticed is a strange thing. Men who join it, intending merely to look on, are carried away by excitement, and soon find themselves cursing and fighting, burning and raiding with the foremost.

A brief pause and I gave the word to face about again. As I expected, the gang in the alley gave way before us, and the pursued became the pursuers. My men's blood was up now, their patience exhausted; and for a few moments pike and staff played a merry tune. But quickly the mob behind closed up on our heels. Stones began to be thrown, and presently one, dropped I think from a window, struck a man beside me and felled him to the ground.

That was our first loss. Drunken Steve, a great gross fellow, always in trouble, but a giant in strength, picked him up-we could not leave the man to be murdered-and plunged on with us bearing him under his arm.

'Good man!' I cried between my teeth. And I swore it should

save the drunkard from many a scrape. But the next moment another was down, and him I had to pick up myself. Then I saw that we were as good as doomed. Against the stones we had no shield.

The men saw it too, and cried out, beside themselves with rage. We were as rats, set in a pit to be worried-in the dark with a hundred foes tearing at us. And the town seemed to have gone mad-mad! Above the screams and wicked laughter, and all the din about us, I heard the great church bell begin to ring, and hurling its notes, now sharp, now dull, down upon the seething streets, swell and swell the tumult until the very sky seemed one in the league against us!

Blind with fury-for what had we done? – we turned on the mob which followed us and hurled it back-back almost to the High Street. But that way was no exit for us; the crowd stood so close that they could not even fly. Round we whirled again, wild and desperate now, and charged down the alley towards the West Gate, thinking possibly to win through and out by that way. We had almost reached the locksmith's-then another man fell. He was of the Waldgrave's following, and his comrade stooped to raise him; but only to fall over him, wounded in his turn.

What happened after that I only knew in part, for from that moment all was a medley of random blows and stragglings in the dark. The crowd seeing half of us down, and the rest entangled, took heart of grace to finish us. I remember a man dashing a torch in my face, and the blow blinding me. Nevertheless I

staggered forward to close with him. Then something tripped me up, something or some one struck me from behind as I fell. I went down like an ox, and for me the fight was over.

Drunken Steve and two of the Waldgrave's men fought across me, I am told, for a minute or more. Then Steve fell and an odd thing happened. The mob took fright at nothing-took fright at their own work, and coming suddenly to their senses, poured pell-mell out of the alley faster than they had come into it. The two strangers, knowing nothing of the way or the town, knocked at the nearest door and were taken in, and sheltered till morning.

CHAPTER V.
MARIE WORT

There never was one of my forefathers could read, or knew so much as a horn-book when he saw it; and therefore I, though a clerk, have a brain pan that will stand as much as any scholar's and more than many a simple man's. Otherwise the blow I got that night must have done me some great mischief, instead of merely throwing me into a swoon, in which I lay until the morning was well advanced.

When I came to myself with an aching head and a dry mouth, I was hard put to it for a time to think what had happened to me. The place in which I lay was dark, with spots of red lights like flaming eyes here and there. An odour of fire and leather and iron filled my nostrils. A hoarse soughing as of a winded horse came and went regularly, with a dull rumbling and creaking that seemed to shake the place. Dizzy as I was, I rose on my elbow with an effort, and looked round. But my eyes swam, I could see nothing which enlightened me, and with a groan I fell back. Then I found that I was lying on a straw-bed, with bandages round my head, and gradually the events of the night came back to me. My mind grew clearer. Yet it still failed to tell me where I was, or whence came the hoarse choking sound, like the sighing of some giant of the Harz, which I heard.

At last, while I lay wondering and fearing, a door opened and let into the dark place a flood of ruddy light. Framed in this light a young girl appeared, standing on the threshold. She held a tray in her hand, and paused to close the door behind her. The bright glow which shone round her, gave her a strange unearthly air, picking out gold in her black locks and warming her pale cheeks; but for all that I recognised her, and never was I more astonished. She was no other than the daughter of the Papist Wort-the girl to rescue whom we had gone down to the Red Hart.

I could not restrain an exclamation of surprise, and the girl started and stopped, peering into the corner in which I lay.

'Master Martin,' she said in a low tone, 'was that you?'

I had never heard her speak before, and I found, perhaps by reason of my low state, and a softness which pain induces in the roughest, a peculiar sweetness in her voice. I would not answer for a moment. I made her speak again.

'Master Martin,' she said, advancing timidly, 'are you yourself again?'

'I don't know,' I muttered. In very fact I was so much puzzled that this was nearly the truth. 'If you will tell me where I am, I may be able to say,' I added, turning my head with an effort.

'You are in the kitchen behind the locksmith's forge,' she answered plainly. 'He is a good man, and you are in no danger. The window is shuttered to keep the light from your eyes.'

'And the noise I hear is the bellows at work?'

'Yes,' she answered, coming near. 'It is almost noon. If you

will drink this broth you will get your strength again.'

I seized the bowl and drank greedily. When I set it down, my eyes seemed clearer and my mind stronger.

'You escaped?' I said. The more I grew able to think, the more remarkable it seemed to me that the girl should be here-here in the same house in which I lay.

'Through the window,' she answered, in a faint voice.

As she spoke she turned from me, and I knew that she was thinking of her father and would fain hide her face.

'But the bars?' I said.

'I am very small,' she answered in the same low tone.

I do not know why, but perhaps because of the weakness and softness I have mentioned, I found something very pitiful in the answer. It stirred a sudden rush of anger in my heart. I pictured this, helpless girl chased through the streets by the howling pack of cravens we had encountered, and for a few seconds, bruised and battered as I was, I felt the fighting spirit again. I half rose, then turned giddy, and sank back again. It was a minute or more before I could ask another question. At last I murmured-

'You have not told me how you came here?'

'I was coming up the alley,' she answered, shuddering, 'when at the corner by this house I met men coming to meet me. I fled into the passage to escape them, and finding no outlet, and seeing a light here, I knocked. I thought that some woman might pity me and take me in.'

'And Peter did?'

'Yes,' she answered simply. 'May Our Lady reward him.'

'We were the men you met,' I said drowsily. 'I remember now. You were carrying your brother.'

'My brother?'

'Yes, the child.'

'Oh, yes,' she answered, in rather a strange fashion; but I was too dull to do more than notice it. 'The child of course.'

I could ask no more, for my head was already splitting with pain. I lay back, and I suppose went off into a swoon again, sleeping all that day and until the morning of the next was far advanced.

Then I awoke to find the place in which I lay changed from a cave of mystery to a low-roofed dingy room; the shutter of the window standing half-open, admitted a ray of sunshine and a breath of pure air. A small fire burned on the hearth, a black pot bubbled beside it. For the room itself, a litter of old iron stood in every corner; bunches of keys and rows of rusty locks-padlocks, fetter-locks, and door-locks-hung on all the walls. One or two chests, worm-eaten and rickety, but prized by their present possessor for the antiquity of their fastenings, stood here and there; with a great open press full of gun-locks, matchlocks, wheel-locks, spring-locks and the like. Half a dozen arquebuses and pistols decorated the mantel-piece, giving the room something of the air of an armoury.

In the midst of all this litter sat old Peter himself, working away, with a pair of horn glasses on his forehead, at a small lock;

which seemed to be giving him a vast amount of trouble. A dozen times at least I watched him fit a number of tiny parts together, only to scatter them again in his leather apron, and begin to pare one or other of them with a little file. At length he laid the work down, as if he were tired, and looking up found my eyes fixed upon him.

He nodded cheerfully. 'Good,' he said. 'Now you look yourself, Martin. No more need of febrifuges. Another night's sleep, and you may go abroad.'

'What day is it?' I said, striving to collect my thoughts.

'Friday,' he answered, looking at me with his shrewd, pleasant eyes. He was an old man, over sixty, a widower with two young children, and clever at his trade. I never knew a better man. 'Wednesday night you came here,' he continued, showing in his countenance the pleasure it gave him to see me recovering.

'I must go to the castle,' I exclaimed, rising abruptly and sitting up. 'Do you hear? I must go.'

'I do not see the necessity,' he answered, looking at me coolly, and without budging an inch.

'My lady will need me.'

'Not at all,' he answered, in the same quiet tone. 'You may make your mind easy about that. The Countess is safe and well. She is in the castle, and the gates are shut.'

'But she has not-' Then I stopped. I was going to say too much.

'She has not half a dozen men with her, you would say,' he replied. 'Well, no. But one is a man, it seems. The young lord

has turned a couple of cannon on the town, and all our valiant scoundrels are shaking in their shoes.'

'A couple of cannon! But there are no cannon in the castle!'

'You are mistaken,' Peter answered drily. He had a very dry way with him at times. 'I have seen the muzzles of them, myself, and you can see them, if you please, from the attic window. One is trained on the market-place, and one to fire down the High Street. To-morrow morning our Burgomaster and the Minister are to go up and make their peace. And I can tell you some of our brisk boys feel the rope already round their necks.'

'Is this true?' I said, hardly able to believe the tale.

'As true as you please,' he answered. 'If you will take my advice you will lie quietly here until to-morrow morning, and then go up to the castle. No one will molest you. The townsfolk will be only too glad to find you alive, and that they have so much the less to pay for. I should not wonder if you saved half a dozen necks,' Peter added regretfully. 'For I hear the Countess is finely mad about you.'

At this mention of my lady's regard my eyes filled so that I had much ado to hide my feelings. Affecting to find the light too strong I turned my back on Peter, and then for the first time became aware that I had a companion in misfortune. On a heap of straw behind me lay another man, so bandaged about the head that I could see nothing of his features.

'Hallo!' I exclaimed, raising myself that I might have a better view of him. 'Who is this?'

'Your man Steve,' Peter said briefly. 'But for him and another, Master Martin, I do not think that you would be here.'

'You do well to remind me,' I answered, feeling shame that I had not yet thanked him, or asked how I came to be in safety. 'How was it?'

'Well,' he said, 'it began with the girl. The doings on Wednesday night were not much to my mind, as you may suppose, and I shut up early and kept myself close. About seven, when the racket had not yet risen to its height, there came a knocking at my door. For a while I took no notice of it, but presently, as it continued, I went to listen, and heard such a sobbing on the step as the heart of man could not resist. So I opened and found the Papist girl there with a child. I do not know,' Peter continued, pushing forward his greasy old cap and rubbing his head, 'that I should have opened it if I had been sure who it was. But as the door was open, the girl had to come in.'

'I do not think you will repent it!' I said.

'I don't know that I shall,' he answered thoughtfully. 'However, she had not been long inside and the bolts shot on us, when there began a most tremendous skirmish in the lane, which lasted off and on for half an hour. Then followed a sudden silence. I had given the girl some food, and told her she might sleep with the children upstairs, and we were sitting before the fire while she cried a bit-she was all over of a shake, you understand-when on a sudden she stood up, and listened.

'"What is it?" I said.

'She did not answer for a while, but still stood listening, looking now at me and now towards the forge in a queer eager kind of way. I told her to sit down, but she did not seem to hear, and presently she cried, "There is some one there!"

'"Well," said I, "they will stop there then. I don't open that door again to-night."

'She looked at me pitifully, but sat down for all the world as if I had struck her. Not for long, however. In a minute she was up again, and began to go to and fro between the kitchen and the forge door like nothing else but a cat looking for her kittens. "Sit down, wench," I said. But this time she took no heed, and at last the sight of her going up and down like a dumb creature in pain was too much for me, and I got up and undid the door. She was out in a minute, seeming not a bit afraid for herself, and sure enough, there were you and Steve lying one on the top of the other on the step, and so still that I thought you gone. Heaven only knows how she heard you.'

'Peter,' I said abruptly, 'have you any water handy?'

'To be sure,' he replied, starting up. 'Are you thirsty?'

I nodded, and he went to get it, blaming himself for his thoughtlessness. He need not have reproached himself, however. I was not thirsty; but I could not bear that he should sit and look at me at that moment. The story he had told had touched me-and I was still weak; and I could not answer for it, I should not burst into tears like a woman. The thought of this girl's persistence, who in everything else was so weak, of her boldness who in her

own defence was a hare, of her strange instinct on our behalf who seemed made only to be herself protected-the thought of these things touched me to the heart and filled me with an odd mixture of pity and gratitude! I had gone to save her, and she had saved me! I had gone to shield her from harm, and heaven had led me to her door, not in strength but in weakness. She had fled from me who came to help her; that when I needed help, she might be at hand to give it!

'Where is she?' I muttered, when he came back and I had drunk.

'Who? Marie?' he asked.

'Yes, if that is her name,' I said, drinking again.

'She is lying down upstairs,' he answered. 'She is worn out, poor child. Not that in one sense, Master Martin,' he continued, dropping his voice and nodding with a mysterious air, 'she *is* poor. Though you might think it.'

'How do you mean?' I said, raising my head and meeting his eyes. He nodded.

'It is between ourselves,' he said; 'but I am afraid there is a good deal in what our rascals here say. I am afraid, to be plain, Master Martin, that the father was like all his kind: plundered many an honest citizen, and roasted many a poor farmer before his own fire. It is the way of soldiers in that army; and God help the country they march in, be it friend's or foe's!'

'Well?' I said impatiently; 'but what of that now?' The mention of these things fretted me. I wanted to hear nothing about the

father. 'The man is dead,' I said.

'Ay, he is,' Peter answered slowly and impressively. 'But the daughter? She has got a necklace round her neck now, worth-worth I dare say two hundred men at arms.'

'What, ducats?'

'Ay, ducats! Gold ducats. It is worth all that.'

'How do you know?' I said, staring at him. 'I have never seen such a thing on her. And I have seen the girl two or three times.'

'Well, I will tell you,' he answered, glancing first at the window and then at Steve to be sure that we were not overheard. 'I'll tell you. When we had carried you into the house the other night she took off her kerchief, to tear a piece from it to bind up your head. That uncovered the necklace. She was quick to cover it up, when she remembered herself, but not quick enough.'

'Is it of gold?' I asked.

He nodded. 'Fifteen or sixteen links I should say, and each as big as a small walnut. Carved and shaped like a walnut too.'

'It may be silver-gilt.'

He laughed. 'I am a smith, though only a locksmith,' he said. 'Trust me for knowing gold. I doubt it came from Magdeburg; I doubt it did. Magdeburg, or Halle, which my Lord Tilly ravaged about that time. And if so there is blood upon it. It will bring the girl no luck, depend upon it.'

'If we talk about it, I'll be sworn it will not!' I answered savagely. 'There are plenty here who would twist her neck for so much as a link of it.'

'You are right, Master Martin,' he answered meekly. 'Perhaps I should not have mentioned it; but I know that you are safe. And after all the girl has done nothing.'

That was true, but it did not content me. I wished he had not seen what he had, or that he had not told me the tale. A minute before I had been able to think of the girl with pure satisfaction; to picture with a pleasant warmth about my heart her gentleness, her courage, her dark mild beauty that belonged as much to childhood as womanhood, the thought for others that made her flight a perpetual saving. But this spoiled all. The mere possession of this necklace, much more the use of it, seemed to sully her in my eyes, to taint her freshness, to steal the perfume from her youth.

For I am peasant born, of those on whom the free-companions have battened from the beginning; and spoil won in such a way seemed to me to be accursed. Whether I would or no, horrid tales of the storming of Magdeburg came into my mind: tales of streets awash with blood, of churches blocked with slain, of women lying dead with living babes in their arms. And I shuddered. I felt the necklace a blot on all. I shrank from one, who, with the face of a saint, wore under her kerchief gold dyed in such a fashion!

That was while I lay alone, tossing from side to side, and troubling myself unreasonably about the matter; since the girl was nothing to me, and a Papist. But when she came presently to me with a bowl of broth in her hands and a timid smile on her lips-a smile which gave the lie to the sadness of her eyes and the

red rims that surrounded them-I forgot all, necklace and creed. I took the bowl silently, as she gave it. I gave it back with only one 'Thank you,' which sounded hoarse and rustic in my ears; but I suppose my eyes were more eloquent, for she blushed and trembled. And in the evening she did not come. Instead one of the children brought my supper, and sitting down on the straw beside me, twittered of Marie and 'Go' and other things.

'Who is Go?' I said.

'Go is Marie's brother,' the child answered, open-eyed at my ignorance. 'You not know Go?'

'It is a strange name,' I said, striving to excuse myself.

'*He* is a strange man,' the little one retorted, pointing to Steve. 'He does not speak. Now you speak. Marie says-'

'What does Marie say?' I asked.

'Marie says you saved his life.'

'Well, you can tell her it was the other way,' I exclaimed roughly.

Twice that night when I awoke I heard a light footstep, and turned to see the girl, moving to and fro among the rusty locks and ancient chests in attendance on Steve. He mended but slowly. She did not come near me at these times, and after a glance I pretended to fall asleep that I might listen unnoticed to her movements, and she be more free to do her will. But whenever I heard her and opened my eyes to see her slender figure moving in that dingy place, I felt the warmth about my heart again. I forgot the gold necklace; I thought no more of the rosary, only

of the girl. For what is there which so well becomes a woman as tending the sick; an office which in a lover's eyes should set off his mistress beyond velvet and Flanders lace.

CHAPTER VI.
RUPERT THE GREAT

I have known a man very strong and very confident, whom the muzzle of a loaded pistol, set fairly against his head, has reduced to reason marvellously. So it fared with Heritzburg on this occasion. My lady's cannon, which I went up to the roof at daybreak to see-and did see, to my great astonishment, trained one on the Market Square, and one down the High Street-formed the pistol, under the cooling influence of which the town had so far come to its senses, that the game was now in my lady's hands. Peter assured me that the place was in a panic, that the Countess could hardly ask any amends that would not be made, and that as a preliminary the Burgomaster and Minister were to go to the castle before noon to sue for pardon. He suggested that I and the girl should accompany them.

'But does Hofman know that we are here?' I asked.

'Since yesterday morning,' the locksmith answered, with a grin. 'And no one more pleased to hear it! If he had not you to present as a peace-offering, I doubt he would have fled the town before he would have gone up. As it is, they had fine work with him at the town-council yesterday.'

'He is in a panic? Serve him right!' I said.

'I am told that his cheeks shake like jelly,' Peter answered.

'Two of the Waldgrave's men are dead, you know, and some say that the Countess will hang him out of hand. But you will go up with him?'

'Yes,' I said. 'I see no objection.'

Some one else objected, however. When the plan was broached to the girl, she looked troubled. For a moment she did not speak, but stood before us silent and confused. Then she pointed to Steve.

'When is he going, if you please?' she asked, in a troubled voice.

'He must go in a litter by the road,' I answered. 'Peter here will see to it this morning.'

'Could I not go with him?' she said.

I looked at Peter, and he at me. He nodded.

'I see no reason why you should not, if you prefer it,' I said. 'Either way you will be safe.'

'I should prefer it,' she muttered, in a low tone. And then she went out to get something for Steve, and we saw her no more.

'Drunken Steve is in luck,' Peter said, looking after her with a smile. 'She is wonderfully taken with him. She is a-she is a good girl, Papist or no Papist,' he added thoughtfully.

I am not sure that he would have indorsed that later in the day. At the last moment, when I was about to leave the house to go up to the castle my way, and Steve and his party were on the point of starting by the West Gate and the road, something happened which gave both of us a kind of shock, though neither said a word

to the other. Marie had brought down the little boy, a brave-eyed, fair-haired child about three years old, and she was standing with us in the forge waiting with the child clinging to her skirt, when on a sudden she turned to Peter and began to thank him. A word and she broke down.

'Pooh, child!' Peter said kindly, patting her on the shoulder. 'It was little enough, and I am glad I did it. No thank's.'

She answered between her sobs that it was beyond thanks, and called on Heaven to reward him.

'If I had anything,' she continued, looking at him timidly, 'if I had anything I could give you to prove my gratitude, I would so gladly give it. But I am alone, and I have nothing worth your acceptance. I have nothing in the world, unless,' she added with an effort, 'you would like my rosary.'

'No,' Peter said almost roughly. I noticed that he avoided my eye. 'I do not want it. It is not a thing I use.'

She said she had nothing; and we knew she had that chain! Yet Heaven knows her face as she said it was fair enough to convert a Beza! She said she had nothing; we knew she had. Yet if ever genuine gratitude and thankfulness seemed to shine out of wet human eyes, they shone out of hers then.

What I could not stomach was the ingratitude. The fraud was too gross, too gratuitous, since she need have offered nothing. I turned away and went out of the forge without waiting for her to recover herself. I dreaded lest she should thank me in the same way.

I knew Peter, and knew he could have no motive for traducing her. He was old enough to be her grandfather, and a quiet good man. Therefore I was sure that she had the chain, three or four links of which should be worth his shop of old iron.

But besides I had the evidence of my own eyes. There was a crinkle, a crease in her kerchief, for which the presence of the necklace would account; it was such a crease as a necklace of that size would cause. I had marked it when she brought the child into the room in her arms. The boy's right arm had been round her neck, and I had seen him relax his hold of her hair and steady himself by placing his little palm on that wrinkle, as on a sure and certain and familiar stay. So I knew that she had the necklace, and that she had lied about it.

But after all it was nothing to me. The girl was a Papist, a Bavarian, the daughter of a roistering freebooting rider, versed in camp life. If with a fair outside she proved to be at heart what every reasonable man would expect to find her, what then? I had no need to trouble my head. I had affairs enough of my own on my hands.

Yet the affair did trouble me. The false innocence of the child's face haunted and perplexed me, and would not leave me, though I tried to think of other things and had other things to think of. I was to meet the Burgomaster in the market-place, and go thence with him, and I had promised myself that I would make good use of my opportunities; that I would lose no point of the town's behaviour, that not a lowering face should escape me, nor

a quarter whence danger might arise in the future. But the girl's eyes made havoc of all my resolutions, and I had fairly reached the market-place before I remembered what I was doing.

There indeed a sight, which in a moment swept the cobwebs from my brain, awaited me. The square was full of people, not closely packed, but standing in loose groups, and all talking in voices so low as to produce a dull sullen sound more striking than silence. The Mayor and four or five Councillors occupied the steps of the market-house. Raised a head and shoulders above the throng, and glancing at it askance from time to time with scarcely disguised apprehension, they wore an air of irresolution it was impossible to mistake. Hofman in particular looked like a man with the rope already round his neck. His face was pale, his fat cheeks hung pendulous, his eyes never rested on anything for more than a second. They presently lit on me, and then if farther proof of the state of his mind was needed, I found it in the relief with which he hailed my appearance; relief, not the less genuine because he hastened to veil it from the jealous eyes that from every part of the square watched his proceedings.

The crowd made way for me silently. One in every two, perhaps, greeted me, and some who did not greet me, smiled at me fatuously. On the other hand, I was struck by the air of gloomy expectation which prevailed. I discerned that a very little would turn it into desperation, and saw, or thought I saw, that cannon, or no cannon, this was a case for delicate and skilful handling. The town was panic-stricken, partly at the thought

of what it had done, partly at the sight of the danger which threatened it. But panic is a double-edged weapon. It takes little to turn it into fury.

I made for the opening into the High Street, and the Burgomaster, coming down the steps, passed through the crowd and met me there.

'This is a bad business, Master Martin,' he said, facing me with an odd mixture of shamefacedness and bravado. 'We must do our best to patch it up.'

'You had your warning,' I answered coldly, turning with him up the street, every window and doorway in which had its occupant. Dietz and two or three Councillors followed us, the Minister's face looking flushed and angry, and as spiteful as a cat's. 'Two lives have been lost,' I continued, 'and some one must pay for them.'

Hofman mopped his face. 'Surely,' he said, 'the three lead on our side, Master Martin-'

'I do not see what they have to do with it,' I answered, maintaining a cold and uninterested air, which was torture to him. 'It is your affair, however, not mine.'

'But, my dear friend-Martin,' he stammered, plucking my sleeve, 'you are not revengeful. You will not make it worse? You won't do that?'

'Worse?' I retorted. 'It is bad enough already. And I am afraid you will find it so.'

He winced and looked at me askance, his eyes rolling in a fever

of apprehension. For a moment I really thought that he would turn and go back. But the crowd was behind; he was on the horns of a dilemma, and with a groan of misery he moved on, looking from time to time at the terrace above us. 'Those cursed cannon,' I heard him mutter, as he wiped his brow.

'Ay,' I said, sharply, 'if it had not been for the cannon you would have seen our throats cut before you would have moved. I quite understand that. But you see it is our turn now.'

We were on the steps and he did not answer. I looked up, expecting to see the wall by the wicket-gate well-manned; but I was mistaken. No row of faces looked down from it. All was silent. A single man, on guard at the wicket, alone appeared. He bade us stand, and passed the word to another. He in his turn disappeared and presently old Jacob, with a half-pike on his shoulder, and a couple of men at his back, came stiffly out to receive us with all the formality and discipline of a garrison in time of war. He acknowledged my presence by a wink, but saluted my companions in the coldest manner possible, proceeding at once to march us without a word spoken to the door of the house, where we were again bidden to stand.

All this filled me with satisfaction. I knew what effect it would have on Hofman, and how it would send his soul into his shoes. At the same time my satisfaction was not unmixed. I felt a degree of strangeness myself. The place seemed changed, the men, moving stiffly, had an unfamiliar air. I missed the respect I had enjoyed in the house. For the moment I was nobody; a prisoner, an alien

person admitted grudgingly, and on sufferance.

I comforted myself with the reflection that all would be well when I reached the presence. But I was mistaken. I saw indeed my lady's colour come and go when I entered, and her eyes fell. But she kept her seat, she looked no more at me than at my companions, she uttered no greeting or word of acknowledgment. It was the Waldgrave who spoke-the Waldgrave who acted. In a second there came over me a bitter feeling that all was changed; that the old state of things at Heritzburg was past, and a rule to which I was a stranger set in its place.

Three or four of my lady's women were grouped behind her, while Franz and Ernst stood like statues at the farther door. Fraulein Anna sat on a stool in the window-bay, and my lady's own presence was, as at all times, marked by a stateliness and dignity which seemed to render it impossible that she should pass for second in any company. But for all that the Waldgrave, standing up straight and tall behind her, with his comeliness, his youth, and his manhood and the red light from the coat of arms in the stained window just touching his fair hair, did seem to me to efface her. It was he who stood there to pardon or punish, praise or blame, and not my lady. And I resented it.

Not that his first words to me were not words of kindness.

'Ha, Martin,' he cried, his face lighting up, 'I hear you fought like an ancient Trojan, and broke as many heads as Hector. And that your own proved too hard for them! Welcome back. In a

moment I may want a word with you; but you must wait.'

I stood aside, obeying his gesture; and he apologised, but with a very stern aspect, to Hofman and his companions for addressing me first.

'The Countess Rotha, however, Master Burgomaster,' he continued, with grim suavity, 'much as she desires to treat your office with respect, cannot but discern between the innocent and the guilty.'

'The guilty, my lord?' Hofman cried, in such a hurry and trepidation, I could have laughed. 'I trust that there are none here.'

'At any rate you represent them,' the Waldgrave retorted.

'I, my lord?' The Mayor's hair almost stood on end at the thought.

'Ay, you; or why are you here?' the Waldgrave answered. 'I understood that you came to offer such amends as the town can make, and your lady accept.'

Poor Hofman's jaw fell at this statement of his position, and he stood the picture of dismay and misery. The Waldgrave's peremptory manner, which shook him out of the rut of his slow wits, and upset his balanced periods, left him prostrate without a word to say. He gasped and remained silent. He was one of those people whose dull self-importance is always thrusting them into positions which they are not intended to fill.

'Well?' the Waldgrave said, after a pause, 'as you seem to have nothing to say, and judgment must ultimately come from your lady, I will proceed at once to declare it. And firstly, it is her will,

Master Burgomaster, that within forty-eight hours you present to her on behalf of the town a humble petition and apology, acknowledging your fault; and that the same be entered on the town records.'

'It shall be done,' Master Hofman cried. His eagerness to assent was laughable.

'Secondly, that you pay a fine of a hundred gold ducats for the benefit of the children of the men wantonly killed in the riot.'

'It shall be done,' Master Hofman said, – but this time not so readily.

'And lastly,' the Waldgrave continued in a very clear voice,' that you deliver up for execution two in the marketplace, one at the foot of the castle steps, and one at the West Gate, for a warning to all who may be disposed to offend again-four of the principal offenders in the late riot.'

'My lord!' the Mayor cried, aghast.

'My lord, if you please,' the Waldgrave answered coldly. 'But do you consent?'

Hofman looked blanker than ever. 'Four?' he stammered.

'Precisely; four,' the young lord answered.

'But who? I do not know them,' the Mayor faltered.

The Waldgrave shook his head gently. 'That is your concern, Burgomaster,' he said, with a smile. 'In forty-eight hours much may be done.'

Hofman's hair stood fairly on end. Craven as he was, the thought of the crowd in the market-place, the thought of the

reception he would have, if he assented to such terms, gave him courage.

'I will consult with my colleagues,' he said with a great gulp.

'I am afraid that you will not have the opportunity,' the Waldgrave rejoined, in a peculiarly suave tone. 'Until the four are given up to us, we prefer to take care of you and the learned Minister. I see that you have brought two or three friends with you; they will serve to convey what has passed to the town. And I doubt not that within a few hours we shall be able to release you.'

Master Hofman fell a trembling.

'My lord,' he cried, between tears and rage, 'my privileges!'

'Master Mayor,' the Waldgrave answered, with a sudden snap and snarl, which showed his strong white teeth, '*my dead servants*.'

After that there was no more to be said. The Burgomaster shrank back with a white face, and though Dietz, with rage burning in his sallow cheeks, cried 'woe to him' who separated the shepherd from the sheep, and would have added half-a-dozen like texts, old Jacob cut him short by dropping his halberd on his toes and promptly removed him and the quavering Burgomaster to strong quarters in the tower. Meanwhile the other members of the party were marched nothing loth to the steps, and despatched through the gate with the same formality which had surprised us on our arrival.

Then for a few moments I was happy, in spite of doubts and forebodings; for the moment the room was cleared of servants,

my lady came down from her place, and with tears in her eyes, laid her hand on my rough shoulder, and thanked me, saying such things to me, and so sweetly, that though many a silken fool has laughed at me, as a clown knowing no knee service, I knelt there and then before her, and rose tenfold more her servant than before. For of this I am sure, that if the great knew their power, we should hear no more of peasants' wars and Rainbow banners. A smile buys for them what gold will not for another. A word from their lips stands guerdon for a life, and a look for the service of the heart.

However, few die of happiness, and almost before I was off my knees I found a little bitter in the cup.

'Well, well,' the Waldgrave said, with a comical laugh, and I saw my lady blush, 'these are fine doings. But next time you go to battle, Martin, remember, more haste less speed. Where would you have been now, I should like to know, without my cannon?'

'Perhaps still in Peter's forge,' I answered bluntly. 'But that puzzles me less, my lord,' I continued, 'than where you found your cannon.'

He laughed in high good humour. 'So you are bit, are you?' he said. 'I warrant you thought we could do nothing without you. But the cannon, where do you think we did find them? You should know your own house.'

'I know of none here,' I answered slowly, 'except the old cracked pieces the Landgrave Philip left.'

'Well?' he retorted, smiling. 'And what if these be they?'

'But they are cracked and foundered!' I cried warmly. 'You could no more fire powder in them, my lord, than in the Countess's comfit-box!'

'But if you do not want to burn powder?' he replied. 'If the sight of the muzzles be enough? What then, Master Wiseacre?'

'Why, then, my lord,' I answered, drily, after a pause of astonishment,' I think that the game is a risky one.'

'Chut, you are jealous!' he said, laughing.

'And should be played very moderately.'

'Chut,' he said again, 'you are jealous! Is he not, Rotha? He is jealous.'

My lady looked at me laughing.

'I think he is a little,' she said. 'You must acknowledge, Martin,' she continued, pleasantly, 'that the Waldgrave has managed very well?'

I must have assented, however loth; but he saved me the trouble. He did not want to hear my opinion.

'Very well?' he exclaimed, with a laugh of pleasure; 'I should think I have. Why, I have so brightened up your old serving-men that they make quite a tolerable garrison-mount guard, relieve, give the word and all, like so many Swedes. Oh, I can tell you a little briskness and a few new fashions do no harm. But now,' he continued, complacently, 'since you are so clever, my friend, where is the risk?'

'If it becomes known in the town,' I said, 'that the cannon are dummies-'

'It is not known,' he answered peremptorily.

'Still, under the circumstances,' I persisted, 'I should with submission have imposed terms less stringent. Especially I should not have detained Master Hofman, my lord, who is a timid man, making for peace. He has influence. Shut up here he cannot use it.'

'But our terms will show that we are not afraid,' the Waldgrave answered. 'And that is everything.'

I shrugged my shoulders.

'Chut!' he said, half in annoyance and half in good humour. 'Depend upon it, there is nothing like putting a bold face on things. That is my policy. But the truth is you are jealous, my friend-jealous of my excellent generalship; but for which I verily believe you would be decorating a gallows in the market-place at this moment. Come, fair cousin,' he added, gleefully, turning from me and snatching up my lady's gloves and handing them to her, 'let us out. Let us go and look down at our conquest, and leave this green-eyed fellow to rub his bruises.'

My lady looked at me kindly and laughed. Still she assented, and my chance was gone. It was my place now to hold the door with lowered head, not to argue. And I did so. After all I had been well treated; I had spoken boldly and been heard.

For a time after the sound of their voices had died away on the stairs, I stood still. The room was quiet and I felt blank and purposeless. In the first moments of return every-day duties had an air of dulness and staleness. I thought of one after another, but

had not yet brought myself to the point of moving, when a hand, raising the latch of one of the inner doors, effectually roused me. I turned and saw Fraulein Anna gliding in. She did not speak at once, but came towards me as she had a way of coming-close up before she spoke. It had more than once disturbed me. It did so now.

'Well, Master Martin,' she said at last, in her mild spiteful tone, 'I hope you are satisfied with your work; I hope my lord's service may suit you as well as my lady's.'

CHAPTER VII.
THE PRIDE OF YOUTH

But I am not going to relate the talk we had on that, Fraulein Anna and I. I learned one thing, and one only, and that I can put very shortly. I saw my face as it were in a glass, and I was not pleased with the reflection. Listening to Fraulein Anna's biting hints and sidelong speeches-she did not spare them-I recognized that I was jealous; that the ascendency the young lord had gained with my lady and in the castle did not please me; and that if I would not make a fool of myself and step out of my place, I must take myself roundly to task. Much might be forgiven to Fraulein Anna, who saw the quiet realm wherein she reigned invaded, and the friend she had gained won from her in an hour. But her case differed from mine. I was a servant, and woe to me if I forgot my place!

Perhaps, also, it gave me pleasure to find my uneasiness shared. At any rate, I felt better afterwards, and a message from my lady, bidding me rest my head and do nothing for the day, comforted me still further. I went out, and finding the terrace quiet, and deserted by all except the sentry at the wicket, I sat down on one of the stone seats which overlook the town and there began to think. The sun was behind a cloud and the air was fresh and cool, and I presently fell asleep with my head on my arms.

While I slept my lady and the Waldgrave came and began to walk up and down the terrace, and gradually little bits of their talk slid into my dreams, until I found myself listening to them between sleeping and waking. The Waldgrave was doing most of the speaking, in the boyish, confident tone which became him so well. Presently I heard him say-

'The whole art of war is changed, fair cousin. I had it from one who knows, Bernard of Weimar. The heavy battalions, the great masses, the slow movements, the system invented by the great Captain of Cordova are gone. Breitenfeld was their death-blow.'

'Yet my uncle was a great commander,' my lady said, with a little touch of impatience in her tone.

'Of the old school.'

I heard her laugh. 'You speak as if you had been a soldier for a score of years, Rupert,' she said.

'Age is not experience,' he answered hardily. 'That is the mistake. How old was Alexander when he conquered Egypt? Twenty-three, cousin, and I am twenty-three. How old was the Emperor Augustus when he became Consul of Rome? Nineteen. How old was Henry of England when he conquered France? Twenty-seven. And Charles the Fifth, at Pavia? Twenty-five.'

'Sceptres are easy leading-staves,' my lady answered deftly. 'All these were kings, or the like.'

'Then take Don John at Lepanto. He, too, was twenty-five.'

'A king's son,' my lady replied quickly.

'Then I will give you one to whom you can make no

objection,' he answered in a tone of triumph: 'Gaston de Foix, the Thunderbolt of Italy. He who conquered at Como, at Milan, at Ravenna. How old was he when he died, leaving a name never to be forgotten in arms? Twenty-three, fair cousin. And I am twenty-three.'

'But then you are not Gaston de Foix,' my lady retorted, laughter bubbling to her lips; 'nor a king's nephew.'

'But I may be.'

'What? A king's nephew?' the Countess answered, laughing outright. 'Pray where is the king's niece?'

'King's niece?' he exclaimed reproachfully-and I doubt not with a kind look at her, and a movement as if he would have paid her for her sauciness. 'You know I want no king's niece. There is no king's niece in the world so sweet to my taste, so fair, or so gracious as the cousin I have been fortunate enough to serve during the last few days; and that I will maintain against the world.'

'So here is my glove!' my lady answered gaily, finishing the speech for him. 'Very prettily said, Rupert. I make you a thousand curtsies. But a truce to compliments. Tell me more.'

He needed no second bidding; though I think that she would have listened without displeasure to another pretty speech, and an older man would certainly have made one. But he was full of the future and fame-and himself. He had never had such a listener before, and he poured forth his hopes and aspirations, as he strode up and down, so gallant of figure and frank of face

that it was impossible not to feel with him. He was going to do this; he was going to do that. He would make the name of Rupert of Weimar stand with that of Bernard. Never was such a time for enterprise. Gustavus Adolphus, with Sweden and North Germany at his back, was at Munich; Bavaria, Franconia, and the Rhine Bishoprics were at his feet. The hereditary dominions of the Empire, Austria, Silesia, Moravia, with Bohemia, Hungary, and the Tyrol, must soon be his; their conquest was certain. Then would come the division of the spoil. The House of Weimar, which had suffered more in the Protestant cause than any other princely house of Germany, which had resigned for its sake the Electoral throne and the rights of primogeniture, must stand foremost for reward.

'And which kingdom shall you choose?' my lady asked, with a twinkle in her eye which belied her gravity. 'Bohemia or Hungary? or Bavaria? Munich I am told is a pleasant capital.'

'You are laughing at me!' he said, a little hurt.

'Forgive me,' she said, changing her tone so prettily that he was appeased on the instant. 'But, speaking soberly, are you not curing the skin before the bear is dead? The great Wallenstein is said to be collecting an army in Bohemia, and if the latest rumour is to be believed, he has already driven out the Saxons and retaken Prague. The tide of conquest seems already to be turning.'

'We shall see,' the Waldgrave answered.

'Very well,' my lady replied. 'But, besides, is there not a proverb about the lion's share? Will the Lion of the North forego

his?'

'We shall make him,' the young lord answered. 'He goes as far as we wish and no farther. Without German allies he could not maintain his footing for a month.'

'Germany should blush to need his help,' my lady said warmly.

'Never mind. Better times are coming,' he answered. 'And soon, I hope.'

With that they moved out of hearing, crossing to the other side of the court and beginning to walk up and down there; and I heard no more. But I had heard enough to enable me to arrive at two or three conclusions. For one thing, I felt jealous no longer. My lady's tone when she spoke to the Waldgrave convinced me that whatever the future might bring forth, she regarded him in the present with liking, and some pride perhaps, but with no love worthy of the name. A woman, she took pleasure in his handsome looks and gallant bearing; she was fond of listening to his aspirations. But the former pleased her eye without touching her heart, and the latter never for a moment carried her away.

I was glad to be sure of this, because I discerned something lacking on his side also. It was 'Rotha,' 'sweet cousin,' 'fair cousin,' too soon with him. He felt no reverence, suffered no pangs, trembled under no misgivings, sank under no sense of unworthiness. He thought that all was to be had for pleasant words and the asking. Heritzburg seemed a rustic place to him, and my lady's life so dull and uneventful, my lady herself so little of a goddess, that he deemed himself above all risk of refusal.

A little difficulty, a little doubt, the appearance of a rival, might awaken real love. But it was not in him now. He felt only a passing fancy, the light offspring of propinquity and youth.

But how, it may be asked, was I so wise that, from a few sentences heard between sleeping and waking, I could gather all this, and draw as many inferences from a laugh as Fraulein Anna Max from a page of crabbed Latin? The question put to me then, as I sat day-dreaming over Heritzburg, might have posed me. I am clear enough about it now. I could answer it if I chose. But a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse, and a horse with eyes needs neither one nor the other.

Presently I saw Fraulein Anna come out and go sliding along one side of the court to gain another door. She had a great book under her arm and blinked like an owl in the sunshine, and would have run against my lady if the Waldgrave had not called out good-humouredly. She shot away at that with a show of excessive haste, and was in the act of disappearing like a near-sighted rabbit, when my lady called to her pleasantly to come back.

She came slowly, hugging the great book, and with her lips pursed tightly. I fancy she had been sitting at a window watching my lady and her companion, and that every laugh which rose to her ears, every merry word, nay the very sunshine in which they walked, while she sat in the dull room with her unread book before her, wounded her.

'What have you been doing, Anna?' my lady asked kindly.

'I have been reading the "Praise of Folly,"' Fraulein Max

answered primly. 'I am going to my Voetius now.'

'It is such a fine day,' my lady pleaded.

'I never miss my Voetius,' Fraulein answered.

The Waldgrave looked at her quizzically, with scarcely veiled contempt. 'Voetius?' he said. 'What is that? You excite my curiosity.'

Perhaps it was the contrast between them, between his strength and comeliness and her weak figure and pale frowning face, that moved me; but I know that as he said that, I felt a sudden pity for her. And she, I think, for herself. She reddened and looked down and seemed to go smaller. Scholarship is a fine thing; I have heard Fraulein Anna herself say that knowledge is power. But I never yet saw a bookworm that did not pale his fires before a soldier of fortune, nor a scholar that did not follow the courtier and the ruffler with eyes of envy.

Perhaps my lady felt as I did, for she came to the rescue. 'You are too bad,' she said. 'Anna is my friend, and I will not have her teased. As for Voetius, he is a writer of learning, and you would know more about many things, if you could read his works, sir.'

'Do you read them?' he asked.

'I do!' she answered.

'Good heavens!' he exclaimed, staring at her freely and affecting to be astonished. 'Well, all I can say is that you do not look like it!'

My lady fired up at that. I think she felt for her friend. 'I do not thank you,' she said sharply. 'A truce to such compliments,

if you please. Anna,' she continued, 'have you been to see this poor girl from the town?'

'No,' Fraulein Max answered.

'She has come, has she not?'

'And gone-to the stables!' And Fraulein Anna laughed spitefully. 'She is used to camp life, I suppose, and prefers them.'

'But that is not right,' my lady said, with a look of annoyance. She turned and called to me. 'Martin,' she said, 'come here. This girl-the papist from the town-why has she not been brought to the women's quarters in the house?'

I answered that I did not know; that she should have been.

'We will go and see,' my lady answered, nodding her head in a way that premised trouble should any one be found in fault. And without a moment's hesitation she led the way to the inner court, the Waldgrave walking beside her, and Fraulein Anna following a pace or two behind. The latter still hugged her book, and her face wore a look of secret anticipation. I took on myself to go too, and followed at a respectful distance, my mind in a ferment.

The stable court at Heritzburg is small. The rays of the sun even at noon scarcely warm it, and a shadow seemed to fall on our party as we entered. Two grooms, not on guard, were going about their ordinary duties. They started on seeing my lady, who seldom entered that part without notice; and hastened to do reverence to her.

'Where is the girl who was brought here from the town?' she said, in a peremptory tone.

The men looked at one another, scared by her presence, yet not knowing what was amiss. Then one said, 'Please your excellency, she is in the room over the granary.'

'She should be in the house, not here,' my lady answered harshly. 'Take me to her.'

The man stared, and the Waldgrave, seeing his look of astonishment, interposed, murmuring that perhaps the place was scarcely fit.

'For me?' my lady said, cutting him short, with a high look which reminded me of her uncle, Count Tilly. 'You forget, sir cousin, that I am not a woman only, but mistress here. Ignorance, which may be seemly in a woman, does not become me. Lead on, my man.'

The fellow led the way up a flight of outside steps which gave access to the upper granary floor; and my lady followed, rejecting the Waldgrave's hand and gazing with an unmoved eye at the unfenced edge on her left; for the stairs had no rail. At the top the groom opened the door and squeezed himself aside, and my lady entered. The Waldgrave had given place to Fraulein Anna-whom desire to see what would happen had blinded to the risks of the stairs-and she was not slow to follow. The young lord and I pressed in a pace behind.

'This is not a fit place for a maiden!' I heard my lady say severely; and then she stopped. That was before I could see inside, the sudden pause coming as I entered. The loft was dark, the unglazed windows being shuttered; but my eyes are good,

and I knew the place, and saw at once-what my lady had seen, I think, at a second glance only-that the man beside whom the girl was kneeling-or had been kneeling, for as I entered she rose to her feet with a word of alarm-was bandaged from his chin to his crown, was helpless and maundering, talking strange nonsense, and rolling his head restlessly from side to side.

'Why, you are a child!' my lady said; and this time her voice was soft and low and full of surprise. 'Who is this?' she continued, pointing to the man; who never ceased to babble and move.

'It is Steve, my lady,' I said. 'He was hurt below, in the town, and the girl has been nursing him. I suppose she-I think no one told her to go elsewhere,' I added by way of apology for her.

'Where could she be better?' my lady said in a low voice. 'Child,' she continued gently,' come here. Do not be afraid.'

The girl had shrunk back at the sound of my lady's first words, or at sight of so large a company, and had taken her stand on the farther side of Steve, where she crouched trembling and looking at us with a terrified face. Hearing herself summoned, she came slowly and timidly forward, the little boy who had run to her holding her hand, and hiding his face in her skirts.

'I am the countess,' my lady said, looking at her closely, but with kindness, 'and I have come to see how you fare.'

It was a hard moment for the girl, but she did the very best thing she could have done, and one that commended her to my lady's heart for ever. For, bursting into tears-I doubt not the sound of a woman's voice speaking mildly to her touched her heart-she

dropped on her knees before the countess and kissed her hand, sobbing piteous words of thankfulness and appeal.

'Chut! chut!' my lady said, a little tremor in her own voice. 'You are safe now. Be comforted. You shall be protected here, whatever betide. But you have lost your father? Yes, I remember, child. Well, it is over now. You are quite safe. See, this gentleman shall be your champion. And Martin there. He is a match for any two. Tell me your name.'

'Marie-Marie Wort.' The girl answered suppressing her tears with an effort.

'How old are you?'

'Seventeen, please your excellency.'

'And where were you born, Marie?'

'At Munich, in Bavaria.'

'You are a Romanist, I hear?'

'If it please your excellency.'

'It does not please me at all,' my lady answered promptly; but she said it with so much mildness that Marie's eyes filled again. 'I warn you, we shall, try to convert you-by kindness. So you are nursing this poor fellow?' And my lady went up to Steve, and touched his hand and spoke to him. But he did not know her, and she stepped back, looking grave.

'The fever is on him now,' Marie said timidly. 'He is at his worst; but he will be better by-and-by, if your excellency pleases.'

'He is fortunate in his nurse,' my lady answered, gazing searchingly at the other's pale face. 'Will you stay with him, child,

or would you rather come into the house, where my women could take care of you, and you would be more comfortable?'

A look of distress flickered in the girl's eyes. She hesitated and looked down, colouring painfully. I dare say that with feminine tact she knew that my lady even now thought it scarcely proper for her to be there-in a house where only the men about the stable lived. But she found her answer.

'He was hurt trying to protect me,' she murmured, in a low voice.

My lady nodded. 'Very well,' she said; and I saw that she was not displeased. 'You shall stay with him. I will see that you are taken care of. Come, Rupert, I think we have seen enough.'

She signed to us to go before her, and we all went out, and she closed the door. At the head of the steps, when the Waldgrave offered her his hand, she waved it away, and stood.

'Bring me a hammer and a nail,' she cried.

Three or four men, nearly half our garrison, had collected below, hearing where we were. One of these ran and fetched what she called for; while we all waited and wondered what she meant. I took the hammer and nail from the man and went up again with them.

'Give me my glove,' she said, turning abruptly to the Waldgrave.

He had possessed himself of one in the course of the conversation I have partly detailed; and no doubt he did not give it up very willingly. But there was no refusing her under the

circumstances.

'Hold it against the door!' she said.

He obeyed, and with her own hands she drove the nail through the glove, pinning it to the middle of the door. Then she turned with a little colour in her face.

'That is my room!' she said, with a ring of menace in her tone. 'Let no one presume to enter it. And have a care, men! Whatever is wanted inside, place at the threshold and begone.'

Then she came down, followed by the Waldgrave, and walked through the middle of us and went back to the terrace, with Fraulein Anna at her heels. The Waldgrave lingered a moment to look at a sick horse, and I to give an order. When we reached the terrace court a few minutes later, we found my lady walking up and down alone in the sunshine.

'Why, where is the learned Anna?' the Waldgrave said.

'She is gone to amuse herself,' my lady answered, laughing. 'Voetius is put aside for the moment in favour of Master Dietz!'

'No?' the young lord exclaimed, in a tone of surprise. 'That yellow-faced atomy? She is not in love with him?'

'No, sir, certainly not.'

'Then what is it?'

'Well, I think she is a little jealous,' my lady answered with a smile. 'We have been so long colloguing with a papist, Anna thinks some amends are due to the Church. And she is gone to make them. At any rate, she asked me a few minutes ago if she might pay a visit to Dietz. "For what purpose?" I said. "To discuss

a point with him," she answered. So I told her to go, if she liked, and by this time I don't doubt that they are hard at it.'

'Over Voetius?'

'No, sir,' my lady answered gaily. 'Beza more probably, or Calvin. You know little of either, I expect. I do not wonder that Anna is driven to seek more improving company.'

CHAPTER VIII.
A CATASTROPHE

All that day the town remained quiet, and all day the Waldgrave and my lady walked to and fro in the sunshine; or my lady sat working on one of the stone seats, while he built castles in the air, which she knocked down with a sly word or a merry glance. Fraulein Anna, always with the big book, flitted from door to door, like an unquiet spirit. The sentries dozed at their posts, old Jacob in his chair in the guard-room, the cannons under their breech-clouts. If this could be said to be a state of siege, it was the most gentle and joyous one paladin ever shared or mistress imagined.

But no message reached us from the town, and that disturbed me. Half a dozen times I went to the wall and, leaning over it, listened. Each time I came away satisfied. All seemed quiet; the market-place rather fuller perhaps than on common days, the hum of life more steady and persistent; but neither to any great extent. Despite this I could not shake off a feeling of uneasiness. I remembered certain faces I had seen in the town, grim faces lurking in corners, seen over men's shoulders or through half-open doors; and a dog barking startled me, the shadow of a crow flying over the court made me jump a yard.

Night only added to my nervousness. I doubled all the guards,

stationing two men at the town-wicket and two at the stable-gate, which leads to the bridge. And not content with these precautions, though the Waldgrave laughed at them and me, I got out of bed three times in the night, and went the round to assure myself that the men were at their posts.

When morning came without mishap, but also without bringing any overture from the town, the Waldgrave laughed still more loudly. But my lady looked grave. I did not dare to interfere or give advice-having been once admitted to say my say-but I felt that it would be a serious thing if the forty-eight hours elapsed and the town refused to make amends. My lady felt this too, I think; and by-and-by she held a council with the Waldgrave; and about midday my lord came to me, and with a somewhat wry face bade me have the prisoners conducted to the parlour.

He sent 'me at the same time on an errand to another part of the castle, and so I cannot say what passed. I believe my lady dealt with the two very firmly; reiterating her judgment of the day before, and only adding that in clemency she had thought better of imprisoning them, and would now suffer them to go to their homes, in the hope that they would use their influence to save the town from worse trouble.

I met the two crossing the terrace on their way to the gate and was struck by something peculiar in their aspect. Master Hofman was all of a tremble with excitement and eagerness to be gone. His fat, half-moon of a face shone with anxiety. He stuttered when he tried to give me good day as I passed; and he seemed

to have eyes only for the gate, dragging his smaller companion along by the arm, and more than once whispering in his ear as if to adjure him not to waste a moment.

The little Minister, on the other hand, hung back and marched slowly, his face wearing a look of triumph which showed very plainly-or so I construed it-that he regarded his release in the light of a victory. His sallow cheeks were flushed, and his eyes gleamed spitefully as he looked from side to side. He held himself bolt upright, with a square Bible clasped to his breast, and as he passed me he could not refrain from a characteristic outbreak. Doubtless to bridle himself before my lady had almost choked him. He laughed in my face. 'Dry bones!' he cackled. 'And mouths that speak not!'

'Speak plainly yourself, Master Dietz,' I answered, for I have never thought ministers more than other men. 'Then perhaps I shall be able to understand you.'

'Sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal!' he replied, cracking his fingers in my face and laughing triumphantly.

He would have said more, I imagine; but at that moment the Burgomaster fell bodily upon him, and drove him by main force through the gate which had been opened. Outside even, he made some attempts to return and defy us, crying out 'Whited sepulchres!' and the like. But the steps were narrow and steep, and Hofman stood like a feather bed in the way, and presently he desisted. The two stumbled down together and we saw no more of them.

The men about me laughed; but I had reason for thinking it far from a laughing matter, and I hastened into the house that I might tell my lady. When I entered the parlour, however, where I found her with the Waldgrave and Fraulein Anna, she held up her hand to check me. She and the Waldgrave were laughing, and Fraulein Anna, half shy and half sullen, was leaning against the table looking at the floor, with her cheeks red.

'Come,' my lady was saying, 'you were with him half an hour, Anna. You can surely tell us what you talked about. Don't be afraid of Martin. He knows all our secrets.'

'Or perhaps we are indiscreet,' the Waldgrave said gravely, but with a twinkle in his eye. 'When a young lady visits a gentleman in captivity, the conversation should be of a tender nature.'

'Which shows, sir, that you know little about it,' Fraulein Anna answered indignantly. 'We talked of Voetius.'

'Dear me!' my lord said. 'Then Master Dietz knows Voetius?'

'He does not. He said he considered such pagan learning useless,' Fraulein Anna answered, warming with her subject. 'That it tended to pride, and puffed up instead of giving grace. I said that he only saw one side of the matter.'

'In that resembling me,' my lord murmured.

My lady repressed him with a look. 'Yes,' she said pleasantly. 'And what then, Anna?'

'And that he might be wrong in this, as in other matters. He asked me what other matters,' Fraulein Max continued, growing voluble, and almost confident, as she reviewed the scene. 'I said,

the inferiority of women to men. He said, yes, he maintained that, following Peter Martyr. Well, I said he was wrong, and so was Peter Martyr. "But you do not convince me," he answered. "You say that I am wrong on this as on other points. Cite a point, then, on which I am wrong." "You know no Greek, you know no Oriental tongue, you know no Hebrew!" I retorted. "All pagan learning," he said. "Cite a point on which I am wrong. I am not often wrong. Cite a point on which I am confessedly wrong." So'-Fraulein Anna laughed a little, excited laugh of pleasure-'I thought I would take him at his word, and I said, "Will you abide by that? If I show you that you have been wrong, that you have been deceived only to-day, will you acknowledge that Peter Martyr was wrong?" He said, oh yes, he would, if I could convince him. I said, "Exemplum! You came here because you were afraid of our cannon. Granted? Yes. Well, our cannon are cracked. They are *brutum fulmen*-an empty threat. We could not fire them, if we would. So there, you see, you were wrong." Well, on that-'

But what Master Dietz said on that, and what she answered, we never knew, for the Waldgrave, bounding from the table, with a crash which shook the room, swore a very pagan oath.

'Himmel!' he cried in a voice of passion. 'The woman has ruined us! Do you understand, Countess? She has told them! And they have taken the news to the town!'

'I do understand,' my lady said softly, but with a paling face. 'By this time it is known.'

'Known! Yes; and our shutting up that poisonous little snake will only make him the more bitter!' my lord answered, striking the table a great blow in his wrath. 'We are undone! Oh, you idiot, you idiot!' and breaking off suddenly he turned to Fraulein Max, who stood weeping and trembling by the table. 'Why did you do it?'

'Hush!' my lady said nobly; and she put her arm round Fraulein Anna. 'She is so absent. It was my fault. I should not have let her see them. Besides, she did not know that they were going to be released. And it is done now, and cannot be undone. The question is, what ought we to do?'

'Yes, what?' my lord cried bitterly, with a glance at the culprit, which showed that he was very far from forgiving her. 'I am sure I do not know, any more than the dog there!'

My lady looked at me anxiously.

'Well, Martin,' she said, 'what do you say?'

But I had nothing to say, I felt myself at a loss. I knew, better than any of them, the Minister's sour nature, and I had seen with my own eyes the state of resentment and rage in which he had left us. His news would fall like a spark dropped on powder. The town, brooding in gloom, foreboding, and terror, would in a moment blaze into fierce wrath. Every ruffian who had felt his neck endangered by the Countess's sentence, every family that had lost a member in the late riot, every one who had an old grievance to avenge, or a new object to gain, would in an hour be in arms; while those whose advantage lay commonly on the side

of order might stand aloof now-some at the instance of Dietz, and others through timidity and that fear of a mob which exists in the mind of every burgher. What, then, had we to expect? My lady must look to have her authority flouted-that for certain; but would the matter end with that? Would the disorder stop at the foot of the steps?

'I think we are safe enough here, if your excellency asks me,' I said, after a moment's thought. 'A dozen men could hold the wicket-gate against a thousand.'

'Safe!' my lady cried in a tone of surprise. 'Yes, Martin, safe! But what of those who look to me for protection? Am I to stand by and see the law defied? Am I to-' She paused. 'What is that?' she said in a different tone, raising her hand for silence.

She listened, and we listened, looking at one another with meaning eyes; and in a moment she had her answer. Through the open windows, with the air and sunshine, came a sound which rose and fell at intervals. It was the noise of distant cheering. Full and deep, leaping up again and again, in insolent mockery and defiance, it reached us where we stood in the quiet room, and told us that all was known. While we still listened, another sound, nearer at hand, broke the inner stillness of the house-the tramp of a hurrying foot on the stairs. Old Jacob thrust in his head and looked at me.

'You can speak,' I said.

'There is something wrong below,' he muttered, abashed at finding himself in the presence.

'We know it, Jacob,' my lady said bravely. 'We are considering how to right it. In the mean time, do you go to the gates, my friend, and see that they are well guarded.'

'We could send to Hesse-Cassel,' the Waldgrave suggested, when we were again alone.

'It would be useless,' my lady answered. 'The Landgrave is at Munich with the King of Sweden; so is Leuchtenstein.'

'If Leuchtenstein were only at home-'

'Ah!' the Countess answered with a touch of impatience; 'but then he is not. If he were-well, even he could scarcely make troops where there are none.'

'There are generally some to be hired,' the Waldgrave answered. 'What if we send to Halle, or Weimar, and inquire? A couple of hundred pikes would settle the matter.'

'God forbid!' my lady answered with a shudder. 'I have heard enough of the doings of such soldiers. The town has not deserved that.'

The Waldgrave looked at me, and slightly shrugged his shoulders; as much as to say that my lady was impracticable. But I, agreeing with every word she said, only loved her the more, and could make him no answer, even if my duty had permitted it. I hastened to suggest that, the castle being safe, the better plan was to wait, keeping on our guard, and see what happened; which, indeed, seemed also to be the only course open to us.

My lady saw this and agreed; I withdrew, to spend the rest of the day in a feverish march between the one gate and the

other. We could muster no more than twelve effective men, including the Waldgrave; and though these might suffice for the bare defence of the place, which had only two assailable points, the paucity of our numbers kept me in perpetual fear. I knew my lady's proud nature so well that I dreaded humiliation for her as I might have feared death for another; with a terror which made the possibility of her capture by the malcontents a misery to me, a nightmare which would neither let me rest nor sleep.

My lord soon recovered his spirits. In an hour or two he was as buoyant and cheerful as before, dividing the blame of the *contretemps* between Fraulein Anna and myself, and hinting that if he had been left to manage the matter, the guilty would have suffered, and Dietz not gone scot-free. But I trembled. I did not see how we could be surprised; I thought it improbable that the townsfolk would try to effect anything against us; impossible that they should succeed. Yet, when the stern swell of one of Luther's hymns rose from the town at sunset, and I remembered how easily men's hearts were inflamed by those strains; and again, when a huge bonfire in the market-place dispelled the night, and for hours kept the town restless and waking, I shuddered, fearing I knew not what. I will answer for it, my lady, who never ceased to wear a cheerful countenance, did not sleep that night one half so ill as I.

And yet I was caught napping. A little before daybreak, when all was quiet, I went to take an hour's rest. I had lain down, and, as far as I could judge later, had just fallen into a doze, when a

tremendous shock, which made the very walls round me tremble, drew me to my feet as if a giant hand had plucked me from the bed. A crashing sound, mingled with the shiver of falling glass, filled the air. For a few seconds I stood trembling and bewildered in the middle of the room-in the state of disorder natural to a man rudely awakened. I could not on the instant collect myself or comprehend what had happened. Then, in a flash, the fears of the day returned to my mind, and springing to the door, half-dressed as I was, I ran down to the courtyard.

Some of the servants were already there, a white-cheeked, panic-stricken group of men and women intermixed; but, for a moment, I could get no answer to my questions. All spoke at once, none knew. Then-it was just growing light-from the direction of the stable-gate a man came running out of the dusk with a half-pike on his shoulder.

'Quick!' he cried. 'This way, give me a musket.'

'What is it?' I answered, seizing him by the arm.

'They have blown up the bridge-the bridge over the ravine!' he replied, panting. 'Quick, a gun! A part is left, and they are hacking it down!'

In a moment I saw all. 'To your posts!' I shouted. 'And the women into the house! See to the wicket-gate, Jacob, and do not leave it!' Then I sprang into the guardhouse and snatched down a carbine, three or four of which hung loaded in the loops. The sentry who had brought the news seized another, and we ran together through the stable court and to the gate, four or five of

the servants following us.

Elsewhere it was growing light. Here a thick cloud of smoke and dust still hung in the air, with a stifling reek of powder. But looking through one of the loopholes in the gate, I was able to discern that the farther end of the bridge which spanned the ravine was gone-or gone in part. The right-hand wall, with three or four feet of the roadway, still hung in air, but half a dozen men, whose figures loomed indistinctly through a haze of dust and gloom, were working at it furiously, demolishing it with bars and pickaxes.

At that sight I fell into a rage. I saw in a flash what would happen if the bridge sank and we were cut off from all exit except through the town-gate. The dastardly nature of the surprise, too, and the fiendish energy of the men combined to madden me. I gave no warning and cried out no word, but thrusting my weapon through the loophole aimed at the nearest worker, and fired.

The man dropped his tool and threw up his arms, staggered forward a couple of paces, and fell sheer over the broken edge into the gulf. His fellows stood a moment in terror, looking after him, but the sentry who had warned me fired through the other loophole, and that started them. They flung down their tools and bolted like so many rabbits. The smoke of the carbine was scarce out of the muzzle, before the bridge, or what remained of it, was clear.

I turned round and found the Waldgrave at my elbow. 'Well done!' he said heartily. 'That will teach the rascals a lesson!'

I was trembling in every limb with excitement, but before I answered him, I handed my gun to one of the men who had followed me. 'Load,' I said,' and if a man comes near the bridge, shoot him down. Keep your eye on the bridge, and do nothing else until I come back.'

Then I walked away through the stable-court with the Waldgrave; who looked at me curiously. 'You were only just in time,' he said.

'Only just,' I muttered.

'There is enough left for a horse to cross.'

'Yes,' I answered, 'to-day.'

'Why to-day?' he asked, still looking at me. I think he was surprised to see me so much moved.

'Because the rest will be blown up to-night,' I answered bluntly. 'Or may be. How can we guard it in the dark? It is fifty paces from the gate. We cannot risk men there-with our numbers.'

'Still it may not be,' he said. 'We must keep a sharp look-out.'

'But if it *is?*' I answered, halting suddenly, and looking him full in the face. 'If it is, my lord?' I continued. 'We are provisioned for a week only. It is not autumn, you see. Then the pickle tubs would be full, the larder stocked, the rafters groaning, the still-room supplied. But it is May, and there is little left. The last three days we have been thinking of other things than provisions; and we have thirty mouths to feed.'

The Waldgrave's face fell. 'I had not thought of that,' he said.

'The bridge gone, they may starve us, you mean?'

'Into submission to whatever terms they please,' I answered. 'We are too few to cut our way through the town, and there would be no other way of escape.'

'What do you advise, then?' he asked, drawing me aside with a flustered air. 'Flight?'

'A horse might cross the bridge to-day,' I said.

'But any terms would be better than that!' he replied with vehemence.

'What if they demand the expulsion of the Catholic girl, my lord, whom the Countess has taken under her protection?'

'They will not!' he said.

'They may,' I persisted.

'Then we will not give her up.'

'But the alternative-starvation?'

'Pooh! It will not come to that!' he answered lightly. 'You leap before you reach the stile.'

'Because, my lord, there will be no leaping if we do reach it.'

'Nonsense!' he cried masterfully. 'Something must be risked. To give up a strong place like this to a parcel of clodhoppers-it is absurd! At the worst we could parley.'

'I do not think my lady would consent to parley.'

'I shall say nothing to her about it,' he answered. 'She is no judge of such things.'

I had been thinking all the while that he had that in his mind, and on the spot I answered him squarely that I would not consent.

'My lady must know all,' I said, 'and decide for herself.'

He started, looking at me with his face very red. 'Why, man,' he said, 'would you browbeat me?'

'No, my lord,' I said firmly, 'but my lady must know.'

'You are insolent!' he cried, in a passion. 'You forget yourself, man, and that your mistress has placed me in command here!'

'I forget nothing, my lord,' I answered, waxing firmer. 'What I remember is that she is my mistress.'

He glared at me a moment, his face dark with anger, and then with a contemptuous gesture he left me and walked twice or thrice across the court. Doubtless the air did him good, for presently he came back to me. 'You are an ill-bred meddler!' he said with his head high, 'and I shall remember it. But for the present have your way. I will tell the Countess and take her opinion.'

He went into the house to do it, and I waited patiently in the courtyard, watching the sun rise and all the roofs grow red; listening to the twittering of the birds, and wondering what the answer would be. I had not set myself against him without misgiving, for in a little while all might be in his hands. But fear for my mistress outweighed fears on my own account; and in the thought of her shame, should she awake some morning and find herself trapped, I lost thought of my own interest and advancement. I have heard it said that he builds best for himself who builds for another. It was so on this occasion.

He came back presently, looking thoughtful, as if my lady

had talked to him very freely, and shown him a side of her character that had escaped him. The anger was clean gone from his face, and he spoke to me without embarrassment; in apparent forgetfulness that there had been any difference between us. Nor did I ever find him bear malice long.

'The Countess decides to go,' he said, 'either to Cassel or Frankfort, according to the state of the roads. She will take with her Fraulein Max, her two women, and the Catholic girl, and as many men as you can horse. She thinks she may safely leave the castle in charge of old Jacob and Franz, with a letter directed to the Burgomaster and council, throwing the responsibility for its custody on them. When do you think we should start?'

'Soon after dark this evening,' I answered, 'if my lady pleases.'

'Then that decides it,' he replied carelessly, the dawn of a new plan and new prospects lighting up his handsome face. 'See to it, will you?'

CHAPTER IX.
WALNUTS OF GOLD

Night is like a lady's riding-mask, which gives to the most familiar features a strange and uncanny aspect. When to night are added silence and alarm, and that worst burden of all, responsibility-responsibility where a broken twig may mean a shot, and a rolling stone capture, where in a moment the evil is done-then you have a scene and a time to try the stoutest.

To walk boldly into a wall of darkness, relying on daylight knowledge, which says there is no wall; to step over the precipice on the faith of its depth being shadow-this demands nerve in those who are not used to the vagaries of night. But when the darkness may at any instant belch forth a sheet of flame; when every bush may hide a cowardly foe and every turn a pitfall, and there are women in company and helpless children, then a man had need to be an old soldier or forest-born, if he would keep his head cool, and tell one horse from another by the sound of its hoofs.

We started about eight, and started well. The Waldgrave and half a dozen men crossed first on foot, and took post to protect the farther end of the bridge. Then I led over the horses, beginning with the four sumpter beasts. Satisfied after this that the arch remained uninjured, and that there was room and to

spare, I told my lady, and she rode over by herself on Pushka. Marie Wort tripped after her with the child in her arms. Fraulein Max I carried. My lady's women crossed hand in hand. Then the rest. So like a troop of ghosts or shadows, with hardly a word spoken or an order given, we flitted into the darkness, and met under the trees, where those who had not yet mounted got to horse. Led by young Jacob, who knew every path in the valley and could find his way blindfold, we struck away from the road without delay, and taking lanes and tracks which ran beside it, presently hit it again a league or more beyond the town and far on the way.

That was a ride not to be forgotten. The night was dark. At a distance the dim lights of the town did not show. The valley in which we rode, and which grows straighter as it approaches the mouth and the river, seemed like a black box without a lid. The wind, laden with mysterious rustlings and the thousand sad noises of the night, blew in our faces. Now and then an owl hooted, or a branch creaked, or a horse stumbled and its rider railed at it. But for the most part we rode in silence, the women trembling and crossing themselves-as most of our people do to this day, when they are frightened-and the men riding warily, with straining eyes and ears on the stretch.

Before we reached the ford, which lies nearly eight miles from the castle, the Waldgrave, who had his place beside my lady, began to talk; and then, if not before, I knew that *his* love for her was a poor thing. For, being in high spirits at the success of

our plan-which he had come to consider *his* plan-and delighted to find himself again in the saddle with an adventure before him, he forgot that the matter must wear a different aspect in her eyes. She was leaving her home-the old rooms, the old books, and presses and stores, the duties, stately or simple, in which her life had been passed. And leaving them, not in the daylight, and with a safe and assured future before her, but by stealth and under cover of night, with a mind full of anxious questionings!

To my lord it seemed a fine thing to have the world before him; to know that all Germany beyond the Werra was convulsed by war, and a theatre wherein a bold man might look to play his part. But to a woman, however high-spirited, the knowledge was not reassuring. To one who was exchanging her own demesne and peace and plenty for a wandering life and dependence on the protection of men, it was the reverse.

So, while my lord talked gaily, my lady, I think, wept; doing that under cover of darkness and her mask, which she would never have done in the light. He talked on, planning and proposing; and where a true lover would have been quick to divine the woman's weakness, he felt no misgiving, thrilled with no sympathy. Then I knew that he lacked the subtle instinct which real love creates; which teaches the strong what it is the feeble dread, and gives a woman the daring of a man.

As we drew near the ford, I dropped back to see that all crossed safely. Pushka, I knew, would carry my lady over, but some of the others were worse mounted. This brought me

abreast of the Catholic girl, though the darkness was such that I recognized her only by the dark mass before her, which I knew to be the child. We had had some difficulty in separating her from Steve, and persuading her that the man ran no risk where he lay; otherwise she had behaved admirably. I did not speak to her, but when I saw the gleam of water before us, and heard the horses of the leaders begin to splash through the shallows, I leant over and took hold of the boy.

'You had better give him to me,' I said gruffly. 'You will have both hands free then. Keep your feet high, and hold by the pommel. If your horse begins to swim leave its head loose.'

I expected her to make a to-do about giving up the child; but she did not, and I lifted it to the withers of my horse. She muttered something in a tone which sounded grateful, and then we splashed on in silence, the horses putting one foot gingerly before the other; some sniffing the air with loud snorts and outstretched necks, and some stopping outright.

I rode on the upstream side of the girl, to break the force of the water. Not that the ford is dangerous in the daytime (it has been bridged these five years), but at night, and with so many horses, it was possible one or another might stray from the track; for the ford is not straight, but slants across the stream. However, we all passed safely; and yet the crossing remains in my memory.

As I held the child before me-it was a gallant little thing, and clung to me without cry or word-I felt something rough round its neck. At the moment I was deep in the water, and I had no hand

to spare. But by-and-by, as we rode out and began to clamber up the farther bank, I laid my hand on its neck, suspecting already what I should find.

I was not mistaken. Under my fingers lay the very necklace which Peter had described to me with so much care! I could trace the shape and roughness of the walnuts. I could almost count them. Even of the length of the chain I could fairly judge. It was long enough to go twice round the child's neck.

As soon as I had made certain, I let it be, lest the child should cry out; and I rode on, thinking hard. What, I wondered, had induced the girl to put the chain round its neck at that juncture? She had hidden it so carefully hitherto, that no eye but Peter's, so far as I could judge, had seen it. Why this carelessness now, then? Certainly it was dark, and, as far as eyes went, the chain was safe. But round her own neck, under her kerchief, where it had lain before, it was still safer. Why had she removed it?

We had topped the farther bank by this time, and were riding slowly along the right-hand side of the river; but I was still turning this over in my mind, when I heard her on a sudden give a little gasp. I knew in a moment what it was. She had bethought her where the necklace was. I was not a whit surprised when she asked me in a tremulous tone to give her back the child.

'It is very well here,' I said, to try her.

'It will trouble you,' she muttered faintly.

'I will say when it does,' I answered.

She did not answer anything to that, but I heard her breathing

hard, and knew that she was racking her brains for some excuse to get the child from me. For what if daylight came and I still rode with it, the necklace in full view? Or what if we stopped at some house and lights were brought? Or what, again, if I perceived the necklace and took possession of it!

This last idea so charmed me-I was in a grim humour-that my hand was on the necklace, and almost before I knew what I was doing, I was feeling for the clasp which fastened it. Some fiend brought the thing under my fingers in a twinkling. The necklace seemed to fall loose of its own accord. In a moment it was swinging and swaying in my hand. In another I had gathered it up and slid it into my pouch.

The trick was done so easily and so quickly that I think some devil must have helped me; the child neither moving nor crying out, though it was old enough to take notice, and could even speak, as children of that age can speak-intelligibly to those who know them, gibberish to strangers.

I need not say that I never meant to steal a link of the thing. The temptation which moved me was the temptation to tease the girl. I thought this a good way of punishing her. I thought, first to torment her by making her think the necklace gone; and then to shame her by producing it, and giving it back to her with a dry word that should show her I understood her deceit.

So, even when the thing was done, and the chain snug in my pocket, I did not for a while repent, but hugged myself on the jest and smiled under cover of the darkness. I carried the child a mile

farther, and then handed it down to Marie, with an appearance of unconsciousness which it was not very hard to assume, since she could not see my face. But doubtless every yard of that mile had been a torture to her. I heard her sigh with relief as her arms closed round the boy. Then, the next moment I knew that she had discovered her loss. She uttered a sobbing cry, and I heard her passing her hands through the child's clothing, while her breath came and went in gasps.

She plucked at her bridle so suddenly that those who rode behind ran into us. I made way for them to pass.

'What is it?' I said roughly. 'What is the matter?'

She muttered under her breath, with her hands still searching the child, that she had lost something.

'If you have, it is gone,' I said bluntly. 'You would hardly find a hayrick to-night. You must have dropped it coming through the ford?'

She did not answer, but I heard her begin to sob, and then for the first time I felt uncomfortable. I repented of what I had done, and wished with all my heart that the chain was round the child's neck again. 'Come, come,' I said awkwardly, 'it was not of much value, I suppose. At any rate, it is no good crying over it.'

She did not answer; she was still searching. I could hear what she was doing, though I could not see; there were trees overhead, and it was as much as I could do to make out her figure. At last I grew angry, partly with myself, partly with her. 'Come,' I said roughly, 'we cannot stay here all night. We must be moving.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.