

In The Blue Pike

Georg Ebers

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Translated from the German by Mary T. Safford

This etext was produced by David Widger widger@cecomet.net

Volume 1.

CHAPTER I.

"May a thunderbolt strike you!" The imprecation suited the rough fellow who uttered it. He had pointed out of doors as he spoke, and scarcely lowered the strange tones of his voice, yet of all the rabble who surrounded him only two persons understood his meaning a fading, sickly girl, and the red-haired woman, only a few years her senior, who led the swearing man by a chain, like a tame bear.

The Nuremberg magistrates had had Cyriax's tongue cropped for gross blasphemy, and listeners could scarcely comprehend the words he mangled in his gasping speech.

The red-haired woman dropped the knife with which she was slicing bread and onions into a pot, and looked at her companion with an anxious, questioning glance.

"Nuremberg Honourables," he stammered as fast as he could, snatched his wife's shawl from her shoulders, and drew it over his unkempt head.

The woman beckoned to their travelling companions a lame fellow of middle age who, propped on crutches, leaned against the wall, an older pock-marked man with a bloated face, and the sickly girl calling to them in the harsh, metallic voice peculiar to hawkers and elderly singers at fairs.

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"Help Cyriax hide. You first, Jungel! They needn't recognise him as soon as they get in. Nuremberg magistrates are coming. Aristocratic blood-suckers of the Council. Who knows what may still be on the tally for us?"

Kuni, the pale-faced girl, wrapped her bright-coloured garment tighter around her mutilated left leg, and obeyed. Lame Jungel, too, prepared to fulfil red-haired Gitta's wish.

But Raban had glanced out, and hastily drew the cloth jerkin, patched with green and blue linen, closer through his belt, ejaculating anxiously:

"Young Groland of the Council. I know him."

This exclamation induced the other vagabonds to glide along the wall to the nearest door, intending to slip out.

"A Groland?" asked Gitta, Cyriax's wife, cowering as if threatened with a blow from an invisible hand. "It was he "

"He?" laughed the chain-bearer, while he crouched beside her, drawing himself into the smallest space possible. "No, Redhead! The devil dragged the man who did that down to the lower regions long ago, on account of my tongue. It's his son. The younger, the sharper. This stripling made Casper Rubling, [Dice, in gambler's slang] poor wretch, pay for his loaded dice with his eyesight."

He thrust his hand hurriedly into his jerkin as he spoke, and gave Gitta something which he had concealed there. It was a set of dice, but, with ready presence of mind, she pressed them so hard into the crumb of the loaf of bread which she had just cut that it entirely concealed them.

All this had passed wholly unnoticed in the corner of the long, wide room, for all the numerous travellers whom it sheltered were entirely occupied with their own affairs. Nothing was understood except what was said between neighbour and neighbour, for a loud uproar pervaded the tavern of The Blue Pike.

It was one of the most crowded inns, being situated on the main ferry at Miltenberg, where those journeying from Nuremberg, Augsburg, and other South German cities, on their way to Frankfort and the Lower Rhine, rested and exchanged the saddle for the ship. Just at the present time many persons of high and low degree were on their way to Cologne, whither the Emperor Maximilian, having been unable to come in April to Trier on the Moselle, had summoned the Reichstag.

The opening would take place in a few days, and attracted not only princes, counts, and knights, exalted leaders and more modest servants of the Church, ambassadors from the cities, and other aristocrats, but also honest tradesfolk, thriving money-lenders with the citizen's cloak and the yellow cap of the Jew, vagrants and strollers of every description, who hoped to practise their various feats to the best advantage, or to fill their pockets by cheating and robbery.

This evening many had gathered in the spacious taproom of The Blue Pike. Now those already present were to be joined by the late arrivals whom Cyriax had seen ride up.

It was a stately band. Four aristocratic gentlemen at the head of the troop were followed by an escort of twenty-five Nuremberg mercenaries, a gay company whose crimson coats, with white slashes on the puffed sleeves, presented a showy spectacle. Their helmets and armour glittered in the bright light of the setting sun of the last day of July, as they turned their horses in front of the wide gateway of The Blue Pike to ride into Miltenberg and ask lodgings of the citizens.

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The trampling of hoofs, the shouts of command, and the voices of the gentlemen and their attendants outside attracted many guests to the doors and windows of the long, whitewashed building.

The strollers, however, kept the place at theirs without difficulty; no one desired to come near them.

The girl with the bandaged foot had now also turned her face toward the street. As her gaze rested on the youngest of the Nuremberg dignitaries, her pale cheeks flushed, and, as if unconsciously, the exclamation: "It is he!" fell from her lips.

"Who?" asked red-haired Gitta, and was quickly answered in a low tone

"I mean Lienhard, Herr Groland."

"The young one," stuttered Cyriax.

Then, raising the shawl, he continued inquisitively:

"Do you know him? For good or for evil?"

The girl, whose face, spite of its sunken cheeks and the dark rings under the deep-set blue eyes, still bore distinct traces of former beauty, started and answered sharply, though not very loudly, for speech was difficult:

"Good is what you call evil, and evil is what you call good. My acquaintance with Lienhard, Herr Groland, is my own affair, and, you may be sure, will remain mine." She glanced contemptuously away from the others out of doors, but Cyriax, spite of his mutilated tongue, retorted quickly and harshly:

"I always said so. She'll die a saint yet." Then grasping Kuni's arm roughly, he dragged her down to him, and whispered jeeringly:

"Ratz has a full purse and sticks to his offer for the cart. If you put on airs long, he'll get it and the donkey, too, and you'll be left here. What was it about Groland? You can try how you'll manage on your stump without us, if we're too bad for you."

"We are not under eternal obligations to you on the child's account," added red-haired Gitta in a gentler tone. "Don't vex my husband, or he'll keep his word about the cart, and who else will be bothered with a useless creature like you?"

The girl lowered her eyes and looked at her crippled limb.

How would she get on without the cart, which received her when the pain grew too sharp and the road was too hard and long?

So she turned to the others again, saying soothingly:

"It all happened in the time before I fell." Then she looked out of doors once more, but she did not find what she sought. The Nuremberg travellers had ridden through the broad gateway into the large square courtyard, surrounded by stables on three sides. When Cyriax and his wife again called to her, desiring to know what had passed between her and Groland, she clasped her hands around her knees, fixed her eyes on the gaystuffs wound around the stump where her foot had been amputated, and in a low, reluctant tone, continued:

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"You want to learn what I have to do with Herr Groland? It was about six years ago, in front of St. Sebald's church, in Nuremberg. A wedding was to take place. The bridegroom was one of the Council Lienhard Groland. The marriage was to be a very quiet one the bridegroom's father lay seriously ill. Yet there could have been no greater throng at the Emperor's nuptials. I stood in the midst of the crowd. A rosary dropped from the belt of the fat wife of a master workman she was decked out like a peacock and fell just in front of me. It was a costly ornament, pure gold and Bohemian garnets. I did not let it lie there."

"A miracle!" chuckled Cyriax, but the girl was obliged to conquer a severe attack of coughing before she could go on with her story.

"The chaplet fairly burned my hand. I would gladly have given it back, but the woman was no longer before me. Perhaps I might have returned it, but I won't say so positively. However, there was no time to do it; the wedding party was coming, and on that account But what is the use of talking? While I was still gazing, the owner discovered her loss. An officer seized me, and so I was taken to prison and the next day was brought before the magistrates. Herr Groland was one of them, and, since it wasn't certain that I would not have restored the property I found, he interceded in my behalf. When the others still wished to punish me, he besought my release because it was my first offence. So we met, and when I admit that I am grateful to him for it, you know all."

"H'm," replied Cyriax, giggling, as he nudged his wife in the side and made remarks concerning what he had just heard which induced even red-haired Gitta to declare that the loss of his tongue was scarcely a misfortune.

Kuni indignantly turned her back upon the slanderer and gazed out of the window again. The Nuremberg Honourables had disappeared, but several grooms were unbuckling the knapsacks from the horses and carrying them into the house. The aristocratic travellers were probably cleansing themselves from the dust of the road before they entered the taproom.

Kuni thought so, and gazed sometimes into vacancy, sometimes into her own lap. Her eyes had a dreamy light, for the incident which she had just related rose before her mind with perfect clearness.

It seemed as though she were gazing a second time at the wedding procession which was approaching St. Sebald's, and the couple who led it.

Never had she beheld anything fairer than the bride with the myrtle wreath on her beautifully formed head, whence a delicate lace veil floated over her long, thick, golden hair. She could not help gazing at her as if spellbound. When she moved forward, holding her bridegroom's hand, she appeared to float over the rice and flowers strewn in her path to the church it was in February. As Kuni saw the bride raise her large blue eyes to her lover's so tenderly and yet so modestly, and the bridegroom thank her with a long joyous look of love, she wondered what must be the feelings of a maiden who, so pure, so full of ardent love, and so fervently beloved in return, was permitted to approach the house of God, accompanied by a thousand pious wishes, with the first and only man whom she loved, and to whom she wished to devote herself for her whole life. Again, as at that time, a burning thrill ran through her limbs. Then a bitter smile hovered around her lips.

She had asked herself whether the heart of one who experienced such joys, to whom such a fate was allotted, would not burst from sheer joy. Now the wish, the hope, and every new resolve for good or ill were alike over. At that hour, before the door of St. Sebald's, she had been capable of all, all, perhaps even the best things, if any one had cherished her in his heart as Lienhard Groland loved the beautiful woman at his side.

She could not help remembering the spell with which the sight of those two had forced her to watch their every movement, to gaze at them, and them only, as if the world contained nothing else. How often she had

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repeated to herself that in that hour she was bewitched, whether by him or by her she could not decide. As the throng surged forward, she had been crowded against the woman who lost the rosary. She had not had the faintest thought of it when the bailiff suddenly snatched her from her rapturous gazing to stern reality, seizing with a rude grip the hand that held the jewel. Then, pursued by the reviling and hissing of the populace, she had been taken to prison.

Now she again saw herself amid the vile rabble assembled there, again felt how eagerly she inhaled the air as she was led across the courtyard of the townhall into the presence of the magistrates. Oh, if she could but take such a long, deep breath of God's pure air as she did then! But that time was past. Her poor, sunken chest would no longer permit it. Then she fancied that she was again standing before the judges, who were called The Five.

Four magistrates sat with the Pfander [Chief of police] at the table covered with a green cloth, but one, who surpassed all the others both in stature and in manly beauty, was the selfsame Lienhard Groland, who yesterday had led to the altar the wonderfully lovely girl who had bewitched her. She felt how the blood had mounted into her cheeks when she again saw him who could know nothing of her except that she was a jade, who had stolen another person's property. Yet her glance soon met his, and he must have been blind had he not read in the radiant lustre of her blue eyes, which had early learned to woo applause and promise love, what he was to her, and how gratefully her heart throbbed for him.

After the other gentlemen had treated her harshly, and threatened to put her in the stocks, he interceded for her, and entreated his brother magistrates to let mercy, in this instance, take the place of justice, because she was so young, and perhaps had intended to return the rosary later. Finally he bent smiling toward his companions and said something to them in a subdued tone. The voice was so low that his intention to keep her in ignorance of it was evident. But Kuni's hearing had been as keen as a bird's, and not a word escaped her. He could not help regarding it as an evil omen for him and his young wife if a girl, hitherto unpunished, should be plunged into disgrace and perhaps made miserable throughout the rest of a long life on account of his wedding procession.

How high her heart had throbbed at this request, and when it was granted, the discussion closed, and she herself informed that she would be set free, she hurried after her preserver, who had left the Council chamber with the other magistrates, to thank him. He permitted her to detain him, and when she found herself alone in his presence, at first, with streaming eyes, she was unable to utter a word. He laid his hand kindly on her shoulder to soothe her, and then listened to her assurance that, though she was a strolling rope-dancer, she had never taken other people's property.

Now she closed her eyes to have a clearer vision of the picture evoked by memory, which rose so vividly before her. Again she saw herself seize his hand to kiss it humbly, yet with fervent devotion; again she met the patronizing but friendly smile with which he withdrew it, and a thrill of happiness ran through every nerve, for she imagined she once more felt his slender white hand soothingly stroke her black hair and burning cheeks, as if she were a sick child who needed help. Later years had never granted her aught more blissful than that moment.

As had often happened before, the memory of it overmastered her with such power that she could not escape it, but recalled his every look and movement. Meanwhile, she imagined that she heard his voice, whose deep, pure tones had pleased her ear, alive to harmony, more than any to which she had ever listened, counselling her to give up her vagrant life, and again received his assurance that he pitied her, and it would grieve him if she, who seemed worthy of a better fate, should be ruined, body and soul, so young. Thus absorbed, she neither saw nor listened to anything that was occurring near her or in the large room of the tavern, but stood gazing into vacancy as if rapt away from earth.

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True, Cyriax and the others had lowered their voices, for they were talking about her and the aristocratic couple on whose wedding day Kuni had stolen the rosary.

Raban, a tall, lank vagabond with red-rimmed eyes, whose ugly face bristled with a half-grown black beard, had a few more particulars to give concerning the bride and bridegroom. He wandered about the world and, whenever he stretched out his hand to beg, gave the pretext that he was collecting the price of blood required for a man whom he had killed in self-defence, that his own head might not fall under the axe of the executioner. His dead father had heated the furnaces in the smelting works at Eschenbach, near Nuremberg, and the bride was Katharina, the eldest of the three daughters of the owner, old Harsdorffer of the Council. He had been a man of steel and iron, and opposed Lienhard Groland's father at every point, not excepting even their official business. When he discovered that the young man was carrying on a love affair with his daughter, he had summoned him before a court of justice for a breach of the law which forbade minors to betroth themselves without parental consent. The magistrates sentenced Lienhard to five years' exile from the city but, through the Emperor's mediation, he was spared the punishment. Old Harsdorffer afterward succeeded in keeping the suitor away from his daughter a long time, but finally relinquished his opposition.

"The devil came soon enough and broke his stiff neck," added Cyriax, on whom the vagabond's story had had the same effect as a red rag upon a bull. Spite of the old slanderer's mutilated tongue, invectives flowed fast enough from his lips when he thought of young Frau Groland's father. If the Groland outside resembled his father-in-law, he would like to drink him a pledge that should burn like the plague and ruin.

He snatched a flask from his pocket as he spoke, and after a long pull and a still longer "A-ah!" he stammered:

"I've been obliged to bid farewell to my tongue, yet it feels as if it were sticking in my throat like the dry sole of a shoe. That's what comes from talking in this dog-day heat."

He looked into the empty bottle and was about to send Kuni out to fill it again. In turning to do so he saw her pale face, wan with suffering, but which now glowed with a happy light that lent it a strange beauty. How large her blue eyes were! When he had picked her up in Spain she was already a cripple and in sore distress. But Groland probably knew what he was about when he released her. She must have been a pretty creature enough at that time, and he knew that before her fall she was considered one of the most skilful rope-dancers.

An elderly woman with a boy, whose blindness helped her to arouse compassion, was crouching by Raban's side, and had just been greeted by Kuni as an old acquaintance. They had journeyed from land to land in Loni's famous troupe, and as Raban handed Cyriax his own bottle, he turned from the dreaming girl, whose services he no longer needed, and whispered to the blind boy's mother who among the people of her own calling still went by the name of Dancing Gundel the question whether yonder ailing cripple had once had any good looks, and what position she had held among rope-dancers.

The little gray-haired woman looked up with sparkling eyes. Under the name of "Phyllis" she had earned, ere her limbs were stiffened by age, great applause by her dainty egg-dance and all sorts of feats with the balancing pole. The manager of the band had finally given her the position of crier to support herself and her blind boy. This had made her voice so hollow and hoarse that it was difficult to understand her as, with fervid eloquence, vainly striving to be heard by absent-minded Kuni, she began: "She surpassed even Maravella the Spaniard. And her feats at Augsburg during the Reichstag I tell you, Cyriax, when she ascended the rope to the belfry, with the pole and without "

"I've just heard of that from another quarter," he interrupted. "What I want to know is whether she pleased the eyes of men."

"What's that to you?" interposed red-haired Gitta jealously, trying to draw him away from Gundel by the chain.

Raban laughed heartily, and lame Jungel, chuckling, rapped on the floor with his right crutch, exclaiming:

"Good for you!"

Kuni was accustomed to such outbursts of merriment. They were almost always awakened by some trifle, and this time she did not even hear the laughing. But Cyriax struck his wife so rudely on the hand that she jerked furiously at the chain and, with a muttered oath, blew on the bruised spot. Meanwhile Gundel was telling the group how many distinguished gentlemen had formerly paid court to Kuni. She was as agile as a squirrel. Her pretty little face, with its sparkling blue eyes, attracted the men as bacon draws mice. Then, pleased to have listeners, she related how the girl had lured florins and zecchins from the purse of many a wealthy ecclesiastic. She might have been as rich as the Fuggers if she hadn't met with the accident and had understood how to keep what she earned. But she could not hold on to her gold. She had flung it away like useless rubbish. So long as she possessed anything there had been no want in Loni's company. She, Gundel, had caught her arm more than once when she was going to fling Hungarian ducats, instead of coppers, to good-for-nothing beggars. She had often urged her, too, to think of old age, but Kuni never cared for any one longer than a few weeks, though there were some whom she might easily have induced to offer her the wedding ring.

She glanced at Kuni again, but, perceiving that the girl did not yet vouchsafe her even a single look, she was vexed, and, moving nearer to Cyriax, she added in a still lower tone:

"A more inconstant, faithless, colder heart than hers I never met, even among the most disorderly of Loni's band; for, blindly as the infatuated lovers obeyed every one of her crazy whims, she laughed at the best and truest. 'I hate them all,' she would say. 'I wouldn't let one of them even touch me with the tip of his finger if I could not use their zecchins. 'With these,' she said, 'she would help the rich to restore to the poor what they had stolen from them.' She really treated many a worthy gentleman like a dog, nay, a great deal worse; for she was tender enough to all the animals that travelled with the company; the poodles and the ponies, nay, even the parrots and the doves. She would play with the children, too, even the smallest ones isn't that so, Peperle? like their own silly mothers." She smoothed the blind boy's golden hair as she spoke, then added, sighing:

"But the little fellow was too young to remember it. The rattle which she gave him at Augsburg it was just before the accident because she was so fond of him Saint Kunigunde, how could we keep such worthless jewels in our sore need? was made of pure silver. True, the simpletons who were so madly in love with her, and with whom she played so cruelly, would have believed her capable of anything sooner than such kindness. There was a Swabian knight, a young fellow "

Here she stopped, for Cyriax and the other vagabonds, even the girl of whom she was speaking, had started up and were gazing at the door.

Kuni opened her eyes as wide as if a miracle had happened, and the crimson spots on her sunken cheeks betrayed how deeply she was agitated. But she had never experienced anything of this kind; for while thinking of the time when, through Lienhard Groland's intercession, she had entered the house of the wealthy old Frau Schurstab, in order to become estranged from a vagabond life, and recalling how once, when he saw her sorrowful there, he had spoken kindly to her, it seemed as if she had actually heard his own voice. As it still appeared to echo in her ears, she suddenly became aware that the words really did proceed from his lips. What she had heard in her dream and what now came from his own mouth, as he stood at the door, blended into one. She would never have believed that the power of imagination could reproduce anything so

faithfully.

Listening intently, she said to herself that, during the many thousand times when she had talked with him in fancy, it had also seemed as if she heard him speak. And the same experience had befallen her eyes; for whenever memory reverted to those distant days, she had beheld him just as he now looked standing on the threshold, where he was detained by the landlady of The Pike. Only his face had become still more manly, his bearing more dignified. The pleasant, winning expression of the bearded lips remained unchanged, and more than once she had seen his eyes sparkle with a far warmer light than now, while he was thanking the portly woman for her cordial welcome.

While Kuni's gaze still rested upon him as if spellbound, Cyriax nudged her, stammering hurriedly:

"They will have to pass us. Move forward, women, in front of me. Spread out your skirt, you Redhead! It might be my death if yonder Nuremberg fine gentleman should see me here and recollect one thing and another."

As he spoke he dragged Kuni roughly from the window, flung the sack which he had brought in from the cart down before him, and made them sit on it, while he stretched himself on the floor face downward, and pretended to be asleep behind the women.

This suited Kuni. If Lienhard Groland passed her now he could not help seeing her, and she had no greater desire than to meet his glance once more before her life ended. Yet she dreaded this meeting with an intensity plainly revealed by the passionate throbbing of her heart and the panting of her weakened lungs. There was a rushing noise in her ears, and her eyes grew dim. Yet she was obliged to keep them wide open—what might not the next moment bring?

For the first time since her entrance she gazed around the large, long apartment, which would have deserved the name of hall had it not been too low.

The heated room, filled with buzzing flies, was crowded with travellers. The wife and daughter of a feather-curler, who were on their way with the husband and father to the Reichstag, where many an aristocratic gentleman would need plumes for his own head and his wife's, had just dropped the comb with which they were arranging each other's hair. The shoemaker and his dame from Nuremberg paused in the sensible lecture they were alternately addressing to their apprentices. The Frankfort messenger put down the needle with which he was mending the badgerskin in his knapsack. The travelling musicians who, to save a few pennies, had begun to eat bread, cheese, and radishes, instead of the warm meals provided for the others, let their knives drop and set down the wine-jugs. The traders, who were hotly arguing over Italian politics and the future war with Turkey, were silent. The four monks, who had leaned their heads against the cornice of the wide, closed fireplace and, in spite of the flies which buzzed around them, had fallen asleep, awoke. The vender of indulgences in the black cowl interrupted the impressive speech which he was delivering to the people who surrounded his coffer. This group also soldiers, travelling artisans, peasants, and tradesfolk with their wives, who, like most of those present, were waiting for the vessel which was to sail down the Main early the next morning gazed toward the door. Only the students and Bacchantes, [Travelling scholars] who were fairly hanging on the lips of a short, slender scholar, with keen, intellectual features, noticed neither the draught of air caused by the entrance of the distinguished arrivals and their followers, nor the general stir aroused by their appearance, until Dr. Eberbach, the insignificant, vivacious speaker, recognised in one of the group the famous Nuremberg humanist, Wilibald Pirckheimer.

CHAPTER II.

At first Dietel, the old waiter, whose bullet-shaped head was covered with thick gray hair, also failed to notice them. Without heeding their entrance, he continued, aided by two assistants who were scarcely beyond boyhood, to set the large and small pine tables which he had placed wherever he could find room.

The patched tablecloths which he spread over the tops were coarse and much worn; the dishes carried after him by the two assistants, whose knees bent under the burden, were made of tin, and marred by many a dent. He swung his stout body to and fro with jerks like a grasshopper, and in doing so his shirt rose above his belt, but the white napkin under his arm did not move a finger's width. In small things, as well as great ones, Dietel was very methodical. So he continued his occupation undisturbed till an inexperienced merchant's clerk from Ulm, who wanted to ride farther speedily, accosted him and asked for some special dish. Dietel drew his belt farther down and promptly snubbed the young man with the angry retort; "Everybody must wait for his meal. We make no exceptions here."

Interrupted in his work, he also saw the newcomers, and then cast a peevish glance at one corner of the room, where stood a table covered with fine linen and set with silver dishes, among them a platter on which early pears and juicy plums were spread invitingly. The landlady of The Pike had arranged them daintily upon fresh vine leaves an hour before with her own plump but nimble hands. Of course they were intended for the gentlemen from Nuremberg and their guests. Dietel, too, now knew them, and saw that the party numbered a person no less distinguished than the far-famed and highly learned Doctor and Imperial Councillor, Conrad Peutinger. They were riding to Cologne together under the same escort. The citizens of Nuremberg were distinguished men, as well as their guest, but Dietel had served distinguished personages by the dozen at The Blue Pike for many years among them even crowned heads and they had wanted for nothing. His skill, however, was not sufficient for these city demigods; for the landlord of The Pike intended to look after their table himself. Tomfoolery! There was more than enough for him to do that day over yonder in the room occupied by the lansquenets and the city soldiers, where he usually directed affairs in person. It roused Dietel's ire. The cooking of The Blue Pike, which the landlady superintended, could vie with any in the Frank country, on the Rhine, or in Swabia, yet, forsooth, it wasn't good enough for the Nuremberg guests. The Council cook, a fat, pompous fellow, accompanied them, and had already begun to bustle about the hearth beside the hostess. They really would have required no service at all, for they brought their own attendants. It certainly was not Dietel's usual custom to wish any one evil, but if Gotz Berlichinger, who had recently attacked a party of Leipsic merchants at Forchheim, or Hans von Geisslingen had fallen upon them and subdued their arrogance, it would not have spoiled Dietel's appetite.

At last they moved forward. The others might treat them as they chose; he, at least, would neither say anything to them nor bow before them as the ears did before Joseph in Holy Writ. Nevertheless, he looked out of the corner of his eye at them as he took from the basket of the round-checked kitchen maid, who had now found her way to him, one fresh brown roll after another, and placed them beside plate after plate. How well risen and how crusty they were! They fairly cracked under the pressure of the thumb, yet wheat rolls had been baked specially for the Nuremberg party. Was God's good gift too poor for the Honourables with the gold chains?

Now, even fragile little Dr. Eberbach, and the students and Bacchantes who had stood around him like disciples, intently listening to his words, bowed respectfully. The ungodly, insolent fellows who surrounded the Dominican Jacobus, the vender of indulgences, had turned from him, while he exhorted them, as if he were an importunate beggar. What did the merchants, artisans, and musicians know about the godless Greek and Latin writings which brought the names of Pirckheimer and Peutinger before the people, yet how reverently many of these folk now bowed before them. Only the soldiers with swords at their sides held their heads erect. They proved that they were right in calling themselves "pious lansquenets." The broad-shouldered knight, with the plumed hat and suit of mail, who walked beside them, was Sir Hans von

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Obernitz, the Schultheiss of Nuremberg. He was said to be a descendant of the ancient Brandenstein race, and yet was the world topsy-turvy? he, too, was listening to every word uttered by Wilibald Pirckheimer and Dr. Peutingger as if it were a revelation. The gray-haired leech and antiquary, Hartmann Schedel, whom Herr Wilibald, spite of the gout which sometimes forced a slight grimace to distort his smooth-shaven, clever, almost over-plump face, led by the arm like a careful son, resembled, with his long, silver locks, a patriarch or an apostle.

The young envoy of the Council, Herr Lienhard Groland, lingered behind the others and seemed to be taking a survey of the room.

What bright, keen eyes he had; how delicately cut was the oval face with the strong, very slightly hooked nose; how thick were the waving brown locks that fell upon the slender neck; how well the pointed beard suited his chin; with what austere majesty his head rose above the broad, plaited, snow-white ruff, which he must have just donned!

Now his eyes rested upon the vagrants, and Dietel perceived something which threw him completely off his balance; for the first time he changed the position of his napkin, jerking it from its place under his left arm to tuck it beneath the right one. He had known Kuni a long time. In her prosperous days, when she was the ornament of Loni's band and had attracted men as a ripe pear draws wasps, she had often been at the tavern, and both he and the landlord of The Pike had greeted her cordially, for whoever sought her favour was obliged to order the best and dearest of everything, not only for her and himself, but for a whole tableful of hungry guests. When she had met him just now he would never have recognised her had she not been in Gundel's company. True, the sight of her in this plight was not unexpected, yet it pierced him to the heart, for Kuni had been a remarkable girl, and yet was now in far greater penury than many of much less worth whom he had watched stumbling along the downward path before her. When he saw Lienhard Groland's glance rest upon her, he noticed also how strangely her emaciated face changed colour. Though it had just been as white as the napkin under his arm, it now flushed as red as the balsam blossoms in the window, and then paled again. She had formerly gazed around her boldly enough, but now she lowered her eyes to the floor as modestly as any demure maiden on her way to church.

And what did this mean?

The honourable member of the Nuremberg Council must be well acquainted with the girl, for his eyes had scarcely met hers ere a strange smile flitted over his grave, manly face.

Now was it in jest or earnest? he even shook his finger at her. He stopped in front of her a moment, too, and Dietel heard him exclaim:

"So here you are! On the highway again, in spite of everything?"

The distance which separated them and the loud talking of the guests prevented the waiter's hearing her reply, "The captive bird can not endure the cage long, Herr Lienhard," far less the words, added in a lower tone:

"Yet flight has been over since my fall at Augsburg. My foot lies buried there with many other things which will never return. I can only move on wheels behind the person who takes me." Then she paused and ventured to look him full in the face. Her eyes met his beaming with a radiant light, but directly after they were dimmed by a mist of tears. Yet she forced them back, though the deep suffering from which they sprung was touchingly apparent in the tone of her voice, as she continued:

"I have often wished, Herr Lienhard, that the cart was my coffin and the tavern the graveyard."

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Dietel noticed the fit of coughing which followed this speech, and the hasty movement with which the Nuremberg patrician thrust his hand into his purse and tossed Kuni three coins. They did not shine with the dull white lustre of silver, but with the yellow glitter of gold. The waiter's eyes were sharp and he had his own ideas about this unprecedented liberality.

The travelling companions of the aristocratic burgomaster and ambassadors of the proud city of Nuremberg had also noticed this incident.

After they had taken their seats at the handsomely ornamented table, Wilibald Pirckheimer bent toward the ear of his young friend and companion in office, whispering:

"The lovely wife at home whom you toiled so hard to win, might, I know, rest quietly, secure in the possession of all the charms of foam-born Aphrodite, yet I warn you. Whoever is as sure of himself as you cares little for the opinion of others. And yet we stand high, friend Lienhard, and therefore are seen by all; but the old Argus who watches for his neighbour's faults has a hundred sharp eyes, while among the gods three are blind Justice, Happiness, and Love. Besides, you flung gold to yonder worthless rabble. I would rather have given it to the travelling musicians. They, like us humanists, are allied to the Muses and, moreover, are harmless, happy folk."

Lienhard Groland listened till his older friend had finished. Then, after thanking him for his well-meant counsel, he answered, turning to the others also:

"In better days rope-dancing was the profession of yonder poor, coughing creature. Now, after a severe accident, she is dragging herself through life on one foot. I once knew her, for I succeeded in saving her from terrible disgrace."

"And," replied Wilibald Pirckheimer, "we would rather show kindness a second and a third time to any one on whom we have bestowed a favour than to render it once to a person from whom we have received one. This is my own experience. But the wise man must guard against nothing more carefully than to exceed moderation in his charity. How easily, when Caius sees Cnejus lavish gold where silver or copper would serve, he thinks of Martial's apt words: 'Who gives great gifts, expects great gifts again.' [Martial, Epigram 5, 59, 3.] Do not misunderstand me. What could yonder poor thing bestow that would please even a groom? But the eyes of suspicion scan even the past. I have often seen you open your purse, friend Lienhard, and this is right. Whoever hath ought to give, and my dead mother used to say that: 'No one ever became a beggar by giving at the proper time.'"

"And life is gladdened by what one gives to another," remarked Conrad Peutinger, the learned Augsburg city clerk, who valued his Padua title of doctor more than that of an imperial councillor. "It applies to all departments. Don't allow yourself to regret your generosity, friend Lienhard. 'Nothing becomes man better than the pleasure of giving,' says Terentius. [Terenz. Ad. 360] Who is more liberal than the destiny which adorns the apple tree that is to bear a hundred fruits, with ten thousand blossoms to please our eyes ere it satisfies our appetite?"

"To you, if to any one, it gives daily proof of liberality in both learning and the affairs of life," Herr Wilibald assented.

"If you will substitute 'God, our Lord,' for 'destiny,' I agree with you," observed the Abbot of St. Aegidius in Nuremberg.

The portly old prelate nodded cordially to Dr. Peutinger as he spoke. The warm, human love with which he devoted himself to the care of souls in his great parish consumed the lion's share of his time and strength. He

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spent only his leisure hours in the study of the ancient writers, in whom he found pleasure, and rejoiced in the work of the humanists without sharing their opinions.

"Yes, my dear Doctor," he continued in his deep voice, in a tone of the most earnest conviction, "if envy were ever pardonable, he who presumed to feel it toward you might most speedily hope to find forgiveness. There is no physical or mental gift with which the Lord has not blessed you, and to fill the measure to overflowing, he permitted you to win a beautiful and virtuous wife of noble lineage."

"And allowed glorious daughters to grow up in your famous home," cried little Dr. Eberbach, waving his wineglass enthusiastically. "Who has not heard of Juliane Peutinger, the youngest of humanists, but no longer one of the least eminent, who, when a child only four years old, addressed the Emperor Maximilian in excellent Latin. But when, as in the child Juliane, the wings of the intellect move so powerfully and so prematurely, who would not think of the words of the superb Ovid: 'The human mind gains victories more surely than lances and arrows.'"

But, ere he had finished the verse which, like many another Latin one, he mingled with his German words, he noticed Lienhard Groland eagerly motioning to him to stop. The latter knew only too well what had not yet reached the ears of Eberbach in Vienna. The marvellous child, whose precocious learning he had just extolled as a noble gift of Providence to the father, was no longer among the living. Her bright eyes had closed ere she reached maidenhood.

Dr. Eberbach, in painful embarrassment, tried to apologize for his heedlessness, but the Augsburg city clerk, with a friendly gesture, endeavoured to soothe his young fellow-scholar.

"It brought the true nature of happiness very vividly before all our eyes," he remarked with a faint sigh. "In itself it is not lasting. A second piece of good fortune is needed to maintain the first. Mine was indeed great and beautiful enough. But we will let the dead rest. What more have you heard concerning the first books of the Annales of Tacitus, said to have been discovered in the Corvey monastery? If the report should be verified "

Here Eberbach, delighted to find an opportunity to afford the honoured man whom he had unwittingly grieved a little pleasure, eagerly interrupted. Hurriedly thrusting his hand into the breast of his black doublet, he drew forth several small sheets on which he had succeeded in copying the beginning of the precious new manuscript, and handed them to Peutinger, who, with ardent zeal, instantly became absorbed in the almost illegible characters of his young comrade in learning. Wilibald Pirckheimer and Lienhard Groland also frequently forgot the fresh salmon and young partridges, which were served in succession, to share this brilliant novelty. The Abbot of St. Aegidius, too, showed his pleasure in the fortunate discovery, and did not grow quieter until the conversation turned upon the polemical writing which Reuchlin had just finished. It had recently appeared in Frankfort under the title: *The Eye Mirror*, and assailed with crushing severity those who blamed him for opposing the proposal to destroy the books of the Jews.

"What in the world do we care about the writings of the Hebrews?" the deep bass voice of Hans von Oberritz here interrupted the conversation. "A new Latin manuscript that I value! But has this noble fragment of Tacitus created half as much stir as this miserable dispute?"

"There is more at stake," said Lienhard Groland positively. "The Jewish writings merely serve as a pretext for the Cologne inquisitors to attack the great Reuchlin. He, the most profound and keenest student of the noble Greek tongue, who also forced the venerable language in which the Old Testament speaks to discourse to us Germans "

"The Hebrew!" cried Hans von Oberritz impatiently, passing his napkin over his thick moustache; "what do

we want of it? How can a sagacious man plunge into such annoyances on its account?"

"Because the excess of liberty which you gentlemen grant to the human intellect blinds him," observed the abbot. "His learning would throw the doors wide open to heresy. The Scriptures are true. On them Tungern and Kollin, whom you mention, rely. In the original Hebrew text they will be given up to every one who wishes to seek an interpretation "

"Then a new bridge will be built for truth," declared the little Thuringian with flashing eyes.

"The Cologne theologians hold a different opinion," replied the abbot.

"Because the Grand Inquisitor and his followers Tungern, Kollin, and whatever the rest may be called are concerned about some thing very different from the noblest daughter of Heaven," said Lienhard Groland, and the other gentlemen assented. "You yourself, my lord abbot, admitted to me on the ride here that it angered you, too, to see the Cologne Dominicans pursue the noble scholar 'with such fierce hatred and bitter stings.'" [Virgil, Aeneid, xi. 837.]

"Because conflict between Christians always gives me pain," replied the abbot.

But here Dr. Eberbach impetuously broke in upon the conversation:

"For the sake of a fair woman Ilion suffered unspeakable tortures. But to us a single song of Homer is worth more than all these Hebrew writings. And yet a Trojan war of the intellect has been kindled concerning them. Here freedom of investigation, yonder with Hoogstraten and Tungern, fettering of the mind. Among us, the ardent yearning to hold aloft the new light which the revival of learning is kindling, yonder superior force is struggling to extinguish it. Here the rule of the thinking mind, in whose scales reason and counter-argument decide the matter; among the Cologne people it is the Grand Inquisitor's jailers, chains, dungeons, and the stake."

"They will not go so far," replied the abbot soothingly. "True, both the front and the back stairs are open to the Dominicans in Rome."

"Yet where should humanism find more zealous friends than in that very place, among the heads of the Church?" asked Dr. Peutinger. "From the Tiber, I hope "

Here he paused, for the new guest who had just entered the room attracted his attention also. The landlord of The Blue Pike respectfully preceded him and ushered him directly to the Nuremberg party, while he requested the Dominican monks who accompanied him to wait.

The late arrival was Prof. Arnold von Tungern, dean of the theological faculty at the University of Cologne. This gentleman had just been mentioned with the greatest aversion at the table he was now approaching, and his arrogant manner did little to lessen it.

Nevertheless, his position compelled the Nuremberg dignitaries to invite him to share their meal, which was now drawing to a close. The Cologne theologian accepted the courtesy with a patronizing gesture, as if it were a matter of course. Nay, after he had taken his seat, he ordered the landlord, as if he were the master, to see that this and that thing in the kitchen was not forgotten.

Unwelcome as his presence doubtless was to his table companions, as sympathizers with Reuchlin and other innovators, well as he doubtless remembered their scornful attacks upon his Latin he was a man to maintain his place. So, with boastful self-conceit, allowing no one else an opportunity to speak, he at once began to

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complain of the fatigues of the journey and to mention, with tiresome detail, the eminent persons whom he had met and who had treated him like a valued friend. The vein on the little doctor's high forehead swelled with wrath as he listened to this boastful chatter, which did not cease until the first dish was served. To brave him, Eberbach turned the conversation to humanism, its redeeming power over minds, and its despicable foes. His scornful jests buzzed around his enemy like a swarm of gnats; but Arnold von Tungern pretended not to hear them. Only now and then a tremor of the mouth, as he slowly chewed his food, or a slight raising of the eye-brows, betrayed that one shaft or another had not wholly missed its mark.

The older gentlemen had sometimes interrupted the Thuringian, to try to change the conversation, but always in vain, and the guest from Cologne vouchsafed them only curt, dry answers.

Not until a pause occurred between two courses did von Tungern alter his manner. Then, like an inquisitor who has succeeded in convicting the person accused, he leaned back in his chair with a satisfied, long-drawn "So-o," wiped his moist chin, and began:

"You have showed me your state of mind plainly enough, my young Herr Doctor. Your name is Eberbach, if I am not mistaken. We will remember it at a fitting opportunity. But, pugnaciously as your loud voice summons to the strife, it will never destroy the sacred and venerable things which are worthy to endure. Thanks to the foundation of rock which supports them, and the watchfulness of their defenders, they will stand firmer than the walls of Jericho, whose fate you doubtless wish to bestow upon them. But you, my valued friends" here he turned to the envoys "who stand at the head of communities whose greatness is founded upon their ancient order and system, beware of opening your ears and your gates to the siren song and fierce outcries of the innovators and agitators."

"Thanks for the counsel," replied Wilibald Pirckheimer, with repellent coldness; but Arnold von Tungern pretended to consider the humanist's reply an assent, and, nodding approvingly, continued:

"How could you help exclaiming, with us and the pagan Ovid, 'We praise the ancients!' And this is merely saying that what time has tested and made venerable is the best." [Ovid. *Fast.*, 1, 225.]

Here Doctor Peutinger tried to interrupt him, but the other cut him short with an arrogant wave of the hand, and in an instructive tone began again:

"The honourable Council of Nuremberg so I am informed set a praiseworthy example several years ago. There was a youthful member of one of your patrician families an Ebner, I believe, or a Stromer or Tucher. He had imbibed in Padua mistaken ideas which, unhappily, are held in high esteem by many from whom we should expect more discernment. So it chanced that when he returned home he ventured to contract a formal betrothal with an honourable maiden of noble lineage, against the explicit desire of her distinguished parents. The rebellious youth was therefore summoned before a court of justice, and, on account of his reckless offence and wanton violation of custom and law, banished from the city and sentenced to pay a fine "

"A punishment which I endured calmly, Herr Professor," interrupted Lienhard Groland, "for I myself was that 'rebellious youth.' Besides, it was by no means the teachings of humanism which led me to an act that you, learned sir, doubtless regard with sterner eyes than the Christian charity which your clerical garb made me expect would permit."

These words fell, with the winning earnestness peculiar to him, from the lips of the young man who, at a time when he cared for no other woman than his new-made bride, had seen in the poor, endangered rope-dancer a human being worthy of aid. Only his fiery dark eyes met the professor's sternly enough.

The latter was still seeking a fitting reply, when the folding doors of the room were thrown wide open, and a

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belated party of travellers entered. They came opportunely, for they afforded a timely excuse to withhold an answer without attracting notice; yet at the head of the new guests of The Blue Pike was his Cologne colleague Conrad Kollin, who was followed, as he himself had been, by a number of Dominican friars.

Tungern, of course, went to greet him, and this made it easy to part from his table companions in a manner that aroused no comment; for while Kollin was surrounded and respectfully welcomed by the Dominican friars and many other travellers, the humanists left the house.

CHAPTER III.

Dietel did not lose sight of the envoys. After whispering together a short time they had risen and gone out. At the door the Abbot of St. Aegidius left them to greet Professor Kollin, and, with the easy kindness characteristic of him, to say that the room had become too warm for the other gentlemen. They presented their compliments to the distinguished citizen of Cologne, and placed their table at the service of the newcomer.

Dietel's sharp ears had enabled him to catch these words; but then he was obliged to move again, a table had to be set outside the house for the Nuremberg travellers and their companions, and jugs of wine must be filled for them.

Then he was called back to the taproom. While the landlord of The Pike was serving a fresh meal to Professor Kollin at the table vacated by the Nuremberg dignitaries, and Arnold von Tungern was emptying the full vials of his wrath upon the little doctor and the whole body of humanists, the Nuremberg travellers and their guests were now conversing freely, as if relieved from a nightmare, upon the topics which most deeply interested them.

Dietel would far rather have served the Cologne theologians, whom he regarded as the appointed defenders of the true faith, than the insignificant folk at the other tables who had just finished their meal.

How unmannerly their behaviour was! Better wine had been served before dessert, and they now shouted and sang so loudly and so out of tune that the air played by the strolling musicians could scarcely be distinguished. Many a table, too, groaned under blows from the clinched fist of some excited reveller. Every one seemed animated by a single desire—to drink again and again.

Now the last pieces of bread and the cloths were removed from the tables. The carousers no longer needed Dietel. He could leave the task of filling the jugs to his young assistants.

What were the envoys outside doing? They were well off. In here the atmosphere was stifling from the fumes emanating from the throng of people, the wine, and the food. It seemed to draw all the flies from far and near. Whence did they come? They seemed to have increased by thousands since the early morning, when the room was empty. The outside air appeared delightful to breathe. He longed to fill his lungs again with the pure wind of heaven, and at the same time catch a few words of the conversation between the envoys to the Reichstag.

So Dietel hobbled to the open window, where the strollers were resting.

Cyriax was lying on the floor asleep, with the brandy bottle in his arms. Two of his companions, with their mouths wide open, were snoring at his side. Raban, who begged for blood—money, was counting the copper coins which he had received. Red-haired Gitta was sewing another patch of cloth upon her rough husband's already well-mended jerkin by the dim light of a small lamp, into which she had put some fat and a bit of rag for a wick. It was difficult to thread the needle. Had it not been for the yellow blaze of the pitchpans fastened

to the wall with iron clamps, which had already been burning an hour, she could scarcely have succeeded.

"Make room there," the waiter called to the vagrants, giving the sleeping Jungel a push with his club foot. The latter grasped his crutch, as he had formerly seized the sword he carried as a foot soldier ere he lost his leg before Padua. Then, with a Spanish oath learned in the Netherlands, he turned over, still half asleep, on his side. So Dietel found room, and, after vainly looking for Kuni among the others, gazed out at the starlit sky.

Yonder, in front of the house, beside the tall oleanders which grew in wine casks cut in halves instead of in tubs, the learned and aristocratic gentlemen sat around the table with outstretched heads, examining by the light of the torches the pages which Dr. Eberbach drew forth, one after another, from the inexhaustible folds of the front of his black robe.

Dietel, the schoolmaster's son, who had once sat on the bench with the pupils of the Latin class, pricked up his ears; he heard foreign words which interested him like echoes of memories of his childhood. He did not understand them, yet he liked to listen, for they made him think of his dead father. He had always meant kindly, but he had been a morose, deeply embittered man. How pitilessly he had flogged him and the other boys with hazel rods. And he would have been still harsher and sterner but for his mother's intercession.

A pleasant smile hovered around his lips as he remembered her. Instead of continuing to listen to the Greek sentences which Herr Wilibald Pirckheimer was reading aloud to the others, he could not help thinking of the pious, gentle little woman who, with her cheerful kindness, so well understood how to comfort and to sustain courage. She never railed or scolded; at the utmost she only wiped her eyes with her apron when the farmers of his little native town in Hesse sent to the schoolmaster, for the school tax, grain too bad for bread, hay too sour for the three goats, and half-starved fowls.

He thoughtfully patted the plump abdomen which, thanks to the fleshpots of The Blue Pike, had grown so rotund in his fifteen years of service.

"It pays better to provide for people's bodies than for their brains," he said to himself. "The Nuremberg and Augsburg gentlemen outside are rich folk's children. For them learning is only the raisins, almonds, and citron in the cake; knowledge agrees with them better than it did with my father. He was the ninth child of respectable stocking weavers, but, as the pastor perceived that he was gifted with special ability, his parents took a portion of their savings to make him a scholar. The tuition fee and the boy were both confided to a Beanus that is, an older pupil, who asserted that he understood Latin in order that he might look after the inexperienced little fellow and help him out of school as well as in. But, instead of using for his protégée the florins intrusted to him, the Beanus shamefully squandered the money saved for a beloved child by so many sacrifices. While he feasted on roast meat and wine, the little boy placed in his charge went hungry." Whenever, in after years, the old man described this time of suffering, his son listened with clinched fists, and when Dietel saw a Beanus at The Blue Pike snatch the best pieces from the child in his care, he interfered in his behalf sternly enough. Nay, he probably brought to him from the kitchen, on his own account, a piece of roast meat or a sausage. Many of the names which fell from the moist lips of the gentlemen outside Lucian and Virgil, Ovid and Seneca, Homer and Plato were perfectly familiar to him. The words the little doctor was reading must belong to their writings. How attentively the others listened! Had not Dietel run away from the monks' school at Fulda he, too, might have enjoyed the witticisms of these sages, or even been permitted to sit at the same table with the great lights of the Church from Cologne.

Now it was all over with studying.

And yet it could not be so very serious a matter, for Doctor Eberbach had just read something aloud at which the young Nuremberg ambassador, Lienhard Groland, could not help laughing heartily. It seemed to amuse

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the others wonderfully, too, and even caused the astute Dr. Peutinger to strike his clinched fist upon the table with the exclamation, "A devil of a fellow!" and Wilibald Pirckheimer to assent eagerly, praising Hutten's ardent love for his native land and courage in battling for its elevation; but this Hutten whom he so lauded was the ill-advised scion of the knightly race that occupied Castle Steckelberg in his Hessian home, whom he knew well. The state of his purse was evident from the fact that the landlord of The Pike had once been obliged to detain him because he could not pay the bill though it was by no means large in any other coin than merry tales.

But even the best joke of the witty knight would have failed to produce its effect on the listening waiter just now; for the gentlemen outside were again discussing the Reuchlin controversy, and in doing so uttered such odious words about the Cologne theologians, whom Dietel knew as godly gentlemen who consumed an ample supply of food, that he grew hot and cold by turns. He was a good man who would not hurt a fly. Yet, when he heard things and opinions which his mother had taught him to hold sacred assailed, he could become as angry as a savage brute. The little impious blasphemer Eberbach, especially, he would have been more than ready to lash with the best hazel rod which he had ever cut for his dead father. But honest anger affords a certain degree of enjoyment, so it was anything rather than agreeable to him to be called away.

The feather curler and his table companions wanted Kitzing wine, but it was in the cellar, and a trip there would have detained him too long from his post of listener. So he turned angrily back into the room, and told the business men that princes, bishops, and counts were satisfied with the table wine of The Blue Pike, which had been already served to them, and the sceptre and crozier were of more importance than their twisted feathers. "Those are not the wisest people," he added sagely, "who despise what is good to try to get better. So stick to the excellent Blue Pike wine and say no more about it!"

Without waiting for an answer from the astonished guests, he limped back to his window to resume his listening. The conversation, however, had already taken a new turn, for Dr. Peutinger was describing the Roman monument which he had had put up in the courtyard of his Augsburg house, but, as this interested Dietel very little, he soon turned his attention to the high road, whence a belated guest might still come to The Blue Pike.

The landlady's little kitchen garden lay between it and the river Main, and there no, it was no deception there, behind the low hawthorn hedge, a human figure was moving.

One of the vagabonds had certainly slipped into the garden to steal fruit or vegetables, or even honey from the bee hives. An unprecedented offence! Dietel's blood boiled, for the property of The Blue Pike was as dear to him as his own.

With prompt decision he went through the entry into the yard, where he meant to unchain the butcher's dog to help him chase the abominable robber. But some time was to elapse ere he could execute this praiseworthy intention; for before he could cross the threshold the landlord of The Pike appeared, berated him, and ordered him to be more civil in the performance of his duties. The words were intended less for the waiter than for the feather dealer and his friends.

The latter had complained of Dietel to the landlord of The Pike, and, after he had received a reproof, they punished him for his rudeness by ordering him to fetch one jug of wine from the cellar after another. At last, when, with many a malediction, he had brought up the fifth, his tormentors released him, but then the best time was lost. Nevertheless he continued the pursuit and entered the little garden with the dog, but the thief had fled.

After assuring himself of this fact he stood still, rubbing his narrow forehead with the tips of his fingers.

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The rogue was most probably one of the vagrants, and like a flash it entered his mind that the ropedancer, Kuni, who in her prosperous days, instead of eating meat and vegetables, preferred to satisfy her appetite with fruits and sweet dainties, might be the culprit. Besides, when he had looked around among the guests just before, she was no longer with the other vagabonds.

Certain of having found the right trail, he instantly went to the window below which the strollers lay, thrust his head into the room from the outside, and waked the wife of the tongueless swearer. She had fallen asleep on the floor with the sewing in her hand. The terror with which she started up at his call bore no favourable testimony to her good conscience, but she had already recovered her bold unconcern when he imperiously demanded to know what had become of lame Kuni.

"Ask the other travellers the soldiers, the musicians, the monks, for aught I care," was the scornful, irritating answer. But when Dietel angrily forbade such insolent mockery, she cried jeeringly:

"Do you think men don't care for her because she has lost her foot and has that little cough? You ought to know better.

"Master Dieter has a sweetheart for every finger, though the lower part of his own body isn't quite as handsome as it might be."

"On account of my foot?" the waiter answered spitefully. "You'll soon find that it knows how to chase. Besides, the Nuremberg city soldiers will help me in the search. If you don't tell me at once where the girl went by St. Eoban, my patron "

Here red-haired Gitta interrupted him in a totally different tone; she and her companions had nothing good to expect from the city soldiers.

In a very humble manner she protested that Kuni was an extraordinarily charitable creature. In a cart standing in the meadow by the highroad lay the widow of a beggar, Nickel; whom the peasants had hung on account of many a swindling trick. A goose and some chickens had strayed off to his premises. The woman had just given birth to twins when Nickel was hung, and she was now in a violent fever, with frequent attacks of convulsions, and yet had to nurse the infants. The landlady of The Pike had sent her some broth and a little milk for the children. As for Kuni, she had gone to carry some linen from her own scanty store to the two babies, who were as naked as little frogs. He would find her with the sick mother.

All this flowed from Gitta's lips with so much confidence that Dietel, whose heart was easily touched by such a deed of charity, though he by no means put full confidence in her, allowed himself to be induced to let the city soldiers alone for the present and test the truth of her strange statement himself.

So he prepared to go in search of the cart, but the landlord of The Pike met him at the door, and, angrily asking what ailed him that day, ordered him to fetch the Erbach, more of which was wanted inside. Dietel went down into the cellar again, but this time he was not to leave it so speedily, for the apprentice of a Nuremberg master shoemaker, whose employer was going to the Frankfort fair with his goods, and who made common cause with the feather dealer, stole after Dietel, and of his own volition, for his own pleasure, locked him in. The good Kitzing wine had strengthened his courage. Besides, experience taught him that an offence would be more easily pardoned the more his master himself disliked the person against whom it was committed.

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CHAPTER IV.

The ropedancer, Kuni, really had been with the sick mother and her babes, and had toiled for them with the utmost diligence.

The unfortunate woman was in great distress.

The man who had promised to take her in his cart to her native village of Schweinfurt barely supported himself and his family by the tricks of his trained poodles. He made them perform their very best feats in the taverns, under the village lindens, and at the fairs. But the children who gazed at the four-footed artists, though they never failed to give hearty applause, frequently paid in no other coin. He would gladly have helped the unfortunate woman, but to maintain the wretched mother and her twins imposed too heavy a burden upon the kind-hearted vagabond, and he had withdrawn his aid.

Then the ropedancer met her. True, she herself was in danger of being left lying by the wayside; but she was alone, and the mother had her children. These were two budding hopes, while she had nothing more to expect save the end the sooner the better. There could be no new happiness for her.

And yet, to have found some one who was even more needy than she, lifted her out of herself, and to have power to be and do something in her behalf pleased her, nay, even roused an emotion akin to that which, in better days, she had felt over a piece of good fortune which others envied. Perhaps she herself might be destined to die on the highway, without consolation, the very next day; but she could save this unhappy woman from it, and render her end easier. Oh, how rich Lienhard's gold coins made her! Yet if, instead of three, there had been as many dozens, she would have placed the larger portion in the twins' pillows. How it must soothe their mother's heart! Each one was a defence against hunger and want. Besides, the gold had been fairly burning her hand. It came from Lienhard. Had it not been for Cyriax and the crowd of people in the room, she would have made him take it back she alone knew why.

How did this happen?

Why did every fibre of her being rebel against receiving even the smallest trifle from the man to whom she would gladly have given the whole world? Why, after she had summoned up courage and approached Lienhard to restore his gift, had she felt such keen resentment and bitter suffering when the landlord of The Blue Pike stopped her?

As she now seized his gold, it seemed as though she saw Lienhard before her. She had already told Cyriax how she met the aristocratic Nuremberg patrician, a member of the ancient and noble Groland family, whom his native city had now made an ambassador so young. But what secretly bound her to him had never passed her lips.

Once in her life she had felt something which placed her upon an equal footing with the best and purest of her sex a great love for one from whom she asked nothing, nothing at all, save to be permitted to think of him and to sacrifice everything, everything for him even life. So strange had been the course of this love, that people would have doubted her sanity or her truthfulness had she described it to them.

While standing before St. Sebald's church in Nuremberg, the vision of the young Councillor's bride at first made a far stronger impression upon her mind than his own. Then her gaze rested on Lienhard. As he had chosen the fairest of women, the bride had also selected the tallest, most stately, and certainly the best and

wisest of men. During her imprisonment the image of this rare couple had been constantly before her. Not until, through the young husband's intercession, she had regained her liberty, after he prevented her kissing his hand and, to soothe her, had stroked her hair and cheeks in the magistrate's room, did the most ardent gratitude take possession of her soul. From this emotion, which filled heart and mind, a glowing wealth of other feelings had blossomed like buds upon a rosebush. Everything in her nature had attracted her toward him, and the desire to devote herself to him, body and soul, shed the last drop of blood in her heart for him, completely ruled her. His image rose before her day and night, sometimes alone, sometimes with his beautiful bride. Not only to him, but to her also she would joyfully have rendered the most menial service, merely to be near them and to be permitted to show that the desire to prove her gratitude had become the object of her life.

When, with good counsel for the future, he dismissed her from the chief magistrate's room, he had asked her where she was to be found in case he should have anything to say to her. It seemed as though, from mingled alarm and joy, her heart would stop beating. If her lodgings, instead of an insignificant tavern, had been her own palace, she would gladly have opened all its gates to him, yet a feverish thrill ran through her limbs at the thought that he might seek her among her vagabond companions, and ask in return for his kindness what he would never have presumed to seek had she been the child of reputable parents, yet which, with mingled anger and happiness, she resolved not to refuse.

During the day and the night when she expected his visit, she had become aware that she, who had never cared for any man save for the gifts he bestowed, was fired with love for Lienhard. Such ardent yearning could torture only a loving heart, yet what she felt was very unlike the love with which she was familiar in songs, and had seen in other girls; for she by no means thought with jealous rancour of the woman to whom he belonged, body and soul his beautiful wife. It rather seemed to her that she was his, and he would no longer be the same if he were separated from her, nay, as if her very love was hers also. When she heard a noise outside of her little room she started, and eagerly as she yearned to see him, blissful as she thought it must be to sink upon his breast and offer him her lips to kiss, the bold ropedancer, who never cared for the opinions of others, could not shake off, even for a moment, the fear of wronging the fair wife who had a better right to him. Instead of hating her, or even wishing to share the heart of the man she loved with his bride, she shrank from the approaching necessity of clouding her young happiness as though it were the direst misfortune. Yet she felt that its prevention lay, not in her own hands, but in those of Fate. Should it please Destiny to lead Lienhard to her and inspire him with a desire for her love, all resistance, she knew, would be futile. So she began to repeat several paternosters that he might remain away from her. But her yearning was so great that she soon desisted, and again and again went to the window with a fervent wish that he might come.

In the terrible tumult of her heart she had forgotten to eat or to drink since early morning, and at last, in the afternoon, some one knocked at the door, and the landlady called her.

While she was hurriedly smoothing her thick black hair and straightening her best gown, which she had put on for him in the morning, she heard the hostess say that Herr Groland of the Council was waiting for her downstairs. Every drop of blood left her glowing cheeks, and the knees which never trembled on the rope shook as she descended the narrow steps.

He came forward to meet her in the entry, holding out his hand with open-hearted frankness. How handsome and how good he was! No one wore that look who desired aught which must be hidden under the veil of darkness. Ere her excited blood had time to cool, he had beckoned to her to follow him into the street, where a sedan chair was standing.

An elderly lady of dignified bearing looked out and met her eyes with a pleasant glance. It was Frau Sophia, the widow of Herr Conrad Schurstab of the Council, one of the richest and most aristocratic noblewomen in the city. Lienhard had told her about the charming prisoner who had been released and begged her to help

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him bring her back to a respectable and orderly life. The lady needed an assistant who, now that it was hard for her to stoop, would inspect the linen closets, manage the poultry yard— her pride and keep an eye on the children when they came to visit their grandmother. So she instantly accompanied Lienhard to the tavern, and Kuni pleased her. But it would have been difficult not to feel some degree of sympathy for the charming young creature who, in great embarrassment, yet joyously as though released from a heavy burden, raised her large blue eyes to the kind stranger.

It was cold in the street, and as Kuni had come out without any wrap, Frau Schurstab, in her friendly consideration, shortened the, conference. Lienhard Uroland had helped her with a few words, and when the sedan chair and the young Councillor moved down the street all the necessary details were settled. The vagrant had bound herself and assumed duties, though they were very light ones. She was to move that evening into the distinguished widow's house, not as a servant, but as the old lady's assistant.

Loni, the manager of the company of rope—dancers, had watched the negotiations from the taproom. During their progress each of the three windows was filled with heads, but no one had been able to hear what was whispered in the street. Just as the curious spectators were hoping that now they might perhaps guess what the aristocratic lady wanted with Kuni, the sedan chair began to move, and the young girl entered the hot room to tell Loni that she would leave the company that day forever.

"In—de—e—ed?" Loni asked in astonishment, lifting the gold circlet which rested on his head. Then he passed his hand through the coal—black hair which, parted in the middle, fell in smooth strands upon his neck, and exerted all his powers of persuasion to convince her of the folly of her plan. After his arguments were exhausted he raised his voice louder. As usual, when excited by anger, he swung his lower right arm to and fro, feeling the prominent muscles with his left hand. But Kuni remained resolute, and when he at last perceived that his opposition only increased her obstinacy, he exclaimed:

"Then rush on to your destruction! The day will come when you will see where you belong. If only it doesn't arrive too late. A man grows twelve and a woman thirty—six months older every year."

With these words he turned his back upon her, and the clown brought the amount of wages which was due.

Many an eye grew dim with tears when Kuni bade farewell to her companions. Shortly after sunset she was welcomed to Frau Schurstab's house.

The first greeting was friendly, and she received nothing but kindness and indulgent treatment afterward. She had a sunny chamber of her own, and how large and soft her bed was! But while, when on the road with Loni's band, if they could reach no town, she had often slept soundly and sweetly on a heap of straw, here she spent one restless night after another.

During the first a series of questions disturbed her slumber. Was it really only the desire to take her from her vagabond life which had induced Lienhard to open this house to her? Did he not perhaps also cherish the wish to keep her near him? He had certainly come to her with Frau Schurstab to protect her reputation. Had it not been so he might have left the matron at home; for Loni and everybody in the company knew that she never troubled herself about gossip. Last year she had obtained a leave of absence from Loni, who was making a tour of the little Frank towns, and spent the carnival season in revelry with a sergeant of the Nurembreg soldiers. When the booty he had gained in Italy was squandered, she gave him his dismissal. Her reputation among her companions was neither better nor worse than that of the other strolling players who, like her, were born on the highway, yet she was glad that Lienhard had tried to spare her. Or had he only come with the old noblewoman on account of his own fair name?

Perhaps her pulses again throbbed faster at the thought he had not ventured to come alone because some

feeling for her stirred in his own heart, and, spite of his beautiful young wife, he did not feel safe from her. Then Fran Schurstab was to serve as a shield. This conjecture flattered her vanity and reconciled her to the step which she had taken and already began to regret.

But suppose he really felt no more for her than the forester who finds a child lost in the woods, and guides it into the right path? How would she endure that? Yet, were it otherwise, if he was like the rest of men, if he profited by what her whole manner must betray to him, how should she face his wife, who undoubtedly would soon come to call on her aunt?

All these questions roused a tumult of unprecedented violence in her young, ardent, inexperienced soul, which was renewed each successive night. It became more and more difficult for her to understand why she had left Loni's band and entered into relations for which she was not suited, and in which she could never, never be at ease or feel happy.

Nothing was lacking in this wealthy household, not even kindness and love. Frau Sophia was indulgent and friendly, even when Kuni, whose heart and brain were occupied with so many other thoughts, neglected or forgot anything. The matron's grandchildren, of whom she often had charge, soon became warmly attached to her. While among the rope-dancers she had been fond of children, and many a little one who journeyed with the band held out its arms to her more joyously than to its own mother. There was something in her nature that attracted them. Besides, her skilful hands could show them many a rare trick, and she could sing numerous songs new to the Schurstab boys and girls, which she had picked up here and there. Then, too, she permitted many a prank which no one else would have allowed. Her duties connected with the household linen and the poultry yard, its owner's pride, were so easily performed, that in her leisure hours she often voluntarily helped the housekeeper. At first the latter eyed her askance, but she soon won her affection. Both she and her mistress showed her as much attention as the gardener bestows upon a wild plant which he has transferred to good soil, where it thrives under his care.

She kept aloof from the servants, and neither man nor maid molested her. Perhaps this was due to foolish arrogance, for after they had learned from rumour that Kuni had danced on the tight rope, they considered themselves far superior. The younger maids timidly kept out of her way, and Kuni surpassed them in pride and looked down upon them, because her free artist blood rebelled against placing herself on the plane of a servitor. She did not vouchsafe them a word, yet neither did she allow any of them to render her even the most trivial service. But she could not escape Seifried, the equerry of her mistress's eldest son. At first, according to her custom, she had roused the handsome fellow's hopes by fiery glances which she could not restrain. Now he felt that she cared for him, and in his honest fashion offered to make her his beloved wife; but she refused his suit, at first kindly, then angrily. As he still persisted she begged the housekeeper, though she saw that matchmaking was her delight, to keep him away.

Even in March Frau Sophia thanked Lienhard for the new inmate of her household, who far exceeded her expectations. In April her praise became still warmer, only she regretted that Kuni's pretty face was losing its fresh colour and her well-formed figure its roundness. She was sorry, too, that she so often seemed lost in thought, and appeared less merry while playing with the children.

Lienhard and his young wife excused the girl's manner. Comfortable as she was now, she was still a prisoned bird. It would be unnatural, nay, suspicious, if she did not sometimes long for the old freedom and her former companions. She would also remember at times the applause of the multitude. The well-known Loni, her former employer, had besought him to win her back to his company, complaining loudly of her loss, because it was difficult to replace her with an equally skilful young artist. It was now evident how mistaken the juggler had been when he asserted that Kuni, who was born among vagrants, would never live in a respectable family. He, Lienhard, had great pleasure in knowing that the girl, on the road to ruin, had been saved by Frau Sophia's goodness.

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Lienhard's father had died shortly after Kuni entered her new home. Every impulse to love dalliance, she felt, must shrink before this great sorrow. The idea sustained her hopes. She could not expect him to seek her again until the first bitterness of grief for the loss of this beloved relative had passed away. She could wait, and she succeeded in doing so patiently.

But week after week went by and there was no change in his conduct. Then a great anxiety overpowered her, and this did not escape his notice; for one day, while his young wife hung on his arm and added a few brief words of sympathy, he asked Kuni if she was ill or if she needed anything; but she answered curtly in the negative and hurried into the garden, where the children, with merry shouts, were helping the gardener to free the beds of crocuses and budding tulips from the pine boughs which had protected them from the frosts of winter.

Another sleepless night followed this incident. It was useless to deceive herself. She might as well mistake black for white as to believe that Lienhard cared for her. To no one save his fair young wife would he grant even the smallest ray of the love of which he was doubtless capable, and in which she beheld the sun that dispensed life and light. She had learned this, for he had often met her in Frau Sophia's house since his father's funeral. The child of the highway had never been taught to conceal her feelings and maintain timid reserve. Her eyes had told him eloquently enough, first her deep sympathy, and afterward the emotions which so passionately stirred her heart. Had the feelings which her glances were intended to reveal passed merely for the ardent gratitude of an impassioned soul?

Gratitude! For what?

His lukewarm interest had tempted her from a free, gay life, full of constant excitement, into the oppressive, wearisome monotony of this quiet house, where she was dying of ennui. How narrow, how petty, how tiresome everything seemed, and what she had bartered for it was the world, the whole wide, wide world. As the chicken lured the fox, the hope of satisfying the fervent longing of her heart, though even once and for a few brief moments, had brought her into the snare. But the fire which burned within had not been extinguished. An icy wind had fanned the flames till they blazed higher and higher, threatening her destruction.

Frau Schurstab had made her attend church and go to the confessional. But the mass, whose meaning she did not understand, offered no solace to the soul which yearned for love alone. Besides, it wearied her to remain so long in the same place, and the confession forced the girl, who had never shrunk from honestly expressing what she felt, into deception. The priest to whom she was taken was a frequent visitor at the Schurstab house, and she would have died ere she would have confided to him the secret of her heart. Besides, to her the feeling which animated her was no sin. She had not summoned it. It had taken possession of her against her will and harmed no one except herself, not even the wife who was so sure of her husband. How could she have presumed to dispute with her the possession of Herr Lienhard's love? Yet it seemed an insult that Frau Katharina had no fear that she could menace her happiness. Could the former know that Kuni would have been content with so little a tender impulse of his heart, a kiss, a hasty embrace? That would do the other no injury. In the circles whence she had been brought no one grudged another such things. How little, she thought, would have been taken from the wealthy Katharina by the trifling gift which would have restored to her happiness and peace. The fact that Lienhard, though he never failed to notice her, would not understand, and always maintained the same pleasant, aristocratic reserve of manner, she sometimes attributed to fear, sometimes to cruelty, sometimes to arrogance; she would not believe that he saw in her only a person otherwise indifferent to him, whom he wished to accustom to the mode of life which he and his friends believed to be the right path, pleasing in the sight of God. Love, feminine vanity, the need of approval, her own pride all opposed this view.

When the last snow of winter had melted, and the spring sunshine of April was unfolding the green leafage

and opening bright flowers in the meadows, the hedges, the woods, and the gardens, she found the new home which she had entered during the frosts of February, and whose solid walls excluded every breath of air, more and more unendurable. A gnawing feeling of homesickness for the free out-of-door life, the wandering from place to place, the careless, untrammelled people to whom she belonged, took possession of her. She felt as though everything which surrounded her was too small, the house, the apartments, her own chamber, nay, her very clothing. Only the hope of the first token that Lienhard was not so cold and unconquerable as he seemed, that she would at last constrain him to pass the barrier which separated them, still detained her.

Then came the day when, to avoid answering his question whether she needed anything, she had gone into the garden. Before reaching the children, who were playing among the crocuses and tulips, she had said to herself that she must leave this house it was foolish, nay mad, to continue to cherish the hope which had brought her hither. She would suffer keenly in tearing it from her heart, but a wild delight seized her at the thought that this imprisonment would soon be over, that she would be free once more, entirely her own mistress, released from every restraint and consideration. How rapturous was the idea that she would soon be roving through the fields and woods again with gay, reckless companions! Was there anything more pleasurable than to forget herself, and devote her whole soul to the execution of some difficult and dangerous feat, to attract a thousand eyes by her bewitching grace, and, sustained by her enthusiasm, force a thousand hearts to throb anxiously and give loud applause as she flew over the rope?

Never had the children seen her more extravagantly gay than after her resolve to leave them. Yet when, at a late hour, Kuni went to bed, the old housekeeper heard her weeping so piteously in her chamber that she rose to ask what had happened. But the girl did not even open her door, and declared that she had probably had the nightmare.

During the next few days she sometimes appeared more cheerful and docile, sometimes more dull and troubled than her household companions had ever seen her. Frau Schurstab shook her head over her protegee's varying moods. But when the month of May began, and Lienhard told his aunt that Loni, who had only remained in Nuremberg during Lent to spend the time when all public performances were prohibited, had applied to the Council for permission to give exhibitions with his company Easter week in the Haller Meadows, the matron was troubled about her protegee's peace of mind. Her nephew had had the same thought, and advised her to move to her country estate, that Kuni might see and hear nothing of the jugglers; but she had noticed the clown with other members of the company, as they passed through the streets on foot and mounted on horses and donkeys, inviting the people, with blare of trumpets and beating of drums, to witness the wonderful feats which Loni's famous band of artists would perform.

Then Kuni packed her bundle. But when she heard the next morning that, before going to the country, Frau Schurstab would attend the christening of her youngest grandson, and spend the whole day with the daughter who was the little boy's mother, she untied it.

One sunny May morning she was left alone, as she had expected. She could not be invited to the ceremony with the other guests, and she would not join the servants. The housekeeper and most of the men and maids had accompanied their mistress to help in the kitchen and to wait upon the visitors. Deep silence reigned throughout the great empty house, but Kuni's heart had never throbbed so loudly. If Lienhard came now, her fate would be decided, and she knew that he must come. Just before noon, he really did rap with the knocker on the outer door. He wanted the christening gift, which Frau Schurstab had forgotten to take for the infant. The money was in the chest in the matron's room. Kuni led the way. The house seemed to reel around her as she went up the stairs behind him. The next moment, she felt, must decide her destiny.

Now he laid his hand upon the doorknob, now he opened the door. The widow's chamber was before her. Thick silk curtains shut out the bright May sunshine from the quiet room. How warm and pleasant it was!

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She already saw herself in imagination kneeling by his side before the chest to help him search. While doing so, his fingers might touch hers, perhaps her hair might brush against his. But, instead of entering, he turned to her with careless unconcern, saying:

"It is fortunate that I have found you alone. Will you do me a favour, girl?"

He had intended to ask her to help him prepare a surprise for his aunt. The day after to-morrow was Frau Sophia Schurstab's birthday. Early in the morning she must find among her feathered favourites a pair of rare India fowls, which he had received from Venice.

As Kuni did not instantly assent, because the wild tumult of her blood paralyzed her tongue, he noticed her confusion, and in an encouraging tone, gaily continued:

"What I have to ask is not too difficult." As he spoke he passed his hand kindly over her dark hair, just as he had done a few months before in the Town Hall.

Then the blood mounted to her brain. Claspng his right hand, beneath whose touch she had just trembled, in both her own, she passionately exclaimed:

"Ask whatever you desire. If you wanted to trample my heart under your feet, I would not stir."

A look of ardent love from her sparkling blue eyes accompanied the words; but he had withdrawn his hand in astonishment, and raised a lofty barrier between them by answering coldly and sternly, "Keep the heart and your dainty self for the equerry Seifried who is an honest man."

The advice, and the lofty austerity with which it was given, pierced Kuni like the thrust of a dagger. Yet she succeeded controlling herself, and, without a word reply, preceded the harsh man into the sleeping room and silently, tearlessly, pointed the chest. When he had taken out the money, she bowed hastily and ran down the stairs.

Probably she heard him call her name more than three times; doubtless, afterward she fancied that she remembered how his voice had sounded in beseeching, tender, at last even imperious tones through the empty corridors; but she did not turn, and hurried into her room.

CHAPTER V.

When, on the evening of the christening day, Lienhard accompanied his aunt home, Kuni was nowhere to be found. Frau Sophia discovered in her chamber every article of clothing which she had obtained for her, even the beaver cap, the prayer-book, and the rosary which she had given. The young burgomaster, at her request, went to the manager of the rope-dancers, Loni, the next morning, but the latter asserted that he knew nothing about the girl. The truth was that he had sent her to Wurzburg with part of his company.

From that time she had remained with the ropedancers. At first the master had watched her carefully, that she might not run away again. But he soon perceived this to be unnecessary; for he had never found any member of the company more zealous, or seen one make more progress in the art. Now the only point was to keep her out of the way of other rope-dancers, English proprietors of circus companies, as well as the numerous knights and gentlemen who tried to take her from him. Her name had become famous. When the crier proclaimed that the "flying maiden" would ascend the rope to the steeple, Loni was sure of a great crowd of spectators. Among her own profession she had obtained the nickname of crazy Kuni.

Yet even at that time, and in the midst of the freest intercourse with German, Spanish, and other officers in

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Flanders and Brabant, young knights and light-hearted priests on the Rhine, the Main, the Danube, the Weser, and the Elbe, whose purses the pretty, vivacious girl, with the shining raven hair and bright blue eyes, the mistress of her art, seemed to their owners worthy to empty, she had by no means forgotten Lienhard. This wrought mischief to many a gay gentleman of aristocratic lineage in the great imperial and commercial cities; for it afforded Kuni special pleasure to try her power upon Lienhard's equals in rank. When she went on with the company, more than one patrician had good reason to remember her with regret; for she, who shared the lion's portion of her earnings with her companions or flung it to the poor, was insatiably avaricious toward these admirers.

The weaker she found many of them, the higher, in her opinion, rose the image of him who had made her feel his manly strength of resistance so cruelly. His stern, inexorable nature seemed to her worthy of hate, yet for three whole years the longing for him scarcely left her heart at peace an hour.

During this whole period she had not met him. Not until after she had come to Augsburg, where Loni's company was to give several performances before the assembled Reichstag, did she see him again. Once she even succeeded in attracting his gaze, and this was done in a way which afforded her great satisfaction. His beautiful wife, clad in costly velvet robes, was walking by his side with eyes decorously downcast; but he had surely recognised her there was no doubt of that. Yet he omitted to inform his wife, even by a look, whom he had met here. Kuni watched the proud couple a long time, and, with the keen insight of a loving heart, told herself that he would have pointed her out to Frau Katharina, if he did not remember her in some way either in kindness or in anger.

This little discovery had sufficed to transfigure, as it were, the rest of the day, and awaken a throng of new hopes and questions.

Even now she did not desire to win Frau Katharina's husband from her. She freely acknowledged that the other's beauty was tenfold greater than her own; but whether the gifts of love which the woman with the cloudless, aristocratic composure could offer to her husband were not like the beggar's pence, compared with the overflowing treasure of ardent passion which she cherished for Lienhard, was a question to which she believed there could be but a single answer. Was this lady, restricted by a thousand petty scruples, as well as by her stiff, heavy gala robes, a genuine woman at all? Ah! if he would only for once cast aside the foolish considerations which prevented him also from being a genuine man, clasp her, whom he knew was his own, in his arms, and hold her as long as he desired, he should learn what a strong, free, fearless woman, whose pliant limbs were as unfettered as her heart, could bestow upon him to whom she gave all the love that she possessed! And he must want something of her which was to be concealed from the wife. She could not be mistaken. She had never been deceived in a presentiment that was so positive. Ever since she reached Augsburg, an inner voice had told her and old Brigitta's cards confirmed it that the destiny of her life would be decided here, and he alone held her weal and woe in his hand.

Yet she had misinterpreted his conduct to his wife. In spite of the finery which Kuni owed to the generosity of the Knight of Neckerfels, who was then a suitor for her favour, Lienhard had recognised her. The sight recalled their last meeting and its painful termination, and therefore he had omitted to attract Frau Katharina's attention to her immediately. But, ere Kuni disappeared, he had repaired the oversight, and both desired to ascertain the fate of their former charge. True, the wish could not be instantly fulfilled, for Lienhard's time and strength were wholly claimed by the mission intrusted to him by the Emperor and the Council.

The next afternoon Kuni ascended the rope to the steeple in the presence of many princes and dignitaries. Firmly as ever she moved along the rope stretched through the wooden stay behind her, holding the balancing pole as she went. The clapping of hands and shouts of applause with which the crowd greeted "the flying maiden" led her to kiss her hand to the right and the left, and bow to the stand which had been erected for the crowned heads, counts, nobles, and their wives. In doing so, she looked down at the aristocratic spectators to

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ascertain whether the Emperor and one other were among them. In spite of the height of the topmost window of the steeple where she stood, her keen eyes showed her that Maximilian's seat was still vacant. As it was hung with purple draperies and richly garlanded, the monarch was evidently expected. This pleased her, and her heart throbbed faster as she saw on the stand all the nobles who were entitled to admittance to the lists of a tournament, and, in the front row, the man whose presence she most desired. At Lienhard's right sat his dazzlingly beautiful wife, adorned with plumes and the most superb gold ornaments; at his left was a maiden of extremely peculiar charm. According to years she was still a child, but her delicate, mobile features had a mature expression, which sometimes gave her a precocious air of superiority. The cut of her white robe and the little laurel wreath on her brown curls reminded Kuni of the pagan Genius on an ancient work of marble which she had seen in Verona. Neither the girl's age nor her light, airy costume harmonized with her surroundings; for the maids and matrons near her were all far beyond childhood, and wore the richest holiday costumes of heavy brocades and velvets. The huge puffs on the upper part of the sleeves touched the cheeks of many of the wearers, and the lace ruffs on the stiff collars rendered it easy, it is true, to maintain their aristocratic, haughty dignity, but prevented any free, swift movement.

The young girl who, as Kuni afterward learned, was the daughter of Conrad Peuting, of Augsburg, whom she had again seen that day in The Blue Pike, was then eleven years old. She was sometimes thought to be fifteen or even sixteen; her mobile face did not retain the same expression a single instant. When the smile which gave her a childlike appearance vanished, and any earnest feeling stirred her soul, she really resembled a mature maiden. What a brilliant, versatile intellect must animate this remarkable creature! Lienhard, shrewd and highly educated as he was, seemed to be completely absorbed in his neighbour; nay, in his animated conversation with her he entirely forgot the beautiful wife at his side; at least, while Kuni looked down at him, he did not bestow a single glance upon her. Now he shook his finger mischievously at the child, but he seemed to be seeking, in mingled amusement and perplexity, to find a fitting answer. And how brightly Lienhard's eyes sparkled as he fairly hung upon the sweet red lips of the little marvel at his left the heart side! A few minutes had sufficed to show the ropedancer all this, and suggest the question whether it was possible that the most faithful of husbands would thus basely neglect, for the sake of a child, the young wife whom he had won in spite of the hardest obstacles, on whose account he had so coldly and cruelly rejected her, the object of so much wooing, and who, this very day, was the fairest of all the beautiful ladies who surrounded her.

In an instant her active mind transported her to the soul of the hitherto favoured wife of the man whom she loved, and her strangely constituted woman's heart filled with resentment against the young creature below, who had not even attained womanhood, and yet seemed to gain, without effort, the prize for which she had vainly striven with painful longing.

She, whose heart had remained free from jealousy of the woman who stood between her and the man she loved, like a solid bulwark erected by Fate itself, was now suddenly overmastered by this passion.

Yet she did not turn against the person to whom Lienhard belonged, as he did to the city, or to his own family, and who was united to him by the will of Heaven, but against the mysterious young creature at his side, who changed with every passing moment.

This child no, this maiden must be a being of some special nature. Like the sirens of whom she had heard, she possessed the mysterious, enviable power of conquering the iron resistance of even the strongest man.

Like a flash of lightning, Kuni, whose kind heart cherished resentment against few and wished no one any evil, suddenly felt an ardent desire to drive the little witch from Lienhard's side, even by force, if necessary. Had she held a thunderbolt instead of a balance pole, she would gladly have struck down the treacherous child from her height not only because this enchantress had so quickly won that for which she had vainly yearned, alas! how long, but because it pierced her very heart to see Frau Katharina's happiness clouded, nay,

perhaps destroyed. A bitterness usually alien to her light, gay nature had taken possession of her, as, with the last glance she cast at Lienhard, she saw him bend low over the child and, with fiery ardour, whisper something which transformed the delicate pink flush in her cheeks to the hue of the poppy.

Yes, the ropedancer was jealous of the laurel-crowned child. She, who cared so little for law and duty, virtue and morality, now felt offended, wounded, tortured by Lienhard's conduct. But there was no time to ponder over the reason now. She had already delayed too long ere moving forward.

Yet even calm reflection would not have revealed the right answer to the problem. How could she have suspected that what stirred her passionate soul so fiercely was grief at the sight of the man whom she had regarded as the stronghold of integrity, the possessor of the firmest will, the soul of inviolable fidelity, succumbing here, before the eyes of all, like a dissolute weakling, to the seductive arts of an immature kobold? These two, who gave to her, the orphaned vagrant, surrounded by unbridled recklessness, physical and mental misery, a proof that there was still in marriage real love and a happiness secure from every assault, were now, before her eyes, placing themselves on the same plane with the miserable couples whom she met everywhere. She could not have expressed her emotions in words, but she vaguely felt that the world had become poorer, and that henceforth she must think of something more trivial when she tried to imagine the pure happiness which mortals are permitted to enjoy. She had seen the blossoms stripped from the scanty remnant of her faith in truth and goodness, which had begun to bloom afresh in her heart through the characters of this pair whose marriage procession she had watched.

Loni had been beckoning a long time; now he waved his gay handkerchief still more impatiently, and she moved on.

Her lips forced themselves into the customary smile with difficulty. Tripping forward was an easy matter for one so free from dizziness. She only carried the pole because it was customary to begin with the least difficult feats. Yet, while gracefully placing one foot before the other, she said to herself safe as she felt that, while so much agitated, she would be wiser not to look down again into the depths below. She did avoid it, and with a swift run gained the end of the rope without effort, and went up and down it a second time.

While, on reaching the end of her walk, she was chalking her soles again, the applause which had accompanied her during her dangerous pilgrimage still rose to her ears, and came—most loudly of all from the stand where Lienhard sat among the distinguished spectators. He, too, had clapped his hands lustily, and shouted, "Bravo!" Never had he beheld any ropedancer display so much grace, strength, and daring. His modest protegee had become a magnificently developed woman. How could he have imagined that the unfortunate young creature whom he had saved from disgrace would show such courage, such rare skill?

He confided his feelings, and the fact that he knew the artist, to his young neighbour, but she had turned deadly pale and lowered her eyes. While looking on she had felt as though she herself was in danger of falling into the depths. Giddiness had seized her, and her heart, whose tendency to disease had long awakened the apprehension of the physicians, contracted convulsively. The sight of a fellow-being hovering in mortal peril above her head seemed unendurable. Not until she followed Lienhard's advice and avoided looking up, did she regain her calmness. Her changeful temperament soon recovered its former cheerfulness, and the friend at her side to whom the lovely child, with her precocious mental development, appeared like the fairest marvel, took care, often as he himself looked upward, that she should be guarded from a second attack of weakness.

The storm of applause from below, in which Lienhard also joined, fanned the flames of desire for admiration in Kuni's breast to a fiery glow. She would show him, too, what she could do compel him to applaud her. She would force him away from the little temptress, and oblige him to gaze up at her whose art she learned this daily possessed the power to fix the attention of spectators like the thrall of the basilisk's eye. When on

In The Blue Pike

the rope she was no insignificant personage. He should tremble for her as did the gray-haired, scarred captain of the foot soldiers, Mannsbach, the day before yesterday. He had told her that his heart had throbbed more anxiously during her daring feats than on the bloodiest field of battle.

She moved forward more swiftly to the time of the lively dancing tune which the city pipers were playing. Midway along the rope she turned, ran back to the cross-shaped trestle at the steeple window, handed the balancing pole to Loni, and received a cage filled with doves. Each one bore around its neck a note containing an expression of homage to the Emperor Maximilian, and they were all trained to alight near the richly decorated throne which was now occupied by the chivalrous monarch. The clown who, with a comical show of respect, offered her what she needed for her next feat, told her this.

Loni, sure of being heard by no unbidden ear, called to her from the window:

"Art is honoured to-day, my girl."

The clown added jocosely:

"Who else was ever permitted to walk over the anointed head of our lord the Emperor?"

But Kuni would not have needed such encouragement. Doubtless she felt flattered by the consciousness of attracting even the sovereign's glance, but what she intended to do immediately was for the purpose of compelling another person to watch her steps with fear and admiration. Crossing her feet, she threw back her garlanded head and drew a long breath. Then she hastily straightened herself, and with the bird cage in one hand and the winged staff of Mercury, which the clown had handed to her, in the other, she advanced to the centre of the rope. There she opened the cage as steadily as if she had been standing on the floor of her own room. The birds fluttered through the little door and went, with a swift flight, directly to their goal. Then, below and beside her, from every place occupied by spectators, and from hundreds of windows, rose thunders of applause; but it seemed to her as if the roaring of the surging sea was in her ears. Her heart throbbed under her pink silk bodice like an iron hammer, and in the proud consciousness of having probably attained already what she desired, and, besides thousands of other eyes, fixed Lienhard's upon her as if with chains and bonds, she was seized with the ambitious desire to accomplish something still more amazing. The man to whom her heart clung, the Emperor, the countless multitude below, were all at this time subject to her in heart and mind. They could think and feel nothing except what concerned her, her art, and her fate. She could and would show to Lienhard, to the Emperor, to all, what they had never witnessed. They should turn faint with sympathizing anxiety. She would make them realize what genuine art, skill, and daring could accomplish. Everything else, even the desire for applause, was forgotten. Though her performance might be called only a perilous feat, she felt it to be true, genuine art. Her whole soul was merged in the desire to execute, boldly and yet gracefully, the greatest and most perfect performance attainable by a ropedancer. With beads of perspiration on her brow, and eyes uplifted, she threw the cage aside, swung her Mercury staff aloft, and danced along the rope in waltz time, as though borne by the gods of the wind. Whirling swiftly around, her slender figure darted in graceful curves from one end of the narrow path to the other. Then the applause reached the degree of enthusiastic madness which she desired; even Loni clapped his hands from the steeple window. She had never seen him do this to any of the company. Yes, she must have accomplished her purpose well; but she would show him and the others something still more wonderful. What she had just done was capable of many additional feats; she had tried it.

With fluttering hands and pulses she instantly loosed from her panting bosom and her hips the garland of roses and leaves twined about the upper portion of her body, and swung it around her in graceful curves as she knelt and rose on the rope.

She had often jumped rope on the low rope, turning completely around so that she faced the other way. To

repeat this performance on the one stretched to the steeple would certainly not be expected from her or from any other. Suppose she should use the garland as a rope and venture to leap over it on this giddy height? Suppose she should even succeed in turning around? The rope was firm. If her plan was successful, she would have accomplished something unprecedented; if she failed if, while turning, she lost her balance her scanty stock of pleasure here below would be over, and also her great grief and insatiable yearning. One thing was certain: Lienhard would watch her breathlessly, nay, tremble for her. Perhaps it was too much to hope that he would mourn her sincerely, should the leap cost her life; but he would surely pity her, and he could never forget the moment of the fall, and therefore herself. Loni would tear the gold circlet from his dyed black locks and, in his exaggerated manner, call himself a son of misfortune, and her the greatest artist who had ever trodden the rope. All Augsburg, all the dignitaries of the realm, even the Emperor, would pity her, and the end of her life would be as proud and as renowned as that of the chivalrous hero who dies victor on the stricken field. If the early part of her life had been insignificant and wretched, its close should be grand and beautiful.

Long consideration was foreign to Kuni's nature. While these thoughts were darting with the speed of lightning through her excited brain, she stripped from the garland, with the presence of mind which her calling teaches even in serious peril, the roses which might have caught her feet, and swung it in a wide circle above her. Then nimbly, yet careful to maintain in every movement the grace without which the most difficult feat would have seemed to her valueless, she summoned all the strength and caution she possessed, went forward at a run, and she did not know herself just how it was done dared the leap over the rope once, twice, and the third and fourth time even accomplished the turn successfully. It had not once cost her an effort to maintain her balance.

Again she saw Loni clapping his hands at the window, and the acclamations of the crowd, which echoed like peals of thunder from the lofty, gable-roofed houses, informed her that the boldness of the venture and the skill with which she had performed it were appreciated by these spectators. True, she could not distinguish the voice of any individual, but she thought she knew that Lienhard was one of those who shouted "Bravo!" and clapped most loudly. He must have perceived now that she was something more than a poor thief of a rosary, a useless bread-eater in the Schurstab household.

She straightened the garland again and, while preparing to take another run, repeat the feat, and, if her buoyancy held out, try to whirl around twice, which she had never failed to accomplish on the low rope, she could not resist the temptation of casting a hasty glance at Lienhard; she had never ascended to the steeple without looking at him.

Secure of herself, in the glad consciousness of success, she gazed down.

There sat the illustrious Maximilian, still clapping his hands. Gratefully, yet with a passionate desire for fresh applause, the resolve to show him the very best which she could accomplish was strengthened. But the next moment the blood faded from her slightly rouged cheeks, for Lienhard was it possible, was it imaginable? Lienhard Groland was not looking up at her! Without moving his hands or vouchsafing her a single glance, he was gazing into the face of the little wearer of the laurel wreath, with whom he was eagerly talking. He was under her thrall, body and soul. Yet it could not be, she could not have seen distinctly. She must look down once more, to correct the error. She did so, and a torturing anguish seized her heart. He was chatting with the child as before; nay, with still more warmth. As he now saw nothing which was happening upon the rope, he had probably also failed to heed what she had performed, dared, accomplished, mainly for his sake, at the peril of her life, on the dizzy height. His wife was still clapping her hands at his side, but Lienhard, as though deaf and blind to everything else, was gazing at the page which the miserable little elf was just giving him. There was certainly writing on it perhaps a charm which rendered him subject to her. How else could he have brought himself to overlook so unkindly herself and her art the best she had to bestow for the sake of this child?

In The Blue Pike

Then, besides the keenest sorrow, a fierce, burning hate took possession of her soul.

She had not appealed to her saint for years; but now, in a brief, ejaculatory prayer, she besought her to drive this child from Lienhard, punish her with misery, suffering, and destruction. A sharp pang which she had never before experienced pierced her to the heart. The pure, sunny air which she inhaled on her lofty height seemed like acrid smoke, and forced tears into the eyes which had not wept for many a long day.

As, not knowing exactly what she was doing, with her ears deafened by the shouts of the crowd, among whom Lienhard now, with anxious suspense, watched her every movement, she again raised the rope and prepared to spring, she fancied that her narrow path rose higher and higher. One more step, and suddenly, with Loui's shriek of horror and the clown's terrified "Jesus and Mary, she is falling!" ringing on the air, she felt as if the rope had parted directly in front of her. Then a hurricane appeared to howl around her, bearing her away she knew not whither. It seemed as though the tempest had seized the ends of the rope, and was dealing terrible blows with them upon her shoulders, her back, and her feet. Meanwhile the little wearer of the wreath was lying on a black cloud opposite to her at Lienhard's feet.

She still held the sheet in her hand, and was shouting to the angry elements the magic formulas which it contained. Their power Kuni knew it had unchained them. Lienhard's deep voice mingled with her furious cries until the roar of the sea, on whose rocky shore the hurricane must have dashed her, drowned every other sound, and rolled over her, sometimes in scorching crimson, sometimes in icy crystal waves. Then, for a long time, she saw and heard nothing more.

When her deadened imagination again began to stir, she fancied that she was struggling with a huge crab, which was cutting her foot with shears. The little elf was urging it on, as the huntsmen cheer the hounds. The pain and hate she felt would have been intolerable if Lienhard had made common cause with the terrible child. But he reproved her conduct, and even struggled with the kobold who tried to prevent his releasing her from the crab. The elf proved stronger than he. The terrible shears continued to torture her. The more she suffered, the more eagerly Lienhard seemed trying to help her, and this soothed her and blended a sweet sense of comfort with the burning pain.

CHAPTER VI.

Kuni remained under the spell of these delusions for many days and nights. When she at last regained her senses, she was lying on a plain couch in a long, whitewashed hall. The well-scoured floor was strewn with sand and pine needles. Other beds stood beside hers. On one wall hung a large wooden crucifix, painted with glaring colours; on the other a touching picture of the Mater Dolorosa, with the swords in her heart, looked down upon her.

Beside Kuni's pallet stood a Gray Sister and an elderly man, evidently a physician. His long black robe, tall dark cap, and gold headed cane bore witness to it. Bending forward, with eyeglasses on his prominent nose, he gazed intently into her face.

Her return to consciousness seemed to please him, and he showed himself to be a kind, experienced leech. With tireless solicitude he strove to cure the numerous injuries which she had received, and she soon learned through him and the nun, that she had fallen from the rope and escaped death as if by a miracle. The triumphal arch under her, and the garlands which decorated the wooden structure, had caught her before she touched the pavement. True, her right leg was broken, and it had been necessary to amputate her left foot in order to save her life. Many a wound and slash on her breast and head also needed healing, and her greatest ornament, her long, thick, dark hair, had been cut off.

Why had they called her, the ropedancer, back to a life which henceforward could offer her nothing save

want and cruel suffering? She uttered this reproach to her preservers very indignantly; but as the physician saw her eating a bunch of grapes with much enjoyment, he asked if this pleasure did not suffice to make her rejoice over the preservation of her existence. There were a thousand similar gifts of God, which scarcely seemed worthy of notice, yet in the aggregate outweighed a great sorrow which, moreover, habit daily diminished.

The Sister tried, by other arguments, to reconcile her to the life which had been preserved, but the words her devout heart inspired and which were intended for a pious soul, produced little influence upon the neglected child of the highroad. Kuni felt most deeply the reference to the sorely afflicted Mother of God. If such sorrow had been sent to the noblest and purest of mortals, through whom God had deigned to give his divine Son to the world, what grief could be too great for her, the wandering vagabond? She often silently repeated this to herself; yet only too frequently her impetuous heart rebelled against the misery which she felt that she would encounter. But many weeks were to pass before she recovered; a severe relapse again endangered her life.

During the first days of illness she had talked to Lienhard in her fevered visions, called him by name, and warned him against the spiteful elf who would ruin him. Frequently, too, oaths and horrible, coarse imprecations, such as are heard only from the mouths of the vagrants among whom she had grown to womanhood, fell from her burning lips. When she improved, the leech asked in the jesting tone which elderly men are fond of using to young women whose heart secrets they think they have detected, what wrong her lover had done her. The Sister, nay, even the abbess, wished to learn what she meant by the wicked witch whom she had mentioned with such terrible curses during the ravings of the fever, but she made no reply. In fact, she said very little, and her nurses thought her a reserved creature with an obdurate nature; for she obstinately rejected the consolations of religion.

Only to her confessor, a kind old priest, who knew how to discover the best qualities in every one, did she open her heart so far as to reveal that she loved the husband of another and had once wished evil, ay, the very worst evil, to a neighbour. But since the sin had been committed only in thought, the kindly guardian of her conscience was quickly disposed to grant her absolution if, as a penance, she would repeat a goodly number of paternosters and undertake a pilgrimage. If she had had sound feet, she ought to have journeyed to Santiago di Compostella; but, since her condition precluded this, a visit to Altotting in Bavaria would suffice. But Kuni by no means desired any mitigation of the penance. She silently resolved to undertake the pilgrimage to Compostella, at the World's End, [Cape Finisterre] in distant Spain, though she did not know how it would be possible to accomplish this with her mutilated foot. Not even to her kind confessor did she reveal this design. The girl who had relied upon herself from childhood, needed no explanation, no confidante.

Therefore, during the long days and nights which she was obliged to spend in bed, she pondered still more constantly upon her own past. That she had been drawn and was still attracted to Lienhard with resistless power, was true; yet whom, save herself, had this wounded or injured? On the other hand, it had assuredly been a heavy sin that she had called down such terrible curses upon the child. Still, even now she might have had good reason to execrate the wearer of the wreath; for she alone, not Lienhard, was the sole cause of her misfortune. Her prayer on the rope that the saints would destroy the hated child, and the idea which then occupied her mind, that she was really a grown maiden, whose elfin delicacy of figure was due to her being one of the fays or elves mentioned in the fairy tales, had made a deep impression upon her memory.

Whenever she thought of that supplication she again felt the bitterness she had tasted on the rope. Though she believed herself justified in hating the little mischief-maker, the prayer uttered before her fall did not burden her soul much less heavily than a crime. Suppose the Sister was right, and that the saints heard every earnest petition?

In The Blue Pike

She shuddered at the thought. The child was so young, so delicate. Though she had caused her misfortune, the evil was not done intentionally. Such thoughts often induced Kuni to clasp her hands and pray to the saint not to fulfil the prayer she uttered at that time; but she did not continue the petition long, a secret voice whispered that every living creature man and beast felt the impulse to inflict a similar pang on those who caused suffering, and that she, who believed the whole world wicked, need not be better than the rest.

Meanwhile she longed more and more eagerly to know the name of the little creature that had brought so much trouble upon her, and whether she was still forcing herself between Lienhard and his beautiful wife.

As soon as she was able to talk again, she began her inquiries. The Sister, who was entirely absorbed in her calling and never left the scene of her wearisome toil, had little to tell; but the leech and the priest, in reply to her questions concerning what had happened during the period of her unconsciousness, informed her that the Emperor had ordered that she should receive the most careful nursing, and had bestowed a donation upon the convent for the purpose. He had thought of her future, too. When she recovered, she would have the five heller pounds which the generous sovereign had left for her as a partial compensation for the injuries sustained while employing her rare skill for the delight of the multitude and, above all, himself. A wealthy Nuremberg Honourable, Lienhard Groland, a member of the Council, had also interested himself in her and deposited the same amount with the abbess, in case she should recover the use of her limbs and did not prefer to spend the remainder of her life here, though only as a lay sister. In that case he would be ready to defray the cost of admission.

"That the lofty convent walls might rise between him and the sight of me!" Kuni said to herself at this information, with a bitter smile. On the other hand, her eyes filled with tears of genuine emotion and sincere shame, when she learned from the leech that Herr Lienhard Groland's lovely wife had come daily to the convent to inquire about her, and had even honoured her couch with a visit several times. She did not remain absent until one day, in the noble lady's presence, Kuni, when her fever was fiercest, loaded the wearer of the wreath, whom her delirium often brought before her as a nightmare, with the most savage and blasphemous curses. The gracious young wife was overwhelmed with horror, which had doubtless prevented her return, unless her absence was due to departure from the city. Besides, she had committed the care of inquiring about her convalescence to an aristocratic friend in Augsburg, the wife of the learned city clerk, Doctor Peutinger, a member of the famous Welser family of Augsburg. The latter had often inquired for her in person, until the illness of her own dear child had kept her at home. Yet, in spite of this, her housekeeper had appeared the day before to inform the abbess that, if the injured girl should recover and wished to lead a respectable life in future, she might be sure of a welcome and easy duties in her own household. This surely ought to be a great comfort to Kuni, the physician added; for she could no longer pursue rope-dancing, and the Peutingers were lavishly endowed with worldly goods and intellectual gifts, and, besides, were people of genuine Christian spirit. The convent, too, would be ready to receive her the abbess had told him so if Herr Groland, of Nuremberg, kept his promise of paying her admission dues.

All these things awakened a new world of thoughts and feelings in the convalescent. That they ought, above all, to have aroused sincere gratitude, she felt keenly, yet she could not succeed in being especially thankful. It would be doing Lienhard a favour, she repeated to herself, if she should enter a convent, and she would rather have sought shelter in a lion's den than under the Peutinger roof. She had been informed the day before that the city clerk's wife was the mother of the child upon whom she had called down misfortune and death.

The keeper of an Augsburg bath-house, who had burned herself with boiling water, occupied the next bed. She was recovering, and was a talkative woman, whose intrusive loquacity at first annoyed Kuni, nay, when she could not silence it, caused her pain. But her conversation soon revealed that she knew every stick and stone in her native city. Kuni availed herself of this, and did not need to ask many questions to learn everything that she desired to know about the little begarlanded elf.

In The Blue Pike

She was Juliane, the young daughter of Herr Conrad Peutinger, the city clerk a girl of unusual cleverness, and a degree of learning never before found in a child eleven years old. The bath-house keeper had many wonderful stories to relate of her remarkable wisdom, with which even highly educated men could not vie. In doing so, she blamed the father and mother, who had been unnatural parents to the charming child; for to make the marvel complete, and to gratify their own vanity, they had taxed the little girl's mind with such foolish strenuousness that the frail body suffered. She had heard this in her own bath-house from the lips of the child's aunt and from other distinguished friends of the Welsers and Peutingers. Unfortunately, these sensible women proved to have been right; for soon after the close of the Reichstag, Juliane was attacked by a lingering illness, from which rumour now asserted that she would never recover. Some people even regarded the little girl's sickness as a just punishment of God, to whom the constant devotion of the father and his young daughter to the old pagans and their ungodly writings must have given grave offence.

This news increased to the utmost the anxiety from which Kuni had long suffered. Often as she thought of Lienhard, she remembered still more frequently that it was she, who had prayed for sickness to visit the child of a mother, who had so kindly offered her, the strolling player, whom good women usually shunned, the shelter of her distinguished house.

The consciousness of owing a debt of gratitude to those, against whom she had sinned so heavily, oppressed her. The kind proposal of the sick child's mother seemed like a mockery. It was painful even to hear the name of Peutinger.

Besides, the further she advanced toward recovery, the more unendurable appeared the absence of liberty. The kind efforts of the abbess to keep her in the cloister, and teach her to make herself useful there by sewing, were unsuccessful; for she could not turn the spinning wheel on account of her amputated foot, and she had neither inclination nor patience for the finer branches of needlework.

Those who charged her with a lamentable lack of perseverance were right; the linen which she began to hem fell into her lap only too soon. When her eyes which could see nothing here except a small walled yard closed while she was working, the others thought that she was asleep; but her mind remained awake, though she had lowered her lids, and it wandered restlessly over valleys rivers, and mountains through the wide, wide world. She saw herself in imagination travelling along the highway with nimble jugglers merry musicians, and other care-free vagrant folk, instead of plying the needle. Even the whirling dust, the rushing wind, and the refreshing rain outside seemed desirable compared with the heavy convent air impregnated by a perpetual odour of lavender.

When at last, in the month of March, little Afra, the fair-haired niece of the portress, brought her the first snowdrop, and Kuni saw a pair of starlings enter the box on the budding linden before her window, she could no longer bear her imprisonment in the convent.

Within these walls she must fade, perhaps die and return to dust. In spite of all the warnings, representations, entreaties, and promises of those who she gratefully perceived it meant well toward her, she persisted in her desire to be dismissed, to live out of doors as she had always done. At last they paid her what was due, but she accepted only the Emperor's bounty, proudly refusing Lienhard Groland's money, earnestly as she was urged to add it to the other and to the viaticum bestowed by the nuns.

CHAPTER VII.

The April sun was shining brightly when the convent gates closed behind Kuni. The lindens in the square were already putting forth young leaves, the birds were singing, and her heart swelled more joyously than it had done for many years.

In The Blue Pike

True, the cough which had tormented her all winter attacked her in the shady cloister, but she had learned to use her wooden foot, and with a cane in one hand and her little bundle in the other she moved sturdily on. After making her pilgrimage to Compostella, she intended to seek her old employer, Loni. Perhaps he could give her a place as crier, or if the cough prevented that, in collecting the money or training the children. He was a kind-hearted man. If he were even tolerably prosperous he would certainly let her travel with the band, and give the girl who was injured in his service the bit of food she required. Besides, in former days, when she scattered gold with lavish hands, he had predicted what had now befallen her, and when he left Augsburg he had asked the nuns to tell her that if she should ever be in want she must remember Loni.

With the Emperor's five heller pounds, and the two florins which she had received as a viaticum from the convent, she could journey a long distance through the world; for there were plenty of carriers and travellers with carts and wagons who would take her for a trifle, and the vagabonds on the highway rarely left people like her in the lurch.

Probably, in former days, she had looked forward to the future with greater strength and different expectations, yet, even as it was, in spite of the cough and the painful pricking in her scars, she found it pleasant so long as she was free and could follow whatever way she chose. She knew the city, and limped through the streets and alleys toward the tavern where the strolling players usually lodged.

On the way she met a gentleman in a suit of light armour, whom she recognised in the distance as the Knight of Neckerfels, who had been paying court to her before her fall. He was walking alone and looked her directly in the face, but he did not have the slightest idea that he had met madcap Kuni. It was only too evident that he supposed her to be a total stranger. Yet it would have been impossible for any one to recognise her.

Mirrors were not allowed in the convent, but a bright new tin plate had showed her her emaciated face with the broad scar on the forehead, the sunken eyes, and the whole narrow head, where the hair, which grew out again very slowly, was just an ugly length. Now the sight of the bony hand which grasped the cane brought a half-sorrowful, half-scornful, smile to her lips. Her arm had been plump and round, but was now little larger than a stick. Pretty Kuni, the ropedancer, no longer existed; she must become accustomed to have the world regard her as a different and far less important personage, whom Lienhard, too and this was fortunate would not have deemed worthy of a glance.

And yet, if the inner self is the true one, there was little change in her. Her soul was moved by the same feelings, only there was now a touch of bitterness. One great advantage of her temperament, it is true, had vanished with her physical beauty and strength the capacity to hope for happiness and joy. Perhaps it would never return; an oppressive feeling of guilt, usually foreign to her careless nature, had oppressed her ever since she had heard recently in the convent that the child on whom she had called down death and destruction was lying hopelessly ill, and would scarcely live till the joyous Whitsuntide.

This now came back to her mind. The jubilant sense of freedom deserted her; she walked thoughtfully on until she reached the neighbourhood of Jacob Fugger's house.

A long funeral procession was moving slowly toward her. Some very exalted and aristocratic person must be taking the journey to the grave, for it was headed by all the clergy in the city. Choristers, in the most elaborate dress, swinging incense holders by delicate metal chains and bearing lanterns on long poles, surrounded the lofty cross.

Every one of distinction in Augsburg, all the children who attended school, and all the members of the various ecclesiastical orders and guilds in the city marched before the bier. Kuni had never seen such a funeral procession. Perhaps the one she witnessed in Milan, when a great nobleman was buried, was longer,

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but in this every individual seemed to feel genuine grief. Even the schoolboys who, on such solemn occasions, usually play all sorts of secret pranks, walked as mournfully as if each had lost some relative who was specially dear to him. Among the girls there were few whose rosy cheeks were not constantly wet with tears.

From the first Kuni had believed that she knew who was being borne to the grave. Now she heard several women whispering near her mention the name of Juliane Peutingen. A pale-faced gold embroiderer, who had recently bordered a gala dress with leaves and tendrils for the dead girl's sister, described, sobbing, the severe suffering amid which this fairest blossom of Augsburg girlhood had withered ere death finally broke the slender stem.

Suddenly she stopped; a cry of mingled astonishment, lamentation, and delight, sometimes rising, sometimes falling, ran through the crowd which had gathered along the sides of the street.

The bier was in sight.

Twelve youths bore the framework, covered with a richly embroidered blue cloth, on which the coffin rested. It was open, and the dead girl's couch was so high that it seemed as though the sleeper was only resting lightly on the white silk pillow. A wreath again encircled her head, but this time blossoming myrtles blended with the laurel in the brown curls that lay in thick, soft locks on the snowy pillows and the lace-trimmed shroud.

Juliane's eyes were closed. Ah! how gladly Kuni would have kissed those long-lashed lids to win even one look of forgiveness from her whom her curse had perhaps snatched from the green spring world!

She remembered the sunny radiance with which this sleeper's eyes had sparkled as they met Lienhard's. They were the pure mirror of the keen, mobile intellect and the innocent, loving soul of this rare child. Now death had closed them, and Juliane's end had been one of suffering. The pale embroiderer had said so, and the sorrowful droop of the sweet little mouth, which gave the wondrously beautiful, delicate, touching little face so pathetic an expression, betrayed it. If the living girl had measured her own young intellect with that of grown people, and her face had worn the impress of precocious maturity, now it was that of a charming child who had died in suffering.

Kuni also felt this, and asked herself how it had been possible for her heart to cherish such fierce hatred against this little one, who had numbered only eleven years.

But had this Juliane resembled other children?

No, no! No Emperor's daughter of her age would have been accompanied to the churchyard with such pageantry, such deep, universal grief.

She had been the jewel of a great city. This was proclaimed by many a Greek and Latin maxim on tablets borne by the friends of the great humanist who, with joyful pride, called her his daughter.

Kuni could not read, but she heard at least one sentence translated by a Benedictine monk to the nun at his side: "He whose death compels those who knew him to weep, has the fairest end." [Seneca, Hippol., 881.]

If this were true, Juliane's end was indeed fair; for she herself, whom the child had met only to inflict pain, had her eyes dimmed by tears, and wherever she turned she saw people weeping.

Most of those who lined the street could have had no close relations with the dead girl. But yonder

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black-robed mourners who followed the bier were her parents, her brothers and sisters, her nearest relatives, the members of the Council, and the family servants. And she, the wretched, reckless, sinful, crippled strolling player, for whom not a soul on earth cared, whose death would not have drawn even a single tear from any eye, to whom a speedy end could be only a benefit, was perhaps the cause of the premature drying up of this pure fountain of joy, which had refreshed so many hearts and animated them with the fairest hopes.

The tall lady, whose noble face and majestic figure were shrouded in a thick veil, was Juliane's mother and she had offered the sick ropedancer a home in her wealthy household.

"If she had only known," thought Kuni, "the injury I was inflicting upon her heart's treasure, she would rather have hunted me with dogs from her threshold."

In spite of the veil which floated around the stately figure of the grieving mother, she could see her bosom rise and fall with her sobs of anguish. Kuni's compassionate heart made it impossible for her to watch this sorrow longer, and, covering her face with her hands, she turned her back upon the procession and, weeping aloud, limped away as fast as her injured foot would let her. Meanwhile she sometimes said to herself that she was the worst of all sinners because she had cursed the dead girl and called down death and destruction upon her head, sometimes she listened to the voice within, which told her that she had no reason to grieve over Juliane's death, and completely embitter her already wretched life by remorse and self-accusations; the dead girl was the sole cause of her terrible fall. But the defiant rebellion against the consciousness of guilt, which moved her so deeply, always ceased abruptly as soon as it raised its head; for one fact was positive, if the curse she had called down upon the innocent child, who had done her no intentional wrong, had really caused Juliane's end, a whole life was not long enough to atone for the sin which she had committed. Yet what atonement was still in her power, after the death which she had summoned had performed its terrible work of executioner?

"Nothing, nothing at all!" she said to herself angrily, resolving, as she had so often done with better success, to forget what had happened, cast the past into oblivion, and live in the present as before. But ere she could attempt to fulfil this determination, the image of the tall, grief-bowed figure of the woman who had called Juliane her dear child rose before her mind, and it seemed as if a cold, heavy hand paralyzed the wings of the light-hearted temperament which had formerly borne her pleasantly over so many things. Then she told herself that, in order not to go to perdition herself, she must vow, sacrifice, undertake everything for the salvation of the dead girl and of her own heavily burdened soul. For the first time she felt a longing to confide her feelings to some one. If Lienhard had been within reach and disposed to listen to her, he would have understood, and known what course to advise.

True, the thought that he was not looking at her when she took the fatal leap still haunted her. He could not have showed more offensively how little he cared for her but perhaps he was under the influence of a spell; for she must be something to him. This was no vain self-deception; had it not been so, would he have come in person to her couch of pain, or cared for her so kindly after the accident?

In the convent she had reached the conviction that it would be degrading to think longer of the man who, in return for the most ardent love, offered nothing but alms in jingling coin; yet her poor heart would not cease its yearning.

Meanwhile she never wearied of seeking motives that would place his conduct in a more favourable light. Whatever he might have withheld from her, he was nevertheless the best and noblest of men, and as she limped aimlessly on, the conviction strengthened that the mere sight of him would dispel the mists which, on this sunny spring day, seemed to veil everything around and within her.

But he remained absent, and suddenly it seemed more disgraceful to seek him than to stand in the stocks.

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Yet the pilgrimage to Compostella, of which the confessor had spoken? For the very reason that it had been described to her as unattainable, it would perhaps be rated at a high value in heaven, and restore to her while on earth the peace she had lost.

She pondered over this thought on her way to the tavern, where she found a corner to sleep, and a carrier who, on the day after the morrow, would take her to the sea for a heller pound. Other pilgrims had also engaged passage at Antwerp for Corunna, the harbour of Compostella, and her means were sufficient for the voyage. This assurance somewhat soothed her while she remained among people of her own calling.

But she spent a sleepless night; for again and again the dead child's image appeared vividly before her. Rising from the soft pillows in the coffin, she shook her finger threateningly at her, or, weeping and wailing, pointed down to the flames doubtless those of purgatory which were blazing upward around her, and had already caught the hem of her shroud.

Kuni arose soon after sunrise with a bewildered brain. Before setting out on her pilgrimage she wished to attend mass, and that the Holy Virgin might be aware of her good intentions repeat in church some of the paternosters which her confessor had imposed.

She went out with the simple rosary that the abbess had given her upon her wrist, but when she had left the tavern behind she saw a great crowd in front of the new St. Ulrich's Church, and recognised among the throngs of people who had flocked thither her companion in suffering at the convent, the keeper of the bath-house, who had been cured of her burns long before.

She had left her business to buy an indulgence for her own sins, and to purchase for the soul of her husband whose death-bed confession, it is true, had been a long one for the last time, but for many centuries at once, redemption from the fires of purgatory. The Dominican friar Tetzal, from Nuremberg, was here with his coffer, and carried written promises which secured certain remission of punishment for all sins, even those committed long ago, or to be committed in the future. The woman had experienced the power of his papers herself. Tetzal had come to Augsburg about a year after her husband's death, and, as she knew how many sins he had committed, she put her hand into her purse to free him from the flames. They must have burned very fiercely; for, while awake at night and in her dreams, she had often heard him wailing and complaining piteously. But after she bought the paper he became quiet and, on the third night, she saw him with her own eyes enter the room, and heard him promise her a great happiness in return for her faithful remembrance.

The very next Sunday, Veit Haselnuss, the bath-house proprietor, a well-to-do man who owned another house besides the one where he lived, invited her to take a walk with him. She knew instantly that her late husband was beginning to pay his debt of gratitude with this visitor and, in fact, a short time after, the worthy man asked her to be his wife, though she had three little children, and his oldest daughter by his first wife was already able to look after the housekeeping. The wedding took place on Whitsunday, and she owed this great happiness entirely to the dispensation which had released the dead man's soul from the fires of purgatory and induced him to show his thankfulness.

Kuni listened to her companion's rapid flood of talk, until she herself enjoined silence to hear the black-robed priest who stood beside the coffer.

He was just urging his hearers, in a loud voice, to abandon the base avarice which gathers pence. There was still time to gain, in exchange for dead florins, living salvation.

Let those who repented sin listen, and they would hear the voices of wailing parents, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, and children, who had preceded them to the other world. Whose heart was so utterly turned

to stone, whose parsimony, spite of all his love of money, was so strong that he would allow these tortured souls to burn and suffer in the flames, when it was in his power, by putting his hand into his purse, to buy a dispensation which would as surely redeem them from the fires of purgatory as his Imperial Majesty's pardon would release an imprisoned thief from jail?

Scales seemed to fall from Kuni's eyes. She hastily forced her way to the Dominican, who was just wiping the perspiration from his brow with the hem of the white robe under his black cowl.

Coughing and panting, he was preparing his voice for a fresh appeal, meanwhile opening the iron-bound box, and pointing out to the throng the placard beside his head, which announced that the money obtained by the indulgences was intended for the Turkish war. Then, in fluent language, he explained to the bystanders that this meant that the Holy Father in Rome intended to drive the hereditary foe of Christianity back to the steppes and deserts of the land of Asia, where he belonged. In order to accomplish this work, so pleasing to the Lord, the Church was ready to make lavish use of the treasures of mercy intrusted to her. Deliverance from the flames of purgatory would never be more cheaply purchased than at this opportunity. Then he thrust his little fat hand, on which several valuable rings glittered, into the box, and held out to the bystanders a small bundle of papers like an open pack of cards.

Kuni summoned up her courage and asked whether they would also possess the power to remove a curse. Tetzal eagerly assented, adding that he had papers which would wash the soul as white from every sin as soap would cleanse a sooty hand, even though, instead of "curse," its name was "parricide."

The most costly had the power to transfer scoundrels roasting in the hottest flames of purgatory to the joys of paradise, as yonder sparrow had just soared from the dust of the street to the elm bough.

Kuni timidly asked the price of an indulgence, but the Dominican unctuously explained that they were not sold like penny rolls at the baker's; the heavier the sin, the higher the fine to be paid. First of all, she must confess sincere contrition for what had been done and inform him how, in spite of her youth, she had been led into such heinous guilt. Kuni replied that she had long mourned her error most deeply, and then began to whisper to Tetzal how she had been induced to curse a fellow-mortal. She desired nothing for herself. Her sole wish was to release the dead girl from the flames of purgatory, and the curse which, by her guilt, burdened her soul. But the Dominican had only half listened, and as many who wanted indulgences were crowding around his box, he interrupted Kuni by offering her a paper which he would make out in the name of the accursed Juliane Peutinger if he had heard correctly.

Such cases seemed to be very familiar to him, but the price he asked was so large that the girl grew pale with terror.

Yet she must have the redeeming paper, and Tetzal lowered his price after her declaration that she possessed only five heller pounds and the convent viaticum. Besides, she stated that she had already bargained with the carrier for the journey to the sea.

This, however, had no influence upon the Dominican, as the indulgence made the pilgrimage to Compostella unnecessary. Since it would redeem the accursed person from the fires of purgatory, she, too, was absolved from the vow which drew her thither.

With stern decision he therefore insisted upon demanding the entire sum in her possession. He could only do it so cheaply because her face and her lost foot showed that she was destined to suffer part of the eternal torture here on earth.

Then Kuni yielded. The paper was made out in the name of Juliane, she gave up her little store, and returned

to the inn a penniless beggar, but with a lighter heart, carrying the precious paper under the handkerchief crossed over her bosom. But there the carrier refused her a seat without the money which she had promised him, and the landlord demanded payment for her night's lodging and the bit of food she had eaten.

Should she go back to the convent and ask for the little sum which Lienhard had left there for her?

The struggle was a hard one, but pride finally conquered. She renounced the kindly meant gift of her only friend. When the abbess returned the money to him, he could not help perceiving that she was no beggar and scorned to be his debtor. If he then asked himself why, he would find the right answer. She did not confess it to herself in plain words, but she wished to remain conscious that, whether he desired it or not, she had given her heart's best love to this one man without reward, merely because it was her pleasure to do it. At last she remembered that she still possessed something valuable. She had not thought of it before, because it had been as much a part of herself as her eyes or her lips, and it would have seemed utterly impossible to part with it. This article was a tolerably heavy gold ring, with a sparkling ruby in the centre. She had drawn it from her father's finger after he had taken his last leap and she was called to his corpse. She did not even know whether he had received the circlet as a wedding ring from the mother of whom she had no remembrance, or where he obtained it. But she had heard that it was of considerable value, and when she set off to sell the jewel, she did not find it very hard to give it up. It seemed as if her father, from the grave, was providing his poor child with the means she needed to continue to support her life.

She had heard in the convent of Graslin, the goldsmith, who had bestowed on the chapel a silver shrine for the relics, and went to him.

When she stood before the handsome gableroofted house which he occupied she shrank back a little. At first he received her sternly and repellantly enough, but, as soon as she introduced herself as the ropedancer who had met with the accident, he showed himself to be a kindly old gentleman.

After one of the city soldiers had said that she told the truth and had just been dismissed from the convent, he paid her the full value of the ring and added a florin out of sympathy and the admiration he felt for the charm which still dwelt in her sparkling blue eyes.

But Compostella was indeed far away. Her new supply of money was sufficient for the journey there, but how could she return? Besides, her cough troubled her very seriously, and it seemed as though she could not travel that long distance alone. The dealer in indulgences had said that the paper made the pilgrimage unnecessary, and the confessor in the convent had only commanded her to go to Altotting. With this neighbouring goal before her, she turned her back upon Augsburg the following morning.

Her hope of meeting on the way compassionate people, who would give her a seat in their vehicles, was fulfilled. She reached Altotting sooner than she had expected. During the journey, sometimes in a peasant's cart, sometimes in a freight wagon, she had thought often of little Juliane, and always with a quiet, nay, a contented heart. In the famous old church, at the end of her pilgrimage, she saw a picture in which the raked souls of children were soaring upward to heaven from the flames blazing around them in purgatory.

The confessor had sent her to the right place.

Here a fervent prayer had the power to rescue a child's soul from the fires of purgatory. Many other votive pictures, the pilgrims at the inn, and a priest whom she questioned, confirmed it. She also heard from various quarters that she had not paid too high a price for the indulgence. This strengthened her courage and henceforward, nay, even during the time of sore privation which she afterward endured, she blessed a thousand times her resolve to buy the ransoming paper from Tetzl, the Dominican; for she thought that she daily experienced its power.

Whenever Juliane appeared, her face wore a friendly expression nay, once, in a dream, she floated before her as if she wished to thank her, in the form of a beautiful angel with large pink and white wings. She no longer needed to fear the horrible curse which she had called down upon the little one, and once more thought of Lienhard with pleasure. When he learned in the other world how she had atoned for the wrong which she had done his little favourite, she would be sure of his praise.

To be held in light esteem, nay, even despised, was part of her calling, like her constant wandering. She had longed for applause in her art, but for herself she had desired nothing save swift draughts of pleasure, since she had learned how little she was regarded by the only person whose opinion she valued. She could never have expected that he would hold her in high esteem, since he was so indifferent to her art that he did not even think it worth while to lift his eyes to the rope. Yet the idea that he placed her in the same rank with others in her profession seemed unendurable. But she need grieve over this no longer, and when she remembered that even the sorest want had not been able to induce her to touch his alms, she could have fairly shouted for joy amid all her misery. The conviction that one man, who was the best and noblest of his sex, might deem her a poor, unfortunate girl, but never a creature who deserved contempt, was the beam to which she clung, when the surges of her pitiable, wandering life threatened to close over her and stifle her.

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CHAPTER VIII.

As Kuni's troubled soul had derived so much benefit from the short pilgrimage to Altotting, she hoped to obtain far more from a visit to Santiago di Compostella, famed throughout Christendom.

True, her old master, Loni, whom she had met at Regensburg, permitted her to join his band, but when she perceived that he was far less prosperous than before, and that she could not be useful to him in any way, she left him at Cologne because a kindhearted captain offered to take her to Vlissingen without pay. Thence she really did set out upon the pilgrimage to Santiago di Compostella; but St. James, the patron saint of the Spaniards, whose untiring mercy so many praised, did not prove specially favourable to her. The voyage to Compostella, the principal place where he was revered, which annually attracted thousands of pilgrims, cost her her last penny, and the cold nights which she was obliged to spend on deck increased her cough until it became almost unendurably violent.

In Santiago di Compostella both her means and her strength were exhausted. After vainly expecting for a long time some token of the saint's helpful kindness, only two courses were left: either she must remain in Compostella and join the beggars in the crowded road to the place of pilgrimage, or she must accept the proposal made by tongueless Cyriax and go back with him to Germany. At first she had been afraid of the brutal fellow, who feigned insanity and was led about by his wife with a chain; but once, when red-haired Gitta was seized by the Inquisition, and spent two days and two nights in jail, and Kuni nursed her child in her place, she had found him more friendly. Besides, in Compostella, the swearer had been in his most cheerful mood. Every day had filled his purse, because there was no lack of people and he understood how to extort money by the terror which horrible outbreaks of his feigned malady inspired among the densely crowded pilgrims. His wife possessed a remedy which would instantly calm his ravings, but it was expensive, and she had not the money to buy it. Not only in Compostella, but also on the long journey from Bavaria through the Swiss mountains, France, Navarre, and the whole of northern Spain, there were always kind-hearted or timid people from whom the money for the "dear prescription" could be obtained.

A cart drawn by a donkey conveyed the child of this worthy couple. When Kuni met her at Compostella she was a sickly little girl about two years old, with an unnaturally large head and thin, withered legs, who seemed to be mute because she used her mouth only to eat and to make a movement of the lips which

sounded like "Baba." This sound, Cyriax explained, was a call that meant "papa." That was the name aristocratic children gave their fathers, and it meant him alone, because the little girl resembled him and loved him better than she did any one else. He really believed this, and the stammering of the fragile child's livid lips won the rough fellow's tender love.

The man who, when drunk, beat his wife till the blood came, and committed plenty of cruel deeds, trembled, wept, and could even pray with fervent piety, when which often happened the frail little creature, shaken by convulsions, seemed at the point of death. He had undertaken the long journey to the "world's end," not only because the pilgrimage to Compostella promised large profits, but also to urge St. James to cure his child. For his "sweet little Juli's" sake, and to obtain for her a cheap nurse who would be entirely dependent upon him, he burdened himself with the lame ropedancer. But he had no reason to repent this; Gitta had enough to do to lead him by the chain and answer the questions of the people, while Kuni nursed her charge with rare fidelity, mended the clothing of the father, mother, and child, as well or as badly as she could, and also helped Gitta with the cooking. The sickly, obstinate little girl certainly did not deserve the name of a "sweet" child, yet Kuni devoted herself to it with warm, almost passionate affection.

The vagabond couple did not fail to notice this, and, on the whole, it pleased them. If Cyriax was vexed when little Juli began to show plainly enough that she preferred her nurse even to him, he submitted because the lame girl watched the child through severe attacks of convulsions and fever as if it were her own, and willingly sacrificed her night's rest for its sake. True, he often talked loudly enough in Kuni's presence of the witch potion which the lame girl mixed in the porridge of his child, who loved him better than anything in the world, to estrange it from him and win it to herself.

Kuni paid little heed to these offensive words; she knew that she had gained the child's love by very different means from the "black art." With far more reason, she dimly felt, the sick child might have been reproached for exerting a secret spell upon her. Her name, "Julie," which she owed to her patron saint, Kuni supposed was the same as "Juliane." Besides, the daughter of the vagabond with the mutilated tongue was born a few days after the death of little Fraulein Peutinger, and this circumstance, when Kuni knew it, seemed significant. Soon after meeting the vagrant pair she had listened to a conversation between two travelling scholars, and learned some strange things. One believed that the old sages were right when they taught that the soul of a dead person continued its existence in other living creatures; for instance, the great Pythagoras had known positively, and proved that his own had dwelt, in former ages, in the breast of the hero Palamedes.

The ropedancer remembered this statement, questioned other Bacchantes about these things, and heard the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul confirmed. Hence, during many a solitary ride, while the cart rolled slowly along, she pondered over the thought that Juliane's soul had lived again in foolish Julie. How? Why? She did not rack her brains on those points. What had been a fancy, slowly became a fixed belief in the mind thus constantly dwelling upon one idea. At last she imagined that whatever she did for Cyriax's child benefited the soul of the little Augsburg girl, whose life had been shortened by her wicked prayer on the rope.

Yet she had not bought the indulgence in vain. But for that, she believed that Juliane's soul would still be burning in the flames of purgatory. The indulgence of the "Inquisitor" Tetzl had proved its power, and rescued her from the fire. To demonstrate this fact she devised many a proof. For instance, one day the idea entered her mind that foolish Juli's brain was so weak because Juliane, during her brief existence, had used more of hers than was fair.

At first this had been a mere fancy; but, true to her nature, she reverted to it again and again, while in the cart which she alone shared with the child, until it had matured to an immovable conviction. During her changeful, wandering life, she had had no fixed religious principles. But, since the notion had entered her mind that Lienhard would reward her for her love by giving her a share, even though a very small one, of his heart, she had clung tenaciously to it, in spite of all rebuffs and the offensive indifference with which he had

treated her. On her sick bed and during her convalescence, she had dwelt upon the fear that her sinful prayer had killed the little wearer of the laurel wreath, until she could say to herself that events had proved it. With the same firmness she now held to the belief that she had found the right idea concerning little Juli's soul.

With the passionate desire to atone to the patrician's daughter for the wrong which she had inflicted upon her, she clasped the vagabond's child to her heart with the love of the most faithful mother, and her affectionate care seemed to benefit herself as well as the ailing little one. Juli was as devoted to her Kuni as a faithful dog. The kindness which the lame ropedancer showed to the fragile child was lavishly returned to her by a thousand proofs of the warmest attachment.

So Kuni had found one heart which kept its whole treasure of love for her alone, one creature who could not do without her, one fragile human plant to which she could be useful and helpful day and night.

Under the care of a faithful nurse little Juli gradually grew stronger, both physically and mentally. The little girl's wan cheeks began to be rosy, the convulsions and fever attacked her less frequently. Besides the faint "Baba," she learned to babble "Duni," (instead of Kuni) and afterward "Mother," and many other words. At last she talked nearly as well as other children of her age. All this afforded the lame girl a wealth of sweet joys wholly new to her, which afforded her heart such warmth and solace that, in spite of the cough which tormented her during many an hour of the day and night, she felt happier during her homeward journey with the fierce blasphemer Cyriax, from whom she expected the worst things, than in the brilliant days of her fame as an artist. Doubtless, as they approached Germany, she often wondered what Lienhard would think of her, if he should meet her amid such surroundings, as the companion of so worthless a couple; but the terror that overpowered her was transformed into pleasant satisfaction at the thought that he would approve, nay, praise her conduct, when she could show him the child, and tell him what she had done for it.

This state of affairs had continued until two months before. Then, at Schaffhausen, her darling had suddenly been attacked with violent convulsions, and the feeble intellect, which her love had so toilsomely and faithfully waked from its slumber, only too soon attained eternal peace. In all Kuni's sorrowful life she had scarcely experienced any grief so bitter. When she closed the little eyes which had gazed into her pale face so often and so tenderly, it seemed as if the sun, moon, and stars had lost their light, and henceforth she was condemned to live in dreary gloom.

What terrible days had followed the child's death! Cyriax raved as if he had really been seized with the lunacy whose pretence helped him to beg his bread. Besides, he gave himself up to unbridled indulgence in brandy, and, when drunk, he was capable of the most brutal acts. The dead Juli's mother, who, spite of an evil youth and a lenient conscience, was by no means one of the worst of women, had to endure the harshest treatment from her profligate companion.

The blow which had fallen upon him filled him with savage rage, and he longed to inflict some pain upon all who came in his way that they, too, might feel what it was to suffer.

The death of his "sweet little Juli" appeared to have hardened the last tender spot in his brutal soul.

Kuni was the only person toward whom at first he imposed some restraint upon himself. True, without any consideration for the girl's presence, he sometimes asked Gitta why they still burdened themselves with the useless hobbler and did not sell the cart and the donkey. But though there was no lack of good offers for the excellent Spanish beast of burden, he allowed matters to remain as before. If the rage seething in his heart led him, in his drunken frenzy, to make Kuni feel its effects, too, the pleading glance of the blue eyes, still large and expressive, with which she had so often hushed the wailing child, sufficed to soothe him.

Yesterday, for the first time, he had seriously threatened to drive the ropedancer away, and she knew that

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Cyriax was capable of anything. True, his wife was attached to Kuni, but she had little influence over her vicious husband. So the sick cripple might only too easily find herself left on the highway.

Still, she had given Cyriax cause for the threat. All day and during the night she had been busy with the unfortunate mother and her twins, and therefore had frequently neglected to fill his brandy bottle. But this could not be helped, and she was not accustomed to think of the future. Whatever her heart urged she did, no matter what might happen. If Cyriax left her in the lurch, she must beg or starve unless chance, which so often mingled in her existence, willed otherwise.

With the child's life the modest happiness which Kuni had enjoyed during the last few months had vanished, not only because the tongueless blasphemer had become a different person, and she sorely missed the delicate little creature who had filled and cheered her heart, but she had also lost the peace of mind which she enjoyed during the existence of her charge.

The young Augsburg maiden, whom she thought she had bought out of the flames of purgatory, did not appear to her again, but the vagrant's child came all the more frequently, and whenever she showed herself she wailed and wept bitterly. Sweet little Juli's soul must now whether it had been Juliane's or not endure the tortures of purgatory, and this pierced Kuni's heart the more deeply the more affectionately she remembered the sickly-child.

Ever since she had used a black plaster, given to her at Singen by a quack, the stump of her foot had become sore again, and sharp pain tortured her so cruelly that, especially when the cough racked her emaciated body and she was jolted to and fro in the springless cart over stony roads, she was afraid that she should lose her reason.

At Pforzheim a barber had examined the wound and, shaking his head, pronounced the black plaster a malignant blood poisoner, and when she refused to have the leg amputated, applied a yellow one, which proved no better. When Cyriax counted up his receipts in the evening, called to red-haired Gitta his favourite maxim, "Fools never die," and handed to her Kuni the larger brandy bottle to fill, she had often summoned up her courage and begged him to buy an indulgence for his sweet little Juli. The result was certain she knew it from her own experience.

Shortly after the child's death he had thrust his hand into his purse more than once at such an appeal and given money for a few candles, but it had not been possible to persuade him to purchase the paper.

This refusal was by no means due to mere parsimony. Kuni knew what induced him to maintain his resistance so obstinately, for in her presence he had told pock-marked Ratz that he would not take the indulgence gratis. Wherever he might be, his family ought to go, and he did not wish to be anywhere that he would not find Juli.

He did not doubt the continued life of the soul after death, but precisely because he was sure that the gates of paradise would remain closed to him throughout eternity he would not help to open them for the dead child. When his imagination tortured him with fancies that mice and beetles were leaping and running out of his pockets and the breast of his doublet, he thought that his end was drawing near. If the devil then had power over his soul, his imps might drag him wherever they pleased, if only he might see little Juli there and hear her call "Baba" and "Father." It would lessen the tortures of hell, however severe they might be. Was it possible for him to conceive of any greater folly than to rob himself of this consolation by transporting the child, through the indulgence, to the kingdom of heaven, where he could never see her again. He had accumulated a goodly sum by begging, it is true, but, strangely enough, he did not think of purchasing salvation for himself in order to meet his child again in heaven, instead of amid the flames of purgatory. Though he had become as rich as the Fuggers, paradise, he knew, would still be closed to him. He was not fit for it.

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He hated everybody who was rich and respectable. He would rather be with his child in the mire of hell than to go with her to a magnificent garden of paradise where swearing was forbidden, where there was no brandy and no highroad, and which offered only pleasures which were none to him.

So Kuni was forced to see the child remain in the fires of purgatory, which hurt her little less than her aching limb.

At her entrance into The Blue Pike pain and mental suffering had driven her to the verge of despair. But the day which began so sorrowfully was followed by an evening of delight she owed to it her new meeting with Lienhard.

From childhood she had been homeless, and every quarter of the globe to which a highroad led was her native land. Yet in Spain and during the journey back she had felt a gnawing longing for Germany, nay, nothing had troubled her more than the thought of dying and being buried outside of its frontier. Her mother, a native of the Rhine country, had given her birth during the fair at Cologne on the Spree; but, whenever homesickness assailed her, it was always the steeples of St. Sebald and St. Ulrich which beckoned to her, and she had longed for the Frank country, the Main, or the richly wooded banks of the Pegnitz. Was this because, in Nuremberg, for the only time in her life, she had been a member of a decorous household, or had the love which, wherever Cyriax's cart and donkey carried her, always drew her heart back to the same ancient city, made it so dear to her?

Probably the latter, for yesterday she had yearned ardently to reach Nuremberg; but since she had seen Lienhard again, she rejoiced that she was in Miltenberg and at The Blue Pike.

Never had he seemed to her so handsome, so manly. Besides, he had spoken to her, listened to her reply, and even given her money with lavish generosity. It was like him! No one else would have been capable of it.

She could live a long time on his three gold florins, if Cyriax abandoned her; yet the unexpected wealth burned in her hand and perplexed her. Did Lienhard no longer know that she would not accept money from him? Had she robbed herself of the certainty that beautified existence; had she failed to show him her superiority to other vagrant girls? Yet no! What he gave her was more, far more, than even a prince bestowed upon an ordinary mendicant. He must measure her by a special standard. If he had only given her the gold with a kind word, not flung it silently into her lap. This half destroyed her pleasure in the present, and the ample supply of money clouded her already disturbed peace of mind still more. Had it been possible, she would have returned the gift as she did the alms at Augsburg. But how was this to be accomplished in the over-crowded inn?

Yet, if she kept the florins, the sacrifice at the convent would lose a large portion of its value, and the good opinion which her act at Augsburg must have inspired might be shadowed.

For some time before leaving the room in the tavern she had turned the coins restlessly over and over under her kerchief, and meanwhile, as if in a dream, made but evasive answers to the questions and demands of Cyriax and Gitta.

Then she glided nearer to the gentlemen at the table, intending to return Lienhard's gift; but the landlord of The Pike followed her suspiciously, and drove her back to her companions.

Thence she had been called to the sick woman and went out of doors. She found the mother of the twins in the meadow by the Main and eagerly devoted herself to them.

The widow's burning head and gasping breath were no favourable symptoms. She herself felt that her end

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was approaching. Her tongue was parched. The water in the jug was warm and flat, yet she longed for a cool drink. During the day Kuni had noticed a well in the kitchen garden, and, in spite of her aching foot, hastened to it at once to draw the cool water. While doing so, the red and white pinks which she had noticed at noon again caught her eye in the starlight night. The sick woman could enjoy their fragrance now, and to-morrow, feast her eyes upon their bright colours.

From childhood she had always been fond of flowers. Stealing was prohibited by her father as wicked and dangerous, and she had never transgressed his commands. When she picked up the costly rosary in Nuremberg, she had intended to return it to the owner. But to pluck the flowers and fruit which the Lord caused to grow and ripen for every one was a different thing, and had never troubled her conscience. So she carelessly gathered a few pinks. Three should go to the sick woman, but Lienhard Groland would have the largest and finest. She would try to slip the flowers into his hand, with the money, as a token of her gratitude. But even while saying to herself that these blossoms should be her last greeting to him, she felt the red spots burning more hotly on her cheeks. Ah, if only he would accept the pinks! Then the most cruel things might happen, she could bear them.

While kneeling before the bed, the waiter, Dietel, noticed her. As she saw him also, she hurried back to the suffering mother as fast as her lame limb would carry her, and raised the jug of fresh water to her parched lips.

This had been a delicious refreshment to the sick woman, and when Kuni saw how much comfort her little service afforded the invalid, her heart grew lighter. Had it been possible she, who was of no importance to any one, would willingly have lain down on the heap of straw in the place of the mother upon whom two young lives depended.

How delightful it was to bring aid! And she possessed the means of being helpful.

So, with sparkling eyes, she pressed the three gold coins into the sufferer's burning hand, and told her that the village authorities would rear the twins for such a sum. Then the parched lips of the fevered woman lauded the merciful kindness bestowed by the lame ropedancer who at that moment seemed to her as powerful as a queen so warmly and tenderly that Kuni felt the blood again mount into her cheeks this time with shame at the praise which she deserved so little, yet which rendered her so happy. Finally, the sufferer expressed a desire for a priest, that she might not pass from earth without a sacrament. Her sins oppressed her sorely. She, and she alone, was to blame for Nickel's being hanged. Never in all her life had she been a glutton; but before the birth of the twins the devil had tormented her with a strange longing for roast fowl, which she had been unable to repress and keep to herself. Solely for her gratification, Nickel stole the goose and the hens. In spite of many a bad business in which his reckless nature had involved him, he was a good fellow, with a loving heart.

For her sake he would have tried to steal the ring from the executioner's finger. Now he had gone into the other world unshriven, with the rope about his neck, for though the benefit of the sacrament was usually granted even to the worst criminals, the peasants strung Nickel up to the nearest tree as soon as they caught him, without heeding his entreaties. This made death even harder for her than the thought of the poor little creatures yonder in the bundle of rags. Kuni's charity had provided for the orphans, but her Nickel would find no mercy from the heavenly Judge throughout eternity.

She had sobbed aloud as she spoke, and then writhed in such violent convulsions that Kuni with difficulty prevented her from throwing herself out of the hot straw in the cart upon the damp meadow.

When she grew somewhat calmer, she repeated Nickel's name again and again till it was heartrending to hear her.

CHAPTER IX.

As soon as the sufferer's condition would permit, Kuni left her, went to the window of the taproom in The Blue Pike, and surveyed its inmates.

Most of them were already asleep on heaps of straw, which were raised at the head by chairs turned upside down. The richer guests had gone to the bedrooms, which, however, they were obliged to share with several others. Some of the strollers were lying on the floor with their knapsacks under their heads. A few of the musicians were still lingering over the wine which the travelling merchants and artisans had ordered for them. Others had gone with some of the vagrants into the little wood beyond the meadow, where they danced, fiddled, and sang.

Their loud shouts were borne by the cool night breeze to the sufferer in the cart. The gentlemen from Cologne, without troubling themselves about the boisterous merriment of the burghers or the transformation of the room into a sleeping apartment, were still sitting at the table talking together eagerly.

The dealer in the indulgences, too, had not yet gone to rest. A tall, broad-shouldered sergeant belonging to the escort had just purchased for the larger part of the zecchins won as his share of the booty in the Italian war the indulgence which he thought would secure him from the tortures of the fire of purgatory. Before opening the door, he struck his broad breast as though relieved of a heavy burden.

The ropedancer looked after him thoughtfully. The paper had now lightened the sergeant's heart as it had formerly done her own. Would she not have been wiser to give her money for the redemption of Nickel's lost soul than for the orphans, whom the charity of the people would perhaps have succoured without her? Probably, too, it would have afforded still greater consolation to the poor dying woman, whom nothing troubled so sorely as her guilt for the doom of her unfortunate husband.

Yet, even thus she had succeeded in making the dying mother's departure easier, and what she had commenced she intended to complete at once.

With a tender smile that lent strange beauty to her pallid, grief-worn face she continued her survey.

She had previously noticed an old priest, whose countenance bore the impress of genuine kindness of heart. She soon found him again among the travellers sleeping on the straw; but the old man's slumber was so sound that she felt reluctant to wake him. Among the Dominicans from Cologne, most of whom were also asleep, there were none she would have trusted, nay, she even thought that one was the very person who, shortly before her fall from the rope, had pursued her with persistent importunity. But the Abbot of St. Aegidius in Nuremberg, who had dined with the ambassadors from his native city, was also a man of benevolent, winning expression. His cheeks were flushed, either by the heat or the wine which he had drunk, but there was a look of attractive kindness upon his well-formed features. When he went through the room a short time before, Kuni had seen him pass his hand caressingly over the fair hair of the pretty little son of a potter's wife from Reren on the Rhine, whose cart was standing outside in the meadow by the Main. He was scarcely of the same mind as the gentleman from Cologne, for he had just waved his plump hand in protest.

Perhaps she might even do him a favour by summoning him. But dared she, a poor vagabond, disturb so distinguished a gentleman at his wine?

Yet there was danger in delay. So she resolved to ask the assistance of the landlady of The Pike, coughed with her handkerchief pressed over her lips, in order not to disturb the sleepers, and turned to leave the room.

But Gitta had just been to see the sick mother, and told Cyriax that Kuni, silly, softhearted thing, had wasted

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her gold coins on the dying woman.

The blasphemer flew into a great rage, muttered a few words to pock-marked Ratz, and then staggered toward their lame travelling companion to bar her passage across the threshold, and ask, in angry, guttural tones, how much of the Groland gold she had flung into the dying woman's grave.

"Is it any business of yours?" was the reply, uttered with difficulty amid her coughing.

"Mine, mine is it any business of mine?" gasped the tongueless man. Then he raised his heavy fist threateningly and stammered jeeringly: "Not not a red heller more nor less than my cart in the name of all the fiends than my cart is of yours. Four heller pounds, Ratz, and the donkey and cart are yours."

"Done!" cried the vagrant, who already had his money ready; but the tongueless blasphemer chuckled with malicious pleasure:

"Now you have it, fool! Whoever doesn't share with me you know that doesn't ride with me."

Then he staggered back to Gitta.

The girl watched him silently for a while. At last she passed her hand quickly across her brow, as if to dispel some unpleasant thought, and shook her burning head, half sadly, half disapprovingly.

She had done a good deed and this, this But she had not performed it for the sake of reward, she had only desired to aid the sufferer.

Straightening herself proudly, she limped toward the kitchen.

Here, frequently interrupted by fits of coughing, she told the landlady of The Pike in touching words that the sick mother, whom she had so kindly strengthened with nice broth, desired the sacrament, as her life would soon be over. The Lord Abbot of St. Aegidius in Nuremberg was still sitting over his wine.

She went no further. The landlady, who, while Kuni was talking, had wiped her pretty flushed face with her apron, pulled the rolled up white linen sleeves farther down over her plump arms, and gazed with mingled surprise and approval into the girl's emaciated face, interrupted her with the promise to do what she could for the poor woman.

"If it were any one else," she continued, significantly, "I would not venture to try it. But the Abbot of St. Aegidius, in his charity, scarcely asks, when help is needed, whence did you come, who are you, or what do you possess? I know him. Wait here a little while. If he condescends to do it, you can take him to the poor creature at once."

While speaking she smoothed, with two swift motions of her hands, the brown hair which had become a little disordered while bustling to and fro to attend to the business, dipped her hands into the water pail, dried them quickly on her apron, untied it, and tossed it to the maid. Then she cleared her throat vigorously and left the kitchen.

In reply to the anxious question of her husband, whom she met on the threshold of the room, as to what she was seeking there, she answered firmly, "What is right and pious"; then modestly whispered her request to the abbot.

Her wish was fulfilled without delay, nay, it might really have been supposed that the interruption was very

opportune to the distinguished prelate; for, with the brief exclamation, "Imperative official duty!" he rose from the table, and went first with the landlady to Kuni and afterward with the latter to the cart beside the laden potter's wain, whose white tilt gleamed in the darkness.

The landlady had undertaken to send to the sexton, whose house was near, that he might immediately obtain everything the abbot needed for the dying woman's viaticum.

Kuni told the sufferer what an exalted servant of the Church was ready to receive her confession and give her the sacrament.

Then she whispered that she might mention Nickel's burdened soul to the abbot. Whatever happened, she could now depart from earth in peace.

Reserving for herself half of the flowers she had gathered in the garden she glided away, in order not to disturb the dying woman's confession.

CHAPTER X.

At the edge of the meadow Kuni paused to reflect. She would gladly have flung herself down on the dewy grass to rest, stretched at full length on the cool turf. She was worn out, and her foot ached and burned painfully after her long walk in the warm August night; but something else exerted a still stronger attraction over her poor longing heart; the desire to see Lienhard again and give him the pinks as a token of gratitude for so much kindness.

He was still sitting with the other gentlemen at the table in front of the tavern. One of the torches threw its light full on his manly face. Kuni knew that he could not see her in the darkness surrounding her figure, yet it seemed as though she was meeting the gaze of his sparkling dark eyes. Now he was speaking. How she longed to know what he said. Summoning up her courage, she glided along in the shadow of the wall and sat down behind the oleander bush on the sharp edge of the tub. No one noticed her, but she was afraid that a fit of coughing might betray her presence, so she pressed her apron firmly over her lips and sat straining her ears to listen. In spite of the violent aching of her foot and the loud rattling in her chest, she thought it a specially favourable dispensation of Providence that she had found her way here just at this moment; for Lienhard was still speaking. The others had asked him to tell them connectedly how the beautiful Katharina Harsdtirffer had become his wife, in spite of the opposition of her stern father and though the Honourable Council had punished him for such insubordination with imprisonment and exile.

He had already related this in detail when Kuni came to listen. Now, pointing to Wilibald Pirckheimer, who sat opposite, he went on with his story, describing how, thanks to the mediation of the latter and of the great artist, Albrecht Durer, he had obtained an audience at Innsbruck with the Emperor Maximilian, how the sovereign had interceded personally in behalf of himself and his betrothal, and how, in consequence of this royal intervention, he had attained the goal of his wishes.

"Our Honourables," he concluded, "now willingly permitted me to return home, and Hans Harsdtirffer, Katharina's father—Heaven rest his soul relinquished his opposition to our marriage. Perhaps he would have done so earlier, but for the keen antagonism which, owing to their totally different natures, had arisen between the stern man and my lighthearted father, and displayed itself in the Council as well as in all the affairs of life. Not until his old opponent, to whom I owed my existence, was on his death-bed, did Herr Hans clasp hands with him in reconciliation, and consent to our betrothal."

"And I know," Wilibald Pirckheimer interrupted, that among the many obstacles which his foes placed in his path, and which clouded his active life, you two, and your loyal love, gave him more light and greater

consolation than anything else. I have often heard him gladly acknowledge this, and as for you, friend Lienhard."

"I know," replied the young Honourable modestly, checking him, "that he was right in deeming the immature youth, which I was at the time of my first wooing, unworthy of his daughter."

"Though you had been the peer in strength and beauty of the valiant Achilles, and in wisdom of the subtle Ulysses, son of Laertes, I would not contradict you," interrupted Pirckheimer; "for, gentlemen, this gallant husband's wife is a jewel of a peculiar kind. Nuremberg is proud of calling Frau Katharina her daughter. Far as the German language is spoken, her equal would be sought in vain."

"You are an enviable man," said little Dr. Eberbach, turning to Lienhard. "But probably you will permit me one question. Even when a boy, as we heard, you loved the child Katharina. As a youth, you took this love across the Alps to Padua and Bologna. But when, like the noble Virgil, I perceive that 'Nowhere is there aught to trust—nowhere,' [Virg. AEn. iv, 373.] and find that the esteemed Catullus's words, 'No man passes through life without error,' [Catull. Dist. I, 5.] are verified, I would fain learn whether in Italy also you held fast, in small things as well as great ones, to the among us men rare bird of the fidelity sworn to the woman whom we love. I, who compared to you, am like a faun with pointed ears beside the handsome Ares, nevertheless know by experience how easily the glowing eyes of that country kindle conflagrations. Was the armour of a former love really strong enough to guard your heart from every flame, even before any vow bound you to the child whom you chose so early for the companion of your life"?

"It was the same before the priest's consecration as afterward," replied the young Councillor, gravely and firmly.

Then, changing his manner, he held out his brimming glass toward the Thuringian and gaily continued:

"It ought not to seem so amazing to a man of your learning, my incredulous Herr Doctor. Surely your far-famed Propertius says, 'Love is benefited by many things, a faithful nature and resolute persistence.' Believe me, doctor, even without the counsel of your experienced Roman, I should have kept faith with the lovely child at home. From my boyhood, Katharina was to me the woman, the one above all others, the worthy Tryphon, my teacher of Greek in Bologna, would have said. My heart's darling has always been my light, as Helios was that of the Greeks, though there were the moon and so many planets and stars besides."

"And the vagrant we saw just now, on whom you bestowed a golden shower of remembrance as Father Zeus endowed the fair Danae?" asked Doctor Peutinger of Augsburg, shaking his finger mischievously at his young friend. "We humanists follow the saying of Tibullus: 'Whoever confesses let him be forgiven,' and know the world sufficiently to be aware that within the walls of Ilium and without enormities are committed." [Horace, Epist. 1, 2, 16.]

"A true statement," replied Lienhard. "It probably applies to me as much as to the young girl, but there was really nothing between us which bore the most distant resemblance to a love intrigue. As a magistrate, I acquitted her of a trivial misdemeanour which she committed while my wedding procession was on its way to the altar. I did this because I was unwilling to have that happy hour become a source of pain to any one. In return, she grew deeply attached to me, who can tell whether from mere gratitude, or because a warmer feeling stirred her strange heart? At that time she was certainly a pretty, dainty creature, and yet, as truly as I hope to enjoy the love of my darling wife for many a year, there was nothing, absolutely nothing, between me and the blue-eyed, dark-haired wanderer which the confessor might not have witnessed. I myself wonder at this, because I by no means failed to see the ropedancer's peculiar changeful charms, and the tempter pointed them out to me zealously enough. Besides, she has no ordinary nature. She had accomplished really marvellous feats in her art, until at Augsburg, during the Reichstag, when in the Emperor's presence, she

risked the most daring ventures "

"Could it be the same person who, before our poor Juliane's eyes, had the awful fall which frightened the child so terribly?" asked Doctor Peutingen earnestly.

"The very same," replied Lienhard in a tone of sincere pity; but the Augsburg doctor continued, sighing:

"With that sudden fright, which thrilled her sensitive nature to its inmost depths, began the illness of the angel whose rich, loving heart throbbed so tenderly for you also, Herr Lienhard."

"As mine did for the peerless child," replied the young Councillor with eager warmth. "While Juliane, who sickened at the sight of the girl dancing on the edge of the grave, was pointing out to me some pages in the manuscript of Lucian, which I was to take from you to Herr Wilibald yonder, the unfortunate performer met with the terrible accident. We thought that she was killed, but, as if by a miracle, she lived. Ropedancing, of course, was over forever, as she had lost a foot. This, we supposed, would tend to her welfare and induce her to lead a regular, decorous life; but we were mistaken. In spite of her lameness, Kuni's restless nature drove her back to the highroad. Yet she would have been at liberty to remain in the convent as a lay sister without taking the vows."

"My wife, too, had opened our house to her for Juliane's sake," added Doctor Peutingen. "The sick child could not get the fall which had frightened her so terribly out of her head. Her compassionate heart was constantly occupied with the poor girl, and when she urged her mother to provide for her, she willingly gratified her wish and often inquired about the sufferer's health. How Juliane rejoiced when she heard that the bold and skilful dancer's life would be saved! But when, through the abbess, my wife offered her a situation in our home, the vagabond disdained what the mother and daughter had planned for her, Heaven knows how kindly."

"She treated the gift which we my wife and I left in the convent for her in the same way," added Lienhard. "Why did she refuse the aid I offered no less willingly? Probably because she was too proud to accept alms from a man from whom her ardent heart vainly desired something better."

Here Lienhard Groland hesitated, and it sounded like a confession as he eagerly continued:

"And, gentleman, she often seemed to me well worthy of a man's desire. Why should I deny it? Within and without the walls of Troy we have just heard it sin is committed, and had not the image of another woman stood between us, as the Alps rise between Germany and Italy—perhaps But of what avail are conjectures? Will you believe that there were hours when I felt as though I ought to make some atonement to the poor girl?"

"In your place I should have done it long ago, for the benefit of both," protested little Doctor Eberbach merrily. "The commands of conscience should be obeyed, even when, by way of exception, it requires something pleasant. But how grave you look, sir. No offence! You are one of the rare specimens of featherless birds endowed with reason, who unite to the austerity of Cato the amiability of Titus."

"All due honour to Cato," added Wilibald Pirckheimer with a slight bend of his stately head; "but in my young days we had a better understanding of the art of reconciling stern duty with indulgent compassion, when dealing with a beautiful Calypso whom our sternness threatened to wound. But everything in the good old days was not better than at the present time, and that you, whom I honour as the most faithful of husbands, may not misunderstand me, Lienhard: To bend and to succumb are two different things."

"Succumb!" Sir Hans von Obernitz, the Nuremberg magistrate, here interposed indignantly. "A Groland,

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who, moreover, is blessed with a loyal, lovely wife, succumb to the sparkling eyes of a vagabond wanton! The Pegnitz would flow up the castle cliff first. I should think we might have less vulgar subjects to discuss."

"The daring, skilful ropedancer certainly does not belong to the latter," Doctor Peutinger eagerly retorted. "Besides, who would not desire to know how the free, hot-blooded daughter of the highway settled the account with you, friend Lienhard? Love disdained is said to be the mother of hatred, and from the days of Potiphar's wife has often caused cruel vengeance. Had this girl whom Sir Hans holds in such light esteem really possessed an evil nature, like others of her class "

"That she does not," Lienhard Groland here warmly interrupted the Augsburg guest.

"Whatever Kuni may lack, and whatever errors she may have committed, she is, and will remain a rare creature, even among the few whose lofty spirit can not be bowed or broken by the deepest calamity. When I met her here again at The Blue Pike, among the most corrupt vagabonds, ill and poor, perhaps already the victim of death, I thought it a fitting time to renew the gift which she had refused. I would gladly do more for the poor girl, and my wife at home certainly would not be vexed; she, too, is fond of Kuni, and I repeat it this girl has a good, nay, the best nature. If, instead of among vagabonds, she had been born in a respectable household "

Here the young envoy was suddenly interrupted. His table companions also raised their heads in surprise a strange noise echoed through the night air.

Little Doctor Eberbach started up in affright, Hans von Obernitz, the Nuremberg magistrate, grasped the hilt of his sword, but Doctor Schedel instantly perceived that the sound which reached his aged ears was nothing but a violent, long-repressed fit of coughing. He and the other gentlemen were gazing at the oleander tree whence, before any one approached it, a groan of pain was heard.

The experienced physician shook his white locks gravely and said:

"Whoever uttered that is near the end of his sufferings."

He made a movement to rise as he spoke; he felt that his help was needed.

But another incident diverted the attention of his companions and himself.

CHAPTER XI.

Dietel, the waiter, had at last been released from his confinement in the cellar, and instantly began the search for the thief in the garden with twofold zeal.

Without considering how long a time had passed since he first tried to bring the culprit into the clutches of the law, he had resumed the pursuit where it was interrupted. As a thoughtless child whose bird has flown from the cage looks into the water jug to find it, he had turned the light of his lantern upon places where a kitten could not have hidden itself, and had even been to the meadow on the bank of the Main to seek Kuni with the widow of the thief Nickel; but here the sacrament was just being given to the sufferer, and to interrupt such a ceremony would have been a great crime. His eyes were keen, and the red pinks had gleamed from the straw on which the dying woman lay in the light of the lantern, whose long pole the sexton had thrust into the soft earth of the meadow. Those flowers must have come from the garden of the landlady of The Pike, and she valued her pinks more than anything else. The ropedancer had gathered them for the sick woman, and certainly had not stopped at that one act of theft. How far these vagabonds' impudence went! But he, whose duty it was to look after the property of The Blue Pike, would spoil their pleasure in thieving.

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The dog Phylax had soon put him on the trail, and before any of the gentlemen could reach the groaning person Dietel's triumphant shout rang from behind the oleander:

"Now we've caught the pilferer, and we'll make an example of her!"

His first glance had fallen on the little bunch of pinks in the girl's hand, and the vein on his forehead swelled with wrath at this damage to his mistress's favourite flowers.

But when he shook the culprit by the shoulder and, to his surprise, met with no resistance, he threw the light of the lantern upon her face, and what he saw there suddenly troubled him, for the girl's lips, chin, and dress were covered with bright blood, and her head drooped on one side as if it had lost its support.

This frightened him, and instead of continuing to boast of his success, he called for help.

The Nuremberg gentlemen soon surrounded Kuni, and Doctor Hartmann Schedel told the waiter to carry her, with the aid of his assistants, summoned by his shout, into the house and provide her with a comfortable bed.

Dietel obeyed the command without delay nay, when he heard the famous leech whisper to the other gentlemen that the sufferer's life was but a failing lamp, his feelings were completely transformed. All the charity in his nature began to stir and grew more zealous as he gazed at Kuni's face, distorted by pain. The idea of giving up to her his own neat little room behind the kitchen seemed like a revelation from St. Eoban, his patron. She should rest in his bed. The wanderer who, a few years ago, had scattered her gold so readily and joyously for the pleasure of others certainly would not poison it. Her misery seemed to him a touching proof of the transitory nature of all earthly things. Poor sufferer! Yet she ought to find recovery on his couch, if anywhere; for he had surrounded it with images of the saints, pious maxims, and little relics, bought chiefly from the venders who frequented the tavern. Among them was a leather strap from St. Elizabeth's shoe, whose healing power he had himself tested during an attack of bilious fever.

The burden which he shared with his assistants was a light one, but he was not to reach his destination without delay the little bunch of pinks fell from the hand of the unconscious girl, and Dietel silently picked up the stolen property which had just roused his wrath to such a degree, and placed it carefully on the senseless sufferer's bosom.

The second hinderance was more serious. Cyriax had heard that Kuni was dying, and fearing that he might be obliged to pay the funeral expenses he stuttered to the bystanders, with passionate gestures, that an hour ago he had discharged the cripple whom he had dragged about with him, out of sheer sympathy, long enough. She was nothing more to him now than the cock in the courtyard, which was crowing to greet the approach of dawn.

But the landlord of The Pike and others soon forced Cyriax out of the way. Kuni was laid on Dietel's bed, and the gray-haired leech examined her with the utmost care.

The landlady of The Pike helped to undress her, and when the good woman, holding her apron to her eyes from which tears were streaming, opened the door again and the Abbot of St. AEgidius approached the couch, to render aid to the dying for the second time that night, he saw by Hartmann Schedel's face that he had not come too soon.

The ropedancer had recovered consciousness, and the kind prelate's presence was a solace to her. The confession lasted a long time, and the story which she had to confide to the priest must have been as strange as it was interesting, for the abbot listened eagerly and with evident emotion. When he had performed the duties of his office he remained alone for a time; he could not immediately regain a mood in which he cared

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to rejoin the others. He did not ask for the gentlemen from Cologne; those from Nuremberg, whom he sought, had returned to the table in front of the tavern long before.

The waves of the Main were now reflecting the golden light of the morning sun. Dewdrops glittered on the grass and flowers in the meadow with the cart, and in the landlady's little garden. Carriers' men were harnessing the freshly groomed bays to the pole. The brass rings on the high collars of the stallions jingled loudly and merrily, and long whiplashes cracked over the four and six-horse teams which were beginning the day's journey along the highroad.

But even the rattling of the carts and the trampling of the horses' hoofs could not rouse the Cologne professors, who, with their clerical companions, had gone to rest, and slept in darkened rooms until late into the morning. Most of the humbler guests had already left their straw beds.

Cyriax was one of the first who followed the road. He had sold his cart and donkey, and wanted to burden his red-haired wife with his possessions, but as she resolutely refused he had taken the bundle on his own lazy shoulders. Now he dragged himself and his new load onward, swearing vehemently, for Ratz had remained with the cart in Miltenberg, where the sham lunatic no longer found it safe to stay. This time it was he who was obliged to pull his wife along by the chain, for she had long refused, as if fairly frantic, to desert the dying girl who had nursed her child so faithfully. Again and again the doubly desolate woman looked back toward the companion whom she had abandoned in her suffering until they reached Frankfort. There Gitta left Cyriax and accompanied Ratz. The cart in which her child had lived and died, not its repulsive owner, induced her to sever the bond which, for nine years, had bound her to the blasphemer.

The travelling scholars set off singing merrily; but the strolling musicians waited for the ship to sail down the Main, on whose voyage they could earn money and have plenty to drink.

The vagrants tramped along the highway, one after another, without troubling themselves about the dying ropedancer.

"Everybody finds it hard enough to bear his own cross," said Jungel, seizing his long crutches. Only "Dancing Gundel" lingered in Miltenberg through sympathy in the fate of the companion who had reached the height of fame, while she, the former "Phyllis," had gone swiftly downhill. It was a Christian duty, she said to the blind boy who begged their bread, not to let Kuni, who had once held so lofty a position, take the last journey without a suitable escort. When she heard that her former companion had received the sacrament, she exclaimed to her blind son, while slicing garlic into the barley porridge: "She will now be at rest. We shall earn a pretty penny at the mass in Frankfort if you can only manage to look as sorrowful when you hold out your hand as you do now!"

The monks, the dealer in indulgences, the burghers and artisans who were just preparing to embark for the voyage down the Main, gazed in bewilderment at the distinguished gentlemen who, incredible as it seemed, had actually for Dietel said so foregone their morning nap for the sake of a vagabond girl. The feather-curler shook his head as if something marvellous had happened when he heard the ambassador of the Honourable Council of his own native city, the distinguished Herr Lienhard Groland, say to old Doctor Schedel:

"I will wait here with you, my venerable friend. Since the poor girl can live only a few hours longer, I can join the others, if I hurry, before they leave Frankfort."

"That's right, Lienhard," cried Wilibald Pirckheimer, and the Abbot of St. AEgidius added approvingly:

"You will thereby do something which is pleasing in the sight of Heaven. Yes, gentlemen, I repeat it: there

are few deathbeds beside which I have found so little reason to be ashamed of the fate of being a mortal as by the humble couch of this vagabond girl. If, before the judgment seat above, intention and faith are weighed with the same scales as works, few who close their eyes behind silken curtains will be so sure of a favourable sentence as this poorest of the poor."

"Did the girl really keep no portion of Herr Lienhard's rich gift for herself?" asked the Nuremberg imperial magistrate.

"Nothing," replied the abbot. "She gave the whole, down to her last copper, to the stranger, though she herself must remain here, poor, lame, and deserted and she had only met the sick woman by accident upon the highway. My duty forbids me to repeat the details, and how she bore herself even while at Augsburg, but, thanks to the confession which I have just received, I shall count this morning among those never to be forgotten. O gentlemen, death is a serious matter, and intercourse with the dying is the best school for the priest. Then the inmost depths of the soul are opened to him."

"And," observed Wilibald Pirckheimer, "I think the psychologist would then learn that, the deeper we penetrate the human breast, the darker is the spectacle."

"Yes, my learned friend," the abbot answered, "but we also perceive that the deepest and darkest shafts contain the purest specimens of gold and silver ore."

"And were you really permitted to find such in this neglected vagabond, reverend sir?" asked Doctor Eberbach, with an incredulous smile.

"As certainly," answered the prelate with repellent dignity, "as that the Saviour was right when he called those who were pure in heart blessed above those who were wise and overflowing with knowledge!"

Then, without waiting for the Thuringian's answer, he hastily turned to the young ambassador and begged him to grant the dying girl, who clung to him with tender devotion, a brief farewell.

"Willingly," replied Lienhard, requesting the physician to accompany him.

The latter had just beckoned Doctor Peutinger to his side, to examine with him the indulgence which he had found under the kerchief crossed over the sick girl's bosom. It did not secure redemption from the flames of purgatory for the ropedancer's soul, as the gentlemen expected, but for another, and that other the learned humanist and Imperial Councillor would not believe his own eyes was his beloved, prematurely lost child. There, in large letters, was "Juliane Peutinger of Augsburg."

Astonished, almost bewildered, the usually quiet statesman expressed his amazement.

The other gentlemen were preparing to examine the paper with him, when the abbot, without betraying the secret of Kuni's heart, which she had confided to him in her confession, told Juliane's father that the ropedancer had scarcely left the convent ere she gave up both the Emperor's gift and the viaticum in short, her whole property, which would have been large enough to support her a long time in order to do what she could for the salvation of the child for whom her soul was more concerned than for her own welfare.

The astonished father's eyes filled with tears of grateful emotion, and when Lienhard went with the gray-haired leech to the dying girl Doctor Peutinger begged permission to accompany them. The physician, however, requested him to remain away from the sufferer, who would be disturbed by the sight of a strange face. Then Peutinger charged his young friend to give Kuni his kind greetings and thank her for the love with which she had remembered his dear child.

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The young Councillor silently followed the physician to the sick bed, at whose head leaned a Gray Sister, who was one of the guests of The Blue Pike and had volunteered to nurse the patient.

The nun shook her head sorrowfully as the two men crossed the threshold. She knew how the dying look, and that the hand of death already touched this sufferer. Yet her kind, colourless face, framed by the white sides of her cap, quickly regained its usual quiet, placid expression.

The regular features, now slightly flushed with the fever, of the patient in her charge, on the contrary, were constantly varying in expression. She had noticed the entrance of the visitors, and when she opened her sparkling blue eyes and saw the person to whom her poor heart clung with insatiable yearning they were filled with a sunny radiance, and a smile hovered round her lips.

She had known that he would come, that he would not let her die without granting her one more glance.

Now she would fain have nodded to him and expressed in very, very appropriate words the delight, the embarrassment, the gratitude which filled her soul, but her panting chest could give no breath for utterance. Nay, extreme exhaustion even prevented the movement of her lips. But her heart and brain were by no means inactive. A wealth of internal and external experiences, long since forgotten, rose before her mind. First she fancied that she saw Lienhard, as at their first meeting, approaching the garlanded door of St. Sebald's with his beautiful bride, arrayed in her wedding robes. Then she was transported to the court room and felt his hand stroke her hair. The hours at Frau Schurstab's when she had awaited his visits with an anxious heart came back to her memory. Then she again saw herself upon the rope. Lienhard was toying with the little elf below. But what she beheld this time was far from awakening new wicked wishes, for Juliane once more wore her laurel crown and beckoned kindly to her like a dear, familiar friend. Finally, pale little Juli appeared, as if shrouded in mists. Last of all, she saw herself filling the jug for the sick woman and gathering the red pinks for her and Lienhard in the landlady's little garden by the shimmering starlight. The flowers, whose fragrance was too strong, yet which she had not the strength to remove, lay on the coverlet before her. They were intended for Lienhard, and as she stretched her slender fingers toward them and tried to clasp them she succeeded. She even found strength to hold out her right hand to him with a beseeching glance. And lo! ere her arm fell again the proud man had seized the flowers. Then she saw him fasten the pinks on the breast of his dark doublet, and heard the thrill of deep emotion in his voice, as he said:

"I thank you, dear Kuni, for the beautiful flowers. I will keep them. Your life was a hard one, but you have borne the burden bravely. I saw this clearly, and not I alone. I am also to thank you and give you very friendly remembrances in the name of Doctor Peutingner, of Augsburg, little Juliane's father. He will think of you as a mistress of your art, a noble, high-minded girl, and I I shall certainly do so."

He clasped her burning hand as he spoke; but at these words she felt as she had probably done a few hours before, when, hidden behind the oleander, she listened to the conversation in which he mentioned her kindly. Again a warm wave of joy seemed to surge upward in her breast, and she fancied that her heart was much too small for such a wealth of rapture, and it was already overflowing in hot waves, washing all grief far, far away.

Her gift had been accepted.

The red pinks looked at her from his doublet, and she imagined that everything around was steeped in rosy light, and that a musical tinkling and singing echoed in her ears.

Never had she experienced such a feeling of happiness.

Now she even succeeded in moving her lips, and the man, who still held her little burning hand clasped in his

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first heard his own name very faintly uttered; then her parched lips almost inaudibly repeated the exclamation: "Too late!" and again, "Too late!"

The next instant she pressed her left hand upon her panting breast. The rosy hue around her blended with the red tint of the pinks, and another haemorrhage bore the restless wanderer to that goal where every mortal journey ends.