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A SIEGE OF OLDEN TIMES.

"THIS MORNING, Reinhold Dort, the money changer, was found dead in his bed.

"Yesterday, Helena Hexht, the fair young wife of Peter Hexht, the clothier, in the market place; was taken from him."

"Old Abraham, the apothecary of the Elephant, is gone too."

"And the pretty babe of Martha Gratz—"

"Shame! shame!" cried twenty voices in according chorus, and some frowned their discontent, and some idly shook their clenched hands above their heads.

"Ye are bold citizens to cry thus on death's works," said a young man, who, leaning against a door, listened with a thoughtful face to the tragic gossip of the talkers.

"Death's works!" exclaimed one of the knot; "marry, yes—death and the Governor."

"And the Governor? A money-ringer of three-score and odd, sleeps in death; a young wife defies the doctors; the man of rhabarbs finds all physic vain; a baby died teething; a beggar of eighty needs at last a grave; and all these deeds," cried the young man with a contemptuous laugh, "ye lay upon the Governor."

"And on none but him," replied one of the crowd; and a shout from his fellows approved his answer. "On none but him. There is no hope of relief for the city."

"How know you that," calmly asked the youth.

"I—I have no hope," said the man doggedly.

"Happily, Simon Holzkopf, though, as I believe, the quickest tailor of your quarter; the safety of the city rests not upon you. It may be saved, though you have lost all hope."

"And we are to behold our wives and children fall down dead before our faces!" cried Simon; "hear ye that my masters! We are to starve, and starve in silence, too!"

"The Governor, I doubt not," cried another of the crowd, "finds patience in his larder."

"I saw him yesterday," said a third, "and it made my blood boil, so sleek and fat he looked. Ha! Simon, I wish that you and I, and every honest body among us, had no more than a lark for every capon swallowed by his governorship since the siege; only one mouthful of sour wine for every quart he has taken of the best Rhenish."

"Ay, ay," cried the tailor, and he clutched his jerkin, "our clothes would hang with better credit to the makers, eh, Master Caspar? for I think I have seen the day when your feathers have been finer, ay, and have shone upon plumper limbs. That's hardly the leg of Martin's last;" and Simon Holzkopf glanced askant at the attenuated figure of the young man, who had braved the displeasure of his fellow townsmen by advocating the policy of the determined Governor.

"Never heed the leg, Simon," said Caspar, civilly; "it may dwindle to a rush, still my heart shall not be too heavy for it."

"And is there no hope of capitulation? Will the Governor not relent?" asked more than one of the mob.

"Another week—only another week," 'tis said, he purposes to keep the enemy out. If, by that time, no succor comes—"

"It matters not," cried an old man, "what banner floats upon our walls, since death—death will be at all our hearths."

"Men!" exclaimed Simon Holzkopf, "shall we endure this? Shall we drop

into our graves, while the pampered Governor—"

"Down with the tyrant!" shouted the mob, and Simon, animated by the cry, proceeded in his oration.

"While the pampered Governor feasts upon the best, what cares he for our shrieking babies, our weeping wives? He, gorged with the fat of the earth, drunk with the wine of—"

"Peace, fool!" cried Caspar, and, at his indignant voice, the eloquent tailor stood suddenly silently, with open mouth; "peace—this is no hour to babble falsehood—foolish at any time, most base and wicked at a time like this.—We have all suffered—all must suffer; not one throughout the city but has felt the fierceness of the war. In every place has hunger had its victims."

"The nuns of St. Ursula have eaten their gray parrot," exclaimed Hans Potts, an idle wag, known to many of the mob; and while some laughed at the sally, some, condemning it, called out for Caspar to proceed.

"Not one among us," cried the young man, "bath fared more hardly than the Governor. You—you Simon Holzkopf who know every dish upon the Governor's table, every flask of wine in the Governor's cellar, tell me the dainty that he fed on yesterday. You cannot guess—no; it is too rich, too costly, for your simple apprehension; you cannot dream of such a rarity! Fellow townsmen!" and young Caspar turned for a moment from the abashed Simon to the still increasing crowd; "You remember the holiday at Easter last? The Governor rode through our city, and feasted with the merchants at their hall. The horse he sat upon a king might have backed—a beautiful, a glorious thing—a creature that scarcely touched the earth—an animal of perfect frame and blood. You all remember how your eyes were fixed upon it, and the brute, as conscious of its beauty, pranced to your shouts. Yesterday, the Governor dined off that horse; with the meanest of his men, he drew lots for a choice morsel of that noble steed."

"A burgomaster's wife," cried Hans Potts, "has made a roast of her monkey. Hard times, my masters! In the siege sends our best friends to the spit!"

"Silence, hounds!" exclaimed an old man. "Is this an hour to fling about your sorry jests, when those we love are dropping dead around us? Peace, murderer! Speak you truly, Caspar? Is the garrison so straitened?"

"Go to the walls—ask not of me," replied the youth; "go, and behold the sight I've quitted; if that convince ye not, hang up the Governor and call in the foe."

"What sight? what sight?" roared the mob.

"Famine feeding on a thousand men. Burly soldiers, shrunk almost to skeletons; their flashing, hopeful eyes deep set, and flickering with a horrid glare; their manly cheeks pinched in with want; their hearty, jocund voice sunk into a hoarse whisper; the gallant bearing changed to slow decrepitude; their looks of victory to the blank stare of coming death."

"Horrible! horrible! down with the governor!" exclaimed the crowd.

"They suffer this, but suffer nobly," cried Caspar; "not a murmur, not a look of treason to the stern will of Him who rules them. Martyrs to the glory of their arms, they stand resolved—come what will, they have sworn with the Governor to hold the citadel another week."

"Glory! a pretty word, faith. Shall we dry our wives' eyes with it! Will it fill our children's bellies?" cried one of the crowd.

"I trow they've something more toothsome than glory for supper," said a second, "or does the Governor's lady and his delicate daughter feed off the insipid dish? If so, 'twill spoil their pretty looks!" A derisive shout followed this remark, and again the crowd called for vengeance on the Governor.

"Let's to the citadel!" cried fifty voices, and "to the citadel!" hallooed the mob. With the words, the crowd rushed onward, but soon halted in their course.

Many paused, as they avowed, to reconsider their determination; the greater part slunk home; and when, at length, the discontented townsmen halted at the outer gate, few were to be seen save the half dozen immediate par-

tizans and admirers of Simon Holzkopf and Hans Potts. Whether they demanded instant audience of the Governor, at the time surrounded by his family, gazing wistfully from the walls for expected succor; or whether, contented with his stern answer just rendered to the civic authorities then in garrison, they held their peace, the archives of the city give no note. Quitting the discontented, self-subdued deputies, let us return to the hero of our story, Caspar Brandt.

"And the good widow, Caspar?" asked the old man who had rebuked the wit of Hans Potts, and who, on the flight of the crowd, walked slowly toward the market-place with the youth; "these are sorry times for necessities like hers; how fares she?"

Caspar answered not—strove with manly strength to repress the emotion; but a deep groan burst from his lips—he paused, and quivered like a struck reed.

"Caspar—Caspar Brandt!" cried the old man, and he caught the youth in his arms, "Blessed Virgin, what ails the boy?"

"Nothing—nothing; a sudden faintness—nothing more;" and Caspar, with a sickly smile, pressed the old man's hand.

"By all the saints, your hands burns like heated stone. Come—come to my house. I have yet half a cup of wine, that, for the love of old times, for the grateful thoughts I bear your mother, kind in the days of misery and death to me and mine, shall be spared you. Tell me, how fares the widow?"

"Sick, Master Martin, sick almost to death," answered Caspar. "For two months she has kept her chamber—for two months has been almost helpless.—Still her state brings this comfort with it; she knows not the extreme misery of the town—knows not the bitter sufferings of her friends and neighbors."

"And her wants, Caspar? Alas," cried the old man, "affliction has made me selfish—stealed my heart to old acquaintance, else I had sought you long since. Now, Heaven help me, I can do nothing. Her wants—how are they supplied?"

"She needs but little, of the simplest kind, and that, Heaven be thanked! I have obtained, and may still obtain for her. She will die—she cannot wrestle with the sickness that consumes her; she will die!" repeated the young man in a hollow, hopeless voice, and big tears started from his eyes; "but not with famine;" and as he spoke, the youth clenched his hand and trod the earth with more strength.

"Nay, her years give everything to hope," said Martin.

"At little more than seventeen—ah me! it seems but yesterday—she was your mother. And still she has kept her youthful face—still, in looks, has seemed more than your elder sister."

"Ay, Master Martin, ay. God pardon me!" exclaimed the youth, and the tears poured anon down his cheeks.—"God pardon me, and make me humble. But now—now I cannot think of losing her, and pray for meekness."

"Hope should be the young man's staff as it is the old man's crutch," said Martin. "You will not lose her; trust me, no; the present troubles past, all will be well again. Come in and get a half a cup of poor wine," said Martin, lowering his voice as he passed a passenger, who paused a moment, and leered with the malice of keen want at the old man's talking too fondly of a priceless luxury; "let us good Caspar, drink to better times. A half cup boy, a poor half-cup," and the old man sighed, as he paused at his threshold. Drawing a key from his pocket, he unlocked the door, and led the way into a house, where once comfort and heaped plenty gave a constant welcome. "Sit down, Caspar, your father has sat in that chair, when the roof quaked with the laughter of fifty throats—when fortune herself served at the hearth and seemed my handmaid. Well, well, the hearth is quenched now; the old, old faces are passed like morning shadows; the sweet, constant voices are heard but in my dreams, and I sit at my cold fireside, an old, gray-headed solitary man. But come boy, the wine;" and Martin took a small flask from a shelf. "What stirs you?" asked the old man, seeing Caspar start.

"Your pardon, Master Martin—is not

that bread?" and Caspar pointed to a small loaf by the flask on the shelf; at the same moment, a deep blush crimsoned the young man's face, and he sat as though detected in act of shame.

Martin took the loaf, and, gazing in Caspar's face, a tear shone in the old man's eye, and his voice trembled as he spoke.

"It is so, lad? God help you! It is so!"

"Forgive me, pray, forgive me!" stammered Caspar.

"I have another," said Martin; "your mother was playmate of Margaret, my own bright girl—tended her in sickness—would, with the love of early girlhood, watch her in death: I tell you, boy, I have another," cried the old man with vehemence; "take it, and God increase it to you!"

"Never! I am not that sordid, selfish wretch, to rob old age," cried Caspar, and he sought to reach the door.

"I tell you, boy, I have another," exclaimed Martin; "You hear? another," and he placed himself before the youth.

"Where is it?" asked Caspar; "make me see it; and so bitterly has the time wrung us, that, for her sake, I will—I must despoil you."

"The loaf is—'tis locked up—the key is in my chamber, I have wine—have feasted twice to-day," said Martin; but Caspar mournfully shook his head, and hurriedly embracing the old man, attempted to depart. "You do not quit me thus," cried Martin, holding the youth. "Heaven forgive me! I knew not that things had gone so hardly with you. Hear me; to-morrow I have a new supply—a friend, an old friend has promised me. If, boy, you would see your mother live, cast not away her life upon an idle form. Caspar Brandt, in the name of your dead father, whose spirit at this moment lingers at this hearth, share this with your father's friend."

Saying this, old Martin forced the loaf into Caspar's hands, and broke it. "Now, boy, get your home," said Martin, sealing himself; "bear my good wishes to your mother, and leave me to my supper."

Again Caspar embraced the old man, and swallowing a half-cup of wine forced upon him by the hospitable host—for surely hospitality was in that broken bread, that meagre vintage—hastened from the house. Martin, for the first time, tasted food that day, but he sat not in solitude at his deserted fireside, for he ate his crust, and drank his humble draught, with the spirits of the dead gathered about his board; and the dry bread became manna, and the wine a draught for saints.

Caspar hurried to a distant quarter of the city, where, at the commencement of the siege, he had secured an asylum for his sick mother, where day and night, he had watched her sinking health. The rent of three small houses, bequeathed to her by her father, and frugally applied, had enabled the widow to support herself and child; but since the war had closed about the city, all trade had ceased, debts were no longer paid, social obligations no longer respected or acknowledged. It had been the chief care of Caspar to disguise from his mother the extent of the calamities that pressed around them; and though deceived by filial tenderness, she knew not half the misery that threatened them—half the horrors raging in the city—she read with a mother's eye the haggard story written in her son's face; it was plain that he was sinking beneath the task of administering to her comfort her repose. He had, on the day on which our story opens, been many hours from home, and the widow with a beating heart, and with a thousand thoughts of undefined danger busy in her brain, sat watching the declining rays of a spring sun.—Every sound smote her soul with disappointment, for it was not Caspar's footsteps. There she sat, until suspense became a torture; until, with her overwrought fancy, she had filled her chamber with phantoms of terror; until she was surrounded with a host of fears.

"Caspar! Caspar?" she shrieked and sprang from her chair as the youth entered the house.

"Mother!" exclaimed the boy, and in a moment he stood in the chamber, embracing his parent.

"Now, God be praised!" cried the woman; "God be thanked, and may my doubts, the fears of a widowed

mother, meet forgiveness! Oh, this is a blessing!" and the widow again carressed her son.

"Mother, how is this? Why did you rise to-day, and what is here?" and Caspar pointed to the widow's cloak, for the mother, worn with anxious watching, had resolved to seek her son abroad.

"You have stayed late, Caspar; very late," said the widow, evading an answer to his question, "very late.—What has happened? What news from the walls?"

"We shall beat them yet, mother," said Caspar, with a forced smile; "fear not, we shall have merry days. The Governor is strong in hope, we shall beat them yet."

"Alas! my boy, you are pale and weary, need rest and nourishment."

"A little rest, mother; only a little rest," said Caspar, "for to-day I have fared nobly with our old friend, Martin, of the market-place. I have drunk wine to-day, mother; and see here is bread for supper;" and the boy placed a portion of the loaf upon the table, and hastily quitted the room. Descending a staircase, he unclosed a door which opened into a little stone-paved court; a goat ran to him, and gambled about him. Caspar, breaking the bread which he had received from Martin, gave it to the animal to eat. "Come what will," said the youth looking mournfully upon the feeding creature, "come what will you must not go supperless," and Caspar reserving only a small piece for himself, gave the remainder to the hungry goat. He then, with new looks of cheerfulness, returned to his mother.

"Yes, Caspar," said the widow, "I feel that this misery will end; it would be wicked to doubt it. Your love, your tenderness my brave boy, must find the recompense of happy days. Such virtue cannot pass away unknown and unrewarded."

"I am rewarded, ten times over-paid, dear mother; by your fond words—your doting looks. There, you are better to-day, I am sure, much better," said the son. "Let this hateful war once cease; let these horrid tumults end; this sickening desolating want give place to old, familiar comforts, and you will be strong, be happy once again."

"I am happy, Caspar, believe it, profoundly happy. But for these times of peril I had never known my son. Good gentle, and tender, I ever thought him; but I had not known his full nobility of soul, his generous contempt of wrong, his scorn of selfish times."

"Mother!" cried the youth, blushing at the praise, and playfully placing his hand to her lips. As they sat embraced in each other's arms, the still young and beautiful face of the widow—a face to which even sickness had added a soft and melancholy sweetness, and the flushed, animated, manly countenance of the youth, presented a picture of the purest love, the holiest affection, dignifying hearts; the love of mother for her child, the answering devotion of child to parent. Never was maternal tenderness more exquisitely manifest; never filial duty more devoutly paid. Thus they sat, and Caspar, looking in his mother's face, taught himself to hope for coming health; never had she looked so beautiful."

"Let the war be ended," he thought, "and all will be well again." With those new hopes Caspar rose, and taking a small earthen vessel from the shelf, quitted the room. An hour more had elapsed since the goat had taken her scanty meal, and Caspar was again about to descend the stairs that led into the court, when he was startled by a loud, quick knocking at the door.

"Who knocks there?" asked Caspar, his hand upon the door bolt.

"Open the door, Caspar Brandt; we would speak with you," answered a voice without. "We are sent by the burgomaster; honest men fear not the magistrate."

At these words, Caspar drew the bolt and opened wide the door. Instantly the passage was filled with the under-officers of justice. "Caspar Brandt," said one of them, "you must come with us."

"First tell me for what?" answered Caspar, drawing back.

"That you shall know in proper season," said the officer; "in the meantime you are our prisoner."

"Prisoner! Impossible! With what