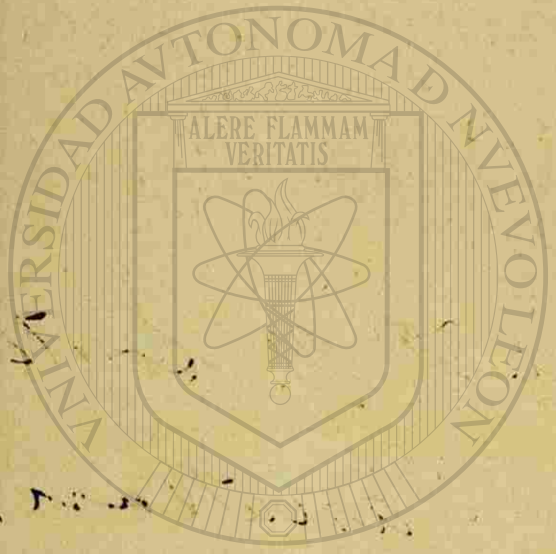
FREDERICK THE GREAT AND HIS COURT

MÜHLBACH



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BY

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CHAPTER I.

QUEEN SOPHIA DOROTHEA.

The halls glowed in the light of a myriad candles; the footmen were running hither and thither, giving a last touch to chairs and tables; the court gardener cast a last critical glance at the groups of plants he had been arranging in the saloons; and, in the picture gallery, the major-domo was decorating the tables destined to-day to furnish especially rich enjoyment to the queen's guests.

Everything presented a more brilliant, luxurious, costly aspect than was usual in the Royal Palace in Berlin. All the faces were happier, less constrained than was their habit; even the footmen smiled and felt cheerful, for they knew that this once they might safely look forward to an evening without kicks and blows, without harsh scoldings and trembling anxiety, since the king could not be present at the banquet which he had charged his consort to prepare for the court and nobility.

The king was ill. The podagra chained him to his roller-chair and his rooms, and in the course of sleepless nights a dull suspicion had awakened in the ruler of Prussia that the reign of Frederick William First might soon be coming to an end, that the portals of the royal tomb might soon open to receive a new royal corpse, and that a new king might soon ascend the throne of Prussia.

This last thought filled the king's heart with bitterness and wrath. Frederick William wished *not* to die, to keep his son Frederick from becoming king; to keep this weak, vacillating youth who sowed flowers and cultivated fruits among poets and musicians at Rheinsberg from occupying the place which Frederick William First had so long filled with fortune and success.

What could Prussia do with this sensitive boy Frederick, a hero of fashion-dressing like a Parisian boulevardier; with this weakling who preferred the sybarite life in his romantic castle to field and march; who found the tones of his flute more inspiring than the trumpet-blast; who asserted that there are kings not by the grace of God only, but by the grace of mind, and that Voltaire was as much a king, and perhaps more of one, than all the kings the pope has blesssed—what could Prussia do with such a king?

No, Frederick William wished *not* to die, in order to keep Frederick from becoming King of Prussia, to keep him from destroying what his father had built up, to save Prussia from perishing under the feeble hands of the dreamy poet.

Therefore, let no one imagine that Frederick William was ill. No one should believe that any other pains plagued him than those of podagra and gout. Those are harmless, innocent pains. A man can live to be eighty with podagra; and gout is like a faithful wife that lives and grows old with one, with whom one can celebrate a silver wedding.

So the king confessed that the gout was pressing him once more in its tender embrace; but the people and the crown prince should not hope that this malady was shortening the king's days. So the queen was commanded to give a banquet; the court and nobility should see that the queen and her daughters could smile and be cheerful, and that no danger therefore threatened the king.

Indeed, the queen really did feel cheerful to-day, for she felt free. It seemed to her that the chain which fastened her had fallen from her for a moment, as though the burden she bore, which bent her neck, had been cast from her. Yes, for once she could raise her head, proud and free, like a queen; she could adorn herself as is right for a queen. Away then, for one day, with dusky robes and an undecorated coiffure. The gout binds the king fast to his arm-chair, and the queen may venture to make a brilliant, truly regal toilet.

With a smile of proud contentment, she drew on a silk robe woven with silver threads which she had secretly ordered from her native city, Hanover, for this evening, and her eyes flashed with joy as she opened a silver-bolted casket to free for a few hours the diamonds that for many a decade had not beheld the light of day.

With a joyous smile her gaze rested upon the sparkling stones that flamed like stars fallen from heaven and made her heart beat with delight; for a queen is but a woman

after all, and Sophia Dorothea had suffered so much and so often the pains and sorrows of the woman, that she longed once more to experience the proud happiness of the queen.

So she put on her whole array of diamonds, fastened a glowing diadem on her brow, bound necklace and bracelets around her throat and arms, and hung long pendants whose colossal splendor made her ears glow and burn.

Then listening with smiling contentment to the astonished exclamations of her ladies, she walked to the great Venetian mirror and examined her toilet. Yes, Sophia Dorothea might well be content to-day. Millions of thalers were there, that spend their days in quiet, bearing no interest, gazing silent and scornful at the sweat-bathed human beings who toil and wear themselves out for the sake of a poor anxious existence.

Sophia Dorothea was not thinking of that; she gazed meditatively in the mirror and thought of by-gone days, of buried hopes, and vanished dreams. These diamonds her illustrious father had given her when she was betrothed with Frederick William. This diadem had adorned her brow when she wedded him.

The necklace a brother had sent her when her first child was born, the bracelet her consort had placed upon her arm when, after long waiting and wishing and praying, Crown Prince Frederick was born. Each separate adornment of the collection was a proud reminder of her past, a star out of her youth. Ah! the diamonds had kept their lustre and shimmer; they were stars still, and flashed as clear as then, but all else was vanished and dead—her youth, her dreams, her hopes, her love! Sophia Dorothea had too often trembled before her husband to be able to love him yet. Love had not driven fear out of her heart. On the contrary, love had been driven out by fear, and she could not love the husband who, for her and her children, had been only a tyrant, who had always thwarted her will, disappointed her hopes, mortally wounded in her not the queen and the woman alone, but the mother. As she looked at the glowing bracelet, as old as her favorite child, her son Frederick, she thought how little his life resembled the glory of these stones, how dark and gloomy his youth, how colorless and filled with tears. She kissed the bracelet and sped greetings to the son, as the door suddenly opened and the Princesses Ulrica and Amalie entered to join her.

The queen turned to them, and the sad expression rapidly disappeared from her features as her eyes rested upon the

beautiful and loveable faces of her daughters presenting themselves in charmingly tasteful ball costumes.

"Ah! how splendid you are, most gracious mamma!" cried the seventeen-years-old Amalie, hopping about the queen's tall and noble figure, and enjoying with childish keenness the glow of the diamonds. "Heaven with all its stars has descended upon you, and your face shines out among them like the most beautiful sun."

"Flatterer!" said the queen, smiling; "if thy father heard thee, he would be angry, for what willst thou call him, if thou callst me the sun?"

"Well, he may be Phœbus, who guides the sun and marks her paths with his horses that scatter golden rays."

"Thou art right," sighed the queen; "he marks her paths and what he wills that she must dō, poor sun, poor queen, who has not even the right to cast her rays whither she will."

"But who takes the right, most gracious mamma," cried Amalie, laughing, as she pointed to the diadem of diamonds; "for I suspect very much that our gracious king and father did not command that your Majesty appear in such brilliant state."

"Whether he commanded it?" cried the queen, trembling. "He would be in a wild rage if he could see me, for you know well how greatly he despises vain display."

"He would reflect at once, that at least one whole military road might be built from this diadem, or that, at least, ten giants for the Royal Guard could be bought for this necklace," said Amalie; and turning to her sister, who had silently withdrawn to the window niche, she continued: "And thou, Ulrica, thou sayest not a word. Has the brilliancy of her Majesty made thee blind or robbed thee of speech, or art thou thinking whom thou wilt invite to dance?"

"No," said the Princess Ulrica, earnestly; "I was thinking that when I am a queen I shall make it a condition that my choice of toilets shall be wholly free, and that it shall never be forbidden me to wear diamonds, for when I am queen I shall wear diamonds every day. They are truly royal ornaments, and never was our most gracious mamma more queen than to-day."

"Do hear this proud princess—how sure of victory she is—talking of being queen as a matter of course, of which there can be no doubt," cried Amalie, laughing. "Dost thou know, then, whether the king, our father, hath decided thus? He may have hunted out some little margrave or unknown apanaged prince, as he did for our poor sister of Baireuth."

"I would not give my hand to such an one," answered Princess Ulrica, passionately.

"Thou wouldst do so should thy father command it," said the queen, gravely.

"No, I would die rather than let myself be forced to such a marriage!"

"Die!" said the queen, sighing. "Men often sigh for death, but he does not come. Our sighs have not the power to bring him hither, and our hand is too feeble to press him to our heart. Thou wouldst yield to thy father, as we have all yielded to him, as even thy brother, the crown prince, has had to do."

"Poor brother!" sighed Amalie; "chained to a wife whom he does not love. What a misfortune that must be!"

Princess Ulrica shrugged her shoulders. "Is not that the fate of all princes and princesses?" she asked. "Are we not all there, to be dealt in like any ware, and handed over to him who offers most? I, for my part, mean to be sold as dearly as possible, and since I cannot be a happy shepherdess, will be at least a mighty queen."

"And I," cried Amalie, enthusiastically, "would marry the poorest, lowliest man, if I loved him, rather than the richest king's son who is indifferent in my eyes."

"Foolish children, both; it is well that your father does not hear you," said the queen, smiling. "His anger would crush you, and he would find a king to-day for thee, Amalie; and for thee, Ulrica, a little apanaged margrave. But, ladies, I hear the voice of our master of ceremonies, coming to tell us that the guests have assembled. Assume a cheerful expression; the king desires us to laugh and be merry. Be, therefore, merry, but remember that his majesty has his spies everywhere; and when you speak with Pöllnitz, never forget that he reports every word to the king. Therefore, be friendly with him, and, most of all, if he leads conversation to the crown prince, speak of him with unconstrained indifference; show as little interest and love as possible for him; rather jest at his romantic life in Rheinsberg; that is the best means to make yourself and him beloved by the king. And now, my daughters, come let us go to the company."

At this point Master of Ceremonies von Pöllnitz opened the door to communicate to her majesty that the company had assembled, and the maids of honor to the queen and princesses entered from the adjoining room.

Sophia Dorothea signified to her two daughters to place themselves one at each side of her, and the master of cere-

monies and the marshal going in advance, she made the tour of the halls with the princesses at her side, bestowing here and there a smile or a gracious word, her glances shedding blessings abroad, like the shower of gold of some god, among this bowing, admiring, murmuring Danaë court company. Ah! that was proud pleasure which filled the heart of the queen as she entered the throne-room amid a burst of music from the tribune, as all the cavaliers in their decorations, the proud, gorgeously attired women bent before her, as she felt that her will was mightier than that of all these taken together, that a smile from her lips was worth more, and would be received with greater rejoicing, than the smile of the dearest betrothed, that her glance scattered joy like the sun, that while all bow before her, there is no one before whom she must bow her head, for the king, her husband, was not by her side. To-day the king did not mar her freedom with his presence and his harsh bearing. To-day she was no trembling, terrorized woman, but a proud queen, as Frederick William to-day was no king, but a poor, gout-plagued, cursing, praying, whining, human being, and nothing more!

CHAPTER II.

FREDERICK WILLIAM I.

HERE, at this end of the castle, the flaming of candles, life, air; there, at that end, where the king's apartments lie, all silence and sullen stillness; here the merry clang of the music, there the monotonous hammering of the death-worm alone breaks the silence. This hammering proceeded directly from the king's room, and Frederick William himself it was who held the hammer in his hand and caused the dull, resounding noise which usually arises when nails are driven into a hollow chest.

The king when well delighted to swing his crutch, letting it fall with a sounding blow on somebody's back, whether that back belonged to a footman, a minister of state, or a woman; the king, when ill, was forced to content himself with beating out his rage upon unfeeling wood, and to swing, instead of his crutch, a hammer and nippers. The gout made of this proud, despotic king a poor, humble cabinet-maker, and when his swollen feet fastened him to his roller-chair, and the pains kept him from governing the machine of state and turning it at will, he contented himself with making chests and cases out of linden-wood. Often the passer-by at dead of night might hear the pounding and hammering which, as a sort of wordless bulletins, reported the state of his majesty's health. When the king worked at night at cabinet-making, it proved to the disturbed Berliners that he was suffering, could not sleep, and that it would therefore be dangerous to meet him the next day during his walk, because one's clothing, height, breadth, or a spoken word reaching the king's ear, might arouse his wrath, and then if not a half-dozen well-directed blows, at least a long sermon would be sure to follow. Why, it was but a short time since King Frederick William had had two respectable young ladies arrested and conveyed to Spandau because he overheard them pronounce the royal garden *charmant*, and this one French word had been enough to make suspects of the poor young things, and lead him to describe them as loose beauties to be sent to Spandau Fortress, thence to be released only after the long and earnest entreaty of their despairing families. Well-washed people and young lads had always cause for anxiety, because the king might seize them and fit them into some regiment or berate them for their idleness in lounging about the streets. Therefore, as soon as the king quit the palace of his ancestors and entered the street, everyone flew in high anxiety toward home or any house that promised shelter, or any secluded by-way, to avoid meeting his Majesty.

But no one had anything to fear from the imprisoned king. The queen could wear her diamonds without anxiety, the Berliners, great and small, could wander through the streets free from all thought of danger, for the dreaded one was ill, chained to his roller-chair, hammering and planing his linden-wood boxes. Meanwhile this occupation had a certain medicinal, beneficent side, and the work not only diverted the king's attention from his pain—it sometimes actually cured him of it. The quick, unceasing movement of the hands and arms spread over the whole body a beneficial warmth and produced a slight perspiration which soothed the nerves and allayed the pains for hours together.

So to-day the work of planing had exercised its healing influence upon the king; to-day, too, he could, during a few happy moments, imagine that his gout, that evil imp, had yielded to the magic of toil and abdicated his body. He

arose before his roller-chair and, with a cry of delight, stretched his arms, which had regained their muscular strength and vitality, far above his head, as if he would embrace the universe. He called with a mighty voice the servant awaiting him in the adjoining room and commanded him to assemble the gentlemen of the Tobacco Club at once and make preparations for a meeting.

"But the gentlemen are all at the queen's ball," answered the astonished body-servant.

"Let them be called hither," commanded the king. "Luckily there are no dancers among them; their limbs are stiff and slow, and the beautiful ladies would be terrified by the jumps of these cavaliers if the latter should try to dance. Go fetch them. Pöllnitz shall come, and Eckert, the Baron von Gotter, and Der Hake, Duke of Holstein, and General Schwerin. Quick, quick! In ten minutes they must all be here; but no one must know why they are called. Whisper into the ear of each one that he must seek my presence immediately without telling anyone whither he is going. I will not have the queen's banquet disturbed. Now haste, and if all these gentlemen are not here in ten minutes my cane on your back shall arrange a feast to which you may howl the music yourself."

That was a threat which lent rare wings to the body-servant's feet and drove him like a whirlwind through the anterooms, where in his flight he fell upon the second body-servant and coughed out the order to carry pipes, tobacco, and beer-mugs to the king's apartments, and then hastened farther to the other wing of the palace where, in the lighted banquet-rooms, the queen's festivities were going on.

Fortune favored the breathless body-servant. In a few moments he had the required gentlemen summoned, and in ten minutes the six were assembled in the king's anteroom asking, with pale faces and confused expression, what could be the ground of their extraordinary summons.

The body-servant shrugged his shoulders in silence and departed speechless into the king's apartment.

His majesty sat in full uniform of his beloved guards at a round table, on which pipes and jugs of foaming beer were in readiness. His majesty had deigned to fill the pipes with his own gracious hand and was in the act of lighting them at the one smoking, dripping, ill-smelling tallow-candle which lighted the room.

"Sire," said the body-servant, "the gentlemen are in the anteroom."

"Do they know why I summoned them?" asked the king, blowing a great cloud of smoke from his mouth.

"Your Majesty forbade me to tell them."

"Go to them and tell them that I have been so wrathful this day as you have seldom seen me. That I stood with my crutch at the door and commanded that but one at a time be admitted."

The body-servant hastened out to the waiting cavaliers, and as he opened the door they saw the king standing near it, his cane raised threateningly.

"What is it?" "Why is the king in a rage?" "What commands do you bring us from his majesty?" the gentlemen anxiously inquired.

The body-servant assumed a horribly tragic aspect. "His majesty is most wrathful to-day—in a horrible temper. Woe to him upon whom the cloud of his anger is discharged. It is ready to burst at this moment. He commanded me to say that each one of you shall enter his apartment singly, not all together. Go, then. For heaven's sake, don't keep the king waiting."

The six courtiers looked at one another, pale and undeceived. Each of them saw in his mind's eye the threatening picture of the king standing with raised cane at the door. None wished to be the first to pass under this yoke.

"Your Excellency has precedence," said Master of Ceremonies von Pöllnitz, bowing low before the Duke of Holstein.

"Not at all," replied the latter. "You know very well his majesty cares nothing for etiquette and would take it very ill if we wished to insist upon it. Go you in first, my dear Pöllnitz."

"Oh, not I, your Excellency. I should not dare to take precedence of you all. If *you* decline this honor it falls to General Schwerin. He must lead to battle."

"But it is no question of a battle here," grumbled the general; "but perhaps of a beating, and that Baron Pöllnitz understands much better than I."

"Gentlemen," said the body-servant, "his majesty will become impatient, and then woe to us all!"

"But, my God! who of us will go, then?" asked Count von Goltz, undecidedly.

"I will go," replied Privy Councillor Eckert, stepping forward. "I owe all that I am to his majesty, and it is but natural to place my back, or, if he desire it, my life, at his disposal." And with a firm step he approached the door, which he opened with quick pressure.

They saw the king raise his cane higher, his eye flashing, and they saw Eckert enter the room, his head bowed. Then the door closed and all was still.

"Was it *he* whom the king's wrath threatened?" asked Pöllnitz, timidly.

"The king's wrath threatens everyone to-day," said the body-servant, with an ill-boding sigh.

"Who will go next?" the five courtiers began to ask one another again. And only after a long and hard struggle did Master of Ceremonies Pöllnitz this time determine to make the dangerous journey. Again they all saw the door open, the king standing with raised cane, and again the door closed without their learning anything further. Four times the same scene was repeated, four times they saw the dread picture of the king with his cane. But when General Schwerin, the last of the six courtiers, finally entered the royal apartment, the king no longer stood at the door, but lay in his roller-chair and laughed until he cried, while Baron Pöllnitz stood before him and described in his droll, humorous way, the scene of anxiety in the anteroom, imitating the voice of each of the gentlemen and their share in the conversation.

"You believed in my wrath, then?" asked the king, breathless with laughter. "The joke succeeded perfectly, and your souls trembled with anxiety—even his, old Schwerin's! Now he, too, knows at last what fear is—he who on the battlefield and in the midst of bullet-hail never felt such a sensation."

"Yes, Sire; a ball is a pitiful splinter in comparison with the lightning of wrath in your eyes. When the cannons thunder my heart jumps for joy, whereas before the thunder of your voice it would timidly creep away within my breast. Death I fear not, but I fear the wrath and displeasure of my king."

"Ah! thou art a worthy fellow," said the king in a friendly tone, offering the general his hand. "And now, gentlemen, away with all constraint and etiquette! The king is over there at the ball, and your comrade, Frederick William, herewith opens the Tobacco Club."

He took up his pipe and lighted it again at the candle; then he let himself slide down upon one of the chairs that were near the round table, the other gentlemen followed his example, and the Tobacco Club began its sitting.

CHAPTER III.

THE TOBACCO CLUB.

At first there was a pause. Everyone was busy lighting his pipe. Soon great clouds of smoke began to ascend, veiling the whole room in their blue mist, and out of their midst the tallow-candle twinkled with a sickly yellow shine, not like fire, but only like dead gold.

"Light some candles," commanded the king. "Our Tobacco Club shall this day offer a brilliant and glowing external appearance, not too sharply contrasting with the ball festivities over yonder. Tell me, Pöllnitz, how is it coming on over there? Is there a goodly company? Are they enjoying themselves? Is the queen cheerful, and do the princesses spring about lustily?"

"Your Majesty, I have never seen more gorgeous festivities than these of to-day," said Pöllnitz, "and never was her majesty more beautiful, more radiant, and more full of enjoyment, too, than to-day. She glowed and sparkled like a sun among all the ladies, beautifully dressed and richly bejewelled as many of them were."

"So! She dressed in great state, then?" asked the king, and a cloud passed over his face.

"Sire, I did not know that her majesty possesses so truly princely a treasure of diamonds."

"Ah! She wears her diamonds? They are making the most of my absence, as it seems. They are enjoying the evening greatly, while I writhe upon my bed of pain," shouted the king, who in his readily aroused ill-will quite forgot that he himself had commanded the festivities and had required of his consort that she should appear cheerful and care-free.

"Sire, your Majesty is, happily, not ill and not upon a bed of pain," said the Duke of Holstein; "the queen has, therefore, good cause for being cheerful."

The king did not reply. He drank a long draught from his beer-mug, then with an angry motion of the hand snapped the lid upon the mug.

"I should not wonder if Fritz, too, had come over secretly for this ball," murmured the king. "They risk everything when they do not fear my surprising them."

"But your Majesty understands managing surprises as no one else does," called Count Hake, taking pains to give the

conversation a new direction. "I never felt my heart beat as it did to-day when I crossed this threshold."

The king, quickly appeased, laughed aloud. "I never saw such pale faces in my life as yours. Verily, if my fingers were not quite so stiff and unwieldy, I should paint you a picture of that scene that would make a superb companion-piece to my picture of the Tobacco Club; and I would call it 'The Six Tailors' Apprentices Afraid of Blue Monday.' Ah! see, we devote ourselves now to art and poetry, and soon our learned and fantastic son will have no advantage over us. If he plays the flute, we paint; if he writes poems full of feeling, we will write jibes in rhyme; and while he sings to the sun and the moon, we are like unto the gods, seven Jupiters wrapping us in clouds; naturally not, in this case, for the purpose of befooling Semele or any other female, for we have ever been true to our consort at all places and times, and are of opinion that in this respect the crown prince might well follow the example of his father."

"In all respects, your Majesty," observed Count Goltz, blowing upward a great cloud of smoke.

"Ah! he hopes to rule the State one of these days with his book knowledge and his poems," said the king, smiling. "Instead of occupying himself with useful things, exercising recruits, drawing plans, and perfecting himself in the art of war, he wastes his time upon the useless trumpery of superficial learning that is of no use to anyone and only injures himself; for to be a good king a man must be no learned dreamer, and whosoever holds the fiddle-bow and leader's baton in place of the sceptre can never make a good general."

"Yet at the last muster the crown prince's regiment was the most beautiful and best drilled," said the Duke of Holstein.

The king bestowed a glance full of suspicion upon him which no one understood. He did not like to have the crown prince defended, and every such utterance filled him with suspicion of the speaker.

"Your Majesty forgets that we are here in the Tobacco Club, and not in the Council of State," said Pöllnitz, with flattering voice. "If your Majesty wished to be angry it would not be necessary to light our pipes and keep the beer-mugs filled, for your pipe goes out because you do not smoke it, and the beer loses its foam because you do not drink."

"It is true," said the king, and while he lifted the mug, he continued, "I drink this glass to the welfare of him who first conquered his rabbit heart and ventured to come in to me. Who was it—I have forgotten?"

"It was Privy Councillor von Eckert, your Majesty," said Count Hake, with an ironical smile, as Eckert bowed, laughing.

"And he went into the room as though he were going to a battle," said Baron Pöllnitz, smiling. "He took leave in his thoughts of all his fine breweries and his artistic, smokeless chimneys; leave of the exchanges of the cities which he had not yet supplied with royal commissaries to free them from their burdensome wealth; leave of his decoration and his money-bags, and exclaiming, with a tear, 'I have the king to thank for all that I am; it is but natural to place my back, and if need be, my life, at his disposal,' he marched with the courage of death into the king's apartment."

"Did he really do that? did he say that?" shouted the king. "That pleases me, Eckert, and I shall reward thee for that. True, I picked thee up out of the dirt, and made a distinguished man of my chimney-sweep; but it rarely happens that men are grateful and remember benefits received. Since thou dost this, thou hast a noble heart, and I know how to cherish that. The new house in the Jaegerstrasse which I shall have built, shall belong to thee, and I shall give thee no mere bare walls, but it shall be fitted out at my expense with beautiful furnishings and all things necessary."

"Your Majesty is the most gracious, most kind ruler," cried Eckert, hastening to the king and pressing his hand to his lips. "Yes, your Majesty is perfectly right in saying that you picked me up out of the dirt, but my heart at least was ever pure and spotless, and so shall I keep it. From the dregs of the people your Majesty rescued me. As the noble Romans gave their slaves freedom when the slaves had proved themselves worthy by noble deeds, so my king rescued me from the slavery of poverty and lowliness and gave me freedom. But I, too, shall strive to make myself worthy by great and worthy deeds."

"And to this end Berlin offers the best opportunity, for there are many smoky chimneys and bad breweries left there yet. Finance Minister von Eckert can accomplish many glorious deeds before he is gathered to his ancestors."

All laughed, and even the king could not refrain from a slight smile. Eckert's face alone had become dark and pale, and as he bent his angry eyes upon Master of Ceremonies von Pöllnitz he said, with a forced laugh, "Indeed, you are dazzlingly witty to-night, and your jests charm me so that, if your wine-dealer should ever again decline to supply you because the old bill was not yet paid, I would gladly send a few

bottles from my cellar that your Excellency may drink my health."

"That I will," said Pöllnitz, in a friendly tone. "Yes, to your lasting health will I drink, for the longer you live the more time your ancestors, like my own, have to increase and multiply, and it seems you are not destined to be the founder of coming generations; you must at least take care to be the founder of your ancestry, the father of your fathers. You beget ancestors as others children, and, if I am not in error, you now have three. But that is very little for a rich and distinguished man, so here's to your health, and I suggest to your Majesty to confer upon him a new ancestor for every chimney freed from smoke."

"Softly, softly, Pöllnitz," called the king, laughing. "Leave thy malice and listen to me once seriously. I have given Eckert the new house, and having conferred upon him a title of nobility, it is fitting to give him a coat of arms for his door. Let us, therefore, consider, gentlemen, how Herr von Eckert's escutcheon shall be composed. Each of you shall speak his mind in turn. The duke begins.

With serious and learned mien they now began to discuss Eckert's coat of arms, and each one, taking into consideration the favor which Eckert found in the king's eyes, endeavored to find the most beautiful and imposing escutcheon possible. But all the learned devices proposed failed utterly to please the king. It went against the grain to give the newly created baron a coat of arms that would have been fitting for a house of the old aristocracy.

"When I have a house built," he said, shaking his head, "I like people to see that it is new, and I give it a good coat of fresh white paint, and not an antique gray stone color to set it posing as an ancient knightly castle. So Eckert, too, must have a fresh coat for his house, and a brand new 'scutcheon."

"Your Majesty is wholly of my opinion," cried Pöllnitz, solemnly; "and as every noble race bears in its coat of arms a token and a reminder of the deeds and events through which it rose to greatness, the noble race of the Von Eckerts must have a reminder in its 'scutcheon. I propose, therefore, that this shield be quartered. The first quarter shall show on a silver ground a black chimney, which will also give a hint of the Prussian colors; the second field is blue with a golden vat referring to Eckert's brewer talents; the third field is green with a golden pheasant in the centre, suggesting Eckert's earlier occupation as gamekeeper in Brunswick; and the fourth field shows on a red ground a cock and knife,

mementoes of that pleasant time when Privy Councillor von Eckert fed and tended fowls in Baireuth."

A burst of laughter from the whole Tobacco Club rewarded Pöllnitz for his proposition, which so pleased the king that he decided in all seriousness to adopt it and bestow upon the house in the Jaeger Street an escutcheon with the emblems proposed by Pöllnitz.

The merriment of the gentlemen of the Tobacco Club now assumed a more fiery, vigorous expression, and each endeavored to rouse the king's laughter anew by coarse jests. But merriest of all was Master of Ceremonies Pöllnitz. Jests flowed from his lips as from a bottomless spring; and if for a moment they threatened to run dry, a glance at Eckert's pale face twitching with suppressed rage sufficed to start him off again. When the king spoke with Eckert of the arrangements for the new house, Pöllnitz leaned with a spiteful smile toward his neighbor.

"Confess, Sir Count, that I have made good my want of tact," he said. "It was I who by thoughtless repetition of his words obtained for that hypocrite the gift of the house, but now I have helped him to a coat of arms, and I wager our privy councillor would give his house to get rid of his escutcheon."

"What art thou looking so grave about, Pöllnitz," the king asked at that minute across the table. "I venture thou art angry that I did not give thee the pretty house in the Jaeger Street."

"By no means, your Majesty. I could not use that house, pretty as it may be."

"Ah, yes, thou art right; for thee it is far too large," said Frederick William, laughing.

"No, your Majesty, it were far too small for me, for when a courtier of my sort once decides to set up a house he must make it in keeping with his rank and birth, and that costs money, much more, alas! than I ever possessed. True, I once had a fortune of nearly two hundred thousand thalers when my father died. But what is a nobleman to do with a bagatelle like that? It was too little to live upon decently, too much to go begging upon; so I calculated how long I could live comparatively decently upon it, and when I found that with some economy it might last four years, I lived four years like a noble and generous courtier, and had the good luck to possess during those four years the tenderest friends and the most faithful sweethearts, who never deserted me until the last thaler of my fortune was gone and I forced to turn to and try my luck once more."

"So, thou hast got rid of two hundred thousand thalers in four years?" said the king.

"Yes, your Majesty, and I assure you that I was obliged to live most economically and in some respects needily."

Frederick William looked at him with an astonished, almost admiring, expression. There lay something in the nature of this master of ceremonies which impressed the king. The magnificent extravagance of the baron, which contrasted so greatly with the king's own frugality, exercised, precisely through this contrast, an extraordinary influence upon the king and led him to admire this frivolous, witty, clever courtier.

"Are fifty thousand thalers' income not enough to live decently upon?" asked the king.

"Your Majesty, if one undertakes to meet in any degree the claims made upon a nobleman, one might almost starve upon it."

"Come, explain that to us; tell us once how much thou needest to live as befits a nobleman."

Pöllnitz was silent a moment, staring reflectively before him, and blowing thick clouds of smoke through his nose, letting them curl in spiral streams up over his brow.

"Your Majesty, to live in comparative decency I should require annually four hundred thousand thalers," he said, after a pause.

"Not true, not possible!" shouted the king.

"So possible, my King, that I scarcely know how I shall get on with that."

"Do ye believe that, gentlemen?"

"I, for my part, have not the fourth part of this sum," said the Duke of Holstein, laughing.

"I not one-tenth," cried Count von der Goltz.

"I not one-twentieth," shouted General Schwerin and Count Hake together.

"And yet," said the king, "ye all live as respectable courtiers and honored gentlemen. Let us hear how Pöllnitz means to do it—to get rid of so much money. Quick, Jochen, quick, give us a sheet of paper and pencil here."

The body-servant hastily reached the king pencil and paper.

"Fill the mugs again, Jochen," commanded the king, "and then take thy place there at the foot of the table and listen well how Pöllnitz explains. It is always worth while to know how one can spend four hundred thousand thalers a year. Begin, Pöllnitz. I will be secretary, and thou shalt dictate; but woe to thee if thou fail to keep thy word and usest less. For every thousand thalers less shalt thou swallow ten mugs of beer and smoke a pipe of strong Havana that the Statthalter recently sent."

"But what," asked Pöllnitz, laughing, "shall I have for every thousand thalers extra that I use?"

"Ah, bah! that is impossible, for a nobleman to use more, provided he does not throw it to the winds like a madman."

"And if, nevertheless, for merely living decently and like a nobleman I yet need more, what shall I have, your Majesty, for every thousand?"

"Well, for every thousand I'll pay a hundred of your oldest debts," said the king. "But now begin. And ye, gentlemen, drink, smoke, and give good heed."

CHAPTER IV.

CASTLES IN SPAIN.

"I WILL begin," said Pöllnitz. "First, I need a respectable house for the reception of my guests, the exhibitions of my collections, the entertainment of my friends, the pursuance of my studies in silent retirement, and the arrangement of my wife's reception-rooms and parlors wholly apart from mine, for now and then I shall wish to smoke and have smoking friends with me, and separation will be a necessity."

"Thy wife will let thee smoke in her parlor, I take it," said the king, laughing.

"And if she let me, your Majesty, I would not accept it, for it is not fitting for a courtier to smoke in the apartment of a lady."

The king blushed a trifle and put the mug to his lips to hide his embarrassment, for he remembered how often, disregarding her sighs, he had smoked in the queen's apartments.

Pöllnitz continued, quietly: "I must, therefore, have divers *salons* and reception-rooms. Moreover, as it will very frequently happen that my wife and I are at variance and therefore shall not wish to meet, my house must have two staircases wholly disconnected, one from another, as well as two entrances, that my wife and I need never be in danger of meeting when we do not wish to do so."

"Ah! thou wilt live unhappily with thy wife, and ye will quarrel now and then?"

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"Ah! thou wilt live unhappily with thy wife, and ye will quarrel now and then?"

"Not at all, your Majesty; we shall never quarrel, for it were most unseemly for a courtier to quarrel and have a scene with his wife."

The king blushed again, this time with rage. These explanations of the nature of the true courtier were beginning to offend him and appear an ill-natured satire upon himself, for unfortunately the whole world knew that he did but too often give the reins to his violent temper in his intercourse with wife and children, and had more than once terrified the queen herself by his thundering abuse and unseemly threats.

"So your Majesty sees that my house must be very large," continued Pöllnitz; "and being very large, it will involve heavy current expenses and a suitable number of servants. But that may come later. For the present let us stick to the houses, for it is a matter of course that I must have a country house in which to spend the summer months."

"Yes, that is a just demand," said the king, marking a country house upon the paper.

"But one does not go down to his country house to live in the rooms as one does in a town house; one wishes to enjoy nature and the summer. I must, therefore, have a garden and conservatories and a park, and for the care of them several skilful gardeners; and as I cannot expect that my friends will come to me for the mere pleasure of smelling my flowers and eating my peaches and melons, which they could just as well buy of the market gardener, I must prepare for them other and rarer enjoyments. First of all, I must have a forest for hunting and a lake for fishing."

"Yes, that is all true and well founded," said the king, noting the forest and lake upon his paper.

"Now we come to the most important point, the cuisine and wine-cellar. I must give especial care to both, for it were wholly unworthy of a courtier to place before his friends only such dishes as they can daily have at home. No, when I invite my friends, they must, first of all, be sure of getting things to eat that they find nowhere else and which appear to their palates like tasted miracles and fairy stories."

"There I am wholly of thy opinion," cried the king, whose face glowed with pleasure at thought of all the splendors and dainties which the rich Pöllnitz would place before his friends. "Listen! Thou canst let me have such delicate ham pasties, now and then, as I once ate at Grumbkow's. That was indeed, as thou sayest, a never-dreamed-of fairy tale for my palate; and my cook had to get the recipe at once from Grumbkow's. But, think of it, it called for three bottles of champagne, in which the ham was to lie three days, and three bottles of Burgundy to stew it in! So I had to abandon the intention of having such a pasty baked, and told Grumbkow when I desired to eat such a pasty again I should invite myself to dine with him. Thou canst bake me such a pasty now and then."

"I shall obey thy commands, your Majesty," said Pöllnitz, seriously, bowing low. "Let us continue to arrange my house first, and we will have the ham pasties cared for later. As we were speaking of the chase, we must speak of horses, for I naturally cannot demand of my friends that they will hunt on foot, or walk to my lake to fish. I must, therefore, provide fine horses and comfortable wagons, and since the horses cannot take care of themselves and the conveyances, I shall need a fitting number of servants to attend to them."

"That is all true," said the king, noting the heading, 'Horses and Wagons,' below 'Cuisine and Wine-Cellar;' "that is all true, but I think that thou spendest too much thought upon thy friends and not even a little upon thyself; all is meant for thy guests."

"Your Majesty, hospitality is one of the noblest virtues of every cavalier. No one can exercise too much of it, but very easily too little."

The king frowned and stared darkly before him, while the others gazed with growing astonishment at the master of ceremonies who was so bold as to hold up to the king in this unblushing manner all the royal faults and foibles.

Pöllnitz alone remained wholly unconstrained and gay. "Now, having taking sufficient care of my friends," continued he, "it is time to think a trifle of myself. I therefore beg your Majesty to determine how much I need annually for my wardrobe, how much pocket-money, and for gifts to my sweetheart."

"Is not thy wife thy sweetheart? It seems as though thou wouldst be a tender husband in spite of the two staircases and two entrances."

"Your Majesty, it were not fitting for a courtier to have wife and sweetheart in one and the same person. One's wife is there to represent one, a sweetheart to amuse one; one gives one's wife name and rank, one's sweetheart, heart and love. A true courtier does not love his wife, but he demands that all the world shall revere in her the lady who bears his name."

"Pöllnitz! Pöllnitz!" cried the king, threateningly raising his hand; "take good care of thy courtier that I do not meet

him and find in my house no one like him. I will have no mercy upon him, but crush him with my royal scorn."

Pöllnitz shuddered slightly and shrouded himself in a cloud of smoke to conceal the perplexity which had spread over his features.

"Go on!" said Frederick William, after a pause. "I have set apart an especial salary for every sentence; so go on. But, in truth, I hope thou hast come to the end and that the demon that dwells in thee and tortures thee will let no further bubbles float upward in thy madly luxurious fancy."

"Yes, your Majesty, I am ready, and beg your Majesty, therefore, to count up the sum total of these divers expenditures."

The king counted, his companions smoked and drank in deep silence, Pöllnitz listened attentively toward the windows that led to the court, whence he had heard voices and the sound of horses' feet.

Suddenly the king uttered an oath and struck the paper lying before him with his fist.

"As God helps me, Pöllnitz is right," said the king. "Four hundred thousand thalers a year are not enough for a courtier of his fertile imagination. The sum here is six hundred thousand thalers."

"And your Majesty admits that I have demanded nothing extravagant or superfluous?"

"That I admit."

"Accordingly, your Majesty will have to count me out five thousand thalers."

"The devil! Where shall I get them?"

"Your Majesty forgets having promised me for every thousand in excess of four hundred thousand, one hundred for myself."

"Did I say that, gentlemen?" asked the king, and when all those present confirmed the statement, Frederick continued, with a loud laugh: "I see now that none of you know Pöllnitz. I did not say I would give Pöllnitz the money, but that for every thousand I would pay one hundred of his oldest debts, and those are two very different things. If I gave him the money, you may be certain that his creditors would never see a pfennig of it. But what I have promised I will fulfil. To-morrow thou mayst bring me a list of thy oldest debts, and I will pay five thousand of them."

"But, your Majesty, my account is not finished. I have only the most urgent and necessary things there, and many things I have forgotten. I have no foresters to keep the

poachers from my game, no watchman to scare the burglar from my town house, no men to care for the fish in my stream and silence the frogs who destroy my sleep and that of my friends."

"Go away with thy castles in Spain, fool that thou art!" cried the king, half angry, half amused. "Find thyself another king rich enough to meet thy follies."

"Your Majesty, permit me nowhere to seek anything else," said Pöllnitz, bowing low. "I have found so gracious and noble a monarch that I am perfectly content. I did but wish to prove to your Majesty and these gentlemen, who hold me a spendthrift, that even without great dissipation and excess one can use up a very considerable fortune. Now, you will appreciate that I have proved myself a model of economy in living four years upon the trifling sum of two hundred thousand thalers, instead of spending it in one-half year."

The king laughed and raised the beer-mug above his head, calling upon the company to join him in a health to the "miser" Pöllnitz.

The beer-mugs were clanging merrily amid jests and laughter, when suddenly a lightning-flash seemed to have struck all save the king. The raised arms of the six courtiers sank to place the beer-mugs on the table, while the gentlemen hastily rose from their seats to bow in deep humility.

CHAPTER V.

FATHER AND SON.

The king had sunk into his chair in speechless astonishment. He did not understand what spell had seized these gentlemen, forcing them to rise out of their seats in violation of the rules of the Tobacco Club. He did not see that the door had opened at his back, that in the midst of the smoke and steam that filled the room with floating, tremulous clouds a young man had appeared, whose entrance caused the sudden overwhelming impression upon the courtiers. And there was, indeed, something exalted and impressive in this youth—a wonderful brilliancy of beauty, nobility of soul, youth, royalty, and melancholy spread over a face whose sharp, clearly marked lines spoke of deep pain and bitter experiences, while on the narrow purple-red lips there played

a smile so fresh and gentle that the beholder saw at once the heart that sent that smile must be still very youthful, confiding, and impressible. But in wonderful contrast to this friendly, youthful mouth were the eyes—which, like great, mysterious, impenetrable orbs, shone from the frame of the narrow, delicately flushed face—now flaming and sparkling like diamonds, now gleaming with youthful superciliousness, now assuming the firm, penetrating gaze of an observant sage. The somewhat retreating forehead and the straight and finely pointed nose formed a profile indicating elevation of character. It was the eye, the head, of a hero; and had they belonged to a figure that corresponded with the giant power of that gaze, he would have been a Titan, and might have crushed the world like a toy in his hands; but his slender, evenly built, graceful figure was delicate rather than powerful, maidenly rather than heroic; yet one could not but feel that the head would lend giant forces to this figure, and that if he could not, like a Titan, conquer with the physical power of his arm, he would none the less rule with the commanding power of his brain.

This was the unexpected apparition that suddenly terrified the gentlemen of the Tobacco Club and sped them from their seats, this the youth before whose blazing, smoke-penetrating eye the gaze of the courtiers sank timidly to earth.

The king still sat, speechless with astonishment, in his chair as the young man stood close behind him.

"I venture to wish your Majesty good evening," said a full, resonant voice.

The king shuddered, a glowing red spread over his face. "Fritz!" he murmered, softly. "Fritz!" he repeated, more loudly, and already the distant thunder of the coming storm reverberated through his voice.

"I come from Ruppin, where I have been reviewing my regiment," said the crown prince in a quiet, friendly voice, bespeaking pardon, as it seemed, for his unexpected arrival.

The king did not heed it. His mistrust was already flaming up in fiery wrath. He thought of the queen's supposing him ill and suffering, imprisoned in his bed. Not for a moment did he doubt that she had suggested the crown prince's coming, and that the latter was now present to ascertain whether the king's life was in danger and whether the throne of Prussia would not soon be empty to receive his successor.

Such dark suspicions it was which aroused the king's rage and filled his heart with bitter distrust.

With a violent motion he pushed away the crown prince's

proffered hand and rose from his seat. His wrathful eye took in at a glance the whole circle of his companions, who still surrounded the table in reverent silence.

"Why did ye arise from your chairs?" shrieked the king, in a trembling voice. "How dared ye act against my commands in violation of my royal behest? Know ye the laws of the Tobacco Club? Know ye that these laws expressly forbid you to leave your seats, to greet anyone standing? Ye are all silent! Miserable cowards are ye all, that dare not even defend yourselves, that hang your cloaks to the wind and dissimulate with each new-comer and try to flatter him. Answer me, Pöllnitz, knewest thou the law of the Tobacco Club that forbids thee to stand up?"

"I knew it, sire; but I thought I might make an exception in greeting the crown prince."

"So thought we all," said General Schwerin, in a firm voice.

The king pounded the table with his clenched fist till the mugs and bottles jingled.

"You thought so," he shrieked, "and yet you knew that you dared make no exception for me, the king. But then, that is more important than the king. The crown prince is the king in the future, the sun of the coming day. What the king could not grant, the crown prince will one day bestow; from the king there is nothing more to be hoped, nothing more to be feared. So turn to the crown prince; scorn the laws of the father to flatter the son. The son is such a fine French courtier, who likes adornment and courtly beauty, for whom the noble question of etiquette is an important matter; so let us rise when the crown prince enters the room, though we know that here in this room no one is more or signifies more than another, and though it has often enough been here forgotten that I am king. Yes, the king can be forgotten, if only no one forgets the crown prince, who may perhaps soon be king."

"God grant your Majesty a long and happy life," said the crown prince, who had stood behind the king's chair silent and motionless during the king's passionate speech.

"Who speaks to him? who tells him to speak without my asking him?" shrieked the king, whose whole figure trembled with rage. "He who has etiquette at his fingers' ends should know that to the king no man speaks who has not first been bidden. But then he thinks, too, that the king understands nothing of all that; for the king is an old-fashioned man who does not even know how the true courtier

must live and comfort himself. Ah! Pöllnitz, there hast thou a courtier according to thy sketch, a true pattern of a courtier. Ah! thou thoughtest, perhaps, I had not observed what face was behind this picture. Thou toldest me I had not recognized the courtier whom thou hast sketched in such alluring colors to prove to me that four hundred thousand thalers yearly are not enough to keep out of debt. Patience, patience! My eyes are still open and I still see. Woe to you all when I see that ye dare to defy the king to please the crown prince. I will prove to you that I still live and that I alone am ruler. Herewith I close the Tobacco Club, and you may all go to the devil."

"Your Majesty will doubtless permit me to go, instead, to Rheinsberg, and to take my leave at once," said the crown prince, bowing reverently before the king.

Frederick William did not honor him with a glance. He turned his head away and said but the one word, "Go!"

The crown prince bowed again with the same reverence and formality, then turned to the courtiers, and nodding lightly to them, said:

"Good evening, gentlemen. I sincerely regret to have aroused the king's displeasure against you; yet this displeasure is wholly justified, for against a law decreed by the king no man may offend, not even as you did, out of goodness of heart and generosity."

And the crown prince, who with these words had removed himself wholly from the reach of the king's anger and at the same time done justice to all—to the king in granting the righteousness of his wrath, to the courtiers in praising their loyalty—thus made himself master of the situation, from which he emerged, not as a scolded and browbeaten son, but as triumphant victor.

With light, firm tread, with head proudly raised, he went to the door, while the king, in spite of his wrath, experienced a sort of shame and could not conceal from himself that he had once more dealt wrongly with the crown prince.

But this very consciousness made him more violent and stirred his wrath the more. He uttered a wild oath and glared threateningly at the pale, silent, trembling courtiers.

"Hypocrites and eye-servants, all!" he hissed between his teeth, striding slowly in front of them. "Hake, give me thy arm and lead me into the other room. I will not longer see these persons."

Count Hake hastened to him, and leaning on his arm, the king tottered into the adjoining room.

When the door had closed behind him, the remaining courtiers seemed to awaken out of their stupefaction. They raised their bowed heads and looked at one another with half shamefaced, half angry, glances. They had been scolded like children and felt, nevertheless, that they were men.

Their honor had suffered a keen wound, but reverence for the king kept them from demanding atonement. Like noble steeds robbed of their freedom they gnawed the bit with which their master bridled them and felt themselves curbed and forced to obedience.

When Count Hake came to command the gentlemen, in the king's name, to leave the palace at once, they had not the courage to do so, but made the count their emissary to the king, to beg in the most humble terms for pardon and mercy, and to assure him that all were true to him to the death, and their demeanor toward the crown prince only the consequence of thoughtless impulse.

The count undertook the task with a sigh, and went to give the message to the king, while the agitated courtiers in breathless, anxious silence, awaited his return.

Finally the door opened and Count Hake returned.

"Well, what says the king?" "Has he pardoned us?" "Will he take us into favor again?" "Is he convinced that we are his true, humble, and obedient servants?" they inquired.

Count Hake replied to all this storm of questions with a melancholy shake of the head. A pause of breathless expectation followed. All eyes were fastened upon the count, whose lips held for them the word of condemnation or of grace.

"Gentlemen," he finally said, and his voice sounded as hollow and terrible to the trembling courtiers as that of the Angel of Death; "gentlemen, the king commands me to say to you that unless you depart instantly he will find means of removing you by force."

This was a threat which restored full muscular power to the trembling courtiers. Silent, with downcast mien and anxious, timid looks, they hastened thence, to feel, for the first time, free from fear of prison or the king's corporal's stick.

Meanwhile the king's ire had by no means subsided. It panted for new victims. But the very servants were shy of the king's stick, and even his last companion, Count Hake, was now banished from his presence with the rest.

So he was alone, wholly alone in this barren, dusky apartment, whose comfortless stillness began to depress him. He let himself slide into an arm-chair and gazed with a troubled air about the room that was but faintly cheered by the chande-

lier, lighted, for economy's sake, with but four candles. Nothing interrupted the stillness, and only now and then came a sound of dance-music from the other wing of the palace, from the queen's apartments. These tones made the king sigh and filled his heart at once with sorrow and rage. The queen was happy, while her husband was suffering; the whole court was rejoicing, while he, alone, abandoned, gnashing his teeth, lay there in this dark, cheerless apartment. And yet he was king, mighty ruler of millions of subjects, who all trembled before him; of whom not one, perhaps, loved him; who all turned their faces to yonder rising sun, to the son so unlike his father, so little the son of that father's heart. As the king thought of that deep grief, a new foreboding overcame him. Again arose the thought that he might perhaps die, and that no one would mourn him, that all would hail his son. He folded his hands and prayed; in the agony of his soul he turned to God. With prayer he deadened the voice in his breast that began to murmur reproaches and blame.

The king prayed. Exhausted with anger, pious contrition and world-scorning beatitude filled his soul. When the tones of the music now floated over to him he experienced a pious indignation at this unworthy festivity, a joyful satisfaction in himself that he was not among the godless who paid homage to idle pleasure, but there praying alone in his solitary chamber.

Just at this moment the door opened and the body-servant's timid and anxious face appeared.

"Your Majesty commanded me to report immediately when the coffins that came yesterday should be unpacked and arranged in the White Hall," said the servant. "That is now the case, and if your Majesty so commands, they can now be examined."

"Ah! my coffin is ready!" murmured the king, starting involuntarily. "My coffin and that of the queen. And the queen gives a ball and is dancing, perhaps, instead of humbling her soul in prayer and serving God. I will awaken her from this unholy sensuality. It is a sign from God that the coffins have just now come. The queen shall see them."

He called his two body-servants and commanded one of them to conduct him to the ball-room, the other to illuminate the room in which the coffins had been placed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WHITE HALL.

The queen knew nothing of all that had happened in the king's apartments. Faithful to the orders sent by the king, none of the gentlemen summoned to him had betrayed whither he was going, and the queen had not noticed their absence. After having finished the *grande tournée* through the halls she had seated herself to play, and had no inkling that the king, released a few hours from his pain, had abandoned the roller-chair.

To-day she was wholly herself, wholly queen, proud and happy, smiling and filled with the sense of power, kindly condescending to the horde of flattering, smiling men and women who surrounded her. Never had the queen been seen so friendly, never so regal, so brilliant.

The queen had seated herself at cards with the Margravine Maria Dorothea and the ambassadors of the Kings of England and France. Behind her chair stood her two maids of honor, to whom she occasionally addressed a word or two, inquiring after the princesses, who had given themselves over to the enjoyment of the dance in the adjoining room.

Suddenly the music ceased, and a strange silence shocked the company in the dancing-room. The queen, in the act of arranging her hand of cards among her diamond-clad fingers, turned smiling to one of her maids, and commanded her to call the two princesses to their mother at the close of that dance. Then she gave her attention to the play once more, when suddenly the Princess Amalie, pale and terrified, rushed to her, whispering several words in her ear.

Sophia Dorothea uttered a slight cry, and crouched in utter terror. "The king! My God, the king!" she murmured.

"He seems very angry," whispered Princess Amalie. "Do not let him see your diamonds."

The queen's three companions at cards sat in reverent silence, cards in hand, around the table, and waited for their royal partner's lead. But suddenly she laid all her cards down upon the table and with a violent movement loosened the bracelets from her arms and the necklace from her throat, clutched the sparkling trinket and concealed it in the large pocket of her skirt.

"Loosen the long earrings, Amalie," she whispered; and

while the princess obeyed this command, the queen again picked up her cards from the table.

Her brilliancy was gone; the diamonds had crawled timidly into her skirt-pocket, the fire had died out of her eyes. The king was there. Sophia Dorothea was therefore no longer a glittering queen, but a timid, humble wife, afraid of the anger of her husband!

Her companions at play still sat with downcast eyes, and seemed to have seen nothing of her change of toilet. They were still waiting for the queen's card. Sophia Dorothea had taken up her cards again, and played a queen. Lord Hastings took it with a king.

"Lost," she said, with a melancholy sigh. "Queens always lose when the king comes. It is, however, a comfort that the conqueror is a king," she said, with a smile, which the proud queen managed to extort from the humiliated wife.

Then she quietly went on playing, though she had distinctly observed that the king was already standing in the door of the dancing-room, watching her.

When the king strode to her, calling her by name, she turned with an expression of pleased surprise, and arose to meet him.

"Ah! my king, what joy you have prepared for us!" she said, smiling. "It is most kind that your majesty glorifies this festivity with your presence."

"Yet I come to cast a gloom over this brilliant festivity, for a few moments," said the king, in a harsh, stern tone, roughly shoving the queen's arm through his own. "It is good and necessary to reflect a little, in the midst of intoxicating pleasures of this world, upon the transitoriness and vanity of all things earthly, and to interrupt sensuous music with prayer. I have come to administer this medicine to your soul, sick with vanity. Come with me, Queen!"

"Ye there," he continued, nodding backward, to the court company, which had crowded together in groups, "ye there may accompany us."

He drew the queen forth with him. Silently the train of guests in festal array arranged themselves behind the royal pair. Whither? No one knew. Even the queen had asked her husband in vain, receiving from him no answer.

This long train of gayly dressed cavaliers and ladies, gorgeous in flowers, jewels, uniforms, and decorations, offered a most lively scene. One might have thought them wedding-guests going in solemn procession to church to take part in the nuptials of some happy piar. But they who led the

procession were not in the least like a happy wedding pair. The king stared savagely before him from under his wrinkled brow, with fiercely closed lips. The queen looked pale and terrified, and her eyes wandered unsteadily hither and thither, as though seeking some danger, some approaching terror.

The procession moved gravely, silently, through the flower-scented dancing-room; then farther up the broad, carpeted staircase, and along the corridor, to that great door which led to Frederick William's own "White Hall." "We are on the spot," said the king, as he opened the door and led her into the room.

Suddenly Sophia Dorothea uttered a cry, and staggered backward.

"Two coffins," she murmured, horrified, now directing her reluctant eyes toward the darkly gorgeous coffins, now letting them wander about the great hall, fastening them on the lofty figures of the great marble Electors who kept watch by the coffins of the living in this room.

"Yes! Two coffins," replied the king, sternly, harshly. "Our coffins, Sophia! and in this hour I will show them to thee, and the court assembled with thee, that the sight of them may arouse ye out of your sensual enjoyments. Death must knock at thy heart, that it may awake out of its voluptuous sleep and return within itself! Yes, in these coffins we shall one day repose, and there will be an end of all frivolity and all splendor. No one will fear my eye or my cane. No one will rejoice over the fineries of the queen and her gorgeous diamonds. Dust will return to dust, and king and queen will be nothing but food for worms."

"Ah!" said Sophia Dorothea, whose noble heart was humiliated at this pious self-abasement of the king's; "ah! we shall always be more than food for worms. The dust of common mortals the mighty hand of time will strew to all the winds, and over their graves history will stride with obliterating foot; but at ours it will pause, our dust it will gather, to form for us a monument thereof. When our body of flesh and blood is lowered to the vault where rest our ancestors, our forms will rise again, if only with members of stone and a breast without a heart. See there, my consort, these noble and impressive figures of your ancestors. They, too, have descended into the vault, but their figures in marble have arisen, and in our magnificent halls they occupy the first place, hearing our words, observing our deeds."

And while the queen thus spoke, her face glowed with a truly noble energy and beauty. She was truly imperial, even

without the glow of her diamonds. She was no longer Frederick William's wife, she was the sister of the English king, the mother of the future king—she was the Queen.

But Frederick William, in his pious contrition, was offended at her glancing eyes, her proudly posed head. He felt that her soul had freed itself from the burden of an oppressive will, foreign to herself, that her being was free, separated from his own. But she should recognize him again as her master, bend again penitent under the yoke. The queen should be the wife again, that obeys the king because the Bible commands, "And he shall be thy master."

"So let our ancestors behold us trying our coffins in their presence!" said the king, laying his hand firmly and heavily on the queen's shoulder. "We know that diamonds are gorgeously becoming to thee, and that I am none too ugly in my uniform; now let us see whether our coffins are becoming to us."

"What dost thou mean, my King?" asked Sophia Dorothea, anxiously, fastening a trembling look upon the king.

"I mean that we shall try whether some day we shall with decency and becoming dignity fill our places in our coffins; that to-day, in jest, we shall enter our coffins as we shall one day have to do in solemn earnest."

"But that were a cruel jest," cried the queen.

"Oh, yes! to the children of earth everything seems cruel which reminds them of death and the transitoriness of earthly joys," said the king, with emphasis. "Yet such warning is good and wholesome; and if we accustomed ourselves to leave the dancing-room at times and rest in our coffins, we should doubtless lead much more beatific and serious lives. Lie down in thy coffin, Sophia Dorothea; thy soul will profit by it, and mine eyes will behold a picture which, praised be God, they never will behold; they will behold thee in thy coffin."

"Oh, thou art younger than I, my husband," cried the queen; "thou wilt one day bury me, and it is therefore not necessary to lay me in my coffin for a trial."

"Compel thy soul, and make her humble and still," said the king, who had a feverish attack of piety on that day. "We have come here to try our coffins. Let us do it."

"I should not have come, had I known your majesty's intention," said the queen, shuddering.

"Thou art come because I willed it so," murmured the king, his cheeks red with rage and his eyes blazing wrath.

Sophia Dorothea recognized the symptoms of a rising thunder-storm, and knew that, once come to an outbreak, it would sweep away all dams and hinderances. She was therefore compelled to anticipate the outburst, check the floods of wrath, before they plunged forth released.

With an imperative gesture she summoned one of her maids of honor, and said, proudly and quietly, "Give me your hand, countess! I am tired, and will rest upon this couch of new and unwonted form."

And, with the dignity of a truly royal mind, she raised her robe a little to lift her foot over the side of the coffin, and set it upon the floor thereof. She stood in the coffin, tall, proud, erect, commanding, and majestic to behold. Then, with inimitable grace, she bent over and lay down upon the coffin-floor.

The coffin creaked and groaned slightly; among the courtiers there arose a murmur of resentment and horror. The king stood by the coffin, and Sophia Dorothea fastened her gaze upon him with an expression so strange, flaming, penetrating, that he involuntarily fastened his eyes upon the floor, and had not the courage to meet her glance.

Sophia Dorothea saw that, and smiled. Then she slowly arose, and stood there again, proud and quiet.

The Countess Hake wished to take her hand, to help her step out. The queen motioned her proudly back.

"Not at all," she said; "kings and queens leave the grave only through their own power and greatness, supported by the hand of history."

Then she stepped over the edge of the coffin and, bowing low before the king, said, "Now it is your turn, my husband."

The king shuddered, and cast a sinister, distrustful glance at the queen. The words she meant so literally had for him a prophetic, uncanny meaning, and a light shudder passed through his frame as he drew near the coffin. But, conquering himself with a mighty effort, he entered the coffin and signalled one of his gentlemen-in-waiting to help him lie down.

"It is good to rest upon this couch," he said, stretching his limbs contentedly. "Here I shall one day sleep, until it pleases God to wake me."

"May that day be far from us, my husband and king!" said Sophia Dorothea, solemnly. "Permit me to offer you my hand to help you in stepping out of the coffin."

She gave the king her hand, and he, grasping it, was about to rise, when a strange, unusual noise was heard without—a

loud, penetrating cry, several times repeated, then hasty steps approaching the hall.

The courtiers murmured and whispered to one another, and their faces grew white.

"What is it?" asked the king, still sitting in the coffin.

No one answered; all exchanged timid glances, but no one dared speak.

"I *will* know what is happening," cried the king, painfully trying to rise.

The major-domo stepped forward. "Your majesty, there are two soldiers without who were keeping watch in the corridor. They both assert that a tall, white figure, with veiled face and black gloves, slowly passed them, coming hither. They, thinking someone was masking, followed the apparition, and saw it enter the salon here. They hastened hither to check it, but your majesty sees that no one is here."

"The white lady, the white lady," murmured the king, terror-stricken, sinking back, weak and broken, into the coffin. "The white lady veiled, with black gloves; that means my approaching end."

"The white lady," whispered the courtiers, shuddering, and involuntarily moving from the door through which the unholy apparition was said to have entered their midst.

The queen alone was silent. She looked with a strange, questioning glance to the grave, marble figures of the Electors, and her mind was far away with her beloved son Frederick.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAID-OF-HONOR AND THE GARDENER.

It was a delicious May day. The elder was in bloom, the birds sang, and the swans rocked softly on the smooth mirror of the water-lily bedecked, flower-garlanded pond in the midst of the crown prince's garden in Rheinsberg. It was early morning. The windows were closed and curtained, and nothing was yet heard of the joyous, unrestrained life that, at other times, delighted the occupants of this charming castle. No other music was to be heard than the nightingale's trills, the jubilant twitter of finches hidden in leafy roofs of lofty trees. The crown prince slumbered still, for his flute was silent, and that was a sure sign for all the inhabitants of the

castle that its master was not yet awake, or at least was not yet ready to begin the day. The music of his flute was the morning sacrifice with which the young prince greeted every day, and which, like Memnon's statue that resounded when the first ray touched it, betrayed to the flattering courtiers that their sun, too, had arisen. But now the flute was silent. The sun had not yet arisen, although, here in the park, she cast her golden sheen upon the shrubbery and scented bloom, and had drunk the dew from the flower-chalices.

It had been a hot night, and the dew had refreshed the plants and blossoms but sparingly. Fritz Wendel, the gardener, was at work already, sprinkling the flowers with the great watering-pot, and drenching the dust from the plants. But, while doing so, he selected the finest flowers and plucked them, hiding them carefully under the shrubbery, perhaps to shield them from the sun, or perhaps to keep them safe from the inquisitive eyes of passers-by. And yet there were such eyes there now, watching him, resting upon him with so tender and smiling an expression, that it was easy to see that the maiden to whom the eyes belonged had an especial interest in the handsome young gardener, who seemed to realize the fables of old, in his modest costume and striking beauty. One might have taken him for the god Apollo, who, attracted by some Daphne, and clad in working dress, had come to dwell near the shepherdess of his love. Perhaps this charming young girl thought of that, hidden behind the elder-bushes watching him, or perhaps she thought him a prince, and waited longingly for the moment when he would throw aside his mask, and stand, her equal, at her side. For she was, though not a princess, maid-of-honor to a princess, and of distinguished birth. But what does youth care for genealogy and escutcheons? And what need this thirteen-year-old child ask whether Fritz Wendel be the son of a peasant or a prince? He pleased her, for he was young and handsome, and he had another very great advantage for her. He was her first adorer. All the rest of the world still called Fraülein von Schwerin a child, and played with the little Louise. The crown princess had begged her from her mother as a sort of toy for amusement in lonely hours, and the title "maid-of-honor" that had been given to the child was only a jest that was laughed at, and meant to assure Fraülein von Schwerin certain access to the crown princess at all hours of the day.

But the little Louise was a child in years only. She possessed already heart and mind of a mature woman. In all her feeling, thought, imagination, and desires, she was a passion-

loud, penetrating cry, several times repeated, then hasty steps approaching the hall.

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But the little Louise was a child in years only. She possessed already heart and mind of a mature woman. In all her feeling, thought, imagination, and desires, she was a passion-

ate, fiery, loving woman. So nothing wounded her pride so much as being called a child, and never was she happier than when her years seemed forgotten in favor of her understanding and mature mind.

Fritz Wendel, the young gardener, had had the good fortune not to know their number. For him "little Fraülein von Schwerin" was a thoroughly grown-up lady. More than that, she was the goddess whom he worshipped; the fairy whose glance sufficed to make his flowers bloom and his heart beat. For her alone he cultivated the flowers, tended the peaches and melons on the sunny walls. For her alone had God created the world, for she was the queen of the world; and it was therefore perfectly natural that poor Wendel, too, should be at her feet and make her the ruler of his whole being.

The little maid had now been watching her silent, romantic, first love long enough to be weary of such unnatural silence; and just as Fritz Wendel plucked a lovely narcissus she stepped from behind the elder-bush, and smilingly wished him good morning. Fritz Wendel started, and a bright blush covered his face. He was so embarrassed that he quite forgot to reply to her greeting, and only bent lower over the flowers.

"For whom are the flowers?" asked Louise, now standing close to him. "And why hast thou hidden away the best, so as not to add them to the bouquet which the princess must have every morning?"

"No one commanded me always to pick the loveliest flowers for the princess," said Fritz Wendel, who still did not dare to look at the little maid. "The prince merely commanded me to put fresh flowers in the vases every morning; that is all."

"That seems to me not to be all," cried Louise; "for thou hast picked other flowers besides these. For whom are they, if not for the princess?"

Fritz Wendel now ventured to lift his eyes, and slyly look at the little girl standing smiling at him.

"They, too, are for a princess," he said, softly, "my princess!"

"Ah! Thou, too, hast an especial princess for whom thou choosest flowers?"

"Yes; I have my princess whom I serve, who commands me, for whom I am ready to give my life, to become a robber, a murderer, a highwayman, if she wills it so, and but gives me a sign to do it," cried the youth, with all the energy of his passionate nature.

Louise played carelessly with a tuft of elder that she held in her hand. She plucked single blossoms off it and tossed them in the air, and blew them, standing upon tip-toe and springing about, sending the blossoms up again whenever they fluttered downward.

"I should like to know," she said, laughing, "whence it comes that I find such a splendid bouquet every morning in my room, and who is so bold as to pick a bouquet that contains lovelier flowers than the princess' vases."

"Certainly it is someone who worships the gracious Fraülein," said the young gardener, with downcast eyes, blushing at his own boldness.

"It must be some distinguished gentleman—one of the crown prince's courtiers, perhaps," exclaimed Fraülein von Schwerin, with a teasing side-glance at her embarrassed adorer. "Who else could venture to love me, and send me flowers?"

"Yes, you are right, who could venture?" murmured Fritz Wendel, sadly. "But, Fraülein, have you never heard of madmen who lose the consciousness of what they are, and compare themselves with emperors, kings, even God himself? Perhaps he who brings you flowers is such a madman, and, just because he is mad, holds himself for your equal."

"Heavens! how pale thou art," said Louise, looking at the youth with undisguised tenderness. "And why art thou crying, Fritz?"

She took his hand and looked at him steadily, with a strange, half-inquisitive, half-provoking expression in her eyes.

Fritz Wendel started, with shuddering delight, at her touch, and snatched his hand away almost rudely. "Because I am a wretched gardener," he muttered; "because I am not rich and noble and brilliant, like your courtiers."

"Yesterday at table Baron Kaiserling was telling of an Austrian general who had been a poor peasant's son and a cow-herd," said Louise, suggestively. "Now he is a general, and has married a countess."

Fritz Wendel's face glowed with energy and courage. "Heavens! why is there no war?" he exclaimed, full of enthusiasm. "I, too, should become a general, for I should fight like a lion."

"Ah! you, too, wish to become a general, and marry a countess?"

"Not a countess, but——"

"Fritz Wendel! Fritz Wendel!" they heard a voice calling in the distance.

"It is the head gardener," said the poor lad sorrowfully.

"Farewell, Fraulein. Be gracious and merciful, and go to walk in the garden again to-morrow."

He took his flower-basket, and hastened down the long alley.

Fraulein von Schwerin looked angrily after him.

"Again no declaration," she murmured, indignantly, stamping the ground like a defeated child. "But he *shall* make me a declaration of his love. Madame Morien told me that there is no sensation more divine than that of the first declaration. And she says it is wisest not to choose one's lover of one's own rank, because then one is certain of not being deserted by him. She told me yesterday that no one had adored her so faithfully as the huntsman's lad that served her father when she was my age; and that no other man had so truly loved and admired her. Well, Fritz Wendell adores me, and I wish him to declare himself, and I must finally know whether it really is such a superb sensation. To-morrow he shall do it. To-morrow I shall be so friendly and so tender that he cannot help telling me his love. But now, to the castle, so as not to be found here."

And the little maid sprang away as lightly as a gazelle.

CHAPTER VIII.

DIPLOMATIST MANTEUFFEL.

The garden was empty once more. Only the birds sang and fluttered about, the morning breeze played through the tree-tops, everything else was still. But not long. Soon the sound of approaching steps was heard, and a new figure approached the entrance to the *allée*.

It was a lady, who though not so young and beautiful a one as Fraülein von Schwerin, was still attractive enough to make an impression upon susceptible masculine hearts. She wore a remarkably tasteful and becoming morning costume, calculated to set off her noble contour and proud, imposing figure, whose chaste outline ill suited her glowing, challenging eyes, and the alluring, seductive smile that played upon her lips.

She, too, had surely not come to enjoy the beauty and freshness of the morning air and the splendor of the flowers. Her eye wandered listlessly about, not heeding the elder-bushes

and jasmine. Now, at the end of the long *allée*, she stood a moment, searching in all directions. When she saw that no one was near her she glided to one side, into the thick boscage, and, finally, walking through a narrow, overgrown path, reached the boundary wall of the garden. Before a door in this wall she paused, listening with bated breath. Finding all still, she knocked three times with her hand, then listened further. The same threefold knock was then heard at the other side of the door. The lady smiled contentedly, and called, with a loud, silvery voice, "Good morning, in the name of God!"

"And the Devil!" answered a deep, manly voice, at the other side of the gate.

"It is he," whispered the lady, quickly drawing a key from her dress and opening the door.

The man who had stood without instantly stepped within, and, bowing low before the lady, reverently kissed her proffered hand.

"Good morning, Count Manteuffel," said the lady, smiling. "You are indeed as punctual as though you had come to a rendezvous with a sweetheart."

"Tempi passatti," sighed the count, "I am married."

"I, too," laughed the lady; "but that does not prevent ——"

"Your still finding ardent admirers," interrupted the count. "But you are still young and beautiful, while I have grown old. Tell me, gracious one, how you have managed to preserve this youthful freshness and these glancing eyes, that held me so fast in their net when I still had a heart."

The lady bestowed upon him a sharp, scornful look. "Count Manteuffel," said she, "you must want something important of me that you are so adoring. But come. Let us first go to the little pavilion here, in the neighborhood. There are comfortable seats there, and we are secure from eavesdroppers."

They went silently from the wall to the pavilion.

"Here we are safe," said the lady, throwing back the lace veil which she had worn lightly upon her hair. "Come, let us sit on this divan, and first tell me why you asked for this appointment to-day, and why you did not, as usual, send your body-servant to bring my letters to you?"

"I had an unconquerable longing to see you, to look once more into your lovely face," sighed the count.

"Yet you say you have no heart in these days," laughed the lady.

"You are the enchantress who reawakens it. Thanks to you, it is at this moment glowing in my bosom."

"It is easy to see that you are treading a path there in which you do not feel at home. You are insipid when you begin to play the lover; yet in other respects you are confessedly one of the keenest and wariest of diplomatists. But with me, I beg of you, no diplomatic subterfuges! What do you want of me? I reported to you in my last letter most exactly the state of things here as well as the state of my finances, which is precisely that of the crown prince's. That is to say, his coffers are precisely as empty as my own."

"And you both have an empress who is so happy as to be able to fill them both," said Manteuffel, drawing from his bosom a purse through whose silver meshes gold pieces glinted. He handed the purse, with a smile, to the lady. "Unfortunate that they are different empresses who are so happy as to be able to assist the crown prince and Madame Brandt."

"What do you mean by that, count? We no longer understand each other, and I beg of you not to speak in riddles. I fear the effort, for my brain."

"I mean that the crown prince no longer turns to the Empress of Austria in his embarrassment. Yet she, as his nearest relative, as the crown princess' own aunt, possesses a natural right to the confidence of the crown prince."

"But perhaps his burden of debt is heavier than the purse of the Empress of Austria," said Madame Brandt.

"He should have made the experiment, have put the purse of the Empress of Austria to the test, as he often did in earlier days, when not the crown prince alone, but the Margravine of Baireuth, learned to measure the liberality of their imperial aunt. But the crown prince has a fickle heart, and forgets past favors easily."

"Yes, that he does," sighed Madame Brandt. "We poor women have to suffer from that. He has loved and forgotten us all."

"All?" asked Manteuffel, eagerly.

"All, count! We are nothing more to him than the toy of a leisure hour. Then he grows weary of us, and casts us aside. There is but one lady whom he truly and unshakenly loves."

"And the name of that lady?"

"His flute, count. Ah! what a face you make! Certainly this lady cannot be bribed by Austrian gold nor the flatteries of the ingenuous Manteuffel; she is always secretive, and trustworthy. She does not betray the beloved one. Ah! count, we might both learn of the flute. Yes, believe me, I should try to resemble her if I did not need so many things which a flute does not need at all, and if the Austrian gold pieces did not shine so temptingly. But you, Count Manteuffel, why should not you resemble the flute? Why have you your spies and eavesdroppers everywhere? Why are you Austrian spy at the Prussian court—you who have enough money, rank, and honor to resist these ordinary temptations?"

Manteuffel's brow clouded over a little, and he pressed his lips together resentfully. But he soon mastered these symptoms of impatience, and was again the friendly, affable, attentive diplomatist.

"I serve the Austrian throne from inclination," he said, "from preference and loyalty. I serve it because it is my profoundest conviction that Austria is destined to form a united Germany, making all Germany Austria. Prussia must be absorbed by Austria. This is my political conviction, and I live according to it."

"And for this political conviction you accept Austrian gold and Austrian decorations," said Madame Brandt, with a laugh. "For the sake of this political conviction you have your spies everywhere, at court, at Potsdam, Dresden, as well as at our little court of Rheinsberg here. Not enough to have won the crown prince's cook, to have him keep a diary for you, you have succeeded in drawing my small and humble person into your interest, and I know best that that costs you a considerable sum of money. And now you wish to make me believe that that is all for the sake of your political conviction. Oh, no! dearest count! I, too, am a diplomatist in a small way, and I, too, have my convictions. One of them is that Count Manteuffel, that harmless Quinze Vingt, has but one real passion in the world—to play a political rôle, and earn as much money incidentally as he can. And whether it be of Austrian or Prussian origin is wholly indifferent to Manteuffel."

"And to what purpose this amiable jest?" asked Manteuffel, with a forced laugh.

"To the end, dear count, that we play no useless comedy, but act uprightly, and take off both our masks whenever, as now, we are alone. I serve you because you give me money for it; you serve Austria because she gives you gold. I should cease to serve you if you did not, as to-day, bring me a full purse in critical moments; and your enthusiasm for Austria's supremacy would cool off if, some unlucky day, Austria's springs should dry up for you. Now, dear count, I think we understand one another; and now tell me, without

evasion, what do you want of me, what have you to say to me?"

"Much that is of importance."

"I knew it," smiled the lady. "Your flatteries betrayed you. Now to business. Let us begin."

"First, then, dearest baroness, you must know that the crown prince will be king in a few days."

"By no means, count; the crown prince received a messenger yesterday evening who informed him of the king's improved condition. The crown prince was visibly rejoiced, and commanded that the feast determined upon for to-day in honor of Madame Morien's birthday should take place."

"Does she still possess the crown prince's love?"

Madame Brandt shrugged her shoulders.

"Love! I said before that the crown prince loves his flute alone."

"Not even the crown princess?"

"Not even the crown princess! And perhaps he might not love the crown princess, even if she could transform herself into the flute. She is not cut of good wood and yields no harmonious tone, he would say to Quantz, and with that he would shut her up in her case forever."

"And do you believe that he will treat the princess so, though she is not the flute? Do you think he will throw her aside?"

"The crown princess fears that."

"And the empress also."

"But why did they give such a musical prince a wife who not only understands nothing of music, but has a thoroughly rough, hoarse voice, and speaks so indistinctly that the prince would not understand her, even if she said clever things."

"You think, then, that the crown prince, as soon as he is free, that is, becomes king, will separate from his wife?" asked Manteuffel, ponderingly.

"No one can know, count. The crown prince never speaks, with his closest friends, of his wife. And even in the most devoted moment, Madame Morien has tried in vain to learn anything from him about it. He is very prudent and distrustful."

"Madame Morien must be won," murmured Manteuffel.

"That is a very difficult task," said Madame Brandt, "for she is unfortunately very rich, and attaches slight importance to money. There is but one means. Get her a lover, handsomer, more ardent, than the crown prince, and she may be won. For you know very well that the good Morien has a very susceptible heart."

"I beg of you, baroness, let us speak seriously. These are things of great importance which we are discussing, and our time is limited. Madame Morien must be won. She alone now has influence over the prince's heart; she must use that influence to keep him from separating from his wife. You, dearest baroness, must use your bewitching eloquence to make Madame Morien understand that the only atonement possible, the only means of reconciliation with Heaven, is her leading back the unfaithful husband to the arms of his wife."

"She cannot lead him back where he never has been."

"But she can prevent his dishonoring the crown princess and the court by a separation. The crown princess must remain his wife, even after he has become king. That is the only bond which can reunite him with Austria. For Austria has many dangerous enemies in the crown prince's company, and the most dangerous of them all is Suhm."

"He, at least, does not belong to the crown prince's company, for you know very well that he is in St. Petersburg as Saxony's ambassador."

"That is just the misfortune. The crown prince trusts him unreservedly. They write one another in cipher, which all our efforts have thus far failed to interpret. Suhm has obtained the crown prince a loan of ten thousand thalers from the Duke of Courland, and now has a yearly allowance for him, until his coronation, of twenty-four thousand thalers from the Empress Anna. The prince has just received the first annual payment."

"That is an idle tale," laughed Madame Brandt. "The crown prince is poor as Job, and has been regularly besieged by his creditors for some time past. No day passes without some vampire's coming either by letter or in person to torture him."

"And it must be Russia that brings him help in this embarrassment!" exclaimed Manteuffel, despairingly. "But we must make every effort to counteract this most dangerous enemy and win Prussia for Austria. Germany needs quiet, and Prussia must not be upon bad terms with Austria. Prussia in arms against Austria would mean the balance of power in all Europe lost, and a war that would perhaps bathe Germany for years in blood and tears. Austria will do all that lies in her power to avoid this. We two, my noble friend, will be Austria's allies, will help her as far as we may. Russia has given Prussia money, it is true. But such obligations

are at an end the moment that money is given back. When the crown prince ascends the throne he will pay his debts to Russia, and all will be over. We must therefore seek another bond which may unite Prussia with Austria more lastingly. You must help me weave this. The crown prince must not be permitted to separate from his wife. Then will the future Queen of Prussia be the niece of the Empress of Austria, and that lays upon the king duties of relationship. But to increase these, to make the relationship closer, we must bring about another marriage in the Austrian interest. Prince Augustus William, the probable successor of the present crown prince, must, like him, marry a princess of Brunswick."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Frau Brandt.

"Impossible? why impossible?"

"Because Prince Augustus William will never agree to this plan; because he bears a passionate love in his heart, a love which would move even you if you had a soul capable of pity."

"By heavens! we are discussing affairs of state, and you mix love up with them," exclaimed Manteuffel, with a disdainful smile. "What have politics to do with love? Let the prince love whom he pleases, provided he marries the Princess of Brunswick."

"But this is a great, true, profound love. A love over which we have no power, for there it is not the Devil who has his hand in the play. It is as pure as Heaven, and wishes for the blessing of Heaven. That you must give up, count. Prince Augustus William will not marry this princess. His heart belongs to Laura von Pannewitz, and he is far too noble, too high-hearted, to bestow his hand without his heart."

Manteuffel laughed aloud. "A royal prince who loves a little maid-of-honor, and would marry her! How romantic, how transcendental! What delicious stuff to make a novel of. Ah! my dear baroness, I congratulate you! This invention does credit to your fancy, and I see the time approaching when you will be famed as a novelist."

"Scoff as you please, count. I repeat it, none the less. Prince Augustus William will not marry the Princess of Brunswick, for he loves the queen's beautiful maid-of-honor, and is determined to marry her."

"This determination will be broken," smiled Manteuffel; "the crown prince himself will help us, believe me. He is no love-blind enthusiast, and will never consent to his brother's entering upon a *mésalliance*."

"And the prince, I tell you, will die rather than abandon his beautiful Laura."

"Well, if he will not abandon her, he must," said Manteuffel, with cruel quiet.

"Poor Laura," sighed Madame Brandt; "she loves him so warmly, her heart will break if she must give him up."

"Ah! bah! every woman's heart is broken once, if not several times, but it always heals. And when it is illuminated afresh by the sun of a new love, the old scars vanish. You yourself have experienced that, dearest baroness. Do but remember the day of our burning, passionate love. Did we not both think we should perish when we were forced to part? Did we not wring our hands to heaven, and pray for death as the most welcome release? And are we not alive today, to smile pityingly at the pains of those days, and remember how many times between we have greeted coming fortune and built triumphal arches in our hearts for entering love?"

"True," sighed Madame Brandt, "we survive pain, and the heart of woman much resembles the earthworm, that lives and writhes on, even when it has been cut in pieces."

Manteuffel laughed. "Now," he continued, "the heart of the beautiful Laura von Pannewitz is but an earthworm, too, and we must not hesitate to tear it to pieces, for it will go on merrily living. You, my friend, shall be the knife to perform the operation. Do you agree to it?"

Madame Brandt was silent, looking sadly in front of her, as if lost in thought. "It is true," she whispered; "we survive it, but the best that is in us dies. I should never have been what I am if I had not been brutally torn from the dream of my first love. We shall kill Laura von Pannewitz; not her body, but her soul."

"And as we are happily not shepherds of men's souls, we need not disquiet ourselves upon that point. Political activity must not inquire about it, and state-craft demands that Prince Augustus William marry the Princess of Brunswick. Further considerations of state require that the crown prince do not separate from his wife, but that, on the contrary, the niece of the Empress of Austria ascend the Prussian throne. To both achievements you must help us. You must watch over the prince and his beloved, and await the suitable moment to bring it to an *éclat*. You must induce Madame Morien to influence the crown prince not to divorce his wife. Such is your task, a noble one; to guard the peace of one marriage, lead two noble hearts back to their duties to the world, and bind with a new bond two mighty houses of Germany. The wife of Emperor Charles VI., the noble empress,

will not be thankless to her ally, Madame Brandt. On the day on which Prince Augustus William marries Princess Amalie of Brunswick, Madame Brandt will receive from the empress a gift of twenty thousand thalers, to buy a set of diamonds."

Madame Brandt's face glowed with pleasure and desire.

"The prince shall and will marry the Princess Amalie," she said; "I vouch for that. From to-day I shall be the evil demon who will poison this sensitive, romantic love of Laura with a poisoned breath, and worry it to death. Heavens! why should I pity her? She does but suffer the fate of all women—my own fate. Who pitied me? Who saved me? No one heard my cry for help, and no one shall hear the plaint of the beautiful Laura von Pannewitz. She is condemned, count. But listen! Do you hear that light, brooding tone that floats toward us? The crown prince is awake; he has opened his windows, and is playing the flute. We must part, for the garden will be full of life at once. We have a sail on the lake this morning, and then, here in the pavilion, Chazot will read us aloud Voltaire's latest play."

CHAPTER IX.

CROWN PRINCE FREDERICK.

Madame Brandt had not been mistaken. The crown prince was awake, and his flute brought a musical morning sacrifice to the beautiful sunny out-door world that was sending its scented greetings to him. The whole man seemed filled with the purest harmony of sensation, and the soft, melting tones of the flute were but the language of his soul. Suddenly he paused and bent his head sidewise, with an expression of rapt attention, as though to catch once more the dying tones still trembling in the air.

"That was good," he said, smiling, "and I think I may note down this adagio without arousing Quantz's scorn."

So speaking, he left the boudoir and went to his "library." As he entered it a pleasant smile played upon his lips, and he bowed his head as if in greeting. It is hard to imagine anything more charming and tasteful than this library. Built according to the prince's own plans, it bore his character and was, in a measure, his portrait. Art and nature, the simplicity of the student, the luxury of the prince, the taste of the

connoisseur, the sensitiveness and enthusiasm of the youth, and the stern bitterness of the king's son early ripe in sorrow and suffering—all this was to be found mirrored in that room, and all this had combined to make it a temple of the Muses, the sciences, and friendship. The apartment was located in the new tower which Knobelsdorf had added to balance the one already there. Its round form gave it a peculiar character, and made the comparison with a temple a natural one. Along the walls in glass cases stood the master-works of the poets of all times—Voltaire, Racine, Molière, Corneille, with Livy, Homer, Cæsar, Cicero, Terence, Ovid; and the poets of modern Italy—Dante, Petrarch, and with these Machiavelli kept them company. Everything that possessed a name in the literature of the nations found its way into the crown prince's library; everything but the works of German authors. Between the bookcases, adorned here and there with busts of famous authors, small divans upholstered in red silk filled the niches, and above them hung portraits of famous contemporaries and friends of the prince. The largest and most beautiful of these was a portrait of Voltaire. To him was given the place of honor, and if the crown prince, seated at his table, glanced up from his work, it was always to meet the face of the French poet sparkling with intellect, spirit, and malice. This had been from youth his chosen friend, with whom for years he had carried on a correspondence carefully concealed from the king. The high, arched windows stood open, and through them opened a glorious view of the garden and the lake gleaming in the sun like molten silver.

The crown prince strode to his table and, without heeding the unopened letters that lay there, took up a blank music-sheet and began to write, humming the melody as he noted it. At times he threw aside the pencil and took up the flute which lay at hand to test certain passages once more before writing them down.

"Finished," said the crown prince, laying the pencil aside. "I fancy Quantz will have to bring himself for once to be content with his pupil; and if the Bendas put on their connoisseur manner again to-day I shall tell them—nothing!" he added, laughing and pushing the sheet aside. "Why take the trouble to let these gentlemen see that I value their approval and seek their applause? That human beings must never see, for ours is a pitiful, petty race, and he who trusts mankind has built on sand. He who sacrifices himself, who gives himself for that race and loves it, is lost.

Oh! I see a time coming when I shall despise all mankind, distrust the whole world! And yet my heart is tender and beats warmly for what is good and beautiful, and I were happy could I but love and trust my fellow-men. But they will not have it; they cannot bear it. I am surrounded by spies who watch my every motion, catch every word to report it faithfully at Berlin, and drop it—a poison drop—in the king's ear. But away with such spider-webs! I have no time to sigh and dream."

He arose and strode several times hastily up and down the room; then he approached the table again and picked up the letters. As his eye rested upon the first address a proud, happy expression stole over his face.

"From Voltaire!" he murmured, breaking the seal and opening impatiently a paper containing two letters and some loose printed sheets. The prince uttered a cry of pleased surprise, and scarcely heeding either letter, his gaze fastened with an inexpressible, half tender, half inquisitive expression upon the printed sheets which he held in his hand.

"At last, at last!" he exclaimed. "The first step is taken, and I am no longer an insignificant, unknown man, with no other claim to acknowledgment than the accident of birth as a king's son—heir to a throne. I shall have a name of my own, for I shall be an author, a poet taking his own place in the republic of letters, and I shall need no crown to insure my being chronicled in the books of history. The first step has been taken. My 'Anti-Machiavelli' is in press. I shall tread under foot this monster of devilish statecraft, and all Europe shall see that a German prince is the first to break a lance against the dragon Machiavelli, who makes human beings the slaves of princes and would subject them to the yoke of trembling, unthinking obedience; who makes of princes monsters whom men must curse, hating them to the very depth of their souls. But what noise is this?" the prince interrupted himself, approaching the door of the anteroom.

Excited voices were heard outside; evidently several persons were having an angry argument.

"I tell you, sir, I must and will speak to the prince himself this day," snarled a rasping voice. "I have been waiting for months, have written the most humble and respectful letters to the prince, and have not even been honored with an answer. Now I have come in person to get my answer, and I swear I will not budge until I have gone to the bottom of the matter."

"It is Ephraim," muttered the crown prince, and his brow darkened.

"Then you can stand on this spot till you turn to a pillar of salt like your great-great-grandmother," cried a second voice.

"Knobelsdorf!" whispered the prince, and a smile flitted over his face.

"The comparison is a happy one," answered the first voice; "for truly this reminds one of Sodom and Gomorrah! But I'll not turn to a pillar of salt. That others shall do for terror and rage when I come with the sword of justice, for justice I mean to have, and if I find none here I'll get it of the king."

"Of the king!" cried a third voice, horrified. "Do you not know that his majesty lies at death's door?"

"Not at all, not at all! If that were so I should not be here. Then I should have waited quietly, whatever the crown prince refuses me. But the king has recovered; and I saw him myself yesterday being pushed in his roller-chair about the garden in Potsdam. The king will get well; and so I am here, and insist upon speaking with the crown prince himself."

"But, I tell you his royal highness is still asleep."

"I answer you, that it is not true, for I heard him playing the flute."

"That was Quantz."

"Oh! nonsense. Quantz! How could Quantz play an adagio as I heard? No, no, that was the crown prince."

"This creature means to bribe me with his flattery," smiled the prince. "But a sorry Orpheus am I, whose tones cannot even still a creditor!"

"But—I repeat it—it was Quantz playing the flute," insisted the discomfited Knobelsdorf. "The crown prince is in bed, unwell, and has given orders to admit no one."

"Oh! I know all that! These noble gentlemen are always unwell when they are in danger of breathing the same air as their creditors," shrieked Ephraim, with a scornful grin. "But I tell you, I shall stay here until I have spoken with the prince, until he gives me back my four thousand thalers that I lent him, without interest and without security, a year ago. I'll have my money again—I must have it—if I'm not to go to pieces myself. And that the prince surely cannot wish. He cannot wish to punish me so sorely for my softness of heart and my sympathy with his hard lot!"

"Now, by God! that is too much," shouted Knobelsdorf.

"Do you know, sir, that you're a brazen knave! You dare to speak of your pity for the heir to the throne! You boast that you lent the crown prince money, when you know very well that you only did it because you knew he would give it back with usurer's interest!"

"If Ephraim knows that, he knows more than I," said the crown prince, with a sorrowful smile; "for, however much I may be heir to the throne, I do not know at this moment where I'm to get the sorry rag of a four thousand thalers to satisfy this vulture. But I must not leave poor Knobelsdorf in this situation any longer. I must silence this usurer's snarling."

CHAPTER X.

THE CROWN PRINCE AND THE JEW.

Just as Knobelsdorf had threatened Ephraim, the Jew, to call the footmen and have him thrown out, the crown prince opened the door and revealed to both the combatants his handsome, proud, quietly smiling countenance.

"Come in, sir," said the crown prince, with a slight nod. "I grant you the audience for which you have so fervently prayed."

The prince stepped with perfect calmness back into the room, while Ephraim, confused and humbled by the quiet dignity of the prince, entered the room with downcast eyes and bowed head, and remained standing near the door.

"Dear Knobelsdorf," said the prince, turning with a smile to the fat, coughing courtier; "dear Knobelsdorf, request the ladies and gentlemen to assemble. We shall sail this morning. In five minutes I shall be with you."

"Five minutes!" said Ephraim to himself, as Knobelsdorf withdrew. "For every thousand thalers scarcely more than a minute's audience. That is a proud debtor! And I should have done better to have nothing to do with him. But I'll not let myself be terrorized—I'll meet him boldly."

"Now, what have you to say to me?" asked the prince, turning his flashing eyes upon Ephraim.

"What have I to say to your Royal Highness?" said Ephraim, astonished. "I loaned your Royal Highness four thousand thalers a year ago, and have received thereof neither principal nor interest."

"Well?"

"Well?" asked Ephraim in astonishment.

"Go on! You cannot have come from Berlin to Rheinsberg to tell me what I've known as well as yourself for a year past!"

"I thought your Royal Highness had forgotten it," said Ephraim, raising his eyes to the crown prince and dropping them instantly to the floor as he met that flaming, penetrating gaze.

"Forgotten!" said the prince, shrugging his shoulders. "I've a good memory for friendliness, and also for every offence against the reverence due the son of the king."

His voice was now so hard and threatening that Ephraim trembled to the depths of his soul and quakingly muttered some words of excuse.

"My Prince," he said, summoning courage, "I am a Jew—that is, a despised, down-trodden, persecuted man, or, rather, not a man, but a creature to be kicked like a dog that is poor and neglected, and treated like a human being only when it has money and treasure. A dog is better off than a Jew in Prussia. A dog that has brought forth young rejoices when the pain is past. But the Jewess who has brought forth her child in agony cannot rejoice, for the laws of the land hang a sword over her, and she may be banished because perchance the child she has born exceeds the number permitted to a Jewess. Perhaps the father is not rich enough to pay the thousand thalers with which he must each time purchase from the state the right to become a father. So our money is the only protecting wall that we Jews can rear between ourselves and misfortune. Money is our honor, our home, our family, our rank, our fate! Without money we are nothing, and he only to whom we offer a gilded palm offers his hand without feeling, contaminated by the touch of a Jew. Judge, then, your Majesty, how greatly I must love and esteem you, to whom I have given a part of my honor, my fortune, my money! What I have done for no one in the world, I have done for your Majesty; for I gave you four thousand thalers without security and without interest. I lent Baron Knobelsdorf, for the crown prince, on his word of honor, my honorable gold. And what have I for it now? No answers to my letters in which I humbly beg repayment of this debt; I am scoffed at, scorned, threatened with the closing of that door which opened so wide when I came to bring the money. Such action is neither righteous nor wise, for as the worm turns when it is trodden upon, the Jew, too,

"Do you know, sir, that you're a brazen knave! You dare to speak of your pity for the heir to the throne! You boast that you lent the crown prince money, when you know very well that you only did it because you knew he would give it back with usurer's interest!"

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rebels under the trampling of men's feet, and remembers that he, too, is a child of God, and that God has placed the passion of revenge as well as love in his heart. When the Jew has been too long maltreated, he revenges himself upon his torturers; and this I too shall do if you refuse to pay my money this day."

Ephraim was silent and leaned against the door, breathing deeply, while the crown prince strode up and down the room with hasty steps, showing all the symptoms of deep excitement. His eyes flamed so wrathfully at Ephraim that the Jew shuddered. Several times the prince opened his lips, but whether his anger robbed him of the power of speech, or whether he mastered himself, certain it is he maintained silence while striding up and down. Suddenly his eye fell upon the flute which lay upon the writing-table. He took it up mechanically and placed it to his lips, first drawing from it light, longing, half-disconnected tones, then playing a brief, simple melody. While he did so the wrathful tension of his features gave place once more to a quiet expression. He laid the flute aside and stepped directly to Ephraim, who had listened breathlessly to the performance.

"That was a rather long and rather shameless speech," he said. "It even held a threat. But I pardon you because you are a Jew, and a Jew has no other weapon than his tongue. Now put up the sword and listen. You lent me four thousand thalers without guarantee and without interest. That is nothing to boast of, for the lender knows that the crown prince of Prussia will not wrong the least of his future subjects. But, knowing that, why does not the lender calmly wait until I call him?"

"I cannot wait, your Highness!" cried Ephraim, passionately; "my credit, my honor, are at stake. Baron Knobelsdorf had given me his sacred promise that I should have money and interest back in half a year, and I believed him because he promised in the crown prince's name. So I need the money in my business. I cannot do without it longer, and I must have it this day."

"Must! And if I say that I pay not a penny of it—cannot satisfy this claim to-day, to-morrow, in many weeks?"

"If his Royal Highness tells me this in all seriousness, I must go and seek my right elsewhere."

"Go to the king?"

"Yes, that will I do!"

"Not, knowing the law that forbids the loaning of money to princes of the Royal House?"

"I know the law well, but I know, too, that the king must make an exception in this case, and that he will repay the money which his successor borrowed. It is possible that his crutch may dance over my back, but that I shall regard as the interest upon my capital, and blows cannot humiliate me, for the Jew is used to being beaten and trodden under foot. Whether or not the king beats me, he will give me back mine honor, for he will give me my gold."

"And if he does not?"

"I will raise my voice in the whole country and cry aloud until the walls collapse and the hearts of men tremble!" cried Ephraim, with all the passionate gesticulation of his people.

"Then arise and cry aloud, for I say I can give no gold this day."

"No gold!" shrieked Ephraim, beside himself. "So I am to be paid again with scornful words and shown to the door with a disdainful smile! My rights are to be kept from me, and my money, and because your Majesty is great and mighty he thinks he can oppress a poor Jew unpunished. But there lives a God of the just and of the unjust, there——"

Ephraim was silent, for before him stood the crown prince, ablaze with wrath, with pale, trembling lips, flaming eyes, and threatening arm.

"Strike, your Majesty, strike!" said Ephraim, crushed and despairing. "I deserve to be struck, for I was a fool, and let myself be blinded by the good fortune of a chance to lend my money to so noble and unfortunate a prince. Strike! for I did not see that a prince, too, is but a man like all the rest, and that he, too, treads the Jew under foot."

The crown prince let his arm sink gently and an indescribably mild smile flitted across his face.

"No," he said, "Ephraim did not err, and he shall be forced to admit that the crown prince is not a man like every other. He shall have money to-day; and if I can give him no hard gold, he shall have diamonds and horses out of the Trakehner stud which the king presented me a little while ago."

"So your Majesty has really no money?" asked Ephraim, reflectively, and almost touched. "It was not to torture the poor Jew that my money was refused me?—it was because the great and beautiful Prince Frederick, upon whom the nations rest their hopes and to whom the hearts of his future subjects already cry aloud in secret, has no money! because he, as well as any other, must suffer human need and human pain! By Heaven! why are we proud and why do we complain

when the heir to a throne suffers our pain and shares our need!"

The prince did not heed him. He had opened one of the cases and taken out a little casket, whose silver-bolted lid he now opened, reviewing the contents with a cold, critical glance; then he took up a large diamond cross and some unset solitaires and brought them to the Jew, who was meditating with downcast eyes.

"Here are diamonds which I think will be well worth four thousand thalers."

Ephraim gently pushed back the prince's hand, shaking his head. "No, I lent gold and gold only can I accept."

The crown prince stamped wildly. "But when I say I have no gold!"

"It follows that I get none," said Ephraim, calmly. "It follows that the poor Jew must wait. It follows that he must give the poor prince what the prince has not, and what the poor Jew still possesses in small measure. It follows that I ask your Royal Highness whether he will accept a thousand thalers from me. But I make one condition."

"Well?"

"That your Royal Highness pay me at once in ringing change the interest upon my capital. Let us understand one another, your Highness! You wished to pay me in diamonds and horses; why not give me now, as interest, a few costly pearls—pearls such as yonder flute conceals, and such as drip like fluid gold from your lips when you lay the flute to them?"

The crown prince stepped close to Ephraim. "Dost thou scoff at me? Wilt thou make a strolling player of the crown prince to pipe before the Jew and melt his heart? Ah! Fredersdorf!" as the door opened and his chamberlain in dusty travelling suit entered the room; "back from Berlin already?"

"Yes, your Royal Highness, and when I heard who ventured to burden your Majesty with his presence at this moment, I hastened hither in my travelling-suit to give your Royal Highness this package, which Splitterberger, the banker, gave me to deliver in the greatest haste, and which, I think, comes from St. Petersburg."

"From Suhm!" exclaimed the crown prince, his face glowing with pleasure as he hastily broke the seal and cut the bands that held the packet. Then he drew out a letter and some books. Darting a happy glance at the letter he laid it carefully on the table, and placing himself so that Ephraim could not see what he did, he took both books in his hands and examined the heavily gilded bindings. Suddenly he smiled, and seizing a penknife, hastily cut the binding loose. A mass of papers fell out, and as the prince unfolded them a ray of proud triumph played over his face.

"Ten thousand thalers!" he whispered. "The Empress and Duke Biron have kept their word."

Then he took some of the papers and went with them to Ephraim. "There are the four thousand thalers and here are a hundred thalers interest. Is that enough?"

"No, your Royal Highness. I am satisfied, but not content, not content with myself. I seem to myself to have done your Royal Highness a wrong, whereas when I came all the world seemed to wish to wrong me."

"Drop the subject," said Frederick, mildly. "Princes must always be the scapegoats of their people, and for what ye suffer ye make us responsible. I am no longer your debtor. You may go."

Ephraim bowed in silence and turned slowly to the door. The crown prince followed him with a meditative, friendly look. Then he stepped quickly to the table and took up the flute.

Ephraim had already passed through the door into the anteroom, when he heard the tones of the flute behind him. On tiptoe he crept through the room; but at the farther door he stood listening. The crown prince had seen the listener, who tried to conceal himself behind the door, but he played on. Then, when the adagio was ended, he laid down the flute and signalled Fredersdorf to close the anteroom door, giving Ephraim a chance to escape unseen.

"Did your Royal Highness see the Jew listening?"

"Yes, but I owed the poor devil this compensation. He was willing to lend me a thousand thalers more unasked. I'll remember him one day. Now, Fredersdorf, tell me, how are things in Berlin? How is the king?"

"Better, your Royal Highness. The king went to Potsdam a few days ago and the fresh air has done him good. He appears in full uniform daily on the balcony of the castle, and has his roller-chair pushed about for hours together. True, the doctors look grave, but all the rest of the world believes that he is improving."

"And God grant that the doctors are mistaken again, as they have so often been!" cried the crown prince. "May the king rule many long and happy years. If he will only let me live after my own fashion! I would give an arm if I could

thereby prolong his life. So let us be merry, Fredersdorf, this day and celebrate the king's recovery."

When he was alone again, he opened the letter from which he had taken the money. With a loving smile he glanced at his friend's writing. "Truly, a faithful friend is worth more than all the kings' crowns in the world. What would have become of me, with all my brilliant prospects, if Suhm had not for the second time stood by me and got this money together in Russia, that I could not find in all the German lands?"

He seated himself at the table and hastily wrote Suhm a letter, ending thus:

"In a brief time my fate will be decided, dear Diaphanes. You will readily imagine how the situation in which I find myself at present tortures me. I have little quiet, yet I was never more philosopher than at this moment. I look forward with indifference to whatever the future may bring forth, neither longing for fortune nor knowing fear; my heart full of pity for those who suffer, of respect for good men, of tenderness for my friends. You, whom I count among the latter, shall be ever more and more convinced that you shall find in me what Orestes found in Pylades, and that no one can more esteem and love you than your faithful

"FREDERICK."

"So," said the crown prince when he had finished, "away with the cares and worries of life! Thou goddess of joy, today shall thy feast be celebrated! Come, Venus, come and bring thy son Cupid, for ye shall be worshipped this day. To you belongs the night. Ye have sent me the little Morien —this dainty gazelle, this joyous tourbillion of love, heart, passion, and caprice. There lies the poetic epistle in readiness for her. Madame Brandt shall bring it to her; the Brandt shall summon me my tourbillion to the temple of joy and love. Away with gravity! Thou genius of love, grant me one hour of blessed forgetfulness!"

He rang for his body-servant and commanded him to make the most beautiful toilet possible, and to bring out the newest and finest French costume for the day. Then he proceeded to the boudoir, to get himself dressed, with the seriousness of Jupiter and impatient haste of a lover.

CHAPTER XI.

CROWN PRINCESS ELIZABETH CHRISTINE.

THE crown princess had not yet left her apartments. She was waiting for the crown prince to come, as he did every morning, to conduct her to the *salon*. This was the only daily opportunity for seeing him alone, even for one fleeting moment; the only time he spoke a few words directly to her, when she might touch his hand, lean upon his arm. A sweet, sad pleasure for this poor young woman who lived only from the sight of her beloved, who cherished no other wish, or thought, or hope, than that of pleasing him, and had never fathomed that secret, had never seen his eyes rest upon her with any other expression than that of cold friendliness, polite indifference. Elizabeth Christine would have given her heart's blood to rest in his arms one single, happy hour, not by constraint, but as a wife who is loved, hearing his whispered contentment. Years of her life she would have sacrificed if she could have won this husband whom she so boundlessly loved, this her god incarnate, this realization of her maiden dreams! And this man was her husband, belonged to her, was united with her by the holiest bonds, and still there was an unconquerable chasm between them, and Elizabeth's sighs, tears, prayers, and devotion could do nothing to fill it out. The crown prince did not love her, and no slightest beat of his heart had ever been for her. A prisoner was this crown prince —a prisoner of marriage. Not love, but constraint, had laid the golden rings upon his hand, that were but the first inconsiderable links of a chain which he had since dragged about in his soul. Elizabeth Christine was for her husband a constant, bitter reminder of his sorrowful, down-trodden, humiliated youth; a constant reminder of the noble friend of his youth whose blood had been shed for him, and whose last cry he had heard with aching heart; a constant reminder of the anger, scorn, hatred, and repugnance of his father, of the hardships so often endured; the insults, injuries, humiliations, even blows, which, all taken together, had finally bent the prince's proud spirit, and brought him to enter upon the slavery of this marriage in order to free himself from his father's cruelty. From the prison at Ruppin he had entered the bondage of this marriage. How could he ever have forgiven his wife all

this, have loved a wife who was forced upon him like the drops of wormwood that we drink to escape worse disease?

He had never let his wife atone for his having been forced to marry her. He was always considerate and friendly to her, though he always met her coldly. One single hour of candid talk she had had with him, and in that hour he had explained what bound them together by force, and therefore separated them forever; for he would never be able to love the wife forced upon him, and was convinced that she could never feel for the man thus forced upon her, who did not love her, anything else but indifference. He had not dreamed what dagger wounds he inflicted upon her, for she had had strength to veil the torture under a smile and bury her feeling deep in her maidenly soul. Years had passed since that conversation, and in these years the love of the crown princess for her husband had grown ever mightier.

Elizabeth Christine still hoped one day to win the heart of her husband, and yet, despite that hope, she trembled in these days more than ever. She felt that the decisive hour was approaching. Under constraint Prince Frederick had married her. Now this constraint would be removed when her husband became king. Would not his conscience command him to make an end of this marriage? Might not her husband cast her aside to choose a wife himself, to make the English princess his wife? Had not King George, although too late, declared his willingness to marry the princess with the crown prince? When Elizabeth thought of all this it seemed to her that her heart must break. He could not force her to go from him, not drive her forth as Abraham drove forth Hagar into the wilderness. He could not force her, but he could beg her, and Elizabeth knew very well that she could refuse nothing he might ask of her.

It was a struggle for her life, her happiness, her future, her honor; for a divorced wife, even when a princess, bears ever a stain upon her honor, and passes through life alone, unmourned, despised.

For some time past the poor crown princess had, therefore, redoubled her efforts to please her spouse, had joined in the merry life of the evening gatherings, and, not scorning to participate in the jests of the company, had succeeded in winning from him more than one approving glance. These were, for Elizabeth Christine, jewels in the martyr crown of her love, and she held them a rarer ornament than diamonds and pearls.

To-day one of those merry, unconstrained gatherings was

to take place which the crown prince so loved and of which he was the most enchanting, wittiest member. Princess Elizabeth would this day be no idle participant of the feast; she would be more beautiful than all, beside; more beautiful than the merry, talented, coquettish Madame Brandt; more beautiful than the gifted tourbillion, Morien; more beautiful than the little Schwerin with her sparkling eyes and her radiant cheeks.

She, too, was young, and could lay claim to love and admiration, not as a princess only, and not alone as the consort of the noblest and most gifted prince of his day, but for her own sake.

She looked critically at herself in the mirror.

"It is true," she said, with a sorrowful smile, "this figure is slender and not wholly without grace, and this face is not ugly! Why does the crown prince find no pleasure in it, why does he never look at it with admiration? These great blue eyes are without soul and fire, in this mouth there is no alluring, enchanting, tempting smile. It is a beautiful form without soul, a beautiful nature without spirit. Ah! my God! my soul lies dead in the coffin of my secret sorrow! He could awaken it with a kiss!" She stretched out her arms and whispered with lips trembling with longing, "Pygmalion, why comest thou not to awaken thy Galatea? Oh! Frederick, Frederick, why dost thou so torture me?" and the poor, trembling young wife, half lying in one of the reclining chairs, wept bitterly.

Merry voices and loud laughter close to her window awakened her from her tearful reverie.

"That is Madame Brandt and the Duke of Brunswick," whispered Elizabeth, as she hastened to the window and hid herself in the curtains.

Yes, there stood the duke, on the terrace, in lively, eager conversation with Jordan, Kaiserling, Chazot and Bielfeld. But there were no ladies to be seen, and the princess came to the conclusion therefore that they had entered the anteroom, and the prince would soon come to fetch her.

"He must not see, no one must see, that I have been weeping. I will laugh and be merry with the rest, for so, only, can I hope to please my husband."

As she spoke, she laughed, but it was a sad, heartrending laugh that found in the anteroom a louder, merrier echo.

CHAPTER XII.

THE POEM.

As the crown princess had supposed, the court ladies and the feminine visitors from Berlin, among them Madame Brandt and Madame Morien, had assembled in the anteroom and were awaiting the crown princess. The first lady of honor, Madame Katsch, withdrew with some ladies to a window niche, Mesdames Brandt and Morien walked up and down the salon in eager conversation.

Madame Morien listened in visible anxiety to the words of her friend, her beautiful, expressive face reflecting all the play of her mind.

"As I tell you," whispered Madame Brandt, "the empress herself sends you word that you may count upon her gratitude in case you are inclined to assist her. You must use all your eloquence, all your influence to divert the crown prince from his intention to divorce his wife at his father's death. The empress desires her niece to become Queen of Prussia."

"I do not wonder at the empress," laughed Madame Morien, roguishly. "The only question is whether the crown prince agrees with her. For you know very well that Prince Frederick is not the man to be influenced by a will outside his own."

"Not by the empress, but by you, dearest!"

"And how does the empress propose to bribe me? For the good lady surely does not think me so foolish or so childish as to make her wish my law simply because it is the wish of an empress. No, the little Morien is, at the present moment, a personage of more importance to the empress than the empress for me, and I very naturally make my own conditions!"

"Do but state those conditions, dearest friend, and I can assure you, in advance, that they will be fulfilled, unless, indeed, you demand the moon or a star."

"You have guessed my wish," said Madame Morien, smiling, "I do demand a star; not, indeed, a little one from the sky, but a greater, more honorable, and more beautiful star, which the empress can give me."

"I do not understand you."

"Ah! you will soon understand me. Listen! Have you not heard that the Empress of Austria is thinking of founding an 'Order of Virtue?'"

Madame Brandt laughed a loud, silvery laugh. "And in that order you wish to be included?"

"Yes, and unless the empress gives me the star of that order, I shall enter upon no further negotiations."

Madame Brandt laughed again. "That is a stroke of genius! 'Le Tourbillon' wishes the star of the Order of Virtue! The beautiful Morien, whose greatest pride lay in her adroit snubbing of all prudes, wishes to turn trainbearer of all the virtues!"

"Dear friend," said Madame Morien, with a bewitching smile that showed two rows of exquisite, pearly teeth; "dear friend, the way of retreat must always be open at the right moment. And as Æsop descending, could not rejoice in the beauty of the path for thinking of the weariness of the coming ascent, so we women should never be so absorbed in the beauty of the present moment as to lose sight of future difficulties. To-day I am Le Tourbillon, and may remain so for years, but when the roses and lilies have faded from my cheeks I shall fasten the robe of the Order of Virtue upon my withered bosom, and become a pious, God-fearing, chaste, and stern priestess of Virtue."

The ladies laughed, a laugh as merry, as silver-clear and innocent as the trill of the lark, or the song of a child. Then Le Tourbillon suddenly resumed a serious, pathetic expression, and said in a nasal, preaching voice:

"Do I not well deserve to be rewarded with the star of the Order of Virtue? Is not the holy task allotted me of reuniting two married hearts? of binding still more closely with my feeble hands what God has joined together? I tell you, make me high priestess of this Order, or I will not assume the rôle allotted to me."

"I vouch for it. Your whim shall be gratified, and you made First Lady of the Order."

"Pardon me, dearest, but that is not enough! I require the Empress of Austria, the exalted aunt of our crown princess, to give me, in an autograph note, her assurance that this Order will be created, and I made its First Lady. It will do no harm if the empress adds a few words of tenderness and esteem."

"I report your conditions to Berlin to-day, and they will be immediately reported to the empress by courier. She will doubtless be ready to fulfill them, for the danger is urgent, and you are a mighty ally."

"Then all is agreed and nothing is wanting but the main point," said Madame Morien, with a provoking smile; "nothing

more than my really fulfilling the conditions and really being to the crown prince a little more than Le Tourbillon, the pretty Morien, a Turkish melody that he listens to when the mood is on. Nothing is wanting save that the crown prince really love me. He pays court to me, presses my hand now and then, whispers a longing word in my ear, embraced me yesterday when we met by accident in the dark corridor, and covered my lips with such fiery kisses that I almost smothered. But that is all, that is the whole romance of my love!"

"No, that is not all! This romance has a continuation," said Madame Brandt, with triumphant looks, drawing from her bosom a sealed letter, and giving it to Madame Morien.

"There, take this new chapter in your romance."

"This letter has no address," said Madame Morien, smiling. "To whom is it?"

"To you."

"No, it is to me!" suddenly cried a voice behind them, and a deft hand snatched the sealed paper from Madame Morien.

"Mine, this letter is mine!" rejoiced the little maid-of-honor, Louise von Schwerin, who had crept unnoticed close behind the ladies and raised the letter high in her outstretched arm.

"The letter belongs to me, it is mine," repeated the presumptuous child, dancing about in front of the horrified ladies, pale with fright. "Who dare say that this letter, which bears no address, is not meant for me?"

"Louise, give me the letter," begged Madame Morien, in a voice trembling with anxiety.

But Louise found a new pleasure in torturing her beautiful friend a little, and revenging herself for being called a child, and laughed at when she spoke of her heart and hinted at her great, secret, unhappy love."

"Take the letter if you can get it!" she exclaimed, springing like a gazelle through the halls and waving the letter like a flag. "Take it!"

Madame Morien hastened after her, and there began a merry chase accompanied by the laughing approval of the court ladies, who watched this race of beauties with much interest.

The child kept the lead, dancing about and laughingly declaring, "The letter is mine, the letter is mine!"

But Madame Morien, fear lending her wings, making one last effort, sped like an arrow behind Louise and was in the act of snatching the letter, when the crown princess entered.

The little maid-of-honor sank with a laugh at her feet and panted breathlessly: "Gracious Princess, rescue me!"

At the appearance of the crown princess Madame Morien had remained standing, breathless not from the race alone but from fear, while Madame Brandt, hiding her own alarm under a smile, approached her friend to lend her countenance and support in this critical moment. The rest of the company stood silent at a respectful distance, gazing with curious glances at this strange scene.

"From what shall I rescue you, little Louise?" asked the crown princess, bending with a smile to the breathless child.

Louise was silent a moment. She felt that the crown princess would rebuke her rudeness. She did not wish to be treated as a child again in the presence of the whole court. So she suddenly decided to insist upon the truth of her assertion and claim the letter for her own.

"Madame Morien wished to snatch away a letter that belongs to me," she replied, with a defiant look at that lady.

"I hope your Royal Highness knows this presumptuous child too well to give credence to her words!" said Madame Morien, evasively.

"Child! She calls me child again!" murmured Louise, beside herself with wrath and determined to carry this scene, which had begun in jest, to the utmost point, and to revenge herself upon Madame Morien.

"So the letter is not addressed to Louise?" asked the crown princess, turning to Madame Morien.

"No, your Royal Highness, it is not to her."

"It is to me," insisted the little maid-of-honor. "Your Royal Highness may assure yourself of the fact. Here is the letter if your Royal Highness will kindly read the address."

"But it has no address," said the crown princess, surprised.

"And still Madame Morien insists that it is meant for her," said Louise, maliciously.

"And still Fraülein von Schwerin persists that it is meant for her," cried Madame Morien, darting a furious glance at Louise.

"I beg your Royal Highness to act as umpire," said Louise von Schwerin.

"How can I?" asked the princess, laughing.

"By opening it and reading it," said the mad child confidently, with the fullest appearance of candor. "The letter is from my mother and I need not conceal it from your highness, as I have nothing to conceal."

"Do you agree to this, Madame Morien?" asked the crown princess; shall I open this letter and serve as umpire?"

But before the terrified young woman found time to reply, Madame Brandt approached the princess with smiling self-possession. She had arrived at a despairing decision. The crown prince had told her that the paper contained a poem. Why might not the poem be meant for the princess as well as for Madame Morien? It doubtless contained a declaration of love, and declarations of love are fitted for every woman and are always welcome.

"If your Royal Highness permits, I can clear up this riddle," said Madame Brandt, perfectly quiet and confident.

The crown princess nodded assent.

"This letter belongs neither to Madame Morien nor Fräulein Schwerin," Madame Brandt continued.

"But you promised explanation, and it seems to me that you do but make the riddle more impenetrable. The letter belongs neither to Madame Morien nor to the little Louise. To whom does it belong, then?"

"It belongs to your Royal Highness!"

"What?" said the princess, astonished, while Madame Morien stared at her friend in speechless horror, and Louise Schwerin laughed outright.

"Yes, this letter belongs to your Royal Highness. The crown prince gave it to me with the command to lay it upon your Royal Highness' dressing-case before the toilet hour. But I came too late and learned that your Royal Highness was already engaged with her toilet. I, therefore, did not venture to disturb, and kept the letter to be delivered now. As I held it in my hand and jested with Madame Morien at the prince's having neglected to address it, Fräulein Schwerin snatched it from me, in a most unseemly manner, asserting that it was hers. Madame Morien hastened after her to get it back. That is the whole story."

"And you say the letter is to me?"

"To you, and contains a poem from his Royal Highness."

"Then I may break the seal," said the princess, opening the letter and unfolding the paper it contained. Then, with a happy smile she exclaimed, "It is indeed a letter from my husband."

"And here comes his Royal Highness to confirm the truth of my statement," said Madame Brandt.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BANQUET.

MADAME BRANDT was right. It was the crown prince, who, surrounded by his courtiers, entered the room just as the crown princess began to read the poem. A murmur of applause arose at his appearance, and the crown princess' face glowed with joy and pleasure at sight of the young prince, whom she could call her husband with confidence, at the moment in which she held in her hand the first love poem from him. The crown prince was not clad to-day as usual, in the uniform of his regiment, but wore a French costume of the latest cut.

But the most beautiful feature of the company was the glowing face of the crown princess. Never had the prince seen her so brilliant. She had never seen him in this exaltation of happiness and love. And all this was for her. She had read only the beginning of the poem he had written her, but this beginning contained words of tenderness, of glowing love. While the crown princess was gazing silently at the prince, Madame Brandt approached him, and lightly describing the scene that had transpired, begged him to confirm her statement.

The crown prince's glance had strayed a moment from Madame Morien, trembling with confusion and fear, to his wife, from whose glowing face he concluded that she really believed the poem had been addressed to herself. She had not read as far as the line in which a direct appeal to Le Tourbillon, the bewitching Leontine, betrayed all. She must be prevented from reaching that line. That was all.

The crown prince approached his wife with a smile which she had never seen, and which made her tremble with joy.

"I beg pardon," he said, "for my poor little poem, which has been handed to you so stormily and ill-deserves so much attention. Read it in some lonely hour when you are *ennuyée*, and may it serve as a diversion for an idle moment, but not now. To-day we will vex ourselves no more with verses and poems, to-day we will laugh and be merry—that is, if it so please you, madame."

The crown princess murmured a few slight words of assent, and while her heart was full of love and pleasure she found, as usual, no words in which to express herself. This shy

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The crown princess murmured a few slight words of assent, and while her heart was full of love and pleasure she found, as usual, no words in which to express herself. This shy

ness, this poverty of words in the midst of the richest wealth of feeling was the misfortuue of the poor crown princess.

If she had possessed, at that moment, courage for a piquant, spirited answer, it would have greatly pleased her husband. But her silence angered him. Silent as herself, he offered her his arm, and greeting Madame Morien with a stolen glance, led his wife through the banquet hall to the table, perfumed with flowers and fruits, and gleaming with silver.

"The gardener of Rheinsberg, by name Frederick of Hohenzollern, invites his friends to partake of what he has produced," said the crown prince, pointing to the great, fragrant melon before his plate; "so let us be seated for, the crown prince being luckily absent, we may be as much at our ease as the mouse when the cat's away."

He seated himself beside his wife and beckoned Madame Morien to the place at his left, whispering to her with an enchanting half smile, "You must be my savior this day. My heart is in flames and needs cooling off. So have a care that I do not burn up in my own fire!"

"Ah! this heart is a phœnix that arises out of the ashes rejuvenated," replied Madame Morien.

"But only to burn again in its own glow!" was the prince's rejoinder. Then, taking up a glass, "The first toast to youth, to that sweet folly which the aged envy us, and of which, alas! every day helps to cure us; to youth and beauty, which this day are so brilliantly represented that one must half believe Madame Venus has sent us all her daughters and their playmates and all their lovers, the rejected and deserted, as well as those whom she is only proposing to reject and desert, and therefore still favors."

The health was drank amidst laughter, and conversation soon ran riot. The fat Knobelsdorf related, in his resonant voice, fragments of the *chronique scandaleuse* of his life of travel; little Jordan, with flashing eye and laughing lips, bandied across at the crown prince one of those series of badinage which the wit of both and their long friendship rescued alike from heaviness and malice; Chazot recited extracts from Voltaire's newly published "Pucelle;" the vain Kaiserling set off every minute some new sky-rocket of his wit or learning, now reciting verses of the "Henriade" to the ladies at his side, now declaiming Gellert's last new fable, then descanting upon painting with the artist Pesne, or drawing a fascinating picture of the future for Fräulein von Schwerin at his side, of that future which should see in Berlin a French theatre and an Itali[illegible] and crowning all, a French-Italian ballet,

with dancers exceeding all the glory known to the German Empire.

But farther along the table sat the Bendas, both Grauns and Quantz, the able and much-dreaded violin virtuoso, teacher of the crown prince, and dreaded by everyone for his rudeness. Before this man even the crown prince felt a sort of timidity, for even he was not secure from brusque repellant answers.

To-day, however, even Quantz was friendly and his face wore the half good-humored, half angry expression of a bull-dog stroked by a friendly hand, and longing to growl, but unable to begin for sheer content.

Louder and stormier grew the merriment, the ladies' cheeks glowed, the courtiers' words became more tender and daring. The crown princess alone sat silent and gloomy beside her husband, and her heart was careworn and sad. She had reflected further upon the scene that had passed, and was now convinced that the poem was not meant for her, but for someone else, so that she felt mortified at her own credulity, and blushed over her own vanity; for how was it possible that he, this brilliant man at her side, should love her, who had naught but her youth and beauty, and had, besides, the misfortune to be not only his wife, but a wife forced upon him against his will? No, the poem was not meant for her; but for whom, then? Who was so happy as to possess the heart of the crown prince? Her heart ached as she recognized that it was another, and not herself, who called this happiness her own, and yet, in her gentleness, there was no anger against that other. But she longed to know her name, not to be revenged upon her, but to pray for her, for her whom the crown prince loved, whom he had to thank, perhaps, for a few poor days of happiness.

But who was it? With a scrutinizing gaze the princess passed in review the faces of all the ladies at the table. There were beautiful, attractive faces among them. Many of them revealed spirit, animation, wit, but none was worthy to be loved by the crown prince. At that moment the prince bent with a charming smile to his neighbor, whispering a word or two. Madame Morien blushed, dropped her eyelids, glanced up again to gaze at him with an ardent look, whispering a word or two with trembling lips, so softly that the prince could scarcely hear. Could this be she? Impossible! This frivolous, coquettish, superficial woman could not possibly have captivated the high-minded prince—could not be Elizabeth's rival.

But who was it, then? If only this everlasting meal would come to an end. If she could only be alone in her apartments to read the poem, which must, without a doubt, contain the solution of the riddle, the name of the loved one.

But the prince seemed to have divined this wish of his wife, and to have determined to thwart it. The dinner had not begun to-day until six, and now it was dark, and the candelabra, with wax candles, were being brought to light the table.

"The candles are burning," cried the crown prince; "let us not leave the table until the candles are burnt out and a champagne illumination in our heads takes their place."

So they talked and laughed, whispered and declaimed, drank and made merry, and the heart of the crown princess grew heavier and more sorrowful.

Suddenly her husband turned to her. "The vanity of an author is stirring within me," he said, laughing, "and I venture the question whether you are not curious to know the poem I had the honor to send you by Madame Brandt?"

"Indeed, I have," she answered, eagerly; "I am burning with curiosity to know it."

"Then permit me to satisfy your wish at once," said the crown prince, reaching his hand to take the poem.

The princess hesitated, but meeting her husband's eye, it rested upon her with such coldly commanding gaze that she shuddered.

She drew the poem from her pocket and silently handed it to him.

"Now, little Fräulein von Schwerin," said the crown prince, laughing and raising his voice, "this whole wise, honorable company shall judge whether this paper is, as that tender child declares, a letter from her dear mother, or, as I assert, a poem which a certain prince has written who sometimes suffers from the versifying fever. Listen, therefore, ladies and gentlemen, but lest anyone imagine that I read anything else than what stands written here, and translate the tender expressions of a mother's love into still more tender feelings of the lover, Madame Morien shall scan the paper with me and testify to the truth of what I read."

He handed the paper to Madame Morien, and slightly bending his head, began to read—the first verses as they stood, then beginning a free improvisation, he recited a poem sparkling with spirit, grace, wit, humor, singing the praise of his wife and studded with jest and *double entendre*. It was received with a burst of applause. While he read what was written, Madame Morien read what was, and her boson heaved as she met his ardent declaration of love and half humble, half imperious invitation to a rendezvous.

The reading ended, loud approval resounded from all sides. The crown prince folded the paper together, turned to his wife and asked her, smiling, whether she was content with the poem.

"So much so," answered she, "that I wish to beg for it again. I should like to treasure it in memory of this hour."

"Treasure it? not at all. A poem, like a flower, is a thing of the moment. A flower in a herbarium has lost life and fragrance; the moment gave it, the moment shall take it away; and we'll sacrifice to the gods what the gods have given."

So speaking, the crown prince tore the paper to shreds and laid them upon his outstretched palm in a little heap.

"Go ye to all the winds and teach all the peoples that nothing is imperishable, not even the poem of a prince," he said, lightly blowing the shreds that fluttered upward like snowflakes. Then began a merry chase after the shreds, each blowing farther, each trying to give to the strip that floated to him some new, definite direction. Only the crown princess sat sorrowful and still. Now and then a scrap of paper settled down before her. She gathered them together mechanically, not blowing them farther, but looking at them with a listless, pained expression. Suddenly she started and blushed violently. She had read two words upon one of the shreds which made her heart beat high with pain and anger. These two words were: "Bewitching Leontine."

The secret was divulged! The poem was written to Leontine—the bewitching Leontine—and not to Elizabeth! But who was she? who of these ladies was called Leontine? This she must know. She summoned all her courage, joined in the general merriment, laughed, jested, chatted with the crown prince and Madame Morien, as well as with the youthful Baron Bielfeld, her *vis-à-vis*.

Never had the crown princess been so witty, and no one dreamed that all these jests were but the masks that hid the wounds in her soul.

The candles were half burnt out, and the champagne illumination was beginning in the heads of some of the members of this round table. Chazot ceased to declaim, and began to sing some of those delightful *chansons* which he had learned from the peasant maids of his fatherland, Normandy; Jordan improvised a sermon in the fanatical, hypocritical manner prevalent for some time past in Berlin; Kaiserling

had risen from his seat and struck an attitude which he had seen Lagière assume in Paris in the Syrène; Knobelsdorf related his most entertaining Italian adventures, and Quantz took courage to administer a vigorous kick to Biche, the crown prince's favorite hound, whom he hated as a rival and who was snuffing at his feet.

"Bielfeld must have his share of the universal illumination, too," said the crown prince, smiling to his wife, as he signalled him to a health to Bielfeld's betrothed in Hamburg.

While Bielfeld arose to join the crown prince, the princess rapidly communicated her orders to one of the servants.

She had seen that Bielfeld, to cool his hot blood, had been drinking whole glasses of water from the *carafe* in front of him. She quickly had the *carafe* emptied and filled with sillery as colorless and clear as the water from a mountain spring. Poor Bielfeld, returning to his place still more heated at thought of his betrothed, filled his glass to the brim and without noticing what he did, emptied the draught of heating sillery.

The crown princess, pursuing the same end, and striving to discover which of the ladies was the bewitching Leontine, now ventured the decisive blow. With an attractive smile, she said to Bielfeld:

"The crown prince spoke of your betrothed; may I congratulate you?"

Bielfeld, who dared not confess that he was about to faithlessly desert her, bowed in silence.

"May I know the name of your betrothed?"

"Fräulein von Randau," murmured Bielfeld, and drank, to hide his embarrassment, a second glass of sillery.

"Fräulein von Randau!" repeated the princess, smiling. "How cold, how ceremonious, that sounds! how impersonal! To be able to imagine a lady one must know her name, for one's name is, after all, in some measure, a part of one's character. What is your *fiancée's* proper name?"

"Regina, your Royal Highness."

"Regina! That is beautiful—a whole prophecy of happiness, for she will ever be queen of your heart. I understand the meaning of a name, and at home, in my father's house, they called me Sybil, for my predictions were always verified. I will tell the fortunes of the company out of their names. Ladies! let us begin. What is your name, dear Madame Katsch?"

And as the princess spoke in all apparent innocence, she smiled and played carelessly with the Venetian glass in front

of her. The crown prince alone saw that the hand that held the glass trembled violently.

He saw the meaning of the prophecy—saw that the crown princess knew the contents of the poem.

"Conceal your name," he whispered rapidly to Madame Morien. Then he turned to his wife, who had just prophesied a long life to Madame Katch, and a happy one.

"What is your name, Fräulein von Schwerin?" asked the crown princess.

"Louise."

"Ah! Louise! Well, I prophesy that you will be happier than your namesake, the beautiful LaVallière. You will never suffer remorse, and never go into a cloister!"

"But, then, I shall probably never have the happiness to be loved by a king," said the little maid-of-honor, with a deep sigh.

A merry laugh from the company greeted this sigh.

The crown princess continued. She had a quaint sally, a bright jest, for each, a piece of delicate flattery.

Now she turned to Madame Morien, still smiling, still playing with the glass.

"Now, your name, dear Madame Morien?" she asked, grasping the glass in her slender fingers and looking intently into it.

"Le Tourbillon is her name," cried the crown prince, laughing.

"Antoinette Louise Albertine are my names," said Madame Morien, hesitatingly.

The crown princess drew a long breath of relief, and darted a beaming glance from the glass to Madame Morien. "Those are too many for me to prophesy from," she said. "Which of them are you called by?"

Madame Morien hesitated. The other ladies, better initiated than the crown princess in Le Tourbillon's small secrets, guessed that something unusual lurked behind the princess' question and Madame Morien's embarrassment, and listened intently for the beauty's answer.

A moment's pause followed. Suddenly Fräulein von Schwerin broke into a laugh. "Well!" she said, "have you quite forgotten that you are called Leontine?"

"Leontine!" exclaimed the crown princess passionately, and her fingers closed over the glass so convulsively that it crushed with a sharp click in her hand.

The crown prince saw the inquiring, surprised gaze of the company fasten upon his wife, and felt called upon to give

the general attention another direction, turning the princess' action into a jest.

"You are right, Elizabeth!" he exclaimed. "The candles have burned down, the illumination has begun, the feast is at an end, and as we sacrificed the poem to the gods we must now yield up the glasses from which he have quaffed a few hours of pleasure and blessed forgetfulness. I therefore sacrifice this glass to the gods! Follow, ye all, my example!"

He raised his glass and threw it over his shoulder to the ground, where it broke with a crash.

All followed the crown prince's example. Each raised a glass with a shout and dashed it to the ground. There was an endless crashing and shouting. In a few moments nothing remained of the gleaming crystal but scattered fragments covering the floor.

But the excited company was not appeased with the first sacrifice; it thirsted for more. The work of destruction had become a mad desire. Having begun with the glasses, they seized upon vases and crystal and porcelain bowls and dishes in the same wild fever of annihilation.

In the midst of the general confusion the door opened and Fredersdorf appeared upon the sill, a letter in his hand.

His unexpected appearance was something so unheard of that it could be explained only by a most unusual occasion. This they all felt despite the mad excitement of their merriment. Instant silence fell upon the company. All looked expectantly at the crown prince, who had received and opened Fredersdorf's letter.

The prince turned pale, the paper trembled in his hand, and he arose hastily.

"My friends," he said, solemnly, "the feast is at an end. I must leave for Potsdam at once. The king is dangerously ill. Farewell!" And offering his wife his arm, he left the room with her.

Silently the guests arose, silently each sought his own apartment, and only here and there was heard a whisper, was seen a questioning, significant look.

CHAPTER XIV.

LE ROI EST MORT, VIVE LE ROI.

King Frederick William's life was coming to an end. The spirit that had long wrestled with the body had now, after long torturing months of secret pain, to confess itself vanquished. The stiff uniform no longer fitted the fallen figure; etiquette and ceremony were supplanted by the all-conquering ruler, Death. Here is no king, but a dying man—nothing more; a father taking leave of his children, a husband embracing his wife for the last time, pressing the last kiss upon her tear-stained cheek, whispering in her ear his prayer for pardon for many a harshness, many a cruel act.

Frederick William had made his peace with God and the world. His pride was broken. He had struggled long enough in his haughtiness against the admission of his sins; but a brave-hearted priest, Roloff, had approached his couch and awakened the slumbering conscience of the monarch.

In vain had the king tried, at first, to meet the accusations with proud self-consciousness. "I have never broken the sixth commandment; I have never been unfaithful to my wife."

Roloff recurred undaunted to the king's sins and offences, his extortions and oppressions, the trade in human beings carried on for his beloved guard; and finally Frederick William was compelled to confess himself vanquished; finally he had the crown taken from his head, and as an humble and penitent sinner, prayed to God for mercy and forgiveness.

Having made his peace with God there remained nothing but to put his last affairs in order, make his peace with the world, taking leave of his wife, his children, his servants.

They were all assembled in his room to say farewell to him. Near the roller-chair in which he sat, wrapped in a silk mantle, stood the queen and the crown prince. His hands rested in theirs, and when he raised his heavy, weary eyes to theirs he met eyes filled with tears, beaming upon him with boundless love and sympathy. Death, which was about to separate them forever, had united father and son. Frederick William had clasped his son in a warm embrace, exclaiming in a voice choked with tears, "Hath not God shown me great mercy in bestowing upon me so noble a son?"

And the son pressed his tear-stained face to the dying

father's breast, and sent up a heart-felt prayer for the king's recovery.

But the end was coming. The king knew that. He had had the oaken coffin in which some months before he had laid himself down brought into his room, and looking upon this sorrowful couch said, with a contented smile: "In that bed I shall sleep well!" Then he beckoned to his private secretary and commanded him to read aloud the order for the funeral ceremonies which he himself had dictated.

After arranging for the care of his corpse, Frederick William desired to assign a memento to each of his favorites, the Prince of Dessau and Count Hake. And the most desirable relic he could think of was a horse. He therefore commanded that his horses be led into the court and begged the gentlemen to go down and each select one. He then had the windows opened into the court. From thence he could command the view of the whole, and bestow a last look upon each of the animals that had so often borne him in festivities and parades. Never again would his foot enter the stirrup, never again would he traverse the streets of Berlin, rejoicing in the stately buildings that his will had called into being; never again would he receive the humble greetings of his subjects, and when next the trumpets blew and cannons thundered, it would be to greet not himself, the king, but the royal corpse.

The king brushed a stolen tear from his eye and forced himself to watch the horses that the grooms were leading up and down. As he did so, he forgot for the moment that death stood at his heels; and he looked with tense attention into the court to see which horses the gentlemen would choose. When he saw which one the Prince of Anhalt-Dessau had selected, he smiled the pitying, superior smile of the connoisseur.

"That is a very bad horse, my dear Prince," he called down into the court, and the indignation of the horse-lover gave his voice its wonted strength and energy. "Take that one there; I guarantee that that is a good animal."

When the prince had taken the one prescribed and Count Hake had selected another, the king commanded that the two animals be caparisoned with the utmost splendor, and gazed into the court with sympathy and interest while this was being done. At his back stood Minister von Podewils and the privy councillors, whom the king had had summoned to prepare the royal writ of abdication by which he proposed to convey the royal power to the crown prince at once. He was surrounded by the queen, the prince, generals, adjutants,

and priests. But he paid no heed to them; he had quite forgotten that he was dying, thought only of his horses, and a wrathful frown wrinkled his brow when he saw a groom putting a blue plush saddle on the yellow silk saddle-cloth of the Prince of Anhalt's horse.

"Oh! If I were but well!" he shouted, threateningly, "how I should thrash that stupid groom! Hake, do me one last favor and beat the rascal for me!"

The horses pricked up their ears and whinnied, and the grooms trembled at the voice of their master, as threatening as ever, and still so hoarse and death-like!

But now the excitement had passed and the king sank back in his chair panting and broken. He had no strength for signing the writ of abdication and could only silently beckon for them to carry him to bed.

There he lay stiff and motionless, with half-open eyes and blue lips, moaning and groaning. A fearful stillness reigned in this chamber of death. Everyone held his breath and listened, everyone expected the mortal sigh of the dying man. Everyone wished to witness the solemn, mysterious moment.

Pale and trembling the crown prince bent over the face of his father. The queen knelt at the other side of the couch, and with grave faces generals, courtiers, physicians, and priests watched the ghostly being who but a moment ago was a king and now is—nothing!

But no! Frederick William was not dead; the breath which had stopped returned to his breast once more. Once more he opened his eyes, still large, full of mind and commanding.

"I do not look so ruinous as I supposed," he said, with the last flickering of human vanity. "Feel my pulse, doctor, and tell me how long I still have to live."

"Your Majesty desires to know?"

"I command it!"

"Then, your Majesty, you are about to die!"

No feature of the king's face changed.

"How can you tell that?"

"By your pulse, sire, which has begun to slacken."

The king raised his arm and moved his hand. "No," he answered, "if the pulse had stopped I could not move my hand."

Suddenly the words ceased, and a hoarse cry issued from his breast. The raised arm sank heavily and noisily down.

"Jesus! Jesus!" moaned the king, "I live and die in thee! Thou art my refuge!"

The last anxious prayer had died on his lips, his spirit had flown.

The crown prince led the weeping queen away; the swarm of courtiers waited, but their faces were no longer sad and anxious—they were expectant. The tragedy had been played to its end. All the world was eager for the drama, the curtain of which was about to rise there in the apartments of the crown prince, now king.

In haste they flocked from the room of death to the doors of the anteroom leading to the apartments of the young king.

Whom will he call first? The king is so young, so full of life, fond of show and state and gay festivities. This is no soldier king; no man of the rod—a cavalier, a poet, a scholar. Science and art will flourish; the corporal's stick is broken; the flute begins its melodious rule.

So they thought, these breathless courtiers waiting there in the young king's anteroom. So thought Pöllnitz, master of ceremonies, standing at the door that led to the young king's rooms.

The crown prince had always treated him graciously, kindly, and now the young king must certainly remember that Pöllnitz alone had, now and then, succeeded in getting Frederick William to pay the prince's debts.

He must remember this now, and Pollnitz's former services must bear Pöllnitz to honors and dignities. He must be favorite—the envied, dreaded, mighty *protégé*—before whom all bow, who is mighty as the king himself; for the king was young, inexperienced, lightly deceived, warm of heart, and rich of fancy, with a strong tendency to pleasure, pomp, and show. These qualities must be fostered; this shall be the leading string with which the king shall be guided. He must be intoxicated with gorgeous feasts, sated with piquant enjoyment, a very Sardanapalus, for whom all life is a flower-strewn feast—nothing more. And then, while the young Frederick is recovering, gathering his forces for new enjoyments, Pöllnitz will rule! This is surely no chimera, no mere dream, but a well-matured plan, for which he had won a mighty ally in Fredersdorf, the young king's body-servant. Fredersdorf had promised that Pöllnitz should be the first whom the young king would summon.

Hence it was that the master of ceremonies stood so near the door which led to the king's inner rooms; hence it was that he looked down with proud disdain upon all these courtiers who were waiting with such expectation for the opening of the doors.

Now, at last, the door opened, and Fredersdorf's face was seen.

"Baron von Pöllnitz!"

"Here I am," said Pöllnitz, casting a triumphant glance at the courtiers, and following Fredersdorf into the royal apartments.

"Have I kept my word?" whispered Fredersdorf, as they crossed the first rooms.

"You have kept your word, and I will keep mine. We will rule together."

"Enter; there is the king," said Fredersdorf, leaving Pöllnitz.

The young king stood at the window, leaning his hot brow upon the pane, drawing a long breath from time to time, and sighing as if deeply troubled. As he turned to Pöllnitz, the master of ceremonies saw that his eyes were red from weeping, and a shudder swept through the frame of the courtier.

A young king just attaining regal power, who was weeping for the death of his father, instead of being intoxicated by his brilliant fortune! How little did this correspond with the wishes of the master of ceremonies!

"Blessings upon your Majesty!" cried Pöllnitz, with apparent enthusiam, bowing to kiss the king's robe.

But the king stepped backward and motioned him to stop.

"Let us leave these ceremonies for coronation-day," he said, with a weary smile. "I need you now for very different things. You are a master and a sage in matters of etiquette and ceremony; you shall, therefore, continue the conduct of affairs at my court, and begin by arranging for the funeral of the king."

"According to the simple standard specified by the late king?" asked Pöllnitz.

"No. I must, unfortunately, begin my rule by an act of disobedience to the last wishes of my father. I cannot let the simple funeral take place which he commanded. The world would misunderstand it and blame me for want of reverence to the royal corpse. It must be buried with all the honor due a king. This is my will. Act accordingly. The details I leave to you. Go to work at once. Buy all that is necessary in the way of mourning and send me the bills. I will have them paid."

The master of ceremonies was dismissed and crossed the royal chambers meditating and revelling in anticipations of future splendor and power.

"One thing more, Pöllnitz," called the king after him from

the threshold of the royal apartment; "one thing more, Pöllnitz: no trickeries, no cheating, no double bills! I shall never pardon anything of that sort. Mark that, sir Baron!" and without awaiting an answer, the king turned back into his rooms.

But Pöllnitz stood staring after him with open-mouthed, horrified aspect.

It seemed to him as though he had seen a ghost.

This was not the young, extravagant, luxurious, confiding ruler whom Pöllnitz expected: this was a collected, serious, saving king, who saw through him, the tried old courtier, and distrusted him.

CHAPTER XV.

WE THE KING.

Two days, two nights, had passed, and still no word from the king. The court of Frederick William First lived on, and the little court in Rheinsberg was consumed with impatience. The means of diversion were exhausted—sailing-parties and promenades, music, reading aloud, all proved vain. Time had shed his wings and put on leaden shoes. Kaiserling's wit and Chazot's humor, where were they? All are silent, awaiting the days of power and splendor sure to dawn for all his favorites when the crown prince becomes king. Hitherto they had all been the friends of the crown prince—tolerated, anxious, secretly summoned, trembling before the wrath of the king, in daily danger of banishment from that idyll at his behest. But when the crown prince is king they are mighty *protégés*, and all the world vies with itself for their favor.

The crown princess alone seemed quiet in the midst of the universal excitement, the torturing expectation. She seemed quiet, and yet she knew that the next days would decide her whole life, that with the thread of life of the dying king her fortune too might snap, and her heart be entombed.

But Elizabeth Christine had a strong heart and a noble soul. She had spent one whole night upon her knees praying and weeping, and her heart had bled in grief and measureless pain. Now she was quiet, prepared for anything, even for separation from him. Should Frederick utter the slightest wish, she would go. Whither? That was unimportant—abroad, away. Whichever road she might journey, one goal she was sure to reach, and that goal was the grave.

If she might not live with him she would die. Knowing this she was quiet, succeeded in being cheerful.

"I invite all the ladies and gentlemen into my rooms today," she said on the afternoon of the second day of this painful waiting. "We will imagine that we have the pleasure of having the crown prince in our midst, and will spend the hours after his fashion. First a sail, then tea in my apartment, by which opportunity Herr Bielfeld will read aloud some chapters of the 'Henriade.' Then come cards, and, late in the evening, music. Do you agree to this, ladies and gentlemen? They murmured a few words of thanks and pleasure, but they looked grave and their brows were clouded. The crown princess noticed it. "It seems I have not met your wishes," she said, "and you are not content with my propositions. Even little Fräulein von Schwerin makes a wry face and my good mistress of ceremonies has lost her friendly smile. What is it; I wish to know? Baron Bielfeld I appoint spokesman for this rebellious assembly—speak!"

Baron Bielfeld sighed. "Your Royal Highness was perfectly right to speak a few days since of your gift of divination. It is certainly an extraordinary happiness, a flattering honor, when we enjoy the privilege of spending the evening in the apartments of the princess in her high presence. Yet if your Royal Highness really deign to permit us to beg a favor, it would be this—to receive us in the garden-salon, or the music-room, and not in her Highness' private apartment, for the private rooms, beautiful as they are, have one great, dreadful fault."

"Well?" asked the crown princess, as Bielfeld was silent once more. "You do, indeed, make me curious. I thought hitherto that my rooms were very beautiful and attractive. The crown prince himself arranged them, and Pesne and Buisson beautified them with charming decorations. Tell me quickly, what fault have my rooms?"

"This, your Royal Highness—that they lie on the right side of the castle."

The crown princess looked at him in astonishment. Then a smile flitted over her face. "Ah!" she said, "now I comprehend. They do not command the great bridge that all must pass who come from Berlin and Potsdam. You are right. That is a great defect in my rooms. But the music-hall lies on the left side and from thence the whole way may be seen. Let us, therefore, read aloud in the music-room and adjourn to our cards in my room only when it has grown so dark that you can no longer see the bridge and the road."

They followed the princess to the music-room, along whose walls small pale-red sofas stood. Whether by accident or out of mischief, the crown princess selected the divans farthest from the windows, so obliging the company to assemble there. But while they followed her each cast a longing glance at the window and the bridge over which the messenger of better fortunes might at any moment make his appearance.

Meanwhile Baron Bielfeld took up his book and began the reading required by the crown princess. But what a torture it was to read and listen to the regular Alexandrines of the "Henriade," while in Potsdam a new Alexander was perhaps placing the crown upon his beautiful young head!

Suddenly Bielfeld paused in his reading and stared at the window.

"Well, why no more?" asked the princess.

"Pardon, but it seemed to me that I saw a horse's head over there on the bridge."

Instantly, as if at a preconcerted signal, all flew to the windows, even the crown princess letting herself be carried with the stream. A general laugh followed. "An ox! Bielfeld's courier is an ox!"

The mortified company slunk back to its seats, and the reading began again. But it did not last long. Bielfeld soon let his book fall again. "Pardon, your Royal Highness," said he, "but this time it is certainly a horse trotting across the bridge."

And again the company rushed to the windows.

True enough, it was a horse! The rider, however, was no royal messenger, but a simple peasant.

"I see," said the crown princess, with a smile, "we must give up the reading. Let us walk in the garden—naturally on the left side of the garden, and as near the fence as possible."

At last the sun set, and the company reluctantly accepted the princess' invitation to cards in her rooms. And this play held to-day, as always, a magic power for the inhabitants of Rheinsberg, for it meant winning something that not the crown prince alone, but all the courtiers, always needed—it meant winning money. Count Wartensleben had been there for several days with a well-filled purse, which Bielfeld, Kaiserling, and Chazot longed to lighten.

The crown princess played a game of trisset in her room with her ladies-in-waiting, while the rest of the company amused themselves with quadrille at different tables in the anteroom.

Suddenly the door opened and the princess' chamberlain entered. As he passed the table where Count Wartensleben and Baron Bielfeld were playing with some ladies he showed them a mourning envelope which he was about to hand to the princess. "The king is dead," was murmured and whispered about, and Wartensleben, Bielfeld, and the ladies dropped their cards. What were a few groschen now, when the crown prince was king?

Wartensleben arose, took his hat, and said, solemnly: "I will be the first to salute the crown princess as queen!"

"I follow you," whispered Bielfeld, gravely, and both approached the open door, through which they could see the crown princess engaged in reading her letter.

She looked unusually contented, and a happy smile played upon her lips. As she looked up she met the two courtiers solemnly approaching her.

"Ah! you know, then, that a courier has really passed the fateful bridge! And you would like to know how the crown prince is coming on?"

"The crown prince!" repeated Wartensleben in astonishment. "Still crown prince?"

"You thought he was already king, and came to salute me as the queen?"

"Yes, your Royal Highness, the words 'your Majesty' were already upon our lips, like an arrow about to speed from the bow."

The whole company broke into a merry laugh, in which the crown princess joined, and conversation continued in a jesting strain until bed-time came, and they all thanked heaven that they could retire to their rooms.

When the crown princess finally found herself alone in her room she drew the letter from her bosom to read it once more.

"Frederick!" she whispered—"my Frederick!" pressing the letter to her lips. Then she read it again and a happy smile settled upon her face.

"No, he will not repudiate me; there it stands in writing. He will not be so cruel as to set the crown upon my head only to strew that head with ashes afterward! If he recognizes me as his spouse before his people, before all Germany, he has reached the determination never to repudiate me. Oh! he knows how I love him, though I never summoned courage to tell him so. My eyes, my sighs have told him, and he has taken pity upon the poor woman who asks nothing save that she may gaze upon him and love him. And who knows but

that some day this great, unexacting love may touch his heart? Grant that, grant that, my God, and then let me die!"

She sank upon her couch, pressed the letter to her lips, and whispered softly: "Good-night, Frederick—my Frederick!"

Soon deep stillness brooded over the castle. The lights were out, the windows dark. Sleep spread his wings upon all those impatiently and expectantly beating hearts and lulled them to slumber.

And *then* came the long-awaited courier dashing along the road. He passes the bridge and its wooden floor resounds under the horse's feet, and still no one hears him. They all sleep so soundly. He pounds at the gate, halloos, this messenger of the new times. There comes a stir of life in the castle, lights appear in the windows, the halls and stairs are full of flitting figures.

A knock at his door aroused Bielfeld. "Up, up! my friend," said fat Knobelsdorf, panting in. "Dress yourself as fast as you can! We must all go down to the queen to congratulate her, must prepare at once to accompany her to Berlin! Frederick William the First is dead, and we are King of Prussia!"

"Ah! that is another fairy tale," said Bielfeld, hastily dressing; "a fairy tale with which we poor discouraged children have been lulled to sleep too often to believe it true."

"Not at all. This time it is true. The king is dead, wholly dead. Jordan has the command to open and embalm the body; and you will understand that when *he* has it under his claws the king will not revive."

And Knobelsdorf laughed at his joke so heartily, and fell so exhausted into a chair, that he did not notice the small table standing beside it, which he knocked over with a loud crash to the floor.

"What are you doing!" exclaimed Bielfeld, anxiously. "You've scattered on the floor all the money I won yesterday. But that's too precious seed to be sown about in that way."

And he knelt and crept about the floor gathering up his winnings. Knobelsdorf pulled him up. "Is it permissible," he asked, indignantly, "to think of such miserable trifles at so glorious a moment—to be scratching about the floor for two-groschen pieces when it will be raining golden ducats upon us presently?"

The two hurried down to the anteroom that led to the princess' apartments. The whole court was there assembled

and each was doing his best to look grave and hide his satisfaction in honor of the importance of the occasion. All were speaking in undertones, for the princess' sleeping-room adjoined the anteroom, and she was still asleep, she who would awaken as queen.

"She must be awakened to receive the communication of her consort."

The first lady in waiting, Madame Katsch, accompanied by Elizabeth's two maids of honor, solemnly entered the room, well armed with salts and stimulants. Elizabeth Christine still lay smiling in her sleep. But at so weighty a moment not even the sleep of a princess can be kept holy.

Madame Katsch drew back the curtains and the sudden light awoke the princess. She looked wonderingly at the lady in waiting, who, bowing low, approached the bed.

"Pardon me that I venture to awaken your Majesty."

"Why do you call me 'your Majesty?' Has another ox crossed the bridge?"

"This time, your Majesty, it was the horse of Baron von Willichs bringing the news that King Frederick William died yesterday in Potsdam. Here, your Majesty, is a smelling-bottle."

The young queen waved it away, feeling not the slightest inclination to faint.

"And has Baron von Willich no letter for me?"

"Yes, indeed, your Majesty. It is here."

The young queen uttered a cry of joy and broke the seal with trembling, hasty fingers.

The letter contained a few lines only, but they had been written by her husband and were of great importance. The king called her to his side to receive the congratulations and homage of their subjects. True, the letter held no single tender, loving word, but the king summoned her to himself and called her "My spouse." He did not think of divorcing, repudiating her, and that was the all-important point.

Up and away, then, to Berlin! Equipages fill the court-yard, servants run hither and thither, the once quiet halls resound with voices, all is movement, noise, haste. In the music-hall the queen received the enthusiastic congratulations of the court. Everyone sees a brilliant future approaching, every heart beats with hope and expectation.

Away, away to Berlin, where a new sun has arisen—to the new king, Frederick the Second.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT AND MERCY.

Cannons were thundering, bells were ringing, the garrison of Berlin took the oath of loyalty, as the garrison of Potsdam had done on the preceding day.

The king was receiving the first great royal company in the White Hall. From all the provinces and every city, from all the corporations, deputations had hastened hither to see the king, the long-wished-for, the long-hoped-for, him who was to deliver them from oppression, servitude, and famine.

Honest rejoicing was universal, and he who saw the face of the young king glowing with enthusiasm felt that for Prussia a new time had indeed come. But who was elected to help put in motion the wheel of the new time? Whom will the new king choose for his friends and servants, whom will he reject, whom punish? For in the White Hall there were present many who, under command of the king, had done the crown prince bitter harm, many who had humiliated him, misused his confidence, slandered him, and aroused the wrath of his father against him. Will the king remember that now, when he has power to punish and take revenge?

Many persons had entered the White Hall trembling with fear, and stood silent, glad if the king's eye did not rest upon them, and they could withdraw unobserved into a window-niche.

Who had offended Frederick so often as Colonel Derschau? Who had ridiculed him, persecuted him so bitterly, executed the commands of the king against him so relentlessly? It was Derschau who had entered the crown prince's prison in the evening and, extinguishing the light by which the crown prince was reading, had said, with a cold smile, with no word of excuse: "The king wills it. Such is the king's command."

In those days "Captain Fritz" had wept with rage and pain, and had sworn to have his revenge upon the cruel officer. Will the king remember now what "Captain Fritz" swore then?

The king stood directly before the captain. His clear eyes were resting with a strange, sad, affectionate expression upon

the man who had caused him so much pain and was now bowed before him with downcast eye and beating heart.

With a sudden movement Frederick offered his hand, saying: "Good day, Derschau!"

It was the first time that Frederick had spoken to him in seven years, and the friendly word touched the colonel to the heart. He bowed low over the proffered hand, and as he kissed it a hot tear fell upon it.

"Colonel Derschau, you were to my father a true and faithful servant; you followed his commands with exactness in every point, yielding him self-effacing obedience. It is fitting that the son reward faithfulness to the father. From this day you are a major-general."

Then the king turned to Privy Councillor Eckert, and his expression grew hard and stern.

"Is the escutcheon built into the house in the Jaeger Street?" he asked. And as Eckert answered in the negative, the king continued: "Then let it not be mounted. The house is royal property, and I will not have it disfigured with such nonsense. Go home. I shall communicate my commands to you."

Pale and broken-hearted, Privy Councillor Eckert stole away. Laughter and half-audible comment accompanied him through the royal halls, and no one had a word of pity or regret for him. None remembered the oft-plighted friendship now, or the urgent assurances of thankfulness and devotion. As he approached the door Baron Pöllnitz stepped up to him, a wild, scornful smile playing about his lips, his expression betraying all the hatred he had been so often forced to suppress and conceal.

"Now," he said, slowly, "will you send me the promised wine from your cellar? You remember, from your house in the Jaeger Street, for which I designed your escutcheon. Ah, those were beautiful days, dear sir. You have often slandered me and won me words of censure from the king. But I have reason to be thankful to you, for the house in the Jaeger Street is stately and fine, and you have fitted it out with such princely magnificence at the king's expense that it is suitable even for a cavalier. Do you remember my description of the house of a courtier? The king called it a castle in Spain at the time, but you, dear, generous man, have made of my air-castle a reality, and now, when it is finished and in order, you give it up for me; for you know, Eckert, that Privy Councillor Eckert is dead, and only Chimney-Builder Eckert has survived him! But even so skilful a chimney-

builder may not remain within twenty miles of Berlin. Still, if my chimney smokes, I may send a messenger, may I not, and you will come and make the damage good again? You promise me this?"

Eckert murmured some unintelligible words and tried to push Pöllnitz from the door before which the relentless courtier had placed himself, like the angel with the flaming sword.

"You wish to go?" he asked, in a friendly tone. "You are doubtless curious as to the royal communication that awaits you at home. I can tell you its contents exactly. You are deprived of your offices and dignities and banished from Berlin—that is all. The king has pardoned you, you see. He might have executed you, or banished you for life to Spandau; but he did not wish to sully his ascent of the throne with your blood, and so he has pardoned you."

"Let me go, or I shall suffocate," coughed Eckert, ghastly pale.

But Pöllnitz still held him fast. "But do you not know, good man, that down in the castle garden there are thousands of human beings? Cannot you hear their rejoicing even here? These hurrahs and cheers would change to a fierce yell of rage if the people should see you, dear Eckert; for you know that the people are starving—you who filled the royal granaries and then closed them with such bolts that they, in the despair of famine, could not open them; you who swore to the king that his people had enough to live upon and did not need his grain and his help. Listen, they are hurrahing again. I will not detain you longer. Go and see how happy they are, for the young king has commanded that the granaries be opened. The king has had bread distributed among the soldiers, who had had none for three days, and has abolished for some months the revenue upon flour. Go, Eckert, see how happy the people are."

With a wild oath, Eckert broke away. Pöllnitz hastened into the adjoining room. There stood the king in the midst of the ministers, surrounded by a deputation from Berlin about to take its leave.

"I command you"—the king was closing his address to his ministers—"I command you, as often as you may hold it needful, to make suggestions contrary to my commands and decrees, and not to weary of repeating them if I should ever, unfortunately, lose sight of the welfare of my subjects; for it is my will that in future, so far as my personal interest may conflict with the general good, the prosperity of my country shall take precedence of my own good."

Thereupon the king left the great hall and withdrew into his private apartments, where his friends and confidants awaited his coming with beating hearts. They were all prepared to catch in their laps the shower of gold now, doubtless, about to descend. They were all convinced that the young king would transfer to their shoulders at least a corner of the purple that had descended upon himself; each one of them dreamed of a minister's portfolio, an embassy, or a general's epaulettes.

As the king entered their midst they welcomed him with loud hurrahs, and Margrave Heinrich, the comrade of many a feast in Rheinsberg, hastened up to him, reaching out both hands to greet him with merry, witty words, as the gardener of Rheinsberg. But Frederick withheld his hand, and no smile illumined his features. Gazing sternly at the margrave and retreating one step, he said, gravely, "Monsieur, I am now the king."

Then, reading astonishment in the faces of all these friends, but a moment before so confidently smiling, he continued more mildly: "We are no longer in Rheinsberg. There the word of Horace is fitting, 'Sweet is folly in its own time.' There I am gardener and friend. But here I am king, and here we must all work, each using his own powers, bearing witness in the service he renders the State to his fitness for being the king's friend."

"Shall I have the honor of counting myself among the king's friends?" asked the old Prince of Anhalt Dessau, who had just entered the hall with his two sons, and had heard the last words of the king. "Will your Majesty hold me and my sons in the favor which his blessed majesty bestowed upon us through so many happy years? O, your Majesty, I beseech you, be merciful to me and to my sons, and leave us the favor, distinction, and influence which we have enjoyed so long."

So speaking, the old prince bent the knee, weeping loudly, before the young monarch. The king nodded reflectively, and a smile played about his lips. He gave the prince his hand and bade him rise. "I shall gladly leave you your offices," said the king, "for I am certain that you will serve me as faithfully and zealously as my father. But as to distinction and influence under *my* reign, no one shall enjoy distinction and no one will influence me—not even my dearest friend."

The friends from Rheinsberg turned pale and stole furtive glances at one another. The king approached his friend Jor-

dan, and taking his arm, withdrew with him into a window-niche, where he had a long and earnest conversation with him. The courtiers and favorites looked with envious glances at the favored one, watching every gesture and expression of the king. Jordan's face was not radiant. On the contrary, a slightly pained expression of wonder passed like a cloud across it.

Then the king left the window-niche and beckoned Bielfeld. With him, too, he spoke long and earnestly, only to dismiss him and call Chazot. Finally he took Von Wartensleben's arm, pacing up and down with him. The faces of the other courtiers darkened. With none of them had he spoken so long, none had he held by the arm, none had he distinguished with such tokens of love and friendship. It was clear that from this day on Wartensleben was the king's favorite.

The young king had read the symptoms of all this envy, malice, grief, and anger in the gestures of his friends. He knew them all too well, had observed them all too exactly. It had amused him to play with souls bound in the toils of such petty selfishness and hatred. But now that the count had served his purpose he, too, must have his wings clipped a trifle.

"Yes, I am ruler over a kingdom," said Frederick. "I have a fine army and well-filled treasury. You will not doubt that my highest endeavor will be to bring my country to the utmost height of prosperity, maintain the reputation of my army, and make good use of my wealth. The money is there to circulate and be used, to reward those who serve their country well, but, primarily, it is there for those who are truly my friends."

The young count's face beamed, and a scornful smile played over the king's face.

"But I shall naturally know how to distinguish," he continued, "and he who needs no money will receive none. You, for instance, my dear count, who are so unusually rich and so remarkably economical, will have to be satisfied with my love, for you will never receive from me one single thaler."

So speaking, he nodded to the count, went into the next room, and shut the door behind him. Dumb with astonishment, the courtiers stood staring at one another when the king had left them. Jordan was the first to break the silence. With a sorrowful smile he offered Bielfeld his hand.

"It shall not be said that disappointed hopes brought envy

with them, and made us blind to the good qualities of our friends. Accept my congratulations and be sure that I rejoice from my heart at your good fortune."

Bielfeld looked at him in surprise. "My good fortune? Dear friend, in this fortune there is nothing to envy, and as to my elevation, it is so trivial that one can scarcely see it. The king told me that he destines me for a diplomatic career, but that I need several years of apprenticeship. For this purpose he has selected me to accompany his ambassador, Count Truchess, to Hanover. When I come back from there I am to be promoted. That is but a small beginning. But you, dear Jordan, what important post have you?"

"What am I?" exclaimed Jordan, smiling. "I am not minister nor councillor of state. I am—you will never guess! —I am director of the poor! I am to see that the streets of Berlin are freed from those annoying beggars, who are to be brought into an almshouse which I am to build. Do you envy me, my friends?"

All were silent. All eyes turned now to Wartensleben.

"And you, dear count, are you the happy man?"

"I!" exclaimed the count, half angry, half amused. "I have nothing and shall never have anything. Do you wish to know what the king said to me? He assured me solemnly that I am rich enough, and shall never have a thaler from him."

They all laughed. "Let us confess," said Bielfeld, "that we have been playing a comedy which Molière might have written under the title, 'The Day of the Dupes.' But listen, the king is playing the flute."

Yes, the king was playing the flute. But soon he laid it aside, for his eye rested upon a table covered with letters and papers. He must read and answer them all himself, for no one should work for him. Everything should go out from himself. He would himself be heart and soul of his State. So he had no more time for playing the flute; he must work, for he was king, *i.e.*, first servant and administrator of his people and his land.

He opened the letters, read them, and noted the answer to each on the margin for the secretary to fill out. The work was near its end. The paper with the large seal, which he now opened, should be the last for to-day. It was a letter from the ecclesiastical department, reporting that, by means of the Roman Catholic schools tolerated in Berlin, many inhabitants were being led away from Protestantism. The department, therefore, inquired whether it would not be better to close and abolish the Catholic schools.

A pitying smile played over the king's features as he read this. "And they assert that they all believe in one God!" he said, "and their pastors preach Christian tolerance and Christian love, and know nothing about it. They all have, not God, but the Church before their eyes. Intolerant are they in their hearts. My whole life shall be a struggle with the preachers. They will despise me and call me a heretic; but the Church may be against me forever if only my conscience exonerates me! Now, to begin the war; and what I write now will be a battle-cry sounded in the midst of the pious camp!"

He took his pen and wrote, as an answer to the ecclesiastical department, on the margin of the paper: "All religions must be tolerated, and the secretary of the treasury has but the one point to care for, that none injure another, for in my country each one must be free to be blessed after his own fashion."

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE GARDEN AT MONTBIJOU.

The first days of excitement were over. The young king had retired for a time to the solitude and quiet of Montbijou, while his spouse, still staying in the crown prince's palace in Berlin, awaited with great trepidation her husband's summons to follow him to Charlottenburg. But the young king seemed to have mind and attention for nothing outside his royal duties. He worked and studied uninterruptedly, and even the flute was silent to make way for decrees and rescripts. Berlin had submitted a few days to the requirements of etiquette and worn mourning, hiding its laughing face until the coronation day of the new king. Even the queen dowager dreamed of coming splendors and glories. Sophia Dorothea had too long been an oppressed and trembling wife; she longed to be a queen! Her son would doubtless give her all the power and influence which her husband had refused her. Her son would remember the days of tears, pain, and humiliation which she had endured for his sake, and now, when it was in his power, he must reward them brilliantly. Frederick was not born to rule; he was a poet, a philosopher, an enthusiast, who dreamed Utopian dreams. For him to reign would be burdensome, and the trumpet-blast of his soldiers an inharmonious interruption of his fantasies. But happily his mother was there ready to reign for him, to take upon herself the heavy burden of the kingdom, and work with his ministers while he was perhaps writing poetical epistles to Voltaire. And why should she not be able to rule and make laws? Had there not been women in all countries who had ruled their peoples with honor and glory? Was not England proud of its Elizabeth, Sweden of its Christine, Spain of its Isabella, Russia of its Catharine? had not Prussia Sophia Charlotte, who had held a most important position? Why shoud not Sophia Dorothea achieve the same glory?

So thought the queen as she paced up and down the shady paths of the garden of Montbijou, listening with a proud smile to the flatteries of Manteuffel, who had just brought her the letter of condolence of the Empress of Austria.

"Her majesty, the empress, writes unusually tenderly and lovingly to-day," said the queen, with a smile.

"She has but expressed to-day those feelings which dwell in her heart at all times," said Manteuffel, reverentially.

The queen nodded with a smile and plucked one of the roses, before a group of which they stood. "The houses of Hohenzollern and Hapsburg have never been friends," she said, reflectively. "It seems to be in their natures not to love one another."

"Could not the hatred of the parents be reconciled in the children?" asked Count Manteuffel.

"But we are not the children; we are of the generation of the fathers!" exclaimed the queen, proudly, remembering how her husband had been thwarted and deceived by the House of Austria, and how, upon his death-bed, that husband had enjoined upon his son Frederick the duty of revenging himself upon the House of Austria.

"Pardon, your Majesty, if I venture to contradict you," said Manteuffel, smiling. "If really between the fathers there exists a regrettable feud, the love of the children has reconciled it; for the young king's wife is the niece, and a warmly loved niece, of the Austrian Imperial House."

"She was so when my husband visited the emperor in Bohemia, and it was not found according to etiquette for the emperor to give the King of Prussia his hand. She was so when the court at Vienna scorned all its promises and all our just claims, and refused to give to Prussia that to which Prussia had undeniable hereditary claims."

"But she was not yet so when Austria, by her energetic interference, saved the then crown prince's life; for your

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"But she was not yet so when Austria, by her energetic interference, saved the then crown prince's life; for your

Majesty well knows that this dear life has been threatened."

"It was threatened, but it would have been saved without Austria's help, for at Frederick's side stood his mother, and she was sister to the King of England."

And the queen darted so proudly scornful a glance at the count that he involuntarily cast down his eyes. Sophia Dorothea saw this and smiled; she had had her triumph, now she would be mild and friendly again.

"Let us talk no more of by-gone times," she said. "The death of my husband has cast a veil of mourning over the past for me, and I must turn from it, that my son, the young king, may not constantly see tears in my eyes. Nay, I will now look steadily to the future, for my intuition tells me that for Prussia that future is to be brilliant, glorious, blessed."

"May it be so for all Germany, your Majesty!" exclaimed the count. "To that end the houses of Hohenzollern and Hapsburg must forget old enmity and stand by one another in love and unity."

"Let Hapsburg prove to us first that it will offer us its hand in love and unity," said the queen. "Let it prove its love in deeds, not words."

"Austria is ready to do so; the only question is whether Prussia is ready to take that hand, fastening upon it the ring of love."

The queen turned so suddenly upon him that she caught the diplomatist's sharp, searching glance. "Austria is fabricating marriage plans again," she said, with a bitter laugh. "Not satisfied with this one marriage of the imperial niece, it longs for a repetition of the master-work. But this time, count, there is no prison from which the candidate will wish to save himself at any price, and this time, before deciding, the last courier's arrival will be waited for."

And the queen, dismissing the count with a nod, beckoned the court ladies following her at a distance, and walked with them down one of the avenues. Manteuffel watched her a long time with a serious air, standing as if spell-bound on the spot where she had left him.

"She is prouder and more determined than ever," he murmured. "That is a token that she will gain influence, and is conscious of her importance. What the queen said of the couriers is doubtless a reference to the courier who on the day of the betrothal brought England's assent an hour too late. There are couriers on the road again, and one of

them has surely been sent to England. We must get to work, must have all the streams of our diplomacy in play, and the courier from England must once more come an hour too late."

A loud, merry laugh resounded near him, and a soft, melodious voice said: "No, count, you will never induce me to believe in your love; you are far too blond to be able to love really."

"Blond!" exclaimed a manly voice, in a tone of horror. "Then you do not like blond hair, and I was so proud of mine! But I will have it dyed black. Will you believe in my capacity for loving then?"

The lady laughed another merry laugh that called forth its own reflection upon the face of the listening Manteuffel. "My ally, Madame Brandt!" he whispered. "She comes at the right moment," he said, "and I must interrupt her tender *tête-à-tête* with Count Voss for a moment."

So speaking, he hastened down the avenue from the opposite side of which the voices came, and entered the thick shrubbery through which a gate led into the adjoining avenue, where Madame Brandt was standing with her despairing adorer. Manteuffel approached the pair with a successful expression of pleased surprise, and inquired how his beautiful friend happened to be in the gardens of the queen dowager.

"Her Majesty did me the honor to invite me for a few summer weeks," said Madame Brandt. "She knew that the physician had recommended continued fresh air for my precarious health, and knowing the close bond of friendship which unites me with her lady in waiting, Fräulein von Pannewitz, she was so gracious as to invite me to Montbijou. Now, I have reported, as exactly as if you were my father confessor, the cause of my being here, and it only remains to introduce to you my cavalier. It is Count Voss, a noble knight, sans peur et sans reproche, ready to sacrifice for the lady of his heart, if not quite his life, at least his blond hair."

"Oh! beware, dear Count," said Manteuffel, laughing; "beware lest this jesting beauty really change your blond hair to a very respectable but less beautiful gray. She is witch and diavolezza enough to be able to do that, and I assure you that in the history of my gray hair the beautiful Madame Brandt plays a prominent rôle."

"It must be delightful to have Madame Brandt cause one to turn gray," said the young count with a pathos that made both his listeners laugh. "Whenever I looked at my gray hair

I should think of her, and with every white hair that fell from my beard, the picture of Madame Brandt would arise before my mind." And the young count gazed with delight straight before him, and his smiling lips, murmured unintelligible sounds.

"He is having an attack of his ecstasy," whispered Madame Brandt. "He has a mania for seeming peculiar, and just at present decides to fall in love, like Petrarch, with some Laura. Let him rave on, and let us talk a little of our own business. But be brief, in order that no one surprise us, for you are under suspicion, and the fame of my innocence were tarnished if you were seen in confidential *tête-à-tête* with me."

"First, then, how are our affairs with the young queen?"

"Barometer, rainy and cold; little sunshine, black clouds, an occasional tempest of volcanic passion," replied Madame Brandt.

"In other words, the queen still fears being divorced from her husband?"

"She no longer fears it for the future, for she is already neglected. The king lives at Charlottenburg, and does not invite the queen to himself. As husband he neglects his wife; whether as king he will neglect his queen remains to be discovered, for no one knows it now," said the lady.

"No one—not even Madame Morien?"

"Not even she. The king seems to have forgotten her wholly. Since that unfortunate *quid pro quo* in Rheinsberg his ardor seems suddenly to have cooled down, as it did with every other lady. No more stolen words or lovelorn sighs! But poor Morien cries her pretty eyes red, for since she is neglected, she loves him passionately."

"And that is, unfortunately, not the means to regain possession of this proud heart," said Manteuffel, with a shrug. "With tears and languishing she will but lose her influence and earn contempt. You, a master of coquetry, should train your pretty pupil better. But now comes the most important question. How stands it with Prince Augustus William's marriage with the Princess of Brunswick?"

Madame Brandt sighed. "You are really inexorable! You have no pity for this chaste and noble love!"

"And you none for the diamonds that are longing to rest upon your proud, chaste bosom!" parodied Manteuffel. "No pity for the charming villa you might buy, to enjoy the fresh air in your garden! You will not hear of being the envy of all the court ladies by reason of the costliest cashmere that the looms of the East ever wove!"

"Stop, stop, Count Devil, for you are indeed more devil than man, and lead my poor soul into temptations to which it must succumb. Well, I accept my destiny. I am the snake resting in the bosom of my poor Laura and poisoning her love. Did you but know, dear Count, what remorse I suffer when I hear her chaste confessions! Think of it, Count, these children have never had the courage to confess their love to one another; that Laura has thus far had the cruel strength not to understand the prince's sighs and stolen words, to show him a cold, repellant mien, though she weeps the whole long night through over her own coldness."

"If matters stand so, we must prevent its coming to an open declaration, and all possible influence must be exerted to induce her to end the romance with a heroic act, and remain in the eyes of the prince a martyr of love," said the Count.

"Wherein should the heroic act consist?"

"A marriage," said the count.

"But where shall we find a man to whom this poor lamb can be sacrificed?"

"There stands one," said Manteuffel, pointing to Count Voss, who was still engaged in writing verses in portfolios, apparently oblivious to the rest of the world.

Madame Brandt laughed aloud. "He to marry the beautiful Fräulein von Pannewitz?"

"Is he not seeking a Laura?"

"Yes; but you forget that, for the moment, he regards me as his Laura, and moans and sighs as forlornly as ever Petrarch himself."

"Then you can the more readily induce him to make this sacrifice for you. He will feel himself the more magnanimous if he accepts from you the maiden you assign to be his wife."

"Listen," said Madame Brandt, looking at the count in a sort of terror. "You are to be feared, for you have a heart of steel in your bosom. I believe you do not know the sensation of human pity!"

"There are higher and nobler considerations to which these petty human impulses must be subordinated. When it is a question of assuring peace for all Germany, perhaps all Europe, we cannot consider whether one human heart is broken, one young love buried. To-day you must complete your masterpiece, and, to save time, I leave you. Farewell."

He kissed her hand, and hastened with a light step down the avenue. Madame Brandt approached the young count, who, once more oblivious, was staring at the ground. She

laid her hand lightly upon his shoulder, and whispered, half tenderly, half reproachfully, "Where were you?"

"With you," said the count, trembling and turning pale at her touch—"with you, dearest and noblest of women; with you in all my thoughts, my longings; and as this wearisome, talkative, intrusive person prevented me from communicating to you verbally what I feel, I used the time of his presence to write down for your benefit what I was forced to conceal."

"But you did not reflect," she said, with tender reproach, "that you compromise me, and give this Manteuffel the best opportunity to tell all the world in what confidential relations we stand to one another. Think of taking your slate and writing, without considering the presence of a lady and her escort at your side!"

"True, they will be crying out again that I am a queer fish," said Count Voss, with an idiotic smile.

"But they will add that this queer fish shows Madame Brandt very little respect and veneration, and must, therefore, be upon a very intimate footing. Ah! the fair fame of a woman is so lightly ruined. It is like the wing of a butterfly that a finger-touch mars. And yet we poor women have nothing but our reputation, our untarnished virtue. It is our only shield, the solitary weapon that we possess against the cruelty of men. And yet ye seek to tear it from us, to tread us under your feet, humiliated and dishonored."

"O, God! O my God! you are weeping!" shrieked the count, discovering a pair of very successful tears in her eyes. "You weeping? I must, indeed, be a very great criminal to make you weep!"

"No; a very noble but an incautious man," said Madame Brandt, smiling through her tears. "You betray to the world what no one save God and ourselves may know."

"My Heavens! what do I betray?" cried the poor count, alarmed.

"You betray that we love one another!" whispered Madame Brandt, fixing an ardent look upon him.

"What! You confess that we love one another?" he shouted, beside himself with delight. "You confess that you respond to my passion?"

"I confess it, and so pronounce our separation."

"Never! no, never! No power on earth shall ever separate us!" he cried, covering her hand with kisses.

"Yet there is a power that has a right to do so. This power is my husband. He suspects my feeling for you already, and will be relentless as soon as his suspicion becomes a certainty."

"Then I will challenge him, shoot him down, and lead you in triumph to my castle as my wife."

"But if, unfortunately, my husband should shoot you?"

"Me! if he should shoot me! I had not thought of that," murmured Count Voss, turning pale. "That would be a most unfortunate accident. Let us, rather, not put fortune to the test. Let us discover some other means. Let us elope!"

She shook her head, smiling sorrowfully. "The king's arm is long, and my husband's desire for revenge would pursue us everywhere."

"But what shall we do?" cried the count, in despair. "We love one another, and are doomed to pine away. Must I, then, really suffer the fate of Petrarch? Is my whole life to be one long song of grief? Is there no means of changing that?"

Madame Brandt laid her hand upon his with tender pressure. "There is one means," she whispered, "a means by which not my husband alone, but the whole world, may be deceived; a means by which we can so drape and conceal our love as to shield us from the malice and slander of all the world."

"Tell me this means!" he cried, passionately. "Tell me, and, however hard it be, should I be forced to purchase it with half my fortune, I will do all if I can but purchase my beloved."

She bent her head nearer to his, and utterly bewitching him with her tender gaze, she whispered, "You must marry, dear count!"

He uttered a cry and stepped back from her in horror.

"I must marry? You wish it so? And you say that you love me!"

"Because I love you, dearest, and because your marriage would rend asunder the bond of etiquette that now separates us. You must marry a lady of my acquaintance, then no one, not even my husband, will find it strange that we are upon terms of confidential friendship, and under the cloak of that friendship our love may revel at will."

"Yes, I see it all; there is no other way," sighed the count. "If I were but married!"

"Oh! you thankless, faithless man!" cried Madame Brandt, with an assumption of indignation. "Already you long for the young wife in whose arms I shall be speedily forgotten."

"You know very well that I long for my marriage only because it will bring me nearer you!"

"Prove that by a promise to marry without objection the lady I shall select!"

"I swear it!" said the count.

"You swear to marry no other than the one I select?"

"I swear it!" he repeated.

"Upon your word of honor?"

"Upon my word of honor and my ancient arms. Show me the lady whom I am to marry, and I'll do it if I must defy the whole world."

"And if she should unfortunately not love you?" asked Madame Brandt.

"What concern is that of mine? Do I love her? Do I not marry her to be nearer you?"

"Ah, my friend!" exclaimed Madame Brandt, with delight, "I see now that our understanding is complete. Come, let me show you the bride I destine for you!"

She laid her arm in his and drew him away with her. Her eye flashed with a wild, defiant gleam, and with self-scornful pleasure she said to herself: "I shall give the beautiful Laura a rich count, and for this traffic in human souls I shall earn diamonds and cashmeres, and the gratitude of an empress."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE QUEEN'S MAID OF HONOR.

Meanwhile, Queen Sophia Dorothea had left the garden after her conversation with Manteuffel and withdrawn to her apartment, dismissing her ladies-in-waiting for several hours, and commanding that no one be admitted to her. She wished to arrange her plans undisturbed; for she felt that Austria was again scheming to thwart her favorite project of an English marriage for her children.

The ladies-in-waiting were therefore free to follow their own inclinations for a few hours.

Laura von Pannewitz had declined to participate in the drive undertaken by the other ladies. She longed for solitude and quiet. It was a rare and delightful pleasure for her to be alone with her own thoughts.

The prince had written to her yesterday, and she had had the cruel courage to send back his letter unopened. But in doing so she had pressed the paper to her lips with bitter tears, and had then sunk upon her knees to beseech God to give her

strength to renounce this love. Since then a whole day had passed, and she had not seen him. Certainly he must be deeply grieved, and he had doubtless omitted, because he was angry with her and would not see her, the morning call he had never before failed to make upon his royal mother.

Now the time for his daily call had passed, the queen had retired to her work-room and forbidden all visitors. So Laura dared not hope to see her lover to-day. As she thought of that a wild despair seized her, and she fled to her friend Madame Brandt. But the friend was not in her room. They said she had gone into the garden; Laura took her hat and shawl and followed. She hastened into the thick shrubbery, sought the loneliest, quietest spot, in which to dream of him whose picture dwelt ever before her eyes. Then she entered the greenhouse that bounded the lower end of the garden, transformed by Queen Sophia Dorothea into a charming salon reserved exclusively for her majesty and her ladies.

Laura seated herself upon a couch surrounded by growing myrtle, and leaning her head upon the trunk of a century-old laurel, closed her eyes. Deep stillness reigned about her. Suddenly light, cautious steps became audible, and a human figure appeared at the entrance of the artificial grotto. Shyly and cautiously he leaned his head forward, spying inquisitively in the direction of the young girl resting upon the laurel trunk.

It was Fritz Wendel, the Rheinsberg gardener. The queen had desired her greenhouses and gardens arranged after the model of those at Rheinsberg, and at the young king's command several of the most skilful gardeners had been sent thence to Berlin to undertake the arrangement of the gardens of Montbijou. Fritz Wendel was among them. Fortune had favored him again, and placed him in the presence of her whom he loved. For little Fräulein von Schwerin was not only the favorite of Queen Elizabeth: Queen Sophia Dorothea also cherished a heart-felt affection for the pert, spoiled child, apparently so innocent and unreserved, whose fresh laugh now and then interrupted the tedium of court etiquette, and brought a little life and movement into the stiff forms of life at court. Moreover, her thoughtless behavior at Rheinsberg had cost her in some degree the favor of the young royal couple. Queen Elizabeth could never quite forget that it was through Louise she had learned the name of her happy rival; and the prince was secretly displeased that through her the secret of his letter to Madame Morien had been divulged.

So Fräulein von Schwerin was less in the presence of Queen

Elizabeth, while Queen Sophia Dorothea kept her whole days at a time, delighting in her childish ways and the teasing jests with which she reduced the stiff and serious cavaliers and ladies of the court to the verge of despair. And the little maid of honor came gladly to the queen-dowager; for Montbijou offered her an especial charm since the handsome gardener, Fritz Wendel, had been installed there.

Fritz Wendel had been arranging plants and flowers, as he did every morning at that hour, in the forcing-house especially intrusted to him. In the midst of his work he had been disturbed by the entrance of the maid of honor, and had fled into the grotto to wait until she should leave the house. From his retreat behind tall, thick Indian plants he commanded Laura's seat, and seeing that she had fallen asleep, he tried stealthily to escape from his hiding-place.

"Ah! if that were *she*," he murmured; "if that were *she*, I should not go away so quietly. I should take courage to sink at her feet, close her in my arms, and press my lips to hers to prevent her crying out. But this one," he continued, almost scornfully, "is as little like her as——"

Suddenly he subsided and retreated toward the grotto, hiding anew behind the Indian plants. In the door of the greenhouse there stood a young man looking inquiringly about. He was tall, and the uniform of an officer of the Guard which he wore set off the advantages of his slender, elastic figure. The star on his breast and mourning on his sleeve marked a member of the royal family. His noble face wore an expression of gentleness almost maidenly, though his high brow revealed intellect and determination. It was Prince Augustus William, the dead king's favorite, for whose sake his elder brother Frederick had had so much to suffer, because King Frederick William had selected Augustus William for his successor, and wished to place him upon the throne in the place of Frederick, the first-born. But Augustus William desired no throne and none of the greatness of this world.

He had come to make his customary call upon his mother, but learning of her command to let no one disturb her, had declined to have an exception made in his favor. His lover's instinct had led him to the greenhouse in which Laura von Pannewitz was sleeping. He had no knowledge of her presence there, and it was therefore not she whom he sought as he glanced searchingly about the greenhouse. He only wished to know that he was alone and unobserved. But suddenly he started, and a scarlet blush took possession of his face. He had discovered the sleeping beauty among the myrtles. In the first storm of delight he wished to rush to her, sink at her feet, awaken her with his kisses. But he paused half-way, and stood hesitating and undecided, deep melancholy expressed in all his features.

"She will not welcome me," he murmured—"she will repel me as she returned my letter yesterday."

He bowed his head, sighing deeply.

"But I love her, and at least I will look at her and worship her as the Catholics do the Virgin." And he stepped rapidly forward.

"By heaven," murmured Fritz Wendel, in his hiding-place, "I'm curious to know what the prince has to say to the sleeping maid of honor, and yet I would give a year of my life to get out of this unseen, for if the prince discovers me, I am lost."

He crouched deeper in his hiding-place, but kept the myrtles well in view despite his fear.

CHAPTER XIX.

PRINCE AUGUSTUS WILLIAM.

The prince had now approached the myrtles, and with bated breath and joyful glance was gazing at his beloved. Then cautiously approaching her, he knelt before her.

"Madonna—my madonna—let me pray to thee, let me gaze at thee," he whispered.

Laura moved in her sleep and murmured some inaudible words. These could not be happy dreams. Laura moaned and sighed in her sleep, uttered some words of grief, and her face assumed an expression of such pain and sorrow that tears stood in the prince's eyes.

"She suffers, too," he whispered. "But why? Who can the blessed unfortunate be for whom Laura sighs?"

Suddenly she opened her eyes and arose. Her astonished, still half-dreaming gaze rested upon the prince kneeling before her, gazing at her beseechingly.

"Am I still dreaming?" she whispered, passing her hand over her brow and brushing her long brown curls aside as though they interrupted her vision.

"Yes, thou art dreaming, madonna—thou art dreaming. Let me, too, dream and in my dream be blessed. Oh, let us both dream one blessed moment more!"

But she drew away her hand and arose angrily from her seat. Tall and proud she stood before him, her eyes flashing reproaches at the prince kneeling before her.

"Arise, my prince," she said, earnestly. "It is not fitting that the brother of the king should kneel before me. And it is not fitting that I should see the son of the queen whose poor maid of honor I am kneeling before me. Arise and tell me to what circumstance is due the strange and unsought pleasure of your Royal Highness seeking me here. Doubtless the queen requested my presence, and your Royal Highness graciously undertook to summon the recreant servant of the queen. Let me hasten to my mistress."

And Laura, feeling her over-strained strength giving way, and experiencing difficulty in restraining the swelling tears, wished to pass the prince and hasten thence. But he detained her. The timidity which at other times made him shy and silent had left him now. He felt that he was facing his fate —that the decision of all his future lay in this present hour.

"No!" he said, firmly, "the queen has not called you, and does not need you. Stay here and grant me one moment of your presence."

His solemn tone and determined aspect made her tremble, and yet delighted her. Her maidenly heart bowed in humility before this man standing angry and commanding before her. She had always seen him humble, pleading, obedient to her will. Now his face was stern, his voice imperious, and she who had withstood the beseeching lover had no courage with which to repel the angry, imperious man.

"Stay," he continued; "resume your place, and let me speak to you for the first time truly and frankly."

Laura sat down in trembling obedience. The prince stood looking at her with a sorrowful smile.

"You sent back my letter unopened yesterday, but now you shall hear me, Laura. I will have it so."

Laura trembled and turned pale. She felt that if at that moment he had commanded her to abandon everything, to tread underfoot her honor and good name, her innocence, maidenhood, and stainless conscience, she would have obeyed his command, and, his true and humble slave, have loved and served him her whole life long.

"Yes, you shall hear me," he continued. "I will have my fate decided—will know whether you really hate me, really despise this pure, worshipful love that I bring you from the depths of my heart. I will know whether your noble, beautiful self is really without pity for my sufferings and my struggles. Why do you avoid me? This I will now know! Is it because you hold me unworthy of your love, feel no affection for me? If this is so—if my love has no power to awaken your heart—be silent, and let me go hence. I will try to bear my fate, or to die. But if this is not the reason of your coldness to me—if it is only the idle prejudices of rank and birth which separate you from me—if you turn from me only because I have the misfortune to be the brother of your king—because the world, with its prejudices and its laws, stands between us, then, Laura, I entreat you, speak! Then, say but one word of comfort and hope, and I will conquer the whole world, crush all prejudices and laws. I will be strong and great as Hercules to level and purify the way our love shall take. To the whole world will I show you as my betrothed, and before God and my king call you my wife. But if not, if you cast me from you because you do not love me, then be silent, and I will go."

A long, painful stillness began. The prince watched with an anxious, suffering face the young girl who, pale and trembling, sat with bowed head before him.

"It is decided, then," he sighed, after a long pause. "Farewell, Fräulein—I accept my fate. You have spoken my sentence—may your heart never accuse you of cruelty and rashness!"

He bowed low before her, turned, and went slowly through the room. He stood at the door. Once more he turned and their eyes met. A shudder ran through her whole figure, and no longer master of herself, forgetting all but him, she stretched her arms toward him, whispering his name.

With a cry of delight the prince sprang to her side, closed her in his arms, pressed her to his heart, and, her face bathed in tears, she whispered: "God sees my heart, he knows how long I have struggled and battled. May he be more merciful than mankind! They will all condemn and reject me. Let them do so! I shall remember this hour and be happy!"

"Thou lovest me, then?" he asked, releasing her in order to be able to look at her. "Thou lovest me?"

"Yes!" she replied, firmly. "I love thee, and in saying that I take my fate in my hands and bow my head to pass under the yoke of shame."

"No one shall scorn thee!" he answered, proudly. "From this hour thou art my betrothed, and I shall one day present thee to the whole world as my wife."

She shook her head with a sad smile. "Let us not think of the future now," she said. "It may be sad and full of suffer-

ing. I shall not complain. I take up my cross, and as I do it, I hold myself blessed, and thank God!"

He kissed the tears from her eyes and whispered in her ear sweet and holy vows of love and faithfulness. She drank in his words with a happy smile. But suddenly Laura started, and raised her head from his breast to listen.

The sound of trumpets filled the air, and the roll of wheels was approaching.

"The king," cried the young girl, turning pale.

"The king!" murmured Prince Augustus, sadly, not daring to hold the young girl longer in his arms.

They had been awakened from their brief dream of happiness. They remembered the world once more, and the people among whom they were living.

"I must go to the queen!" said Laura, rising. "Her majesty will need me."

"And I must go to meet his majesty!" sighed the prince. "But hurry, hurry—let us take different paths to the castle."

He pressed her hand to his lips: "Farewell, my love, my betrothed, have faith in me and be strong and cheery in hope and love."

"Farewell!" she panted, and tried to hasten past him.

But he held her back once more. "Laura, shall we meet here again? Ah! do not bow thy head and blush. Thy dear confession has made of this room a temple of love, and only with pure and holy thoughts will I approach thee here!"

"We shall meet again here," she said. "Every day at this same hour I shall await thee here. But now hasten, hasten!"

They left the house and hastened by different paths to the castle. The flower-room was again lonely and desolate, but only for a short time. Then Fritz Wendel stole from the grotto with flaming cheeks and glowing eyes.

"That is a proud secret that I have discovered—a secret that shall bear me golden fruit with *her!* Louise von Schwerin is not farther removed from the poor gardener Fritz Wendel than Fräulein von Pannewitz from Prince William. And who knows whether it is not a greater shame to be the beloved of a prince than of a gardener! The gardener may work up and become a Freiherr, like the father of Fräulein von Schwerin, but never can Fräulein von Pannewitz be a princess and the wife of her beloved! So Fräulein von Schwerin shall no longer be ashamed of loving the poor gardener Fritz Wendel. I will tell her what I have seen here, will lead her to the grotto to see the rendezvous between the prince and his beloved, and

while the prince tells his Laura of his love I'll be with my Louise alone in the dusk, and then——"

A fiery flush spread over his face, and the breath came panting from his breast. Fleeing before his own wild, stormy thoughts, Fritz Wendel took his way into the garden.

CHAPTER XX.

THE KING AND THE SON.

Laura had not been mistaken. It was the king whose approaching wagon the castle guard of Montbijou had saluted with a trumpet-blast. He came to make the first visit to his mother in Montbijou. He came unannounced, and the perplexed and anxious faces of the courtiers who advanced to meet him told him that his unexpected appearance aroused perhaps more confusion and alarm than pleasure. With a friendly smile he turned to his companion, Pöllnitz, saying:

"Go to her majesty and say to her that her son Frederick awaits her in the gartensalon; but that he has time to await her majesty's convenience."

He beckoned his second cavalier, Count Kaiserling, and, followed by the queen's cavaliers, entered the gartensalon.

Queen Sophia Dorothea received the king's message with a proud and glowing smile. Her fondest hopes were about to be fulfilled. The young king was still the submissive, obedient son. The son alone, not the king, had come to her; he had disrobed himself of his mantle of royalty; without state and without formality the king had come to her, humbly to await her appearance, as though he were her petitioner. At last she was to be queen, not in name alone, but in deed and in fact. Her son was King of Prussia, and she regent of her son. And her whole court should witness this first meeting—should see her triumph, and carry the report thereof from house to house.

So she would not accept this tender request of the king. He had come to her without ceremony, as her son; but she would receive him in full splendor and with exact etiquette, as is fitting for a queen. She called her ladies-in-waiting, and was arrayed in a long black dress with a sweeping train, and even fastened diamonds in the black veil. Then she had the princesses and all the ladies present at court

ing. I shall not complain. I take up my cross, and as I do it, I hold myself blessed, and thank God!"

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So she would not accept this tender request of the king. He had come to her without ceremony, as her son; but she would receive him in full splendor and with exact etiquette, as is fitting for a queen. She called her ladies-in-waiting, and was arrayed in a long black dress with a sweeping train, and even fastened diamonds in the black veil. Then she had the princesses and all the ladies present at court

called, and was a little vexed that, except the princesses, Fräulein von Pannewitz alone must form her retinue, because the maids of honor had not yet returned from their promenade, and the two cavaliers were already with the king in the gartensalon.

At last all the preparations were finished, and Baron von Pöllnitz leading the way, the queen traversed the halls to enter the gartensalon.

The king stood at the window, drumming impatiently on the pane with his long, slender fingers. He thought that his mother showed little impatience to see the son who had hastened in the warmth of a child's love to greet her. He began to speculate as to the motives which could induce her to act in this way, and had already fathomed her intention, when the door opened with a noise, and the master of ceremonies announced, with a solemn voice, "Her majesty, the queen-dowager."

A slight, scornful smile played for a moment over Frederick's lips as he saw his mother enter in brilliant court array; but it vanished again, and he strode toward her with reverent aspect, hat in hand and head bowed.

Sophia Dorothea received him with a gracious smile, and reached him her diamond-clad hand, which he reverently placed to his lips.

"I bid your Majesty welcome!" she said, with trembling voice, for it hurt her to the heart to be obliged to call her son "Your Majesty."

Perhaps the king guessed her feeling. With a sweet smile he looked up to her. "Call me your son, mother, for to your Majesty I will never be anything else than your obedient and grateful son!"

"Then welcome, my son!" she cried, with an undisguised expression of delight, laying her arms about his neck and kissing his brow. "Welcome to the modest house of a poor, sad widow!"

"I hope, mother, that you may feel yourself not only a sorrowful widow, but as the imperious ruler and mother of a king," said Frederick, tenderly. "I wish, therefore, that your Majesty be not continually reminded of the past, not constantly led to think of the great loss you have suffered, and which God has unalterably visited upon us. Your Majesty is not alone a widowed queen; belongs not to the past alone, but yet more to the present. I beg you, therefore, to permit us to call you henceforward, not the queen-dowager, but the queen-mother. You, Master of Ceremonies Von Pöllnitz, have care that the court learn my will, and act accordingly."

The queen had for a moment lost her solemn mien. She was really touched, really thankful. The king's tender attention had touched her mother-heart, and love silenced, for the moment, her imperious wishes.

"Ah, my son, you know how to dry tears, and change the mourning widow into a proud and happy mother," said Sophia Dorothea, offering him both her hands, with a warm expression of love.

The king was so happy at the pure and undissembled tenderness of his mother that he was ready to gratify her every wish, her every whim.

"Oh," he said, "you have not me, but I you, to thank for your so ready acceptance of my wishes. I too will tax your royal patience further and explain still other desires to you."

"Do but tell me your wishes, my son," said the queen; "but first grant me one request: let us be seated"

The king took her hand, and led her to an arm-chair placed by a window that afforded the loveliest outlook over the garden The queen seated herself; the young king sat with bowed head, holding his hat in his hand, before her. Sophia Dorothea noticed this, and the new triumph delighted her heart still further. She cast a hasty glance at the two princesses, who had withdrawn with Prince William to the next window-niche and were watching in astonishment this scene that contrasted so strangely with the harsh, paternal rudeness to which the royal family had hitherto been accustomed. Sophia Dorothea read these thoughts and this astonishment in the frank faces of her children, and found a reflection of the same emotion upon the faces of the cavaliers. Even that of the much-experienced courtier Pöllnitz betrayed a little of his surprise, and possibly of his anger, for a cloud rested upon his brow, and his eyes were dark and sullen.

The queen turned to her son.

"I pray you let me know what you call your wishes," she said, "but which I shall receive as your commands, and with great pleasure."

"I wish that your Majesty may have the grace to surround herself with a larger and more brilliant court; for the Queen Mother two ladies in waiting are by no means enough; for if by accident one should be ill, and the other ill-tempered, your Majesty would have no one to amuse you. I wished,

therefore, to propose that your Majesty, instead of two maids of honor, should surround yourself with six."

The queen looked at her son in tender astonishment.

"My son, you are, indeed, a magician, for you guess all my wishes. I thank you from my heart. But, your Majesty," she continued, apparently observing for the first time that the king still held his hat, and stood bowing his head before her; "your Majesty has still not seated himself."

"Madame," said the king, smiling, "I was waiting for your permission." He took a chair and seated himself at the queen's left. "You accept my proposition then, Mother?"

"I accept it, and beg you to name the ladies whom your Majesty appoints maids of honor."

"Not at all, your Majesty must make her own free choice, and as soon as you have decided I only beg you to let me know."

"I only fear that I shall be greatly cramped in Montbijou with my increased court, and shall scarcely be able to give each lady her own room."

"Your Majesty must not live much longer in this house," answered the king, smiling. "It is large enough for a passing sojourn, but not sufficient for the residence of the Queen Mother. I have therefore conferred with Knobelsdorf, and he is already sketching a plan according to my suggestions, for a handsome and comfortable palace for your Majesty; and I think work can be begun upon the construction of it next week."

The queen blushed with pleasure. All her wishes seemed destined to be fulfilled to-day. The only question now was whether the greatest of all of them should be fulfilled, whether Sophia Dorothea was to be, not queen mother only, but queen regent, too.

She reached both hands to her son, and thanked him tenderly for this new proof of his love and devotion.

"And I ought, perhaps, to decline your kind proposition," she continued, sighing. "The death of my spouse should remind me of the brevity and transitoriness of human life. And is it not challenging fate, to build for me a great and stately mansion, while death is perhaps fashioning a small and simple chamber that may be earlier finished than the great palace which human hands alone can fashion?"

The king looked at her with such alarm that she almost regretted having given the conversation this direction.

"It is cruel, Mother," he said, tenderly, "not to let me enjoy the pleasure of seeing you without this touch of wormwood. But I see in your rosy cheeks and cheery smile that you are only worrying me a little. Let the builders get to work; God will be merciful to me and spare me the noblest and most beloved of mothers."

He kissed the queen's hand and arose. Sophia Dorothea was horrified. He was about to leave her, and she had not ascertained how far her influence reached, and where its boundaries were to be found.

"Will you leave me already, my son?" she asked, tenderly.

"I must, your Majesty, for I hear the engine of government creaking and groaning, and I must hasten to oil it and set it in motion once more. Ah! madame, it is, indeed, no slight task to be king. One must arise early and retire late to perform all his duties, and I truly think it is much pleasanter to be ruled than to have to reign."

The queen scarcely succeeded in suppressing a joyous smile. "I am sure it must be a difficult task," she said; "but I think the king, too, has a right to quiet and recreation. And I think, further, that a mother has some claims upon her son, though that son be a king. You must not leave me yet, my son. You must at least grant me the pleasure of a walk in the garden to survey the new greenhouse. Give me your arm and grant my request."

"Madame, you see what power you possess over me," said Frederick, smiling and offering her his arm. "I forget that I am the servant of my country, because I would fain be yet more the servant of my queen."

The great glass door of the salon opened and, leaning upon his arm, the queen went down the terrace into the garden with him. At a slight distance the princesses, their brothers, and the ladies and gentlemen of the royal company followed them. All were silent, listening intently to the conversation of the royal pair. But the queen no longer desired to be heard and understood by her court. The court had seen her triumph, but it should not see her possible defeat. She therefore spoke softly, and hastened her steps to be a little farther removed from the listening ears of the ladies and gentlemen. She chatted with the king about the new parts of the garden, and then asked whether he proposed to go to Rheinsberg for the summer.

"Unfortunately, I cannot spare the time," he said, with a shrug. "A king is, after all, nothing more than the first employé of his state, and as I accept my salary, I must perform my duties faithfully."

"But I think your Majesty takes it a little too seriously

with your duties," said the queen, with a smile. "You ought to grant yourself more leisure, and not take all the business of reigning upon your own shoulders. One accustomed to dwelling among poets and artists, in an atmosphere of science, must find it difficult to bury himself among acts and documents and rescripts, and the rest of the dusty things. You should leave that to others at times, and not manage the engine of state yourself, but only guide and direct it according to your will."

"Madame," said the king, with a subtile smile, "that engine has its own peculiarities and secrets which its builder may not confide to any employé. Hence he must himself manage and order all, and then he has only himself to thank if the wheels sometimes creak and the machine is not always in full swing."

"But you have your ministers."

"My ministers are my clerks, nothing more."

"Ah! I see you will be a rock, accepting counsel from none," cried the queen, almost impatiently.

"From you always, your Majesty, and if you permit I would at this moment beg your gracious counsel."

The queen's face beamed with pleasure. Frederick saw this, and an almost imperceptible smile flitted over his face.

"Speak, my son," she said, in breathless expectation.

"I wished to ask your advice with reference to the theatre and also as to the location which you find most appropriate for an opera-house."

The pleasure died out of the queen's face and her brow darkened. "I am no fitting counsellor for amusements," she said, pointing to her black robes. "My mourning garb is little suited for such service, and you well know that I can have no pleasure in the theatre after the many cold and wearisome evenings I have sighed through there."

"O madame, it is no question of a German theatre," said the king. "I understand and share fully your aversion to that. No, we will erect a French theatre and an Italian opera, for the French alone know how to play comedy and the Italians to sing. But to create music—that the Germans understand, and so I have assigned to Graun the task of composing an opera with which to inaugurate the new opera-house."

"And this inauguration will surely take place upon some very important occasion—perhaps at the marriage of some member of the family?"

"Ah! your Majesty is thinking of a marriage?" asked the king, lightly.

"Not I, but others seem to be thinking of it. Yesterday I received a letter from my royal brother in London, and Count Manteuffel has just been here and brought me a letter of condolence from the empress of Austria. But the count seemed to have been charged to question me as to the possible marriage of Prince Augustus."

"It were most presumptuous of the count to burden you with matters which happily lie beyond the domain of maternal duties," said the king, "For the marriage of royal princes and princesses is, unfortunately, merely a question of politics, and belongs, therefore, not before the forum of the mother's heart, but before the king."

The queen bit her lip until it bled. "Your Majesty has doubtless thought of this duty and selected a bride for the prince," she said, sharply.

"Pardon," he laughed; "in this question I have not pondered how marriages can be arranged, but how they may be undone."

Sophia Dorothea looked at the king in horror and astonishment.

"My son, are you thinking of a divorce?" she asked, trembling.

"Not of one, but of a great many, mother. I have, as your Majesty doubtless knows, within a few days abolished the torture."

"No," said the queen, impatiently; "I know nothing of it. Politics do not concern me."

"That is wholly appropriate to the noble and truly womanly character of my mother," said the king, smiling. "There is, indeed, nothing more tasteless and tedious than a woman who, instead of giving herself up to the Muses and Graces, insists upon making friends with the capricious old hag, Politics."

"And yet your Majesty, quite unprovoked, just now began to make me acquainted with that tedious personage."

"True, I mentioned to your Majesty that I had abolished the torture," said the king.

"And I ask, does that concern me?"

"Your Majesty wished to know how far I have busied myself in these days with marriage and divorce. I tell you that I have abolished torture, and in doing so naturally busied myself a little with marriage; for your Majesty will admit that there is no harder torture than an unhappy marriage."

"According to that you abolished marriage along with the torture?" asked the queen, horrified.

The king laughed. "Not quite. I am not the Pope, and have, therefore, not received direct from God the right to determine the consciences of men, though perhaps the majority of mankind might incline to bless me if I could really abolish the whole torture of marriage. At least, I have taken care that the claims of marriage, when they cease to be garlands of roses and turn into burdens of steel, can be relaxed. I have facilitated divorce and commanded that when a married couple absolutely cannot live together, divorce shall not be refused them. I hope my royal mother will agree with me."

"Ah! We shall see a great many divorces in the near future," said the queen, with a scornful smile. "Everyone will hasten to do the will of the king, and dissolve his marriage if it be not wholly happy. Who knows whether the king may not be first to set his people a good example!"

"God granting it, he will," said Frederick, earnestly. "His noble mother will certainly always incite him to give his people a good example. The happiness of his people he will always set above his own advantage, and will ever subordinate his own desires. For a prince, far from being the uncontrolled ruler of his people, is but their first servant."

"That is, indeed, a very humble and modest view of a king by the grace of God."

"I do not demand to be a king by the grace of God. I prefer to be king by my own right and my own power. But pardon, mother, you see the hag, Politics, is such an intrusive, talkative, conceited creature that she mixes herself up in everything, even in this long-wished-for *tête à tête* between my royal mother and her dutiful son. Let us leave politics. Your Majesty spoke, I think, of the possible marriage of princes and princesses."

"We spoke first of the marriage of Prince Augustus William," said the queen, who, with the obstinacy of a true woman, kept coming back to her point. "I told you that I received a letter yesterday from my royal brother in London, and that King George the Second greatly inclines to a union of our children."

"Another marriage with England!" said the king, with a melancholy smile. "But you well know, madame, that we have no good-fortune with English marriages. The couriers who bring the consent of England always come too late."

The queen turned pale and stood as though petrified with horror.

"That means that your Majesty has already determined

the bestowal of my son's hand, and that once more my heart's wish—the union of my children with the royal house of England—is not to be fulfilled. Your father's example must, indeed, have made a deep impression, that you so hasten to follow it."

"I find that the king was wholly right and wise in not regarding the wish of his heart and his family in the marriage of the crown prince, but solely the interests and considerations which the policy of the State imposed upon him. I shall, indeed, follow the example of my father, and in the marriage of the crown prince consult neither my own heart nor that of my royal mother, but solely the policy of the State."

"But Prince Augustus William is not crown prince," cried the queen, whose lips trembled, and on whose brow dark clouds rested. "The prince is but your brother, and you may have many sons to contest the succession to the throne."

The king shook his head and an expression of deep sorrow rested like a veil upon his clear and noble face.

"No, madame, I shall never have children," he said, almost solemnly; "and Prince Augustus William will be my heir."

The queen could not summon courage to answer him. She looked offendedly at him. Their glance met, and the sad expression of the usually clear eyes awakened her mother-heart. With a quick motion she reached him both her hands, and pressing them passionately, exclaimed:

"Oh! my son, how poor is life! You are young, beautiful, and highly gifted; you are king, and still you are not happy."

The king's face had quickly cleared.

"I, too, do not hold this life a blessing, but a duty, and if we faithfully perform that duty we can at last be happy. But now we have reached your house again, and now, your Majesty, it is high time for me to return to my prison, and become king once more."

He kissed his mother's hand tenderly, and took leave of his sisters and the prince with a friendly jest. Then beckoning his cavaliers he left the *salon*. Queen Sophia Dorothea walked up and down the veranda, lost in thought. Princess Ulrica, her favorite daughter, ventured to interrupt and join her.

"How is this?" she asked. "Your Majesty looks so sad and grave, and has such reason for being happy. The king was amazingly kind and friendly. Think! you are to have six ladies in waiting and a beautiful new palace of your own!"

"Ah! yes," said the queen, reflectively; "one is surrounded with much outward splendor."

"And how considerate the crown prince is to make you forget the whole past," said Princess Amalie, who had now come out with Prince Augustus. "You are not the Queen Dowager, but the Queen Mother."

"Yes," answered Sophia Dorothea to herself, "I am the queen mother; but even as mother I shall never be queen. Oh! my children!" she exclaimed, passionately, "the king, your brother, is right. Princes are not born to be happy. He is not happy, and you will not be."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE QUEEN'S COURT TAILOR.

A DREARY silence had been prevailing for some time in the usually cheery family of the worthy tailor Pricker. No one ventured to speak a loud word or to laugh, for Pricker, the head and crown of the house, was low-spirited and ill-tempered, and the storm-clouds that rested upon his brow found near relatives of their own in possession of the faces of his wife and both his children, the pretty Anna and her usually jolly brother, William.

Even the help in the workshop were seized with the general discomfiture and looked crabbed enough. The shrill, merry song of the apprentices had subsided into silence, and both pretty maids went silent and cross about their daily work.

A tempest lowered over the house, and everything seemed anxiously to await its descent. When William, the son and heir of the house, returned from his promenades and amusements to the paternal mansion, he first hastened with an anxious expression to the living-room of his mother, and casting a questioning look at the old lady sitting with troubled mien upon the sofa, asked her mysteriously, "Not yet?" and Mother Pricker, sighing, shook her head and answered, "Not yet, not yet!"

When the pretty Anna, usually so happy to linger in her elegant room, painting or singing, heard the house door-bell ring and the tread of a stranger, she flew to her mother and asked, "Has it come?" And again Madame Pricker, sighing, shook her head, and answered, "Not yet!"

Father Pricker alone asked not and sought not. Silent

and proud he sat in the circle of his family; with stoic quiet he heard the ringing of the door-bell, saw strangers enter his office, his work-room. Too proud to betray excitement or anxiety he wrapped himself in Olympic silence, barricaded himself from the questions of his children behind the secure defence of paternal authority.

"But I cannot help seeing that he suffers," said Madame Pricker, with a sigh to her daughter Anna. "I see that he eats less daily and grows steadily paler. If this tension lasts much longer, my poor husband will finally get a dangerous illness and the king will be to blame for the death of the best and noblest of his subjects."

"But why does our father attach such importance to this trifle?" said Anna, with a superior shrug.

Her mother looked at her in amazement.

"You call that a trifle! It is a question of the honor, not of your father alone, but of your whole family. It is a question of the fame and reputation which the family Pricker has enjoyed for a century in Berlin. It is a question whether your father shall be deprived, without rhyme or reason, of his honors and titles, or whether justice shall be done him, and his services acknowledged."

Anna broke out into a loud laugh.

"Dearest mother, you take the matter far too tragically," she said, "and out of a gnat you make a camel. It is not a question of all the great and glorious things you have been counting up, but simply and only of a title. The great question is this, will our father receive the title, 'Court Tailor to the reigning Queen,' or must he content himself with being 'Court Tailor to the Queen Dowager?' It seems to me that that is a very trifling distinction, and I, for my part, do not comprehend why so much importance is attached to it."

"You do not comprehend that you have no family feeling, no sense of the honor of your house," sighed her mother.

"Ah, bah! It is a very poor and very doubtful honor to be the daughter of a tailor, even if the same be court tailor of one queen or a pair of them," said Anna, crossly. "Our father is rich enough to live comfortably without this miserable trade. He has given his children the education fitted to distinguished and aristocratic families; has kept a governess and music-teacher for me, a tutor for William, so that the lad need not be much in the streets, fearing his slender figure might tempt the recruiting officers. He has furnished our rooms with every luxury, and awakened the envy of all our friends. Why has he done this, if he nevertheless means to

condemn us to remain the children of a tailor? Why does he not take the sign from the door—this sign that forever remains a humiliation, even if it does stand printed thereon that father is the court tailor? That title does not make us presentable at court; and no aristocrat ever thinks of marrying a tailor's daughter, while enough of them might wish to do so if our father did but give up his trade, buy a country place, and live upon his own estate as a wealthy and distinguished man."

"Child, child! what are you saying?" cried Mother Pricker, aghast. "Your father give up his standing, his honorable standing, that has been hereditary in the family more than a hundred years? Your father so far dishonor himself as to buy with his hard-earned money some poor cavalier for a son-in-law, who might, perhaps, think wonders of the honor he was doing us in taking you as an appendage to the sixty thousand thalers? Your father buy a country place to eat up in idleness what he and his fathers have got together in centuries? Never will that happen, never will your father give his consent to the marriage of his daughter other than to an honorable citizen, and never will he permit your brother William to become anything else than that which his father, his grandfather, his great-grandfather, and all his ancestors have been—namely, court tailors."

The pretty Anna stamped her foot angrily, and her cheek flushed. "I will never marry a tradesman," she said, throwing her head back angrily, "and never will William submit to carry on the business of his father."

"Then your father will disinherit you both, and you can go away to beg your bread," said the old woman, wringing her hands.

"We do not need to beg, thank God! to get our bread," cried Anna, proudly; "we have both learned enough to come honorably through the world, and, if everything else should fail, I have a capital in my voice, which alone assures me a brilliant future. The young king is planning to arrange an opera, and female voices are such rarities that they will thank God if I accept a place."

"Oh! unhappy, unhappy child!" whined Madame Pricker. "She will disgrace her family, plunge us all into ruin, bring our honorable name into the theatre-bills to be placarded everywhere!"

"You will have the honor of seeing your daughter praised by all the world, laden with flowers wherever she appears, and lauded to the skies in the paper that is now published in Berlin!"

"Those are the new ideas," moaned Madame Pricker, "that are the fashion nowadays and that our king so greatly favors. Oh! misery and want will fall upon our whole city, honor and decency vanish away, and woe descend as upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and Berlin go to ruin. These are the dangerous temptations with which Baron Pöllnitz hath beguiled thine ears, and estranged thee from the honorable and respectable principles of thy family."

Suddenly she was silent, listening. She thought she heard a ring at the lower house-door. Yes. There were steps coming up the stairs and a voice asking for Father Pricker.

"Pöllnitz!" whispered Anna, and a glowing red decked her face, neck, and arms.

"Baron Pöllnitz, Master of Ceremonies to the King!" said Madame Pricker, with a mixture of pleasure and dread. "Perhaps he is bringing——"

The door flew open and with a fresh, cheery greeting the master of ceremonies tripped into the room. Anna had turned to the window and did not respond to the greeting. Madame Pricker advanced to meet him and receive her guest with reverential ceremony.

"Not at all," he laughed. "Why the great circumstance? His majesty, the young king, has no especial fondness for the renewal of titles and dignities which his father, the blessed king, bestowed upon us all. Entreaties are vain. He holds all titles superfluous and ridiculous."

Mother Pricker turned pale and murmured softly some indistinguishable words. But Anna, who still stood sideways at the window, had now turned suddenly to the speakers and fastened her great, gleaming eyes with a questioning glance upon the baron's smiling face.

"At last I have the honor of seeing your face, beautiful Anna," called Pöllnitz, laughing. "I knew very well that there was a charm by which to draw these fine eyes toward me. Let me kiss your hand, my most adorable one; and pardon me if I have perhaps disturbed you."

He flew to Anna with a dainty pirouette and took her hand, which she reluctantly gave him. Then he turned again to Madame Pricker, and bowing before her, said with solemn pathos, "I am here, to-day, not as the friend of your house, but as ambassador of the king, and I beg you, honored Madame Pricker, communicate to your spouse the fact that I wish to speak with him, to deliver a message from her majesty, the queen."

Madame Pricker uttered a cry of joy and, forgetting all

other considerations, hastened from the room. Baron Pöllnitz looked after her with a smile until the door closed after her; then he turned to Anna, who still leaned with a grave face upon the window-sash.

"Anna—my dearest Anna," he whispered, tenderly, "at last we are alone—at last I can tell you how I have longed for you, how happy I am to see you again."

He wished to press her tenderly to his heart, but the young girl turned proudly and coldly away. "Have you forgotten our agreement?" she asked, gravely.

"No. I have treasured your cruel harshness well in my memory. You will listen to me only when I have fulfilled all your wishes; when I have induced your father to engage a singing-teacher once more; when I have managed to let your truly divine voice resound before the assembled court."

"Yes," said Anna, with glowing eyes and cheeks; "this is my goal, my lofty aim. I will be a singer filling all Europe with her fame, at whose feet all men will lie, whose presence even kings and queens will seek."

"And I will be the happy one who paves the way for this pure nightingale. From my hand shall it flutter to the stage and to fame. But when I have kept my word, when you have sung in the royal castle in Berlin, then you must keep yours; and that evening Pöllnitz will be the happiest of mortals."

"I will keep my word," she said, proudly and loftily, as though she were already the famous and gracious prima donna. "On the day on which I have for the first time sung at court, on the day on which the tailor's daughter has purified herself of her lowly birth and become a free, independent, famous artiste, we shall no longer need to blush for our love. Baron Pöllnitz can, without disgrace, make her his wife who has been ennobled by her art, and Anna Pricker need cherish no humiliating consciousness that Baron Pöllnitz has conferred an honor upon her in marrying her."

Baron Pöllnitz had, courtier as he was, his features nevertheless insufficiently under control to conceal all the horror he felt at the words of his pretty sweetheart.

Speechless, he stared a moment into the face glowing with enthusiasm, ambition, and love; then a disdainful, demoniacal smile fled over his features, vanishing instantly, and leaving him the passionate and tender lover of pretty Anna Pricker.

"Yes, my dearest, best-beloved Anna," he whispered, drawing her into his arms, "on that happy, blessed day you will become my wife, and the laurels twined in thy curls will turn for me into a myrtle wreath."

He covered her lips with his kisses. Anna did not resist. But suddenly the baron released her, stepping backward. Colder and more self-possessed than the young girl, he had clearly heard the light step that approached the door from without.

"Someone is coming," he whispered; "assume an expression of indifference, dear Anna. Your face reveals too much excitement."

He tripped to the open spinet and began to play a light melody, while Anna, to cool her flushed cheeks, buried her face in the branches of a high geranium that stood in the window.

Madame Pricker opened the door and begged the master of ceremonies to go into the adjoining room with her, where Father Pricker awaited him.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ILLUSTRIOUS ANCESTORS OF A TAILOR.

Pöllnitz offered his arm to Anna and followed Madame Pricker with her into the adjoining room. This was a long hall, that had something sombre and dusty in its whole arrangement and decoration. Two windows lighted dimly the long high walls that were covered with dark wall-papers. Several sofas of heavy silk of the same color stood about the room, and above them hung divers oil-paintings in black frames, representing manly figures in solemn pose and more or less artistic perfection. The conspicuous resemblance of the features made it evident that these must be consecutive portraits of the same family. It was always the same expression, the same small, compact figure, but the costume was different in each generation, and in the difference of fashion hinted at the different periods of time. And a figure precisely resembling those in the pictures stood in the middle of the room.

This figure, however, was alive, and with a solemn bow, but without leaving the great round table upon which it had been leaning, it greeted the baron, master of ceremonies.

"I bid you welcome to the house of my ancestors," said the little figure, with great dignity. "Blessed be your entrance and your departure."

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CHAPTER XXII.

THE ILLUSTRIOUS ANCESTORS OF A TAILOR.

Pöllnitz offered his arm to Anna and followed Madame Pricker with her into the adjoining room. This was a long hall, that had something sombre and dusty in its whole arrangement and decoration. Two windows lighted dimly the long high walls that were covered with dark wall-papers. Several sofas of heavy silk of the same color stood about the room, and above them hung divers oil-paintings in black frames, representing manly figures in solemn pose and more or less artistic perfection. The conspicuous resemblance of the features made it evident that these must be consecutive portraits of the same family. It was always the same expression, the same small, compact figure, but the costume was different in each generation, and in the difference of fashion hinted at the different periods of time. And a figure precisely resembling those in the pictures stood in the middle of the room.

This figure, however, was alive, and with a solemn bow, but without leaving the great round table upon which it had been leaning, it greeted the baron, master of ceremonies.

"I bid you welcome to the house of my ancestors," said the little figure, with great dignity. "Blessed be your entrance and your departure."

Pöllnitz darted a mischievous look at Anna, who had released his arm on her entrance into the room and withdrawn to a niche.

"But why are you so grave and solemn to-day, dear Pricker?" he said, turning again to the old man.

"Are you not here as ambassador of the royal court?" asked Pricker, in turn. "Am I not, therefore, bound to receive you in festal array and in the festal apartment of my house? Therefore have I requested you to come into the hall of my ancestors, for only in their midst is it fitting for me to receive the royal message. Tell me quickly, how can I serve the royal house? What will it have of me?"

"It desires nothing more than that you change a little the sign before your door," he answered, smiling, and drawing a huge sealed paper from his bosom, "making it read, instead of 'Court Tailor to the Queen and Princesses,' 'Court Tailor to the Queen Mother and the reigning Queen.' Here is the certificate."

The old man accepted the offered script with calm dignity, not one feature betraying the slightest emotion. But Madame Pricker could not retain her joy. With a loud cry she flew to her husband to embrace him, wishing him joy in his nomination. Father Pricker waved her proudly back.

"The House of Hohenzollern hath done justice to my house, that is all. This title, 'Court Tailor to the reigning Queen,' has become, in a manner, a hereditary right in my family, and it were shameless ingratitude on the part of the House of Hohenzollern had it undertaken to withdraw the same from me. For more than a century the Hohenzollerns have been dressed by the Prickers for all balls and festivities, weddings, baptisms, and funerals; we have prepared the costumes of the queens and princesses; and if they were beautiful to look upon, they have our skill alone to thank for it. The proverb says: 'Clothes make the man!' And it is right. We made the coronation suits of both the queens, and it follows that without our help they never would have been crowned, and they owe us, therefore, the most heartfelt thanks. And now you rejoice and are thankful, wife, because they give us what is their duty and our rights."

"Meanwhile, I assure you, friend," said Pöllnitz, smiling, "that it cost hard work to get this nomination for you, and that you owe thanks to me, at least. It took all my eloquence, all my skill in flattery, to win the queen to my scheme."

Father Pricker turned pale and his face lost its quiet dignity.

"Then take the document back," he said, proudly, offering the baron the sealed paper. "If the queen does not grant me this title joyfully, then I will not not have it."

"Not at all; keep it," cried Pöllnitz, laughing. "It is due you, and you have a right to it. I only told you that I had difficulty in getting it, because I wished thereby to win your heart, and make you disposed to grant a request which I have to make of you."

"You doubtless mean with reference to the five hundred thalers that I lent you last month?" asked Father Pricker, smiling. "Let us speak no more of them. The debt is wiped out. You have just paid it, and I shall presently have the pleasure of handing you your note."

"I thank you," said Pöllnitz. "Meanwhile, I did not at the moment mean that trifle. It was another request that I wished to make."

"Let me hear it," said the court tailor, with a gracious nod.

"It is touching a young musician whom I would gladly recommend to your assistance," answered sly Pöllnitz, with a side glance at Anna—"a young and very talented musician, who must earn his bread by giving lessons. But he is, unfortunately, a stranger here, and has few patrons. I thought that if Father Pricker, being known as a connoisseur, would patronize him, this would be most useful to the young man, because then everyone would hasten to employ him. So let your daughter Anna take singing lessons of him and his fortune is made."

"I grant your request," said Pricker, solemnly, not doubting for a moment that Pöllnitz had spoken in full earnest. "I will assist the young musician, and he may give my daughter a lesson daily—that is, if Anna will do the young man that favor."

Anna could scarcely restrain a smile.

"You have commanded it," she said, "and, like an obedient daughter, I will obey your behest."

"Very well," said her father, majestically. "The matter is disposed of. Now, dear Baron, I would beg you to tell us about when the coronation will take place, so that we can make our preparations, and no postponement need be occasioned by us."

"The coronation day is still undetermined, but it will take place in August. You have time enough, therefore, to make all preparations. We will both confer with her majesty, later, touching cut, color, and material of the dresses. But

one piece of advice I can give you to-day, old friend—fit yourself into the new times. Remember that you have now a king who is exactly the opposite of his father. The dead king hated and despised all elegance and fashion; the new king loves them. The old king was a sworn enemy of everything French; the new king adores it, and if you wish to keep up good relations with him you must lay aside your old and respectable German traditions and prejudices, and like all the rest of us, fit yourself into the new system; for, I tell you, a new time is coming, a time of show and splendor. Everything will be different, the fashions first of all."

Father Pricker had been looking at him in horror and astonishment. His cheeks were pale, his lips trembled, and with a voice shaking with rage, he shrieked:

"What! I take a part in all these God-forsaken changes? I cut off my honest German pigtail and put on a piebald monkey-jacket to make myself a laughing-stock for honest men? I so far forget God, my ancestors, and my German fatherland as to employ French hands? Never shall a French foot cross my threshold, never a French word be spoken in my house! A German I was born, a German will I die, and never shall a costume be cut after a French pattern in my workshop while I am alive!"

"If you mean that, your fortune is done for," said Pollnitz, with a shrug.

Father Pricker paid no heed to him. He was looking with flashing eyes at the pictures that hung on the walls and bowing his head reverently before one of them.

"Look there!" he said, pointing with a wave of his hand. "That is my first ancestor, founder of the race of Pricker. He was a German, one of the best and most skilful. With him begins the line of Court-tailors Pricker. He wove the bonds which have, since that time, united the families, Hohenzollern and Pricker. Elector George William invented for him the title of court tailor. In his will he remembered my ancestor liberally, and from that time dates the fortune and the fame of the Prickers. Then look at that next portrait; that is his son, the court tailor of Frederick William, the great elector. From him dates the mantle that the elector wore in the battle of Fehrbellin; but his son, there, had the sad duty of making the great man's funeral robes. With that next picture begins a new epoch for Prussia, for that is Frederick III.'s court tailor, and he made the robe and mantle for the coronation day which elevated Frederick III. to the throne of Prussia. His son followed him, and with the son came a

new epoch for the House of Pricker, as a new era for the Hohenzollerns with the father. The son did not follow his father's example. He was of a gentler, more poetic nature, loved flowers, beauty, poetry, and became therefore a ladies' tailor, and the crown princess, Sophia Dorothea, made him her court tailor. He made the coronation dress of the queen, the wedding dress of the Margravine of Baireuth and of Schmedt. I have made the wedding dress of the Duchess of Brunswick, and with me originated the mourning robes of the present queen mother. And now in the presence of my ancestors, of all these glorious recollections, you would move me to treason and innovation; you would make of the honorable German a French dandy, ashamed of the customs of his fathers! Nay, German I am and German I remain in my habits and fashions if I go to my ruin thereby!"

With a pathetic gesture he waved adieu to the astonished and amused Baron Pöllnitz, then strode proudly through the hall to enter his work-room. His wife followed him, with folded hands and anxious sighs, to quiet the excited man with loving words of comfort.

Pöllnitz and the pretty Anna were alone together again.

"In my whole life I never saw so strange a fool," said Pöllnitz, laughing. "If Molière had known him it would have made a delightful comedy!"

"You forget that this fool may one day be your father-in-law," said Anna, severely, pushing away the baron's outstretched arms.

"Ah! true," said Pöllnitz, smiling. "We must consider that. Come, one last kiss, my pretty Anna—a kiss as a reward for my happily won play, for to-morrow you will have the singing-teacher, and no poor beginner, but a famous and influential musician, who undertakes, as a personal favor to me, to give you instruction, although he is really no teacher, but a composer. Graun himself will give you lessons, and it will be nobody's fault but your own if our love be not speedily crowned with the finest success."

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOFFRI E TACI.

At last the young queen's deep longing for a solitary, unconstrained conversation with her husband was about to be fulfilled. The days of resignation and painful waiting were at an end. The beloved was about to return.

He had written her that he would visit her to-day, had requested her not to close the door of her sleeping-room, because, pressed by an accumulation of business, he would come late; and he wished to see her without the constraint of witnesses.

At last night came and Elizabeth could dismiss her retinue, and withdraw to her apartment to await him. For the first time and to the great astonishment of her ladies in waiting, the queen, therefore, requested them to bring out one of the charming *négligés* which the Empress of Austria had recently sent her. The ladies assure her that she never was more beautiful, but to-day the queen would see and measure everything herself. The great chandelier must be lighted, and she approaches the mirror to examine her costume with the cold criticism of the connoisseur. Then she bends nearer, examines her own face, and an expression of contentment flits over it. Perplexed and questioning glances pass between the ladies in waiting. The queen had never shown an interest in her own beauty, why should she be so happy over it now?

As they were retiring, the first lady in waiting was about to draw the key from her pocket, when Elizabeth, blushing, with a proud yet embarrassed smile, said:

"Do not close the doors to-night. I expect the king."

The ladies bowed reverently and withdrew; but out in the anteroom the reverence vanished and they looked at one another with a scornful smile.

"Poor queen! She would have us believe that the king visits her secretly because he neglects her so."

And they shrugged their shoulders with pitying smiles and slipped away to tell their friends the ridiculous story of the poor, despised, deserted queen's vanity.

But what is that—a wagon in the court-yard, the castle guard's trumpet-blast? Perhaps the queen was right after all; perhaps the king was really coming. And the amazed ladies hastened away to tell their friends that the king loved

his wife passionately, and that a more tenderly devoted pair could not be found.

A knock at the queen's door, and her throat seemed sealed. The little words, "Come in," seemed choking her. She could not move, and stood, as though turned to stone, in the middle of the room, only reaching her arms toward him, bidding him welcome with a tearful smile.

The door opened and he entered. The candle-light from the chandelier fell upon his face. It was beautiful as ever, but his eye was cold, and no smile of welcome played upon his lips. With a stiff, formal bow, he stepped forward, then remained standing.

"Madame," said the king, and his voice was more harsh and cold than she had ever heard it—"madame, I have, first of all, to beg your pardon for disturbing you at so unwonted an hour and robbing you of an hour's sleep. But you see that I am at least a repentant sinner, and you will pardon me when I promise you that to-day's offence against your quiet shall be my last, as it is my first."

The queen uttered a slight cry and pressed her hands to her heart. The king looked at her with an expression of surprise.

"You are pale," he said; "my presence is evidently annoying you. I will withdraw and send your ladies to you."

He approached the door, murmuring some angry words. But Elizabeth had regained her self-control.

"Stay, sire," she said; "I pray you, stay. It was but a passing palpitation, from which I often suffer and for which I ask your pardon."

The king approached her again. "If I may remain, then," he said, smiling, "permit me first to lead you to the sofa."

He offered her his arm, and she followed him to the divan upon which she had awaited his coming with such blissful dreams.

The king seated himself at her side. He rolled up an armchair and took his place opposite her at a slight distance.

"Madame," he said, "is it credible that we two have been married nearly seven years, yet never have been to one another as man and wife? They forced our lips to utter vows of which our hearts knew nothing. I know you hate me because you were forced to marry me. You have never been able to pardon me that I led you to the altar only under compulsion. We swore one another at the foot of the altar, not eternal love, but eternal coldness; and you at least, madame, have been true to your oath to the present hour."

The queen shuddered, murmured some unintelligible words, and her head dropped upon her bosom.

The king continued: "I have come to-day to beg your pardon for the wrong I did you then against my own will. I made you unhappy, for you were forced to give your hand to an unloved husband. Madame, it is, alas! true that between us two there yawns a chasm that is filled with the life-blood of my dearest friend. Forgive me the wrong I did you for the sake of the wrong I have suffered. I had a gentle and tender heart, but it has been trodden under foot and hardened by the blows of fate. I bore a great and joyful confidence toward the world, but I have been shamefully deceived, and have had more to suffer than the poorest beggar. I was forced to see in my own father my cruelest enemy, who watched me ceaselessly to find the moment when he might deal the death-blow. I was forever on my guard, for the most trifling error, the most pitiful nothing sufficed for my condemnation. If you did but know with what rage I was accused in public, and how, after all possible efforts had been made to get me hated by my people, the fear of non-success led them to try to kill me with ridicule. *Soffri e taci*, the Italian proverb, has been my motto, and believe me, it is difficult to follow this simple maxim with its vast meaning."

The king leaned back a moment in his chair, breathing heavily, oppressed by his recollections. The queen sat with bowed head opposite him, motionless, silent, transfixed by his words, that resounded in her heart like the death-knell of her youth.

"I tell you all this, not to play the rôle of a martyr in your eyes, but to make you comprehend how I could be so broken and so weak as to submit at last to the will of my father and be nothing more than his humble and obedient son. I bought my freedom, madame, by placing yourself in chains with me. But when I did so I registered a vow that those chains should bind only so long as I had no power to loosen them. The moment has come when I can redeem my vow, and for that purpose I am here. I know that you do not, *cannot* love me, madame. The only question is whether your aversion is so great that you insist upon a divorce."

The queen had raised her head, and looked with amazement into the sad, gentle face of her husband. Their looks met. The queen could not restrain the sigh that was almost a cry. She could not stem the tide of tears that welled up in her eyes and poured in streams over her cheeks.

"My God, my God!" she cried; "he asks me whether I hate him!"

The king seemed not to have heard her cry nor seen her tears.

"No, madame," he said, with a gentle smile, "I did not ask whether you hate me, for I know that your gentle, truly womanly heart is incapable of that wild passion. I only asked whether your aversion to me is so strong as to demand a divorce. I beg you to answer my question at once and definitively."

Elizabeth Christine had no power to utter a word. She shook her head, and the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"You agree, then, to be, in the eyes of the world, my wife and the Queen of Prussia? You do not demand that I begin my reign with the revelation of our domestic misfortune and give your chaste and noble name with mine to the disgusting chatter of the world?"

"No," said the queen in feverish haste, fearing that her strength might leave her again—"no I do not demand it. I do not wish a divorce."

"I thank you for this word. It is worthy of a queen. You feel with me that we princes have no right to cast from us the evil fate that rests upon us, but must bear it as we can. To be envied are they who can complain and reveal the wounds of their heart. But for us it is fitting to swathe ourselves in royal silence, to keep this pitiful world, that envies while it cheers us and curses while it flatters, from suspecting that a king, too, can suffer and know care, I thank you, madame, and from this hour you will have in me a true friend, a well-wishing brother, ever at your service. Give me your hand to this alliance, which shall be stronger, more lasting, and holier than that bond fastened by the priests, to which our hearts said not amen!"

He offered her his hand, and Elizabeth laid hers slowly and solemnly within it. But as he pressed her hand in his she started and a cry broke from her lips. She pushed his hand from her, and hastily leaning back in the cushions, broke out into a passion of weeping.

Frederick let her weep. He sat opposite her, watching her with a look of deepest sympathy. "You weep, madame?" he asked after a long, painful pause. "I respect your tears, and you have, indeed, a right to them. You are weeping for your lost youth, your heart grown cold under the pressure and force of circumstances. You weep that you are a queen and that reason is again fastening its fetters upon your heart

and hindering you from freeing yourself, as every other woman save a princess might do. Ah! madame, if we were mere human beings, not Prussia's rulers but Prussia's subjects, we might yet be happy, for feeling our own evil fate, and striving to keep my subjects from a like one, I have made divorce easy."

Elizabeth arose from her reclining attitude and looked at the king with a suffering smile. "I thank your Majesty," she said, softly. "It is very noble to lighten for others the sad fate which you have decided to endure yourself."

"Ah! madame," said the king, with a smile, "you forget that I have a noble friend and sister, that I have *you* at my side to help me bear that fate. And then, madame, remember, too, that we do not belong quite in the category of the unhappy married couples. We neither love nor hate each other; we are sister and brother, bound not by blood, it is true, but by the word of the priest. But have no fear, madame; I shall see in you only a sister, and I promise you that I will never, in any way, overstep the bounds prescribed by my reverence for your honor and virtue!"

"I believe you," murmured the queen, blushing deeply, and mortified at the coquettish *négligé* in which she had received the king.

"To the world, we are married," continued the king. "But I promise you that these fetters shall weigh upon you as lightly as possible, and that it shall be my constant endeavor to remind you, as rarely as may be in your private life, that you are, alas! not free, but my wife. When the act of coronation, which I must beg you to endure at my side, is past, you will be free and independent. I will give you a separate court; you shall have palaces of your own for winter and summer, in which you will reside, and where I shall never venture to molest you."

"Shall I never see you again?" asked the queen, with that stoical, resigned quiet which excess of pain sometimes brings with it.

"Oh, madame, I beg you to permit me to be with you occasionally, when etiquette demands it. But I shall always take care that this is exclusively upon neutral ground, and never in our private apartments. I will never come to your house without your permission, and then only on occasions such as your birthday. I hope you will not refuse me then."

"No, I will not refuse you," repeated the queen, looking at her husband with a melancholy, longing glance. But he did not, or would not, see it.

"I beg you," he said, smiling, "to let me make you a little present in memory of this hour, which has brought me a noble sister, you a faithful brother. Accept, I beg you, Castle Schönhausen as the token of our new friendship. I have had it decorated and finished for your summer residence, and you can, if you choose, establish yourself there immediately after the coronation."

"I thank you," said Elizabeth Christine, so softly that her husband scarcely understood her—"I thank you. On the day after the coronation I shall go thither."

She bowed her head once more, and sat still and motionless there. The king felt pity for her dumb pain. He wished to cast one ray of sunshine into her dark future, and warm her heart with a shimmer of happiness.

"Go to Schönhausen, while I make a short journey incognito. But when I come back from it I wish to pass several weeks in Rheinsberg in the midst of my family, and it is a matter of course that you, madame, are a member of my family. I beg you, therefore, to accompany me to Rheinsberg."

Elizabeth arose, and such a delightful, glowing smile illumined her countenance that the king saw it and admired her beauty. She reached him both her hands, and greeted him with such a look as replaced the words that refused to form themselves upon her lips.

The king arose. "I must not longer rob you of your sleep and your rest," he said; "and I too need sleep. We must keep ourselves well for the good of our people, for we have a noble task to perform. Farewell, Elizabeth; we shall rarely meet, but if I were so happy as to believe in a hereafter—and your nobility could almost tempt me to do so—I should say "there we may perhaps see each other oftener, and understand one another better. Pray to God for me. I believe in God, and in the efficacy of the prayers of the good. Farewell."

"Poor woman, unhappy queen!" he murmured as he slowly returned to his apartments. "But why do I pity her? Is not her fate my own and that of every prince—a gilded misery, nothing more?"

A few moments later a wagon rolled through the court-yard once more. It was the king returning to Charlottenburg. The queen, weeping upon her knees, heard the wheels rolling.

"He is gone, he is gone!" she cried, with a moan of pain. "He has left me, and I am a poor, unfortunate, rejected wife! He despises me, and—I—I love him!"

And she wrung her hands and wept aloud and bitterly.

Morning was dawning when Elizabeth Christine, pale, trembling and resigned, arose from her knees.

"*Soffri e taci!*" said she, with a heart-broken smile. "It was the maxim of his youth, and shall be the motto of my whole life. *Soffri e taci!* What a sad, grave phrase it is, humble and proud at once! I have accepted my fate; I will bear it as befits a queen. Silence, my heart—be still. *Soffri e taci!*"

CHAPTER XXIV.

CORONATION DAY.

All Berlin was full of fun and jollity. The streets were crowded with people in their holiday clothes, and the houses were decorated with flowers and bunting. It was coronation day; the citizens of Berlin were to take the oath of allegiance to Frederick, the nobles and officials to do homage to him. All the world poured toward the castle. Everyone was eager to see him come out on the balcony in coronation dress and greet his people, his queen at his side—the beautiful young woman with the gentle smile and the clear, cloudless brow. Everyone wished to see the rich equipages of the nobles on their way to court, and if possible, gather up some of the coin which, according to an old custom, must be stamped this day and scattered to the people.

Packed shoulder to shoulder the people stood on the square watching the balcony on which the king was to appear, and crowded hastily up the steps of the cathedral, between the Brüder and the Breiter Streets, to watch the spectacle the better. The windows of the surrounding houses were filled with gayly dressed women holding bouquets to be waved at the adored young monarch. Even the roofs were covered with troops of merry boys.

All was joy and enthusiasm. Everyone longed to cheer the king who had done so much in the few short weeks of his reign to bless his people, who had opened the granaries, diminished the import duties, banished the torture, facilitated divorce, and abolished ecclesiastical compulsion; who permitted the pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church to resume the robes for mass, the decorated altars, the confessional—all things which Frederick William had forbidden with the utmost rigor; who had called back the religious sects

that had been banished with persecution from Prussia, and permitted each of his subjects to be happy after his own fashion, setting a limit at the same time to the caprice and tyranny of the priests and prohibiting the imposition of fines and punishments by the clergy.

Everyone wished to welcome this high-hearted king, himself a poet and philosopher, honoring the poets and philosophers of his country. Had he not called back the famous scholar Wolfe to Halle, whom Frederick William had banished; resurrected the long-buried Academy of Science, given Berlin two newspapers, and commanded that the internal affairs of the nation be freely and fearlessly discussed in them? All this had Frederick William accomplished in the few brief weeks of his reign, and how much might still be hoped from him!

But not alone the people in the square were dreaming of the golden age; the nobility and higher officials who filled the rooms of the castle were filled with hope and proud rejoicing, and looked forward to a future full of splendid festivities, pomp, and display. Pöllnitz wished to realize his grand ideal and embody in the young the ideal cavalier whom he had once sketched to the dead king. Pöllnitz wished to show the world that not the court of France only could celebrate festivities worthy of the "Arabian Nights," but that Prussia, too, could pour out millions with spendthrift extravagance.

The king had given Pöllnitz power, and Pöllnitz was determined to use it to this end. He sketched the most fabulous plans, reviewed every day of his life the whole array of court beauties to find the tempter who should bewitch the young king and beguile him into the net of luxury that Pöllnitz was restlessly weaving for him. The king did not love his wife; that was an open secret for the whole court. There was the beautiful young Madame von Wreeche, who, with her husband, her brothers, and sisters, had shown so much self-sacrificing devotion to the crown prince at Küstrin, and whom the crown prince, as everyone knew, had loved with the most ardent, boundless passion. Then there was Madame Morien, *le tourbillon*, who had so often cheered and amused the crown prince and to whom he had evidently devoted a warmer feeling of late. Finally, there was Doris Ritter, the poor young girl who had, for Frederick's sake, burdened with shame and disgrace, been whipped through the streets of Berlin, whose sole offence lay in her being Frederick's first love. Now that the king was free, would he not remember her and reward her who had suffered for him all misfortune, sorrow, and dis-

grace? Could not Doris Ritter once more attain power and distinction, transform her low estate into a crown of martyrdom?

Pöllnitz had determined to fix his eye upon Doris Ritter first of all; to find her, draw her forth from her exile and humiliation, provided, of course, that the king proved cold and indifferent to both the other ladies.

But the coronation day unfortunately offered no opportunity for ascertaining the king's feelings. In vain had Pöllnitz hoped to see the period of festivities begin with that day. In vain had he proposed to the king to close the day with a splendid ball in the palace, to which the nobility should be invited. "This must be no day of rejoicing for me," the king had answered, "for it is not only my coronation day, but a day which marks anew the death of my father, who had to die before his successor could be crowned. They are sad memories and heavy duties which this day brings, and I will give them no outward appearance of rejoicing. So give your gold-scattering fancy a rest, Baron Pöllnitz; I am no Haroun al Raschid, but a German prince, and the luxury of the Orient can appear only incognito at the court of a European prince—never officially.

Accordingly, the arrangement of the throne-room had been confided by the king directly to the castellan, and Baron Pöllnitz bore no responsibility; he could criticise the room with a scornful shrug, could confess with joyful pleasure that he would never have consented to such an arrangement, never have lent his name to such poverty-stricken preparations.

The throne, placed before the main wall, was a long, narrow platform, and upon it an old arm-chair whose upholstery showed signs of wear in divers places. Is that the throne on which a king is about to receive the first homage of his nobles? A disdainful smile rested still upon Pöllnitz's lips, when the door opened and the king, followed by his three brothers and the royal princes, entered the room.

Pöllnitz could scarcely restrain a cry of horror. The king wore neither the royal mantle nor the crown, nor had he the richly embroidered robes which he was wont to wear at court festivities. He wore the simple uniform of his guard regiment, and nothing, not even a star on his breast, distinguished him from the generals and staff-officers who surrounded him. And yet, as he stood upon his poor throne, with his three brothers behind him, the princes and generals at either side of the throne—as he stood there alone, erect—there was no one who could be compared to him.

Minister von Arnim's solemn speech found slight attention, and Von Görne's answer perhaps less. What these gentlemen expounded in lengthy paragraphs Frederick had said with glance before they began. His ardent, proud, self-conscious glance had said to each person present, "I am thy king, thy ruler; before me shall thy soul bow down in homage and yield me the oath of allegiance!" And they had all bowed before him, not because accident had made him heir to a throne, but because they were forced to recognize the supremacy of his intellect. Loud and joyous, from thankful hearts, rang out the oath of allegiance from young and old. The king stood upon his unpretentious throne and listened to them, no muscle of his face revealing his inward satisfaction. Impassive and unapproachable he looked, receiving homage, not with the vanity of youth, but with the quiet of a sage accepting what belongs to him, not blinded by a gift.

The act of homage had come to an end; the king descended the three steps again and beckoned his escort. The gentlemen hastened to open the doors leading to the balcony, and bore great sacks filled with coin. The air was filled with the shouts of the multitude. The king had appeared upon the balcony and greeted his people with upraised arm and friendly greeting.

For the first time that day the king's face beamed with pleasure. He took the hand of Prince Augustus William, who was standing next him, and his eyes were flooded with tears, as he said in a low voice full of emotion: "See, these are all my children, and they demand of their father that he love and protect them, make them a great and prosperous nation." And he waved his hand again, and the people shouted again their enthusiasm for the king, who now drew from the proffered bowl a handful of gold and silver coin and scattered it among the multitude.

As the coin fell the crowd pressed toward that point, struggling and pushing to get this memento of the coronation day. Even a woman threw herself boldly into the tussle. She had stood motionless looking at the balcony, but as the king threw down money she had plunged forward with outstretched hands, crying in a passionate voice: "Give me one of those coins—only a little silver one; give it me for a memento." And suddenly there arose a strange murmur among the people by whom the woman stood. They looked at her, whispered together, drew back shy and frightened, as though they dreaded contact with this woman who had first begged so humbly and earnestly, and now with folded arms, wrinkled

brow, scornful smile, and lips pressed tightly together, stood in the midst of a little circle that separated her from the rest of the crowd.

"It is she!" "Yes, it is she!" they whispered.

"She has come to look at the king, for whom she suffered so much; for his sake she was laden with shame and disgrace, cast out from among the honorable and pure, and still she mixes herself in among us, and comes hither to see the king," said a harsh, pitiless voice.

"She has been dishonored," said another; "but we know that she is innocent, and though she has been cast out and reviled, we may well pity her. She, too, has a right to one of the coins which the king's hand has touched." And the speaker approached her and gave her a gold and a silver coin, saying: "There, poor, unhappy woman, take these coins, and may they proclaim a better and a happier future for you too."

The poor woman looked with a firm, tearless look into the good-natured face of the worthy citizen. "No," she said, "for me there is no better time, but only shame and want. But I thank you for your sympathy, and accept this silver coin from you in memory of this hour and this day."

She hid the coin in her pocket. Then she strode proudly through the circle that had formed around her, and was lost in the crowd. The waves of the multitude closed behind her and no one heeded her further. Everyone looked up to the balcony, where the king stood with his splendid escort. No one up there had noticed the little scene which had taken place among the people, no one had heeded the woman who had made a path for herself through the crowd to the old cathedral, from whose steps, leaning on one of the pillars of its columns, she gazed up to the balcony on which the king was standing.

The coins had all been scattered; the king had shown himself to the people, and now he must, according to etiquette, leave the balcony and return to the parlor to make *la grande tournée* and speak a few friendly words to such of the nobility and higher officials as were assembled there. But the king remained. He had beckoned to the princes and the retinue to leave the balcony. He stood, with his arms leaning upon the balustrade of the balcony, looking thoughtfully down at the black sea below him. Often his eye wandered to the cathedral, and each time a shudder passed through the woman who stood leaning against a pillar of the portal. But the king did not see her. His glance wandered unheedingly about.

He saw nothing of the outer world, for his mental vision was turned inward, and he saw only his own heart.

In the great *salon* the gentlemen of the nobility were standing in indignant silence. A cloud rested upon every brow, and black looks abounded. Not even Pöllnitz could manage to keep up the charming stereotyped smile which played about his lips at other times; even he felt the bitter insult, that the king let his nobles and higher officials wait so long merely to gaze upon the disgusting, grimy, unmeaning mass known as the people. Only one group of three gentlemen seemed cheerful and confident, and their eyes glowed with hope and pleasure.

"Ah, the Messieurs von Wreeche have come, too," thought Pöllnitz, and his frown grew still darker. "They have come to get their reward for the good services rendered the crown prince, and they are unquestionably dangerous rivals of us all. The king will doubtless show them especial favor for having suffered so much for him, and been seven years banished from court for his sake. I will go to them and hear what the king promises." And he slipped through the crowd until he stood near the group.

At last there was a movement in the assembly; everyone bowed his head in reverent greeting.

The king had left the balcony and entered the *salon*. He began the *grande tournée*, and passing along the rows of gentlemen, had a friendly word for each. At last he reached the Von Wreeches and paused before them. Every eye was turned to the group. The company held its breath and listened. Frederick's eyes had lost their gayety and grown dark.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is a long time since we met last at the court of the King of Prussia. Nor do I believe that you find here him whom you seek, for you are doubtless seeking the crown prince. But here there is only a king—a king who demands that his majesty be revered and that no one doubt him, even when his commands seem hard and cruel. He who rebels is always worthy of punishment, even when he acts in all good intention. I, gentlemen, shall never tolerate that, and one will and one law only will have validity in my court."

And without a greeting the king passed on. The Messieurs von Wreeche stood with downcast eyes, trembling and rudely shaken, while the face of Pöllnitz beamed again with cheerfulness and contentment.

"Now," he said to himself, "they have fallen into complete disfavor. The king seems disposed to punish those who conferred benefits upon the crown prince. Louis XII. said that

it was unworthy of a king of France to revenge the injury done to a prince of France. The King of Prussia, on the contrary, seems to hold it beneath his dignity to reward the benefits shown the Crown Prince of Prussia. He thinks of the time when he will have a crown prince, and he wishes to terrify all at the thought of devoting themselves to him and neglecting the duties due the legitimate head of the State. But what is the meaning of yonder crowd? Why does the lord marshal approach the king with such an excited and joyful face? I must find out what is going on there."

And again he made his way through the ranks of courtiers, and successfully reached a place just behind the king as the lord marshal, with a loud and excited voice, said:

"Sire, I have to ask a favor. There in the anteroom is a young man who begs permission to cast himself at your feet, and take the oath of allegiance and boundless devotion. He has come from America to do homage to your Majesty; for scarcely had he heard of the incurable illness of the dead king than he quit his asylum to travel night and day, arriving to-day, and, as I trust, at a fortunate moment."

"What is the name of the young man for whom you feel such deep interest?" asked the king, after a pause.

The lord marshal gazed up at him affronted and anxious. He thought Frederick's heart must have told him who it was that stood out there waiting to greet the young king after long exile in America.

"Sire, your Majesty requires me to mention the name?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"I require it."

The lord marshal drew a long breath. "Then, your Majesty, it is my nephew, Lieutenant von Keith, returned from America to throw himself at your feet."

Not a muscle of the king's face moved.

"I know no Lieutenant von Keith," he said, sternly. "He who once was so called, was stricken by his majesty, my father, in deep disgrace from the officers' list, and the hangman hung him in effigy upon the gallows. But if Herr von Keith is still alive he had done better to remain in America, where, perhaps, no one knows of his crime and disgraceful punishment."

"Your Majesty will not receive him, then?"

"You may thank God that I ignore his existence," said the king, solemnly; "for if I should remember that he lives I should have to execute the sentence that the Prussian court-martial pronounced against him!" And passing the lord marshal with a slight nod, the king directed some trifling words to the gentleman next him.

"Now," said Pöllnitz, with a grin, "the king seems to have lost his memory altogether. God grant that he may not have forgotten that it was I who, with infinite trouble and pains, induced Frederick William to pay the crown prince's debts and present him with the Trakehner stud!"

CHAPTER XXV.

DORIS RITTER.

When the king had left the balcony the poor young woman on the steps of the cathedral arose, as though awakening from a deep dream, and looked about her, frightened and anxiously. The sight of the king had drawn her out of the present into happy by-gone days. Now that he had vanished, the blissful memories, too, were gone, and she looked with sad eyes out upon the forlorn present.

She drew her shawl with a violent movement closer about her lean figure and, making her way through the crowd, hastened down the steps and across the square to the pleasure garden. When she had passed the Dogs' Bridge and gradually left the crowd behind her she breathed more easily and paused to rest upon one of the chain-posts of the guard-house. Then she went on, across the fortress trenches and the deserted region that lay beyond, down the Linden Promenade to a house that stood near the great square of the Brandenburger Gate. It was a miserable little house, with dirty window-panes and a grimy color. The low, narrow door looked inhospitable enough, as though it meant to admit no one to the silent rooms within, where no sign of life was to be discovered. Yet it was meant for work, and would have been less poverty-stricken if the great iron bell over the door had oftener filled the room with its merry jingle; for behind this door there was a store, and the bell, if rung by buyers, would have rung courage, hope, and joy into the hearts of the inhabitants. But it was almost always silent, unless some servant caught in the rain, or some crone who might have made her purchases much better a few thousand paces farther on, came to this poor little shop for the sake of the shorter walk. And yet it seemed as though this shop had

once known better days, had once laid claim to elegance and taste. In both windows, near the house-door—and the three formed the whole front of the house—a tasteful arrangement of plants and flowers was to be seen, large blue porcelain pots such as are used for preserved ginger, nuts and raisins in glass dishes, lemons, oranges, dainty bags of coffee, and small Chinese boxes with real tea. But the bags and boxes were empty; the oranges and lemons were hardened and dried by time; the ginger-pots revealed no more their once piquant contents; and even the dusty, half-obliterated sign over the door, that had once represented a gorgeous negro rolling tobacco-leaves, was now but a reminiscence of by-gone days; for the tobacco had long since vanished from the chests, and the little that remained had crumbled to dust. The shop offered only small and insignificant wares in these days—chicory for the poor; the ill-smelling, home-made tallow-candles with which poverty lights up its wretchedness; a few crumbling bonbons in a glass box on the counter; hard, old, oily herrings in an ill-smelling cask; a little syrup in a small one, and a small quantity of hard sugar in a hanging-case on the wall.

Such was the whole inventory of the shop, the whole property of this family which, with its misery, misfortune, despair, and suffering, dwelt alone in the house. Its only means of support was the poor young woman now returning from the pageant with scarcely the courage to open the door that led to her prison.

At last she made an effort, and smoothing away the locks of hair that fell over her brow and hung down upon her lean cheeks, she pressed the door open and strode into the shop. The bell jangled, and a little door opened, through which a pale, ill-clad boy hastened into the shop, and stepping forward with a wan smile, asked the wishes of the new-comer.

But in the midst of his question he subsided, the smile died out of his wilted and aged features, and he stared with troubled mien at the poor woman who was opening the lid of the shop table to go into the inner rooms of the house.

"Ah! it is you, mother," he said, sorrowfully. "I hoped it was somebody to buy something. Then we should have had money to get some bread and need not cry for hunger."

"Money!" said his mother, anxiously. "Did I not give you money, just before I went away, to buy bread for you and your sister?"

"Yes, but father came just then and threatened to beat me if I did not give him the money at once. I did so and he

went away, and we have been alone ever since, and have cried with hunger, while our father enjoyed himself in the beer-house and our mother went to look at the coronation that we too would gladly have seen. I must stay at home and tend the store, that no one has come into, and take care of the poor little sister that cried the whole time for bread which I could not give her."

There was something hard, sullen, hateful in the tone and demeanor of the speaker. He darted such dark, wrathful looks at his mother, who was walking about the shop, that she shuddered before them.

"Why do you look at me so angrily and sadly? Why do you not greet your poor mother as kindly as usual and give her a kiss as reward for all her sorrow and trouble?"

She had seated herself, weary and worn, on an old wooden bench and stretched her arms to her son with a look of unutterable love and tenderness. But the boy did not come to embrace her. He stood opposite her and shook his head with a look of fierce dislike.

"First give us bread, mother," he said, roughly; "then perhaps I may embrace you."

The woman looked with horror into the hard, cold face. She pressed her hand upon her high, pale forehead, as though she would drive away the madness that threatened to confuse her thoughts, and upon her heart whose wild, feverish beating nearly smothered her.

"My God, my God!" she murmured, "am I mad already—am I dreaming? Is that my son—my Karl who loved me so tenderly—my boy, the comfort of my sorrow, the only confidant of my tears? Am I, whom he stares at with such a hateful stare, his mother—his mother who would give her life for him without a murmur—who has hungered and suffered cold for him and worked for him through whole long winter nights—his mother who, for his sake, has had the courage *not* to die, but to bear want, misery, and wretchedness? Karl, my son, come quick to thy mother, for thou knowest well that she loves thee boundlessly and will die if thou no longer lovest her."

The boy stood motionless opposite her. "No, mother, you do not love us—me or little Anna, for if you did you would not have left us to go where people laugh and rejoice while your children wept at home."

"Child, child! I did not go from idle curiosity," she said, sorrowfully; "I went to question the oracle of your future, to see whether for my children the chance of hope and comfort

is still there. I wished to read in a human face whether the man still has a heart, or whether he too is cold and heartless, as all princes are."

She had forgotten that she was speaking to her son. But he listened intently and a sly, scornful smile played over his colorless lips.

"Ah!" he said, "you think he might give you money now for your misfortune and your disgrace. But father told me to-day that all the gold in the world is not enough to pay for shame, and that there is nothing save death or brandy for helping one forget that one is a disgraced or accursed child of the human race. Father told me—" The boy was silent and stepped backward, for his mother had arisen, and stood, deathly pale, before him with flaming eyes, trembling with rage.

It was no woman's head, but that of a Medusa; not the gaze of a loving and tender mother, but of a maniac.

"What did thy father say?" she cried. "Thou wilt not tell me? Speak or I'll murder thee, speak or I'll dash my brains out against yonder wall and thou wilt be the murderer of thy mother."

"You will beat me if I tell you what father said," he answered, defiantly.

"No, no, I will not beat thee. Child, child, have pity on thy mother. Tell me what thy father told thee, with what words he poisoned thy heart, that the love for thy poor mother has died so quickly. Tell me all, my son. I will not beat thee; I will bless thee, though the words should pierce my heart like swords."

She wished to draw her son to her, but the boy drew back passionately.

"No! you shall not kiss me. Father says you make every one whom you touch unhappy and despicable, and we should be rich and happy if you were not our mother."

The poor woman shuddered; her arms sank powerless at her side, her eyes were tearless, dazed.

"What more did thy father say?" she murmured.

She looked at her boy with such death-like misery that he dropped his eyes, realizing how he had tortured her.

"Father was drunk," he said, sullenly. "When he heard that you had gone away he was furious—stamped, clinched his fists, and swore so dreadfully that little Anna cried with fright, and I, too, wept, and begged him to be still, and not blame you so, for it gave me pain, for then I loved you still."

"Then he loved me still!" she moaned, wringing her hands.

"But father laughed at me, and said you did not deserve to be loved, for you were to blame for all our misery. And only because he had married you had he taken to drink—to see and hear nothing of how people pointed their fingers at him. Oh, mother, you are horribly pale and tremble so. I will say nothing more. I will forget everything that father said, and love you again, mother."

The boy cried with fear. The old love had awakened in him again; he approached his mother and wished to embrace her. But now it was she who repulsed him.

"I am not trembling," she said, while her teeth chattered, as if in a chill—"I am not trembling, and thou shouldst not forget what thy father has said to thee. Thou shalt tell me all. Go on! go on! I must hear all."

The boy looked at her with shy, sad looks. His voice, that had been so defiant, was soft and mild, his eyes were filled with tears.

"Father said he had married you because he was sorry for you, and because you had brought him a couple of thousand thalers. But there had been no blessing, only disgrace, with the money. He said you were worse than the hangman, whom everyone fears and despises, for you had been stripped on the market-place, and whipped naked through the open streets, and the street-boys had thrown mud at you, and the stones of the pavement had been stained with your blood that ran from the blows of the hangman's lash."

The poor woman shrieked aloud, and fell fainting to the floor. The boy threw himself upon her crying and moaning, and the little girl, who had been lying asleep upon a straw bed in the corner, awoke and came running to beg her mother for bread.

The woman did not move. She lay, deathly pale, with closed eyes and open mouth, cold and lifeless, unconscious alike of the plaint of her tiny daughter and the kisses and tears of her son.

Suddenly, the boy heard the house door-bell, once and a second time.

"If it is father he will beat me!" thought the lad, slowly rising and going to open the door. "He forbade me to say a word to mother, and I have had to tell her everything."

The bell rang a third time. Karl sprang forward and opened the door with trembling hands. There stood, not his father, but a richly dressed gentleman, who pushed the boy aside with a friendly smile and stepped into the shop.

"I should like to buy some tobacco, my little lad," he said, glancing about the shop with a disdainful smile; "so call the worthy Schömmer, and let him give me a package from his finest canister."

"My father is not at home," said little Karl, staring at the handsome, friendly, brilliantly clad visitor with wide-open eyes.

"Well, I did not come precisely on his account," murmured the gentleman, with an odd smile. "Call thy mother, Madame Schömmer, and tell her I would gladly make a trade with her."

"My mother is lying on the floor in the back room, and I think she is dead," said Karl, bursting into tears.

"Dead! Truly that would be most inconvenient for me, for I have calculated on her being alive. But what did she die of? Is there no physician with her?"

"No one is with her but my little sister. Listen how she is crying."

"Yes, I hear that, and it is no very edifying music. No one else is with her, do you say? Where is thy father?"

"My father is at the beer-house, and no one lives in the house, for no one will come to us."

"Well, if you are all alone I may venture to go to your mother in the back room," said the stranger, with a loud, heartless laugh. "It is to be hoped that she is merely fainting, and as I have had vast experience of fainting women, I shall doubtless succeed in restoring this one. Show me the way, my little Cupid, and lead me to thy mother, the fainting Madame Venus."

He laughingly pushed the boy who had never ceased to stare at him, forward, and followed him with noiseless tread into the back room.

The woman lay stiff and motionless on the floor, and little Anna knelt beside her, begging pitifully for bread.

"Is this thy mother, Madame Schömmer?" asked the gentleman, with a curious look at the poor, corpse-like woman.

"Yes, that is my mother," said the boy, weeping.

"Mother, mother, wake up! Give me bread; I am so hungry!" moaned little Anna.

"Mother, open your eyes!" pleaded the little boy, kneeling beside her and covering her face with kisses. "Wake up and I will love you again, and will believe nothing of all that father said. He was drunk and talked nonsense, as he always does when he has had too much beer and brandy. Oh, dear, dear mother, wake up!"

"She will wake up," said the stranger, who had leaned over her and laid his hand upon her temples and breast—"she will wake up, for she is, as I thought, only fainting, and not dead."

The boy uttered a shout of delight and sprang to his feet. "My mother is not dead," he said, laughing and weeping together. "She will wake up again, she will love me again and be happy."

"Mother, mother, give me bread!" pleaded little Anna.

"Art thou so very hungry?" asked the gentleman, whom the whining began to annoy.

"Yes, we are both very hungry," said the boy, smiling through his tears. "We have had nothing to eat to-day, for mother gave us money, before she went away, to get bread and milk with. But afterward father came and took the money away to buy beer and brandy with."

"Oh! a worthy father," cried the gentleman, laughing and giving the boy a gold-piece from his purse. "There, son, you have money. Take your sister and go to the baker to buy buns. Then sit down in the house-door and eat them, and do not come in here until I call you. But if your father should come, then come at once and tell me, my son."

The children fled, beaming with joy and paying no further attention to their fainting mother. At the door, however, Karl turned around once more and asked:

"But who will tend the shop if the bell rings, and someone wants to buy something?"

"I will do it," said the stranger, laughing. "I will watch over your mother and the store. So go!"

The children ran happily away. The stranger was alone with the fainting woman.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OLD AND NEW SORROW.

A FEW moments he stood idly there, untroubled about the poor fainting woman and making no endeavor to revive her. He watched her face with an inquisitive look, not from pity for her condition, but coldly, full of his own egotistical purposes.

"Hm," he murmured. "In spite of her leanness, she bears traces of great beauty, and I believe that, properly cared for

and clothed, she may well enchain a heart that is touched by her sad fate. Besides, she seems to be hopelessly, despairingly poor—the husband a drunkard, the children crying for bread—so pale and lean that it is easy to see that hunger has been her only lover since then. Under such conditions she will be an easy tool, open to all my plans. She will be accessible to all my teachings, and, by Heaven! I'll teach her to fasten this madcap that has thus far escaped all the toils that Fredersdorf and I have laid for him. She shall be the Delilah that tames this Sampson. True, it is a desperate attempt," he added, with a disdainful glance at the fainting woman, "to make a Delilah out of this grimy, pale, and half-starved woman, but she has the past for her, and my Sampson has a tender and pitiful heart. Besides, nothing has succeeded yet, and it is pardonable if we take refuge in extraordinary means under pressure of despair. So to work, to work!"

He drew a little gold phial from his pocket, held smelling salts to the fainting woman's nose, and rubbed her temples with a little sponge.

"Ah! She is moving already;" and he rubbed her temples again; then seeing that she was gaining strength he lifted her and placed her in a chair. "Aux armes! aux armes!" he murmured, with a smile; "la bataille commence!"

The woman opened her eyes and gazed about her with a questioning, dazed glance. But seeing the stranger watching her with a smile, her eyes filled with horror. She murmured, "I know that face; yes, I know that cold smile. I have met it twice before. When was it? Was it only a frightful dream, or was it reality? When did I see that devilish smile, that iron egotism?"

"She does not flatter me exactly," murmured the gentleman, without for a moment altering his friendly expression. "I'm only curious to know whether she will, finally, recognize me."

Yes, now she had really recognized him. She rose and stood before him proud, wrathful, imperious despite her poverty.

"Pöllnitz!" she cried, with flashing eyes; "yes it is you; I know you now. Who gave you the right to enter this house? What will you here?"

"That I have to ask you," he retorted, smiling. "What are you doing here—here in this dark, wretched hovel? Here where starvation and misery make their dwelling, where misfortune grins at you with hollow-eyed dread? What are you doing here, Doris Ritter?"

She started painfully as he pronounced her name, a scarlet

flush sped over her cheeks, followed by a death-like pallor. "Why do you call me Doris Ritter?" she asked, breathlessly. Then, buried in long-lost recollections, she stared before her, not heeding Pöllnitz.

"Doris Ritter, Doris Ritter," she said, softly, "where art thou? Why do they call thee by thy name, forgetting that thou art a sleep-walker, on the verge of a precipice, who must plunge downward if thy name be called and thou awakest. Doris Ritter," she went on, more passionately, "how dare they speak that name and drag me from my grave?"

"Yes, that is just what I want!" cried Pöllnitz, laughing. "I wish to draw you from the grave of humiliation and oblivion, to make you forget what you have suffered."

"I!" she exclaimed, with a scornful laugh. "And *you* wish to do that? You, Baron Pöllnitz, who are to blame for my misery. What have I done that I should suffer such misery? My God! I was innocent and pure in heart, I could hold up my head before God, and look my parents in the face. I had no need to blush even *before him*, for no sin rested upon me, and only because he respected me did he love me too. It was such a silent, resigned love. It had no language, made no claim. Were we to blame that others understood it, that song without words, and construed what they saw in our eyes? We were widely separated. A chasm yawned between us. It was only a sweet dream. Then ye came to waken us, to make a traitor of the prince, a miserable prostitute of me. Ye threw my love, of which I had never spoken, save to my God, like a rotten fruit, in my face, and tried to soil and stain my whole life with it. And ye succeeded. Ye have trodden my whole existence under foot, and not one ray of hope have ye left me. I shall never forget how ye tore me from my father's arms, dragged me to prison, and fettered my hands, because in my despair I tried to destroy the life ye had dishonored. And then ye came and dragged me before the king. Two men were with him, one with a red, low, bloated face with thick, licentious lips—that was Grumbkow; the other, with a fine, friendly face, an eternal, fawning smile, with cold, disdainful, heartless eyes—that was yourself, Baron Pöllnitz. I threw myself at the king's feet, and pleaded for mercy. But he pushed me from him with his foot, abused me with accusations that wounded my very soul. I swore that I was innocent, that no sin rested upon me, that I had never been the crown prince's mistress, had never spoken to him save in the presence of my father. They laughed, and loudest laughed Baron Pöllnitz."

"It is true ; she has forgotten nothing," murmured Pöllnitz.

"Forgotten," she cried, with a wild laugh. "Can one forget when one was driven like a wild beast through the streets, stripped by the hangman's helpers, hearing the laughter of the mob, feeling the hangman's lash? Oh! I have borne it without going mad ; and as I fled through the streets I saw that the houses were closed, that no one stood at the windows, no one had the heartless courage to watch my martyr's flight, and that comforted me, and I blessed the men and women who had pity and seemed to prove their belief in my innocence by refusing to witness my cruel punishment. As I ran farther, I came to a house that was not closed. The door was open, and before it stood a servant, who pointed at me with his finger, and laughed aloud ; and above him, on the balcony, stood Baron Pöllnitz, with heartless, stony face. Then I uttered the first cry of rage. Then my prayers changed to wild curses. The cry arose in my heart, "He is to blame for my disgrace. He has poisoned the king and, with his pitiless scorn, slain the last doubt as to my guilt. May he feel himself loathed and despised in the hour of his death, may remorse gnaw at his soul and drive him, unresting, through the world all the days of his life!"

She uttered a wild cry and sank, faint and trembling, backward in her chair. Baron Pöllnitz had retained his friendly smile. He laid his hand upon her relaxed arm and said, with a soothing tone: "It is true. I did you a wrong, but I have come to make it good. The day of tribulation is past ; you shall hold your head high again, and none shall dare to doubt your innocence."

She shook her head sadly.

"What help is that for me now? My father died of shame; my husband, who married me for pity and because I brought him a couple of thousand thalers, could not bear his lot, finding me brand-marked and avoided like a criminal. He took to drink, and, when he comes home at night intoxicated, strikes me and calls me the most shameful names, only to beg my pardon the next day with tears, and begin the same old round again. My children——"

She wept bitterly, thinking of the terrible words her little boy had spoken to her that morning. Pöllnitz was weary of the plaint.

"Cry no more," he said. "Crying makes the eyes red, but you must be beautiful and attractive. If you do as I say, you will make your children happy once more. I will get you fine clothing, and I know a skilful person who will make you so temptingly charming, and yet dress you so modestly, that you will be Mater Dolorosa and the beautiful Magdalen in one. Then I will bring you to the king, and he will read in your face the touching story of the wrong done to you. Then the task will be yours of reawakening the long-smouldering love, and finding in his arms compensation for your undeserved misfortune."

She looked at him with such flashing eyes that even Pöllnitz felt a little stricken, and cast down his eyes.

"Does the king send you with this message hither?" she asked, in a harsh, rough tone?

"No, not the king," he answered, almost timidly. "But I know that he remembers you with love and pain, and will rejoice at finding you again."

"If that be true, let him come and seek me," she exclaimed, proudly. "I will never go to him, for I am the affronted and injured. I saw his face to-day. He has grown cold and hard. His heart has been slain and turned to stone in his breast, to a gravestone, for Katt and Doris Ritter. He will not come to me."

"He will come, I tell you. Listen to me, Doris. You will not go to him? Then expect him here. Prepare, at least, so to receive him here as to make an impression upon his heart. Study your rôle well, and get your husband and children out of the way.

"My children," she exclaimed. "Nay, nay, only as mother, only under the protection of their innocent presence will I see him again. For my children only will I accept his sympathy and grace."

Pöllnitz stamped his foot angrily, and an oath died away between his compressed lips.

"You don't understand that our whole plan will fail if you do not do precisely as I prescribe? The king has no heart. But he has senses, and those you must flatter, to warm his chilled heart. You must meet him, not in the majesty of your misfortune alone, but in the tempting witchery of your beauty. You must work upon and win him, not with tears but smiles!"

She looked at him, full of scorn. "Go!" she said ; "we two have nothing to do with one another, and can have nothing in common. I should try to revenge myself for the new dishonor which you have just shown me, in your low propositions, but I know that I have no right to do so, for I am a woman laden with shame, and everyone feels justified in despising me. Go!"

"You send me away, then? You will not hear the voice of a well-meaning friend, you——"

"Baron Pöllnitz" she cried, with a loud voice, trembling with anger, "go, I tell you. Do not force me to extremes, to call the neighbors, and beg them to free me from the shameless man who disregards the sanctity of my house and abuses and sneers at a poor woman who abhors him. Go, and never let me see your face again, or hear your voice!"

"Well, I will go," said Pöllnitz. "Farewell, dear Madame Schömmer. But I shall come again; and perhaps I may be so happy as to find in place of yourself the charming Doris Ritter, the young, enthusiastic maiden of olden days that loved the crown prince so passionately, and accepted his love and his gifts so willingly." He laughed, and pirouetted out of the scantily furnished room. He hastened through the shop, opened the door that led to the street, kicked aside the children sitting on the door-step, and went away.

"She is proud, indeed!" he muttered, with a shrug. "The lash did not humble her. That pleases me, and I am more convinced than ever that we shall succeed with her. She must and shall become the king's mistress, and since she will not go to him, I shall bring him to her. To-morrow he will examine the site for the queen mother's new palace, and that will be an admirable opportunity for me to bring him into her hut."

Doris Ritter, standing erect, with upraised arm, had watched Pöllnitz's departure. In this hour she was no longer the dishonored, shame-laden creature before whom all the world shrunk away—she was a proud woman, conscious of her own worth and her own honor, repelling an insult boldly and demanding just recognition of her dignity. But as the baron's steps died away the ecstasy of excitement died with it; and she was once more a poor, tortured, humiliated woman. With a deep groan she sank down upon a chair, folding her hands in her lap and staring straight before her. Once she muttered between her teeth: "Woe to him, woe to him, if he forgets what I have suffered for him; if he do not remove the shame that rests upon me! Woe to him, if he despises me as they all do. Then will Doris Ritter be his irreconcilable enemy, and take her revenge as surely as God is over us!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

"Courage, my handsome, lovelorn Count," said Madame Brandt to Count Voss, who was standing opposite her, with a forlorn expression, scarcely noticing in his misery the bewitching attitude that his charming Armide had assumed upon the velvet divan before him.

"I do not understand how you can be cheerful and laugh, when you say you love me," he said, hopelessly.

"Yes, I do indeed love you," she cried, laughing; "and for that very reason I am so cheerful. We are approaching our goal, and the curtain which is to conceal us from the world will soon be impenetrable. For no one will suspect that the husband of the young and beautiful Laura von Pannewitz could love the ugly, middle-aged Brandt."

"You, ugly and old?" cried the young count, indignant. "A blessing for you that it is yourself who speak such blasphemy. If it were another, I should kill him."

"But that would be very wrong, my dear friend, for that would betray our love to the world. Nay, nay, if anyone speaks thus to you, you must say, with a shrug, 'I do not know this Madame Brandt; what business is it of mine whether she is pretty or ugly? She may be old as Methuselah, for all I care.'"

"I shall never say anything of the kind. I could never bring myself to utter so disgraceful a lie. No, dearest, not even you are entitled to ask that of me. You see what power over me you possess, and still you are so cruel to me. You have condemned me to marry and I submit to your commands, though it seemed to me that my heart would break when I made my proposal to the queen. But now you must require nothing further, you must not inflict upon me the task of abusing and scoffing at you. No, no, I beg of you on my knees, do not torture me so cruelly, be merciful to me."

He had fallen on his knees before her, and laid his head upon the sofa on which Madame Brandt reclined in a careless attitude. She laid her hand upon his head, and played with his well-cared-for hair.

"I am not cruel. I am only prudent," she whispered, almost tenderly. "I would protect our love from danger, and assure

us an eternity of happiness. Trust me, Alexander, and do not doubt me. On the day that you lead Fraülein von Pannewitz to the altar, I will open my arms to you and tell you that I love you boundlessly!"

"No, no, you do not love," he sighed, forlornly. "You are always hard and cruel to me. You have never shown me any favor, never permitted me even once to press my burning lips upon your own, not the smallest gift have you ever accepted from me."

A scarcely perceptible scornful smile sped over the beauty's face as the passionate youth, still on his knees, continued speaking; she turned her face away to keep him from seeing her expression. But he thought it was because she was angry with him again.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, in utter despair; "you won't even let me see your lovely face, you wish to drive me mad. What have I done to deserve this new torture? Is it an insult to ask of you the small favor of accepting a little gift from me? It is so sweet to constrain those we love to think of us, to place a ring upon the pretty, transparent finger, and say, "Whenever thou seest this thou wilt think of me;" to ornament her throat with a gleaming chain and say to her, 'Now art thou chained, my love holds thee in bondage, thou art mine!' Oh! a man can begin to believe in the love of his sweetheart only when she condescends to accept a gift from him."

"And will you really begin to believe in me then?" she asked, in her tenderest tone, turning her laughing face to him once more.

"Yes!" he replied, delighted; "then I shall really believe in you."

"Well, then, give me something to remind me of you, something I can wear as a little dog wears a collar with its master's name."

She offered him her hand, which he passionately kissed. Then he drew from his bosom a case, so large and heavy that she could scarcely grasp it.

"But that holds no mere ring," she said, reproachfully. "You have deceived me, misused my kindness, and, instead of giving me some simple ring, you wish to overwhelm me with your wealth. Take back this case, dear Count. I will not even look at its contents, I will not know how far your extravagant pride goes. Take your treasures, and give me in their stead the simple ring I promised to accept."

She had arisen, and now handed him the case with the gest-

ure of an offended queen. Her poor lover stood before her with an expression of deep despair.

"If you really wish to torture me to death, do it at once, not day by day, and hour by hour," he said, almost weeping. "I do everything that you command, I am even about to be married for your sake, and you would not show me the slightest friendliness!"

He began to cry outright, and turned away to conceal his tears. Then, summoning all his resolution, he said, with the defiance of despair:

"Well, I will learn of you how to say no, and nothing but no. If you refuse to accept this case, I shall refuse to marry Fraülein von Pannewitz. If you force me to take back these miserable stones, I shall go straight to the queen and tell her that I have made a mistake, that I cannot and will not marry Fraülein von Pannewitz, and am leaving Berlin for a long absence."

"Nay, you must not go away and leave me," she cried, with an appearance of alarm. "Give me the case, I accept it. I cannot have you leave Berlin!"

The count uttered a cry of delight, and rushed to her with open arms. But Madame Brandt waved him softly back.

"When you are married I will kiss you, not before. To-day I merely accept this case, but I shall not open it, for fear of our quarrelling again."

Count Voss was beside himself with gratitude and pleasure, and swore that he longed to marry Fraülein von Pannewitz that very day, to win the gift of a kiss from Madame Brandt. The beauty laughed.

"Love does remove mountains, it is true," she said, "but it cannot lend wings to the tongue of a queen. You have placed the matter in the hands of the queen mother. You have made that royal lady your wooer by proxy, and now you must wait until her majesty pleases to make your offer to Fraülein von Pannewitz."

"She will do it to-day; the queen has given her promise. I was obliged to make my proposal to her, for the Pannewitz family especially demanded that I should have the queen's consent before they consent to my marriage."

"And Laura herself? Have you asked her?"

"Oh!" cried the vain count, with a shrug, "I am certain of her assent. She is a poor Fräulein dependent upon the proud queen dowager. I shall make her a countess and give her the freedom of living independently upon her estates

where she will have everything—honor, wealth, splendor—only not myself, not her husband!"

"Poor Laura!" said Madame Brandt, softly.

"You pity her! but I shall be with you!"

"Yes, you will be with me, but to-day you have been with me too long. That may arouse suspicion. So go! Let me act for you. Act for yourself! do not be daunted by any difficulties; think of the goal that awaits you. Go!"

The count took his leave with a sigh, while Madame Brandt succeeded with difficulty in concealing her impatience and her desire to be alone. She looked after him with a scornful smile when he finally left her.

"Vain fool," she murmured, with a shrug. "He deserves to be deceived, for he is an idiot! But now I will see what this costly box contains."

She flew to the table and hastily raised the lid. A cry of surprise broke from her lips and her eyes glowed with pleasure as brightly as the diamonds in the case.

"This is, indeed, a royal gift," she whispered, breathlessly; "more than royal, for I do not believe that Frederick is capable of giving a woman such diamonds. But I have earned them by my wonderful comedy acting. This unfortunate count is now firmly convinced that I am the most noble, unselfish, loving creature on earth! When I saw this great case coming out of his pocket, how my heart beat, how hard it was to restrain my hands from reaching to grasp the precious treasure. Yet I succeeded in appearing to decline it, mastered my impatience, and did not open it in his presence! Else he would, despite my effort, have seen my delight in my eyes, and that might have led the poor fool to question the unselfishness of my love. Manteuffel himself could hardly have acted more skilfully."

She laughed aloud in the excess of her joy and closed the case, shutting it carefully within her writing-desk.

"Now to the queen mother," she said. "The mine is laid, I will light the fire and bring on the explosion! I must hint to the queen that the marriage of the pretty Laura with Count Voss is necessary to prevent trouble in the royal family. I must—*eh bien, nous verrons!* I hear the queen's voice already; she has begun her promenade in the garden, and I must not be absent!"

She took her hat and shawl and hastened away to the garden.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE QUEEN AS WOOER.

The queen dowager was loitering in the garden of Montbijou. She seemed unusually cheerful, and her proud, grave eyes were lighted with a milder, friendlier gleam than heretofore. She had good reason too for being cheerful, for her bold wishes, cherished in vain so many years, seemed now about to be realized, and all the fine promises which her son had made at his first visit were being kept. She had already received the first monthly installment of her three-fold widow's pension, her retinue had been increased and established upon a truly royal footing, and the king had told her yesterday that he should himself select the site of her new palace to-day. Moreover, the homage which she received from the whole court, and especially from the favorites and immediate attendants of the king, proved what influence was attributed to her and how great the importance attached to her favor and approbation. While Queen Elizabeth Christine had retired to her castle of Schönhausen, where she lived as though in mourning, the pleasure palace of Montbijou had become the meeting-place of the whole court. Even the young king, who had not rejoiced the heart of his queen with a single visit at Schönhausen, came almost daily to call upon his mother, and a brilliant escort of cavaliers accompanied him. So Queen Sophia Dorothea had good reason to be cheerful, and look to the future with joyful anticipations. Besides, this was the first time that she had taken her promenade with her own splendid retinue, that had only yesterday been completed and established. When she looked back, as she occasionally did, she no longer saw the two court ladies alone and bored, but six of the most distinguished and beautiful ladies of the nobility, who had been appointed to her service and were now in conversation with four cavaliers whom the king had selected. She listened to them chattering with her marshal, Count Rhedern, noticed the merry laugh of the newly nominated maid-of-honor, Louise von Schwerin, and the soft, melodious voice of the beautiful Laura von Pannewitz, whose grace and beauty had impressed even her spouse, the dead king, who had actually for a few weeks been enamoured of Laura.

Count Rhedern had besought the queen mother to grant him her assistance and mediation. He had begged her to be

his advocate with the king in a delicate matter. The count wished to marry, but had not yet obtained the king's consent, and would probably obtain it with great difficulty, for the chosen of the count's heart was, alas! no Fräulein of the old nobility, but had the misfortune to be only the daughter of a Berlin merchant.

"But I do not understand," said the queen, after the count finished his confidential communications, "why you wish to marry this lady; I think the nobility of this kingdom is not so poor in beauty, and Count Rhedern need surely not descend so low to seek a wife. Look back of you and you will see beautiful maidens, all of most strictly noble descent."

"Your Majesty is right now as always," sighed Marshal Rhedern. "These ladies are beautiful, aristocratic, young, and amiable, but one thing is wanting to make them perfect, Mamselle Orguelin is neither beautiful, young, nor amiable, but she has one quality wanting in all these charmers, and for this one thing I am forced to marry."

"Count, you speak in riddles, and, as it seems to me, in very doubtful riddles. What is this one thing that Mamselle Orguelin has, and for the sake of which you are forced to marry?"

"Your Majesty, this one thing is money!"

"Ah! money," said her majesty, smiling. "It is, indeed, a fitting thing for a cavalier to marry below his rank for the sake of money."

"Your Majesty, it is precisely because I remember the duties which my rank and my escutcheon impose upon me, that I have had to bring myself to this unsuitable marriage. Your Majesty will pardon me if I venture to lay before you the hidden trouble, the veiled misery of my house! The line of Counts Rhedern is an old and illustrious one. My fathers were ever rich in virtues, but never rich in money. The virtue of frugality alone seems to have been always wanting among them. They were too generous to refuse anyone a request, too proud and extravagant to suit the expenses of their noble family to the narrow limits of their incomes. They maintained externally the pomp and splendor of their rank, and gnawed in secret the hard crust of poverty. So it went from father to son, the debts increasing, the income decreasing; and if I do not determine to make an end of this poverty with one mighty sacrifice, I shall soon exhibit to the court and nobility the wretched spectacle of a Count Rhedern forced to give up his hotel, his equipage, his furniture, and servants, and live like a beggar."

"That is, indeed, a sad and urgent case," cried the queen, filled with sympathy. But are there, in our aristocracy, no heiresses whose fortune might save you?"

"None, your Majesty, who like Mamselle Orguelin could bring me a million."

"A million! that is a large fortune, and I appreciate your being forced to marry the lady. I give you my consent and promise you that the king will not refuse you his own. So make your preparations and have no fear."

"When your Majesty speaks so I am assured," said the count, with a deep sigh.

"And yet you sigh, count."

"Your Majesty, one more assent to my marriage is still wanting."

"The bride's own?"

"Yes; and this assent is bound up with another condition, which your Majesty alone can fulfil."

The queen laughed. "That is truly a strange betrothal. You speak quite seriously of your approaching marriage, and are not even betrothed. You speak of your *fiancée*, and Mademoiselle Orguelin has not given her assent—and whether or no she will do so depends, you say, upon me."

"Yes, your Majesty. For this lady, who is as proud of her million as though it were the most resplendent family tree, will become my wife only upon the condition that she be received at court and granted participation in all the court festivities, as suits her rank as Countess Rhedern."

"Truly, this is vast presumption!" cried the queen, with an angry frown. A shopkeeper's daughter who carries her arrogance so far as to aspire to appear at the court of Prussia! Never shall it be, never can I consent to such an innovation, for it is ruinous, calculated to weaken the prestige of the nobility and diminish its highest and best privilege—that of *alone* approaching royalty. It was this view which prevented me from receiving the so-called Count Néal at my court, although my son has granted him access to his own, and would, as I very well know, be gratified should I follow the royal example. But I, as queen, cannot do so. There must be a limit which separates royalty from the common world, and only unmixed, unblemished nobility can do this. You see, my poor count, that this time I cannot accede to your request."

"Ah! your Majesty, take pity upon me. Do but most graciously remember that I am ruined and a beggar if this alliance fail and I cannot marry Mademoiselle Orguelin's million."

"Yes, I had forgotten that," said her majesty, reflecting.

"Besides, this is a wholly different case, and I do not think that my queen has the same principle to follow here as in the case of the *soi-disant* Count Néal. A man always represents himself and his line, and no power on earth can give him nobler blood than flows in his veins. But with a woman it is different. She takes her husband's name and is elevated to his rank; she becomes bone of his bone, and can do no harm to the prestige of his name. The sons of Count Rhedern will always be Counts Rhedern, though their mother be sprung from no noble house."

"True," said her majesty, "the case differs from that of the adventurer Néal. Her husband's rank would cast a veil over the newly-made countess."

"And your Majesty would be the beneficent protectress of our family," said Count Rhedern, with a sweetly-insinuating tone. "Your Majesty would not only restore my house to its ancient standing, but also save for our country Mademoiselle Orguelin's million; for in case I cannot fulfil the condition which she has imposed upon me and assure her the *entrée* at court, Mademoiselle Orguelin will marry a young Hollander, a friend of her father, who has come hither solely to sue for the hand of the daughter."

"Then it is almost a duty to give you this lady to keep her million in the country," said the queen, with a smile. "Your request shall be acceded to, and this little millionaire, who so longs to appear at court, shall have her way. I will speak to my son, the king, to-day, and can say in advance that I am certain of his consent."

And the queen, proud and happy to have an opportunity of showing the court what influence she exercised upon her royal son, graciously let the count kiss her hand, and listened with pleasure to his passionate expressions of thankfulness and devotion. Then she dismissed him with a gracious nod and commanded him to send her Madame Brandt, whose merry voice she had long heard, and who had just been making the cavaliers and ladies laugh with one of her droll and piquant stories.

While the marshal flew like an arrow to fulfil the commands of his royal mistress, Sophia Dorothea paced up and down with an abstracted smile. Now that she was permitted to act as queen to some trifling extent, the woman in her stirred again. She found it amusing and delightful to have her hand a little in the play in the love affairs of the court people, and to arrange marriages like a beneficent fairy.

In this one day two of the most distinguished counts had besought her support; for both she was to do the wooing; both expected of her the fortune and future splendor of their houses. She was flattered and stimulated by these applications, and was therefore in her best and most gracious humor when she received Madame Brandt and began a conversation with her. At first the conversation turned upon indifferent things, but Madame Brandt knew very well why the queen had granted her an especial interview. She held the light ready which was to spring the mine that had been laid beneath the love and happiness of poor Laura von Pannewitz.

"Did you know," the queen asked, suddenly, "that we have a pair of lovers at our court?"

"A pair of lovers!" repeated Madame Brandt, with such visible surprise and fear that the queen's attention was arrested by it.

"You are so alarmed," she added, with a smile, "that one might suppose we were living in a cloister and it was a crime to speak of love and marriage. Or was it only a little anger that you knew nothing of the love story?"

"Pardon, your Majesty," said Madame Brandt, softly; "I knew this love-story well, but I could not dream that your Majesty had been informed of it."

"Then you knew of it? Ah! yes, Fräulein von Pannewitz is your friend, and it is therefore but natural that she should make you the confidante of her love."

"I am, indeed, the confidante of this unhappy and tearful love," said Madame Brandt, with a sigh; "but your Majesty may be assured that I have left no persuasions, no pleas untried. I have even resorted to threats to cure this unfortunate, enthusiastic young girl of her unholy, unhappy passion."

"You might have spared your pains," said the queen, with a smile, "for this love is not, as you say, an unholy but a happy one! Count Voss came to me this morning to sue for the hand of Fräulein von Pannewitz."

"Poor, unhappy Laura!" sighed Madame von Brandt.

"How so?" cried the queen; "you pity her in spite of my telling you that Count Voss is sueing for her hand?"

"But what has Count Voss to do with Laura's love?" asked Madame Brandt, with such well-feigned astonishment that the unsuspecting queen might well be deceived by it.

"How so?" exclaimed the queen, impatiently. "Is it not Count Voss? Then whom does she love, and who can have

awakened in her an unhappy and tearful love? Do you know? Can you tell me the name?"

"Your Majesty, I know it, but I have pledged my word, with a sacred oath upon the Bible, never to let it pass my lips."

"It was ill considered to tender such a vow," cried the queen, impatiently.

"Your Majesty, it was my friend who demanded it of me; and in view of her sorrow and her tears, I could not refuse her request, by fulfilling which I gave her the poor consolation of pouring out her plaint into the heart of a true and silent friend. And this friendship makes it my duty to beseech your Majesty to support the proposal of Count Voss with all means at command of your royal power, and even to force my poor Laura, if necessary, to this marriage."

"How so? You say she loves another, and yet you wish me to compel her to marry Count Voss?"

"Your Majesty, there is no other means of saving two noble and devoted hearts from the errors of their unholy passion. Laura is a most chaste, noble, and virtuous maiden; but she is in love, and every woman grows weak at last under the tears and anger, the passionate glow of the beloved."

"So her love is returned?"

"Your Majesty, Laura would have maintained her maidenly pride in the face of an unrequited love!"

"And still you call this love unholy and tearful?"

"I call it so and it is so, for there are unconquerable obstacles in its way. A chasm lies between the lovers across which they can never join hands. They would be forced to plunge into its depths before they could be united! And every word which these two unhappy beings speak of their love is an offence—yes, an act of high treason!"

"High treason!" cried the queen, her eyes flashing with indignation. "Now I understand you. This proud, presumptuous maiden ventures to raise her eyes as high as though she were a princess of royal blood. In the arrogance of her beauty she aspires, perhaps, to play the rôle of a Maintenon or a La Vallière. Yes, I understand all now, her sentimental pallor, her sighs, her melancholy smile, her change of color when I told her that the king was coming hither with his court to-day. Yes, so it is, Fräulein von Pannewitz loves——"

"Oh! your Majesty, have mercy, and do not speak the name. For I should have to deny it, and that were a crime against your Majesty; or if I admitted it, I must be unfaithful to my oath and my friend! Your Majesty in your wisdom

has understood what I ventured only half to hint at, and my noble queen knows now why a speedy marriage with Count Voss seems the only means of saving both these great and noble hearts, which must otherwise consume themselves with vain longings or succumb to a passion stronger than their sense of duty."

"Fräulein von Pannewitz shall decide within the present hour to become the bride of Count Voss," cried the queen, imperiously. "Woe to her if she dare refuse; if her impudent arrogance goes so far as to cherish a passion which I have determined to destroy with the whole force of my royal will."

"May your Majesty follow implicitly the wisdom of your royal soul. I would only beg you not to tell poor Laura who it is from whom your Majesty has learned her unfortunate secret."

"I promise you that," said the queen, who turned about with unwonted rapidity, wholly forgetting her royal dignity in her angry haste, and hastened directly to her retinue, which paused as she approached, and took up its position at each side of the *allée*. At that moment a lackey in the royal livery was seen hastening from the palace. He approached Fräulein von Pannewitz and whispered a message in her ear. The maid of honor hastened at once to the queen, and bowing low, said:

"Her majesty the reigning queen has just arrived, and inquires whether your Majesty is disposed to receive her."

The queen did not reply at once. She looked with an annihilating expression of contempt at the young girl who stood before her with downcast eyes, all humility and devotion, seeming to feel the whole weight of the queen's scorn without raising her eyes; for she blushed deeply, and a pained, anxious expression spread over her features. The queen saw that Laura, blushing thus, was bewitching, and would gladly have trodden her under foot, to punish her for such highly treasonable beauty. She felt it impossible to be silent longer, to postpone the crisis. The crater of her anger flamed high, and the destroying stream of lava must break forth. The queen was now merely a passionate, reckless woman, nothing more; controlled solely by her anger and the might of her insulted pride.

"I will go to receive her majesty," she said, with trembling lips. "Her majesty has come without ceremony, and I will therefore receive her without formality. You may all remain here, Fräulein von Pannewitz alone will accompany me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

THE first greetings had been exchanged by the queens, the first questions of politeness and etiquette asked and answered. Sophia Dorothea had given her hand to Queen Elizabeth Christine, and led her into the little salon adjoining the garden salon, in which she was wont to receive the intimate circle of her court. The doors of the garden salon were open, and the two ladies-in-waiting of the reigning queen were seen standing with Laura von Pannewitz, to whom they occasionally addressed a question or observation, receiving brief, fleeting, whispered replies. The wrathful, annihilating glance of the queen had made Laura's heart palpitate, and filled her with a dull, dreadful fear. She felt that the crisis of her fate was approaching, and prayed God to give her strength to resist all evil; yet she was not trembling for herself but for her beloved, and for his sake alone she was determined to bear the worst and meet her fate undaunted. She did not wish to die, to succumb, for she knew that he would die with her. Silently she renewed the oath of love and invincible fidelity which she had vowed for him. Suddenly she heard the hard, imperious voice of the queen mother pronounce her name, and, looking up, saw her standing in the door of the adjoining room.

"I request the queen's ladies to go into the garden," said Sophia Dorothea, "to my ladies in waiting. Fräulein von Pannewitz, stay here."

The ladies bowed low and left the room. Laura von Pannewitz remained. She stood erect with folded hands in the middle of the salon. Her face was deathly pale, her lips trembled, but her eyes, raised to heaven, glowed with heroic courage. As Sophia Dorothea pronounced her name, Laura pressed both hands to her heart as though she would still its anxious beating; and, her head sunk upon her breast, she meekly and submissively obeyed the call of her mistress. At the door of the second salon she paused, awaiting in silence the queen's further commands. Sophia Dorothea not speaking at once, Laura slowly raised her head, looking at both queens, who had seated themselves upon a divan opposite the door. The eyes of both were fastened upon her.

The expression of the queen mother was proud and stern and a contemptuous smile played about her lips, while Elizabeth Christine gazed with a look of boundless pity at the poor girl, leaning against the door like a lily broken by the storm.

"Fräulein von Pannewitz," said Sophia Dorothea, after a long pause, "I have called you because I desire to speak with you upon a subject of importance; and as it bears no postponement, her majesty has given me permission to speak of it in her presence. Listen, therefore, with attention, and weigh each one of my words! I have hitherto treated you with affectionate kindness; I have always let you see in me a considerate mistress, a motherly friend. Now I require of you the unconditional, silent obedience which I, as your queen and mistress, have a right to demand. You are of a noble and distinguished family, which is, however, poor and unable to maintain its children upon a suitably splendid scale. Hence I took you to myself, and hence will I now care for your future, which shall, God grant it, be both brilliant and happy. A rich and noble cavalier has asked me for your hand in marriage; and as he is a wholly fitting and suitable *parti* I have accepted his proposal, and assured him, in advance, of your acceptance."

The queen was silent and looked questioningly at the young girl, still leaning speechless and with bowed head against the door. This silent submission, this unmurmuring resignation, enraged the queen instead of calming her anger. She took this silence for defiance, this humility for obstinacy.

"Are you not curious to know the name of your future husband?" she asked, sharply; "or is it joy, perhaps, that seals your tongue and prevents you from speaking the thanks due me for my maternal care?"

"Pardon, your Majesty," said Laura, raising her soft eyes with a beseeching expression to the queen's stern countenance; "it is not joy which seals my tongue, but reverence for your Majesty. I feel no joy."

"You feel no joy!" exclaimed the queen, with the savage pleasure of the lioness that sees her foe approaching near enough to be torn to pieces. "Then you will have to submit without pleasure to your marriage. That is all! And since you are so superior to all feminine foibles as not even to be curious, I shall have to tell you whose betrothed you are, in order that you may be under no misapprehension and may not perchance, in the tenderness of your heart, render another than your future husband happy in your embraces."

Laura uttered a slight cry and her cheeks, which had been colorless, were flaming purple.

"Have mercy, your Majesty!" whispered Elizabeth Christine, laying her hand upon the shoulder of the queen mother. "See how this poor girl is suffering."

Sophia Dorothea shrugged her shoulders. "Ah, bah! have we not suffered in our lives?" she said, carelessly. "Is there a woman alive who has not wept away the half of her heart?"

"It is true," murmured the queen; "it is the sad privilege of women to weep and suffer."

"Well," asked Sophia Dorothea, turning again to Laura, "it still does not please you to inquire the name of your betrothed? I must tell you. Mark it well—it is Count Voss who has chosen you for his wife, and from now on you will have to turn your love toward him!"

Now, at last, Laura turned her eyes upon the cruel queen, but the young girl's gaze was no longer mild and pleading; it was firm and determined. The queen's imperious manner, instead of subduing this tender, girlish soul, had steeled her courage and restored to Laura the consciousness of her own dignity.

"Your Majesty," she said, with mild decision, "love cannot be bestowed at command."

"You mean that you do not love Count Voss?" cried the queen mother, restraining her wrath with difficulty.

Laura von Pannewitz bowed her head humbly. "Your Majesty has guessed aright," she said; "I do not love Count Voss."

"Well," said the queen, with a cruel laugh, "then you will marry without love, that is all!"

Laura raised her head with a passionate movement. Her eyes met those of the queen with a firm, almost wrathful glance. From this moment Sophia Dorothea was for her no longer queen and mistress, but a mere woman who wished to rob another of the most sacred rights and make a slave of her.

"Your Majesty, pardon me," she said; "as I said that I do not love Count Voss, it follows that I shall never marry him."

The queen mother sprang to her feet as though stung by an adder. "Not marry!" she repeated, with hoarse, trembling voice. "But I tell you that you shall marry him, if I have to let them drag you to the altar by force."

"Then would I say 'No' before the altar!" cried the young girl, turning toward heaven a face glowing with heroism.

The queen uttered a hoarse cry and stood like the lioness

about to rend her prey. But Elizabeth Christine laid her hand upon the raised arm and held it back with gentle force. "Your Majesty," she whispered, softly, "what do you wish to do? You cannot mean to force this poor child to marry against her will, and since she does not love the count she is but right to refuse him her hand."

"Ah! you defend her still!" cried Sophia Dorothea, beside herself. "You do not dream why she refuses to marry the count? You do not comprehend that, when a poor, dependent maid of honor declines the hand of a rich and blameless cavalier, it is only because she thinks she has assured her future elsewhere; because in the arrogance of her vain heart she believes in the possibility of winning a higher lot by her coquetry and well-calculated play? Yet, in spite of its tempting outer side, such a lot could mean for her only shame and disgrace. Surely she cannot be mad enough to believe that her treasonable and unchaste love can be sanctified by the blessing of the church! She cannot hope to place her foot where the rightful wife of the king alone may stand, where the sister of the king of England has stood, where she still stands, and is determined to repulse the miserable coquette who hoped to win a throne by her shameless charms!"

Laura von Pannewitz uttered a shrill cry, and, raising her arms to heaven, exclaimed, "My God! my God! this must I hear and live!"

The queen mother broke into a loud, contemptuous laugh. But Elizabeth Christine looked with questioning wonder at the scene which she failed to comprehend, though its tragic force touched her heart.

"It is a very heavy and cruel accusation which your Majesty hurls at the head of this young girl. Let us hope that she may succeed in justifying herself."

"Justify herself!" repeated the queen mother. "Look at her! See how my words have crushed her, and humiliated her proud being! Believe me, Elizabeth, this Fräulein whom you so generously pity understands my words better than your Majesty. And I know well of what I accuse her. But you, too, my daughter, must know it. You have a right to this, you——"

"Oh! your Majesty, have mercy!" cried Laura, falling upon her knees and stretching out her arms to the queen in supplication. "Speak no further! Do not humiliate me yet more deeply by betraying my secret, which on your lips becomes an accusation against me. Let us pause at this abyss of shame to which your Majesty has hurled me in calling me a miserable

coquette. A being so degraded, so trodden under foot cannot further share the honor of approaching your Majesty. This I see, and therefore humbly beg for my dismissal; not, as your Majesty may assume, to lead an independent though shameful life, but to flee to some quiet corner of the world where, alone and unnoticed, but at least undisgraced, I can weep over the beautiful and innocent dream of my life, from which your Majesty has awakened me with such hard words."

She was wondrously beautiful in this kneeling attitude, with raised arms and pale, noble face bedewed with tears. Sophia Dorothea saw this, and was only the more embittered, more cruel in consequence.

"Ah! she dares to reproach me. She has retained so much consciousness of her shame that she trembles to hear what she did not tremble to do. Listen, my daughter, you who have so soft and pitiful a heart for this Fräulein, you who, when I have spoken, will detest and curse her as I do, and as you are justified in doing! Believe me, Elizabeth, I know all your sorrow, I know the secret history of your noble, proud, and reserved heart! Ask this maiden the source of your sorrow and your suffering, ask her the cause of your tears and your lonely nights of weeping. Demand of her the restitution of your ruined happiness, your blighted hopes. Fräulein Laura von Pannewitz must restore you all this, for it is she who has taken it, she is the beloved of the king!"

"Of the king!" cried Elizabeth, filled with pain, while Laura let her hands fall from her face, which had been buried in them, and looked at the queen with confused, astonished eyes.

"Yes, of the king," replied Sophia Dorothea, whose excited blood flowed to her head until it swam and she was scarcely able to maintain the appearance of outward calmness. "She is the beloved of the king, and for that reason declines to marry Count Voss. But patience, patience! Let her not yet triumph, and if she dares to love my son, the son of Sophia Dorothea, King Frederick, let her remember that Doris Ritter, too, loved him and was loved by him, and was lashed through the streets for doing so!"

Laura von Pannewitz uttered so terrible a cry that even the queen mother paused for a moment and felt a sort of pity for the poor, broken-hearted girl who lay at her feet like a gazelle felled by a fatal shot, writhing in agony. But she dared not yield to this pity, betray her weakness, of which she was ashamed. She took the young queen's hand and said, darting a last contemptuous glance at Laura: "Come, my daughter,

let us torture ourselves no longer with the sight of this Fräulein, whose tears, let us hope, are called forth by remorse and repentance. May she allay our just wrath by determining today to accept the hand of the count voluntarily, without forcing us to harsher measures. Then we may, perhaps, cease to despise her. Come, my daughter!" She took the young queen's hand and accompanied her through the salon to the door which led to the boudoir. Sophia Dorothea threw back the heavy portière with a violent movement and went away. But Elizabeth Christine did not follow her at once. She looked backward to the trembling figure lying there on the floor, and the sight of the pale, noble face touched her.

"Pardon me, your Majesty, if I do not follow you at once," said the young queen; and going to the Fräulein she continued, with a wan smile, "I should like to speak a few words with Fräulein von Pannewitz, and I think I have a right to do so."

The queen mother felt a cruel satisfaction at these words.

"Ah! my daughter," she said, "even your kindness and patience are exhausted, and you feel that here no pardon is possible, but only contempt and wrath. Yes, speak withher! Let her feel the whole force of your indignation. Your words will have annihilating weight with this criminal. But hasten, for the king will appear very soon with his court."

The queen mother let fall the portière, and closed the inner door of her boudoir. She would hear nothing of Elizabeth's conversation with the maid of honor. She needed quiet to regain her self-possession and prepare for receiving the king.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MISUNDERSTANDING.

The young queen, whom the people called, with an irony which she alone could feel, the reigning queen, was alone with Laura von Pannewitz. For a moment she was faint and powerless to speak. New, unwonted, stormy feelings made tumult in her resigned soul. One moment she experienced all the torture of jealousy, anger, the humiliation of rejected love. Leaning against the wall, she gazed across at her who lay wringing her hands and weeping upon the floor, who, nevertheless, called a happiness her own which to possess Eliza-

beth would gladly have given years of her life. At last she had found her for whose sake she was herself rejected. At last she stood face to face with the envied, happy being whom the king loved. This was the despoiler of her happiness! A wild pleasure reigned for a moment in her breast, at seeing that being bathed in tears, writhing humiliated at Elizabeth's feet.

But this passionate feeling soon died away. Elizabeth was too tender and noble a woman to yield long to such stormy emotions. She experienced a certain melancholy joy at seeing that it was not coldness of heart, but love, which estranged the king from his wife, and her sense of justice recognized that this woman whom the king loved was more attractive than herself, with her silent, prosaic beauty. Her love for her husband was so free from egotism, so full of resignation and generosity, that she experienced a feeling of thankfulness for this woman who created for her husband the happiness which she had not been able to grant him.

With a noble, truly royal expression in her beautiful face, she approached the maid of honor, who still lay weeping with covered face upon the floor, and had not noticed the presence of the queen.

"Stand up," said Elizabeth, mildly. "It is not fitting for you to weep. A woman whom the king loves must not, like any other, fall upon her knees and mourn!"

Laura withdrew her hands from her face, and looked up at the queen almost joyfully.

"God has heard my prayer," she said. "He wills it not that your Majesty despise and condemn me. He grants my prayer for the opportunity of justifying myself in your eyes."

"Justify!" repeated Elizabeth. "Ah! believe me, in my eyes you are already justified. You are young, beautiful, talented, merry. You have a rare gift of conversation, with a spirited, witty answer for every piquant word. All this has attracted the king's attention to you, won his love. And with that all is said, for it is impossible for any woman to resist when the king loves her. So I pardon you, and I beg you to fill your whole soul with the one thought that it is your duty to make the king happy. This is what I had to say to you, nothing more. Farewell!"

She was about to go, but Laura held the hem of her dress.

"Oh! your Majesty," she cried, beseechingly, "hear me; do not leave me under this cruelly false impression, with this shameful suspicion. Do not think that I am so demoralized, so bare of every feminine feeling that the laws of the church

and of morals no longer exist for me. Oh, believe me, that the husband of my queen is sacred in my eyes! If I really had the misfortune, as your Majesty believes, to love his majesty otherwise than with the devotion of a loyal subject, I would rather die than do anything, or even think anything, which might offend against your Majesty's rights. Unhappy and blameworthy as I am, your Majesty must not hold me a criminal. Nay! I am not the beloved of the king! Never has his majesty distinguished me by one word, one look. Never have I felt for him anything else than the most obedient, respectful loyalty."

"Ah!" said the queen, sadly, "you repudiate him, you have not even the courage to be proud that the king loves you. You must feel that you are greatly to blame!"

"O my God!" moaned Laura, utterly despairing. "She does not believe me."

"No, I do not believe you, Laura, for I saw how you started and turned pale when the queen accused you of this love for her son; but I have not heard you try to clear yourself."

"I did not know that the queen mother spoke of her son Frederick," murmured Laura, blushing deeply, and speaking so low that the queen did not hear her.

"Do not make further denials," continued Elizabeth; "confess a passion for which every woman on earth must envy you, and I forgive you! Do not believe what the queen told you. I have nothing to ask of you, for I lack nothing; I do not weep, do not complain, do not, as she said, pass my nights in tears, I do not mourn a life's lost happiness. No, I am content and reconciled to my fate, provided that I know the king is happy. But should this be one day otherwise, should you prove faithless to the high duty of making him happy, then, Laura, I withdraw this my pardon; then shall I curse you remorselessly, shall be in my own person your accusing conscience as I now seek to bless you!"

"No, no, you must not go!" cried Laura, deeply moved by Elizabeth's nobility and greatness of soul. "Believe me, have mercy upon me. I suffer enough without this. This dreadful accusation was not needed to punish me for a love which, however much to be condemned, is at least not criminal or sinful! As true as God is over us and hears me, it is not the king whom I love. But you turn from me again! O your Majesty——"

Suddenly Laura was silent and a shudder passed over her whole frame. She had heard the voice of her lover; it seemed

to her that God had sent him to rescue her, to clear her from the shameful suspicion that rested upon her.

The door of the salon opened and Prince Augustus William appeared upon the threshold. His face was carefree and bright, for he had come to greet his mother, of whom he had been told that she was in this room and had commanded that no one be announced. But she had always given her sons the privilege of entering unannounced. Prince William wished to-day, as usual, to use his privilege, wished it the more as he had been told that Fräulein von Pannewitz was with the queen; so a jesting greeting was upon his lips as he entered the salon and met the extraordinary scene transpiring there. Laura upon her knees, her face pale and distorted, and before her the queen, proudly erect, making no effort to lift the young girl from her kneeling, humble attitude. Such a picture the proud and tender lover could not endure. The passionate blood of the Hohenzollerns awoke in him, and the hot waves of anger mastering his brain, he forgot all considerations of reserve. With a bound he was at her side, lifting her from the floor with passionate force, and demanding, with eyes flashing rage:

"What is the meaning of this scene? why are you weeping, Laura? why upon your knees, you who are so holy, pure, and innocent that all the world might kneel in reverence before you? And you, madame, permit this angel to humble herself in the dust before you! How have you dared to wound her? What have you done to her, that this noble face is bathed in tears? Oh, madame, I require an adequate account of this; I demand it in the name of honor, love, and justice, for Laura is my betrothed and I have a right to defend her!"

"Now she will no longer accuse me of an adulterous passion," whispered Laura, clinging, faint and weak, to her betrothed.

"Your betrothed?" said the queen, with a sorrowful smile. "Ah! how young you are and how confiding, my brother, to believe in the possibility of such a union."

"She will be my wife," he cried, ardently. "I have sworn it, and I shall keep my word. I have courage to defy all storms and to brave every danger; I fear no condemnation of the world nor of my brother. Our love is pure and honorable, free before God, the king, and all the world. Go, betray to the king, madame, a love which some accident has doubtless revealed, and for the sake of which you must have been wounding and insulting this dear and noble being, since I found her on her knees before you, weeping!"

"It is true, I have insulted her," said the queen, softly; "I doubted her word, her assurances. But the Fräulein herself knows that this insult was unintentional, and that I was under a false impression for which not I, but the queen mother, was responsible."

"How so? Does my mother, too, know of our love? asked the prince, in astonishment.

"She believes, or rather she is convinced, that Fräulein von Pannewitz loves the king and is loved by him. She therefore overwhelmed her with reproaches and commanded her to marry Count Voss, who has sued for her hand."

The prince pressed his half-fainting, still weeping loved one to his heart with passionate force. "Ah! They wish to tear thee away from me. But my arms shall hold thee and my breast be thy shield to protect thee! Nay, do not tremble, my Laura, and do not weep. As we are here united arm in arm, so shall we now approach the king, so will I show thee to the whole court and say, "This is my betrothed; I have given my oath of eternal fidelity, and never shall it be broken!"

"Hush, be silent!" cried the queen; "let not your mother hear these words, and most of all, do not betray your sad secret to the king! When you have spoken it you are lost, and his remorseless severity will strike you both."

"Then you will not tell him what you have seen and heard here?" asked the prince, in astonishment. "You have the courage to keep a secret from your husband?"

"Oh!" said the queen, with a sorrowful smile, "my whole life, thought, experience is a secret from him. No, my brother, I shall not betray you, either to my husband or your mother. But have a care that no one else learns of this unhappy union, that must, alas! cause you much suffering. Be prudent and wise. Leave the queen mother under the erroneous impression that it is the king whom Laura loves, she will the less suspect yourself and her eyes will be less sharp than they otherwise would be! Thus can you obtain, perhaps, an occasional conversation unattended, a moment of undisturbed companionship, and that in your position is always happiness. But now hear my request. Never speak to me of this love which an accident has revealed to me, and I shall strive from this moment to forget. Never remind me that I am cognizant of a relation which, in the eyes of the king and your mother, is punishable and unpardonable, and of which it were my duty to give notice at once. So long as you are happy, so long as you can place your love under the protec-

tion of secrecy, I shall see and know nothing of your union! But one day, when storm and ruin surge over you, come to me. Then, my brother, you shall find in me a faithful friend, who will open her arms to you and weep with you over your lost happiness."

"O my queen, how noble, how generous you are!" cried Laura, pressing her lips to the hand offered her. But Elizabeth did not tolerate this humble testimony of love, she drew the young girl to herself, and pressed a tender kiss upon her hot, trembling lips.

"Among those who weep and suffer there is no difference of rank," she said. "I am for you not the queen, but a sister who understands and will heal your sorrow! When you are weary of weeping alone, come to me at Schönhausen. There you will find no amusements or noisy pleasures, but a dusky, quiet garden, among whose mighty tree-tops one seems to hear the consolation of the voice of God. You will find quiet, shady places, where you may weep unobserved, and a friend who will never ask the source of your tears."

"I will come," said Laura, in a choking voice. "I know well that I shall soon need this comfort, for my happiness will soon come to an end."

"And may I come too, my noble, generous sister?" asked the prince.

"Yes," she said, with a smile, "you may come, but only when Laura is not there. And now I entreat you, for your own safety, let us break off this conversation. Dry your eyes, Fräulein von Pannewitz, and try to smile. Then pray go down and summon my ladies in the garden. But you, my brother, come with me to your mother, who is there in her cabinet."

"No," he said, passionately, "I cannot see her now, I should not have strength to be quiet and indifferent, and to hide the pain that tortures me."

"O brother!" sighed the queen, "we princes have no right to show our pain. It is the sorrowful privilege of our rank to conceal our suffering; come! The queen, who is filled with wrath, will receive you with a smile, none the less, and we, who are sad and filled with pain, will smile as well. Come!"

"Let me say one word more to my Laura," begged the prince; and as he accompanied the young girl through the room to the door, he laid his arm about her slender waist and pressed a kiss upon her lustrous black hair.

"Laura," he whispered, softly, "Laura, dost thou remember thy vow? Wilt thou be faithful to it? Will my mother's threats find thee strong and courageous? Thou wilt not bow thy head nor let them so far humiliate thee as to force thee to accept the hand of this Count Voss, who would tear thee from me?"

She gave him one glowing look of decision. "They may kill me, but they cannot force me to be unfaithful to myself," she said.

He laid his hand as if with a blessing upon her beautiful head, and smiled at her. The whole history of that noble, chaste, and holy love lay in that smile, and in the glance with which she answered it.

"Dost thou know," he asked her, further, "that thou hast promised me to meet me now and then in yonder greenhouse?"

"I know it," she replied, blushing deeply.

"Well, then, Laura, after a few days we must part! The king will make a pleasure journey and has requested me to accompany him. I must obey."

"Ah, my God! They wish to remove you at once. I shall never see you again!" sighed Laura, pressing her lover's hand upon her bosom, as though she would detain him.

"We shall meet again," he answered, confidently; "but to give me courage to leave you, you must grant me the one favor of seeing you to say adieu. So listen to me. The day of our departure is not yet fixed. Whenever it is determined, I shall come hither and tell my mother of it in your presence. On the evening before our departure I shall be in the greenhouse and await you there. Shall I wait in vain, Laura?"

"No," she whispered, softly, "I shall be there"—and fleeing before her own words, she hastened toward the garden salon. The prince looked after her with a delighted smile, then turned to offer his arm to escort his sister-in-law to the queen mother. But the young queen was not there. She had not wished to be witness and accomplice of this agreement, and had preferred to go alone to the queen mother. The prince, yielding to the first boisterous impulse of his heart, was about to hasten after Fräulein von Pannewitz to accompany her in the garden, when the loud cry of the watch was heard without, followed by the blast of trumpets

CHAPTER XXXI.

A SOIRÉE AT THE QUEEN DOWAGER'S.

"The king is coming," whispered Augustus William, and strode with a sigh toward the boudoir of the queen mother. But the door opened and the two queens hastened forth to go to the garden salon to welcome the king. Both faces were disturbed and deeply moved. Sophia Dorothea felt a sort of awe and dread of the meeting with her son, who might, perhaps, read in the reddened eyes of his sweetheart the story of the past hour, and be angry that they made her weep. She was obliged to confess that she had, perhaps, gone too far—let her rage master her too completely—and this made her constrained and ill at ease.

Elizabeth Christine was not uneasy, but deeply moved. Her heart beat longingly at this meeting with her husband, whom she had not seen since coronation day, with whom she had not spoken since the fateful and sorrowful conversation of that memorable night. For not once had the king addressed her on coronation day, once only had he taken her hand, and that was after the homage, when he had led her into the circle of the assembled court and said: "See, this is your queen."

Both ladies were so moved, so occupied with their own thoughts that, hastening through the salon, they scarcely observed the prince, who had stepped aside to let them pass. The queen mother nodded to him abstractedly, then turned again to Elizabeth, who had scarcely patience to maintain the slow, measured pace of the queen mother instead of hastening forward to meet her husband.

"If this Pannewitz complains to him, I shall have a dreadful scene," said Sophia Dorothea to herself.

"She will not complain," answered Elizabeth.

"All the worse, for then she will play the generous, injured woman," cried the queen, bitterly, "and that I shall still less forgive than a complaint."

The doors opened, the king, accompanied by his retinue and that of both the queens, entered the salon. The expression of both ladies changed instantly. No feature betrayed disquiet. Both greeted him with calm brows and innocent smiles. The king hastened to his mother, and bowing low

before her, tenderly kissed her proffered hand, greeting her with reverent and cordial expressions of affection. Then he turned to his wife, and made a formal, ceremonious bow. But he neither offered to take her hand nor spoke one word. Elizabeth Christine responded with a bow, and as she bent her head suppressed a tear. The queen mother's face was now glowing and triumphant once more. The king knew nothing thus far, and it was only necessary to prevent his speaking with Laura alone and unobserved. Her eye roamed in the direction of the court ladies, and she observed the young girl talking with Prince Augustus William, her face serious and unembarrassed.

"I shall prevent her speaking alone with the king," thought the queen, with rejoicing.

From this moment Sophia Dorothea was in so merry a mood that her spirits seemed to animate her son. There was a play of witty jests hither and thither, a strife of *bons mots* in which the queen yielded naught to her son, and seemed at times to excel him. Elizabeth stood silent and sorrowful at one side, and when at intervals the king's glance, as though by chance, flitted past her face, it seemed contemptuous and repellant. Then her cheeks grew whiter, and she retained with difficulty the stereotyped smile upon her lips. The queen mother proposed a walk in the garden, then an improvised ball in the lighted halls, as the court mourning still forbade all formal festivities.

"But why go seeking for flowers in the garden when there are so many charming ones here?" asked the king, aloud, his smiling glance straying about the circle of court ladies, who all blushed deeply with modestly downcast eyes. Three pairs of eyes followed this glance of the king with exact attention.

"He had scarcely noticed Laura," thought the queen mother, with a long breath of relief.

"He scarcely saw me," thought Elizabeth Christine, with a sigh.

"He did not pause an instant at any of the faces," thought Pöllnitz, "so it is clear that he gives a preference to none of them. I shall succeed with my beautiful Doris."

The king, whose only intention in making his proposition had been to relieve his mother, whose afflicted foot and increasing weight made walking increasingly difficult, now led her to a sofa, silently bowing to his wife and reaching her his left hand to lead her to the same seat. Sophia Dorothea, who noticed every gesture, every syllable of her son on that day, observed this cruel silence, and pitied the poor, pale, si-

lent wife. So the queen mother bent toward the king, who was leaning, hat in hand, against the high back of the sofa.

"My son," she whispered, softly, "I think you have not addressed one word to your wife this day."

The king's face darkened. "Madame," he answered, in the same low tone, but harshly, "madame, Elizabeth Christine is my queen but not my wife."

And, as though fearing further discussion, he beckoned Marquis Algarotti and Count Chazot to approach and participate in the conversation of the two queens.

Suddenly a lady appeared who was entitled to be presented to the queen, having apparently just arrived. This lady was of a striking pallor, which was the more conspicuous because of her black costume relieved by no flower or other decoration. Her eyes, deep in their sockets, glowed with feverish brightness, her thin lips, upon which a labored smile played, were firmly closed, as though to suppress a cry or sigh. No one could have recognized in this pale, majestic, slowly moving figure the "Tourbillon" of old, the merry, arrogant, irrepressible Madame Morien. No one could have dreamed that her beauty, once so fresh, rosy, luxuriant, could attain in so few months this sad, grave character. This was Madame Morien's first appearance at the court of the queen mother, and people said that she was just recovering from a long and serious illness. No one knew the nature of this illness, and the backbiting, insidious court people whispered divers scornful and injurious suggestions about it among themselves. They said Madame Morien had become ill of the withdrawn love of Frederick, suffering from a cold which had attacked, not herself but the king. They hinted that she was afflicted with a new consumption, not of the lungs but the heart, a repetition of the malady which had afflicted Dido when cruel Æneas deserted her.

The queen mother received the beautiful, pale woman very graciously, reaching her hand to be kissed and smiling condescendingly.

"It is a whole eternity since we have seen you here, baroness," she said. "It seems you have wished to be invisible, and quite forgotten that we rejoice to see you."

"Your Majesty is very good to remember that," said Madame Morien, softly. "Death almost made me a candidate for oblivion, and I surely should not have ventured to-day to approach your Majesty with my pale, sad face, if your express command had not emboldened me to do so."

There was something in the low, suffering tone of Madame

Morien's voice which aroused pity and disarmed even the anger of the young queen. For the first time since the banquet at Rheinsberg, Elizabeth Christine now met this woman, who had suffered and wept so much. And in view of the pale face, she forgave her all the pain she herself had suffered through Madame Morien. For, with the instinct of a loving heart, the queen guessed all the terrible affliction of her rival, that it was the same as her own, that she was consuming herself in the woe of a despised and rejected love. For the king had no glance or greeting for his "bewitching Leontine," seemed not to have observed her presence, and quietly continued his conversation with Chazot and Algarotti, without considering Madame Morien's deep reverence worthy of recognition.

"I have some news for your Majesty, too," said the king, turning to the queen. "We are about to transform Berlin into a temple of science and art and to make it a seat of learning. The muses, too, when the mood seizes them, may descend from Olympus and always find a hospitable reception in Berlin. For listen to this last new item. Voltaire comes this autumn to Berlin to visit us, and Maupertius, the great scholar, who first showed to the world the form of the earth, will take up his abode with us as President of the Academy of Sciences; Vaucanson, too, who has made a duck that would do no shame to the real creation, and soon we can call Eulert from St. Petersburg, our own."

"That is all very fine," said Sophia Dorothea, smiling, "but I fear your Majesty, when surrounded by so many scholars, artists, and poets, will quite forget us poor, ignorant women, or banish us from your learned court."

"That would be banishing pleasure, beauty, happiness, the graces, madame, and such barbarity you surely will not attribute to the son of my noble and exalted mother," replied the king, with a smile. "What were the arts without women? Even the Catholic Church was wise enough to see that it never could draw mankind within the meshes of its net with the mere trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and it called a woman to its assistance, whose beautiful, mysterious, immaculate virginity is the finest, most piquant, and intoxicating perfume of the miracle-flower of their religion. And what would the great painters have been without women, without the enchanting sweethearts whom they transformed into holy virgins, making of the dainty creatures chaste madonnas before whom wise children of men fall on their knees in worship to this day, before the eternally feminine, the mysterious

virgin? How many madonnas Raphael made of his Lais Fornarina, and how well Correggio understood transforming his enchanting wife into a repentant Magdalen. I have a réal disgust for the weeping, sighing Magdalens who, worn out with earthly passion, coquette with heaven, and swear the same vows of fidelity to God which they have sworn a thousand times to men and broken a thousand times more. If I were in God's place, I should not accept these curious saints, for I hate pale, lean, sighing, tearful beauties, and the farcical exhibition of their woes could never touch me."

With these words the king darted a glance for the first time in the direction of Madame Morien, and his eye rested upon her with a long, cold, penetrating stare. She had heard every word which he had spoken, and each was like a poisoned dagger thrust into her heart. Though her eyes were fixed upon the ground, she felt that his gaze rested upon her, and she felt its crushing force. She neither cried out nor burst into tears, but, steadily and almost smiling, replied to the questions of Elizabeth Christine, which were meant to keep her from hearing the king's cruel words.

"You have forgotten to mention one great surprise, my son," said the queen mother, who wished to turn the conversation and draw it away from the dangerous domain of religion. "You have not mentioned that you have bestowed upon this excellent and inquisitive city of Berlin two German newspapers and a French one. Yet I assure you that I always await with impatience the day when these papers appear, and bury myself in the new and surprising reading-matter which makes politics a charming subject of conversation for everyone and reports the events of the day most faithfully."

"Let us hope that these journals may have great events to report to us," said the king, gravely; then, resuming his lighter tone, he continued: "But we are quite forgetting that your Majesty promised the ladies a little ball. See how impatiently our little princesses are watching us, and with what wrathful looks my little Amalie is trying to pierce me because I have obliged her to sit in her fauteuil like a maid of honor, while she longs so to dance about us like a merry zephyr. Come, my dear little princess sister, and, to appease you, I beg the first dance."

The king gave his hand to his sister and led her into the dancing-room, whither the queens and the court followed them.

"Now he will doubtless seek his opportunity of speaking to the Pannewitz," thought the queen mother, "so we must take measures." She beckoned her second son, Prince Augustus William, to her side. "My son," she said, "I have a trifling favor to ask of you."

"Your Majesty knows that you have but to command."

"I know that you are a good son, ready to serve your mother. So listen. I have weighty reasons for wishing that the king should not converse for any length of time, alone, with Fräulein von Pannewitz this evening. I will explain at another time why I wish to avoid this. I beg of you, therefore, pay court a little to Fräulein von Pannewitz. Should the king approach her, seem not to see his glance of dismissal, but mingle unembarrassed in the conversation, and do not leave the lady's side until the king has departed. Will you do this for me, my son?"

"I will fulfil exactly the commands of my royal mother," said the prince, with perfect gravity.

He bowed to his mother, and hastened to obey her commands, placing himself at Laura's side. The queen mother, now wholly quieted, took her place with her daughter-in-law and the cavaliers at the card-table, while the king remained in the dancing-hall, inviting almost every lady in the room in turn. With Madame Morien alone he did not dance, her alone he passed unnoticed. Not once did his eye meet hers, that followed him everywhere with a tender, beseeching, melancholy expression.

"So sad?" whispered Madame Brandt, who, radiant with beauty and merriment, came to her side, having just danced with the king. Madame Morien offered, with a smile, her lean, transparent hand. "Dear friend," she whispered "you were right; I should not have come here. I thought myself stronger than I am. I thought my mourning would awaken his sympathy."

"Sympathy," laughed Madame Brandt; "men never have sympathy with women—they can only worship or despise them. They either place us upon an altar or hurl us in the dust under their feet. So we must take care gradually to build up so high the altar upon which they mount us, that they cannot reach us later to drag us down."

"You are right," sighed Madame Morien. "I should have been more prudent, cold, discreet. But I believed in his having a heart, for I loved him."

"You believed in the heart of a man! What woman can boast that she has shut up that chasm, and holds its key?"

"Yes, the heart of a man is an abyss," said Madame Morien, mournfully. "At first they cover it over with flowers, but we think we are dwelling in Paradise; but when the flowers

have wilted they no longer sustain our weight, and we plunge downward, to perish miserably in the depths."

Madame Brandt laid her diamond-laden hand upon her friend's shoulder, and looked with a mischievous expression into her pale face.

"Dear Morien," she said, "not all the blame must be cast upon the men. If a day comes when they free themselves of their love, the blame rests quite as much with the women, if they misuse their power or do not understand making the most of it. It is not enough to love and be loved in return. Besides love itself, one must possess the tactics of love. These tactics are necessary. Women who cannot rule the heart they possess soon lose possession. That is your case, dear friend. You are too much a woman and too little a diplomatist in your love. You gave way to your feeling too completely, and, instead of fanning passion by resistance, you went to meet it; and stimulated by the resistance which you found, you have plunged into that abyss in which, poor Leontine, you have for the moment left health and strength. But it must not remain so. You must emerge proud and triumphant. I will give you my hand, will assist you. While you are sighing, I shall be thinking for you. While you are weeping, I shall use my eyes for you."

Madame Morien shook her head sadly.

"You will only see that he never sees me, has wholly forgotten me."

"If I see that, I shall close my eyes not to see it. And if you see it, you must smile the more brightly, look about you the more victoriously. Dearest friend, what has love made of you? Where is your coquetry and your cleverness? You have become a young girl again, sentimental as a child over its first love. But tender as one may be, one must not be swallowed up in one's love, not lose one's individuality. One must not be a mere charming something rosy to look at, decked with lace like the cushion on which one dreams of one's love. In one corner of our devoted heart there must always be a tigress hidden away, ready to use her claws to tear to pieces him whom she loves, if he venture to spring from her. So cease to be a sentimental, tearful Magdalen. Be a revengeful, cruel tigress. Besides, you have a brilliant object in life outside of your passion. Think of it. First Lady of the Order of Virtue, bearing the cross of modesty upon your chaste breast. What an exalted goal! You will attain it. I bring you the best assurance thereof, an autograph letter from the empress, such as you wished. You see

your conditions are faithfully fulfilled. The empress writes you and assures you of her grace, and that the intended order shall soon be founded. You know what that 'soon' means. The king has not divorced his wife, so you receive the imperial autograph. Now help to get Prince Augustus William married to Princess Amalie of Brunswick, and you shall be First Lady of the Austrian Order of Virtue. There, take the empress's letter, first of all."

And Madame Brandt, plunged her hand in the pocket of her satin skirt to draw out the letter. She started and grew pale.

"Heavens!" she murmured, breathlessly, "the letter is not in my pocket. Yet I am certain that I put it there. A few moments before I came to you I felt the empress' seal quite plainly. The letter was there. Where can it be? Who has stolen it from me? Impossible. I must recover it. It must be in my pocket."

Trembling with fear, in breathless haste Madame Brandt drew forth all the small objects hidden in her pocket to see whether the hapless letter might not have caught in her gold-embroidered handkerchief, or have slidden into the open case of her smelling-bottle. She never thought that they might be observed, and her disquiet and anxiety seen. And truly no one heeded her, for each was busy with his own enjoyment.

In the dancing-room, the couples were circling about in a merry dance to the music. But poor Madame Brandt sought in vain for her letter. Had she lost it, or had it been stolen? Suddenly she remembered that, a little while before, in talking with Pöllnitz she had drawn her fan from her pocket. Perhaps she had drawn out the note with it. Perhaps Pöllnitz had found it, and was seeking Madame Morien to give it to her. She looked in vain about the room for Pöllnitz.

Madame Morien had not noticed her friend's anguish, or had forgotten it. She was gazing about in search of the king, as vainly as Madame Brandt for Pöllnitz.

"I cannot see him," she murmured, sorrowfully.

"Whom?" asked Madame Brandt, searching her pocket once more, in dire anxiety.

"The king," said Madame Morien, astonished that her friend could ask that question. "He must have left the dancing-room. A little while ago he was talking with Pöllnitz, and now——"

"With Pöllnitz?" interrupted Madame Brandt, hastily, and her eye roamed once more, anxiously searching for the master of ceremonies. Suddenly she uttered a low cry, and a

purple flush spread over her face. She had seen the king, and their eyes had met, for his sharp, observant glance was directed steadily upon her. He was standing aside in a window-niche, half-concealed by the long, heavy curtains, staring at both ladies.

"I see the king," said Madame Morien.

"And I see Pöllnitz standing beside him," said Madame Brandt. She hastily pushed the smelling-bottle case and handkerchief into her pocket, and opened her fan to hide her flushed, heated face behind it, for the king's observant look alarmed her.

"Let us make a tour of the halls, dearest Morien," said Madame Brandt, rising. "The heat here smothers me. And I should like to search a little for the letter, which I may, perhaps, have lost somewhere and can find again."

"What letter?" asked Madame Brandt, indifferently.

Her friend looked at her in amazement.

"Have you heard nothing that I've been saying to you?"

"Oh, yes; you said you had given me the autograph letter of the Empress of Austria."

"But I have lost that letter, here, in the dancing-room."

"Then someone will find it and give it to me, as it is probably addressed to me."

"But, dear Morien, I do beseech you, be not so indifferent. This is a very serious and important matter. If I have really lost this letter, and not merely forgotten it in my room, we are in danger of being suspected by the king as Austrian spies."

At mention of the king's name Madame Morien was all attention and sympathy.

"Will they be able to read the letter? Was it not sealed?" she asked.

"That, indeed; but with the private seal of the empress, and her name encircles the coat-of-arms of Austria. Without opening the letter it will, therefore, be recognized as coming from the Empress of Austria, and will awaken suspicion. But listen. It was wrapped in paper which bore no address, but which must compromise us both, if people know that it was meant for me."

"And what was in the paper?"

"These words: 'The enclosed note, dear friend, you will have the goodness to forward to its destination. You see, the empress keeps her word; let us do the same, and not forget our promise. A happy marriage is a good thing, pleasing not alone to God but also to mankind—helping on the one hand to virtue, on the other to a set of diamonds.'"

"Was the letter signed?"

"No, it was not signed, but if it should find its way into the king's hands he will know from whom it comes, for he knows Manteuffel's writing."

"Come, come, let us look for it," said Madame Morien, anxious and alarmed at last. "We must have this hapless paper again. Come!"

She took her friend's arm and went with her down the dancing-room, both examining the floor in alarm to see if something white were not to be found upon the brown parquetry.

"You are right," said the king, emerging from the window-niche. "You are right, Pöllnitz, they are looking for something, and it was therefore Madame Brandt to whom this letter was addressed. Let them search. They will find as little as the eleven thousand foolish virgins. But listen well, Baron, to what I have to say to you. This whole affair remains a secret, of which no one is to know anything. You are to forget that you have found this letter and given it to me, or you may remember that it was a dream—nothing more!"

"Yes, your Majesty," said Pöllnitz, smiling; "a dream like Eckert's, when he thought the house in the Jaeger Street his, which, nevertheless, when he awakened belonged to your Majesty."

"You are a fool," said the king, with a smile, nodding to the baron and going to meet the two queens, who had now finished their game of cards and were returning to the dancing-room. The queen mother offered her hand to her son with a friendly smile. She wished to carry out her project and keep her promise to Count Rhedern. She did not at all doubt that the king, who was so reverential and devoted to her, would grant her the request, the court being once more a witness to the great influence which she exercised upon the king.

She stood with her son directly beneath the great chandelier in the middle of the hall. Near her were the reigning queen and the princes and princesses of the royal house. It was an interesting picture, this group, sharply illuminated from above, the faces all so alike in feature, yet so different in expression—all flowers of one tree, differing each from each in size and form. The courtiers stood in close groups looking at the family picture.

"Your Majesty," said the queen, in her full, silvery voice, "I have one more request to make of you to-day."

The king bowed reverently and kissed his mother's prof-

fered hand. "Oh, your Majesty," he said, "you know well that you have not to request, but to command."

Sophia Dorothea smiled proudly and nodded to the king with a most friendly smile. "I thank you for this word, my son. Listen, then: My marshal, Count Rhedern, is thinking of marrying. I have promised him to obtain your consent to his marriage."

"If my royal mother acquiesces in the marriage of her marshal I also assent to it, assuming, of course, that the betrothed of the count is of good and respectable family. What is the bride's rank?"

The queen looked somewhat embarrassed. "Your Majesty, she has no rank."

The king's brow darkened a little. "Then she was not born to become a countess," he said, "and your marshal would do better to keep silent touching this folly instead of seeking my refusal. I hate every *mésalliance*, and shall tolerate nothing of the sort at my court."

These words, pronounced in a loud, stern voice, produced a different effect upon different members of the family circle. Some faces paled, others flushed. Sophia Dorothea flushed with pleasure, for these words of the king's freed her from the fear that he wished a divorce from his wife to enter upon an unlawful marriage with Fräulein von Pannewitz, and she was too virtuous a woman to believe in the possibility of a mistress *régime* in the Prussian court. So, for the moment, she was perfectly quieted, and the king's love for the beauty, Laura, seemed to her now a mere poetic fancy liable to pass away, and nothing more. Meanwhile, the queen mother was by no means conquered by her son's words. Her pride resented so sudden a defeat in the presence of her court and her family. She had, moreover, pledged her royal word to Count Rhedern, and must redeem the pledge. She tried once more to obtain the king's approval, but he was unyielding. Sophia Dorothea, irritated beyond measure, became obstinate in her determination to carry her point.

"Your Majesty is doubtless perfectly right in wishing to protect the nobility from unworthy *mésalliances*, but there are single exceptional cases where one must consider the good of the nobility itself;" and leaning over to her son she continued, softly, "Count Rhedern is totally ruined and must go to pieces if you prevent his making this rich marriage."

The king was attentive and sympathetic in an instant. "Is the lady so very rich?" he asked.

"Immensely rich, sire. She brings him a dowry of a

million thalers. It is a daughter of the silk factor Orguelin."

"Ah! of Orguelin! He is a worthy man, who has brought much wealth into the country through his factories," said the king, visibly softened.

"It were much to be regretted should this money be withdrawn from the country," continued the queen.

"What do you mean, your Majesty?" asked the king, sharply.

"Mademoiselle Orguelin has several wooers, thanks to her million, and at this moment a young Dutch merchant is the count's rival. This merchant has the father's consent, and will have the daughter's too unless Count Rhedern obtains the advantage over him."

"That must not be," cried the king, quickly. "This Orguelin must not marry the Hollander; a good million must not be lost to the country!"

"Yet your Majesty could not prevent this maiden's marrying according to her choice, nor her father's giving her a suitable dowry."

The king was silent a moment and seemed to be reflecting. Then he said, with a smile: "Your Majesty, you are too excellent an advocate to be resisted. I yield the point. Count Rhedern has my consent to his marriage with Mademoiselle Orguelin."

"But this, alas! is not enough, sire," said the queen, with her most beguiling smile. "There is another trifling condition, without the fulfilment of which the proud millionnaire will not bestow her hand. She will become the count's wife only when he can give her the assurance that she shall appear at court as fits her rank."

"Really!" exclaimed the king, with an ironical smile. "This millionnaire holds it a desirable thing to appear at our court."

"This seems to her a greater happiness than the possession of a husband who is a count."

The king looked reflective, then turning upon his mother a roguish smile, he said: "You know, mother, that I can refuse you nothing, and, since you wish it, Mademoiselle Orguelin when married shall be received as new-made countess at my court. But, favor for favor, I promise this upon condition that Count Néal be presented at your court."

"Count Néal!" cried the queen, angrily. "Your Majesty knows——"

"I know," interrupted the king, with a bow—"I know that

Count Néal is of quite as good ancestry as Countess Rhedern will be, and that, like her, he possesses several millions, which I have secured for our country by the recognition of his count's title. We agree, then, do we not? The Countess Rhedern shall be received at my court as well as Count Néal at yours?"

He offered the queen his hand; she reluctantly gave him hers. "My son, you have outwitted me cruelly," she whispered.

The king smiled. "Madame, we retain for our country three million thalers, and these weigh heavier in the end than a handful of mouldy ancestors. The Prussia of the future will win in battle by means of its nobility, but it will be mighty through its industries, richer and mightier than through its battles!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

UNDER THE LINDENS.

Unter den Linden, in Berlin, now the most beautiful street of the great city, was a lonely and deserted region in the year 1740. Frederick the First was the king of display and splendor. Of him Sophia Charlotte said, upon her death-bed, when they told her that the king would mourn her demise, "He will divert his mind with providing me a gorgeous funeral, and if all goes well with the ceremony and nothing is wanting in the decorations he will be comforted."

Frederick the First had had the lindens planted to make the way which led to Lützelburg, his wife's pleasure palace, more shady and agreeable. This palace he had given her, and it was called, in honor of her, Charlottenburg. He had done what he could to redeem the region that intervened between the city and the palace, but the zeal of the Berliners had done little to help him. No one went willingly to this remote part of the city, and all the buildings erected there had been at royal expense. A few rich men of the nobility had, to please the king, built large houses here, which, however, they did not occupy. One of these stately edifices belonged, not to Count Dohna or Baron von Plessen, but to the famous and respectable Court Tailor Pricker. And for a few days past a new and brilliant sign blazed before his door, upon which in large letters stood the legend, "Court Tailor

to her Majesty the Queen Mother and her Majesty the reigning Queen." Immediately adjoining the great Pricker establishment stood the dwelling of poor Anna Schömmer—the quondam Doris Ritter—and her family.

Deep stillness reigned in this part of the city. Only the royal equipages passed frequently when the king invited his court and nobles to some festivity at Charlottenburg. To-day, however, the royal vehicle stopped and four gentlemen descended from it—the king with his architect, Knobelsdorf, Pöllnitz, and Jordan.

"You must cleanse me this Augean stable, Knobelsdorf," said the king; "you may prove yourself Hercules here. You have the strength for it, and I shall furnish the money. We shall erect ourselves a monument here, making of these sand-fields something brilliant. Here shall come palaces, and a temple of science, art, and religion. At present pretty much everything is wanting which could make of Berlin a suitable abode for the Muses. Knobelsdorf must take care that we can offer them comfortable quarters. What do you think, Jordan—were this site well chosen for the erection of all the fine buildings we dreamed of so often in Rheinsberg? Could we build our acropolis here—our temple of Jupiter and Minerva?"

"To prove to all the world what people already suspect—that your Majesty is no Christian, but a heathen more inclined to revere the religion of the ancient Greeks than that of the new-church fathers?"

"Do people say this? Then they are not wrong if they think I have no especial affection for the priesthood and the Christian Church. Not Christ built this church, but the priests, and a sly business they have carried on with their eternal blessedness. But now, Knobelsdorf, you shall build me here a temple such as I have long dreamed of—a temple of God, majestic without, divinely beautiful within."

"Then the palace of her majesty the queen mother is to be here?" asked Knobelsdorf.

"No, not here; let us go somewhat farther to seek a site for that."

"If your Majesty permits," said Pöllintz, as the king and his escort walked slowly down the middle allée of the lindens, "I should like to suggest what seems to me a most fitting place for the royal palace: it is at the end of the linden allée, the entrance to the park, and possesses both ample space and a charming situation."

"Show us the place," commanded the king, striding forward.

Count Néal is of quite as good ancestry as Countess Rhedern will be, and that, like her, he possesses several millions, which I have secured for our country by the recognition of his count's title. We agree, then, do we not? The Countess Rhedern shall be received at my court as well as Count Néal at yours?"

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"Show us the place," commanded the king, striding forward.

"Here it is, your Majesty," said Pöllnitz, as they reached the end of the lindens.

"What do you think, Knobelsdorf—shall we erect the palace here?" asked the king.

"We should have to begin by removing yonder hovels, your Majesty. But first your Majesty would have to buy them, and for this the consent of the owners is requisite, for they would be rendered homeless through immediate sale of the dwellings."

"Homeless! Since Jordan has been father of the poor there are no more homeless," said the king, with a familiar nod to his dearest friend. "This site seems to me suitable. Is it large enough, Knobelsdorf, for our project?"

"Quite so, your Majesty, and if your Majesty would graciously apportion the necessary moneys the work could begin at once."

"How much do you think we need?"

"At least a million, if all is to be executed as your Majesty has proposed."

"Very well. A million is not too much to give the queen mother pleasure."

"But," said Pöllnitz, "would it not be well to inform the poor dwellers in the hovels yonder of their fate and reconcile them to it with a gracious voice from the king? They are very poor people, your Majesty. The rain drove me to take refuge with them a few days ago, and I have been melancholy ever since, for I had never seen such want and misery. There were starving children, a woman almost perishing with grief, and a drunken husband. When I saw them I wished myself king for a quarter of an hour to brighten up the house with a ray of happiness."

"It must indeed have been a heart-rending scene to touch even Pöllnitz's heart and make him melancholy," cried the king. "Come, Jordan, let us enter, and you shall help me soften the misfortune. Knobelsdorf may sketch this spot meanwhile. Show us the way, Pöllnitz."

In a few moments they stood before the small, dusky house of the Schömmers.

"It is, indeed, a melancholy sight," said the king.

The door of the shop was ajar. The king pushed it open and entered with his companions. No one came to meet them and ask what they wished. Perfect stillness reigned.

"Permit me to go into yonder room and call the woman, your Majesty. No one seems to have heard the bell."

"No, we will go ourselves," said the king, gravely. "It is

well to seek out poverty in its hiding-place, and I think we may thus learn much that would never reach us in our palaces."

"Ah! my king," said Jordan, deeply touched. "From this day the people will call you not king, but father."

The king stepped into the room.

"Is it possible to dwell in such a den of misery?" he muttered.

"Yes, it is possible," answered a low, contemptuous voice. "People who are at home in want and wretchedness can live in such a den."

The king turned, almost in a fright, in the direction whence the voice came. Blinded by the dusk, he had not seen the woman who sat in the farthest corner of the long, narrow room lighted by but a single window. She had folded her hands in her lap and sat motionless. A poor, black dress covered her slender figure, giving her a still more sorrowful aspect. Her face was deathly pale, but of a rarely beautiful oval; her hair, wound about her head in braids, was of a clear blond color—having almost the effect of a halo—illuminated by two wonderful star-like eyes. It was like a picture of the Virgin in some poor village church.

The king stood looking with a reflective expression at this woman, whose eyes had been changelessly fastened upon him as though she would read his thoughts in his face. But that face was quiet, cold, unmoved.

Jordan broke the general silence.

"Arise, good woman," he said, mildly. "It is the king who stands before you."

She arose slowly from her seat, but betrayed not the slightest surprise or pleasure.

"The king!" she said. "What brings the king to a den of misery?"

"To soften the poverty and lessen the wretchedness if it is undeserved," said the king, gently.

She stepped rapidly toward him and made a motion as if to offer him her hand.

"It is undeserved," she said; "but the king himself cannot soften it."

"Let me try, at least. Tell me how I can help you."

She shook her head sadly.

"If King Frederick, son of Frederick William First, does not know, neither do I."

"You are poor; perhaps you suffer actual want?"

"I do not know. It is possible," she said, abstractedly.

"Among so many different pains and tortures, who can distinguish which is horror and despair, which want, starvation, privation?"

"Have you children?"

"Yes," she said, with a shudder, "I have children, and they, I know, suffer want, for they have often begged me for bread when I could give them none."

"Why does not their father care for them? Or is he not living?"

"He is alive, but not for us. He is wiser than I, and drowns his grief, while I gnaw at my own heart."

"You do not know, then, what you fain would ask for?" asked the king, almost angrily.

She looked at him long and questioningly with her large, penetrating eyes. "No," she said, harshly; "I have nothing to ask for."

At that moment the door opened with a slam and the children, Karl and Anna, entered, calling loudly. But they subsided into silence, slinking to their mother's side, as they saw the strangers. But Doris Ritter seemed transformed at sight of her children. Her hard features grew soft and gentle, the cold, marble face was illumined by a ray of divine love. With a passionate gesture she took the children by the hand and led them to the king. "Yes, your Majesty, there is something for which I have to ask, for my children's sake. They are as pure and innocent as the angels of God. May the shame and misfortune of their parents not descend upon their heads. King Frederick, have mercy upon my children!"

And the poor woman, drawing her children with her, sank at the king's feet.

"Jordan," said the king, gently—"Jordan, I charge you with the care of these children. From this day they are your wards."

The unfortunate mother arose in horror, clasping her children in her arms with an expression of such pain and terror as the Greek Niobe wears.

"Oh! you would not tear my children away from me?" she asked. "No, no, I have asked for nothing; we need no mercy, no help. We will starve together, suffer together; only do not separate us. They will cease to love me, will despise their mother, who lives only for them, who thanks God daily, in the midst of her suffering, for giving her these children, the sight of whom has saved her from despair and suicide."

"Those are wild, ungodly words," said the king, angrily. "You should ask God to soften your heart and make you humble. It is, of course, a misfortune to be poor and hungry and have a drunkard for one's husband, but it can be borne if one's conscience is clear. Your children shall not be separated from you. They shall have instruction and clothing at my cost, and I will see what I can do for you. Adieu."

And, slightly bowing, the king turned to the door, laying on the table near the window a handful of gold-pieces as he did so. Doris had followed his every movement. With a wild gesture she bounded forward, and, taking the gold-pieces from the table, handed them to the king.

"Your Majesty," she said, with flaming eyes, "I have asked for my children; but for myself I have not begged. With a few gold-pieces you cannot buy up my sufferings."

"I gave the money for your children, not for you," he said. "You should not rob them of this, their property. If you one day need and wish for help, come to me. I will remember your poverty, not your arrogance. Tell me your name, that I may remember you."

The pale woman looked at him, amazed and questioning. "My name?" she asked, reflecting and speaking as if to herself. "King Frederick asks my name! It is Anna Schömmer."

And as she spoke thus, with a peculiarly proud smile, she laid her hand upon the head of her little daughter Anna as if for support to keep from falling. So she stood, erect, though wellnigh fainting, as the king with his escort left the room. Her boy, who had directed his astonished gaze to the king, followed him on tiptoe and ventured to touch his robe. The mother saw this, and raising her right arm menacingly, while the left one rested upon the little girl, she called with a loud, threatening voice: "Do not touch him, my son! Kings are sacred!"

Frederick, standing upon the threshold, turned again; but he spoke no word, and in silent haste left the dismal little shop. Doris Ritter uttered a deep sigh when he was out of sight. Her hand slipped from the child's head and hung limp at her side. The child paid her no heed. Freed from the restraint of its mother's touch it slipped quickly out of the house to look after the king. The poor woman was alone. A long time she stood motionless, then a deep groan broke from her. "He did not even know me!" she cried, aloud. "For his sake I suffer poverty and shame, and he passes unheeding by and throws me a handful of crumbs

from his richly garnished table." Then she raised her clinched fist toward the heavens. "He did not even know me," she repeated, solemnly. "But one day he shall recognize me, and that will be the day on which I revenge myself upon him for my ruined, lashed, accursed life! Oh! he is a king and I am a poor woman, but the sting of a poisonous insect is enough to kill a king, for a king, too, is but a man! Yes, revenge will I have, revenge for my life of torture!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BERLIN POLITICIANS AND THE FRENCH TAILOR.

MEANTIME the scene without was greatly changed. The royal equipage slowly passing up the street had attracted the attention of the inhabitants, and everyone had descended to see and greet the king. Men and women, children and old people, were hurrying to and fro, and everyone asked his neighbor why the king had come hither and why the fat gentleman sitting on the fence was drawing pictures of the little houses on the sand-lots. Even the proud and exalted Father Pricker had not thought it beneath his dignity to descend to the street and take up his position before the door, surrounded by his apprentices and assistants.

"They say the king is in Schömmer's house," said one of the apprentices who had been doing an errand and gossiping by the way.

Father Pricker shook his head with solemn gravity. "There is some mistake, for the king was doubtless coming to pay me an honor, which is nothing new or surprising to my family. Not one ruler of the House of Hohenzollern has failed to make his visit to the House of Pricker. It is a pretty custom of the Hohenzollerns which the present king will doubtless not neglect."

A loud hurrah from the people in the street interrupted the worthy Pricker. The king was among them. Herr Pricker, who saw with quiet pleasure that Frederick was coming in his direction, stepped rapidly forward and took up his position directly in the king's way. But the king paid no attention to him. He replied to the people's greetings with less than his wonted friendliness, and a cloud rested upon his brow. He entered his carriage, the cavaliers followed, and the equipage rapidly departed.

"Why does this poor foolish folk rejoice?" grumbled Herr Pricker, with a shrug. "What do they mean by their shrieks and their waving of hats? The king looked at them as ill-humoredly as if they were annoying worms, and did not even smile at them. How much disturbed he was he showed by not even recognizing me, the court tailor of his own spouse, though his equipage stood directly before my door, in the full intention of visiting me."

Not far from Father Pricker and his apprentices stood several grave and worthy citizens, in long coats with large ivory buttons, their heads adorned with pigtails sedately braided under their three-cornered hats that covered their smooth, powdered hair.

Father Pricker, recognizing them, greeted them, beckoning them to him.

"God greet ye, worthy friends! Are ye, too, come to greet the king?" he asked them.

"We were going that way and did but pause."

"A handsome young man!" said the fat brewer.

"A very wise and learned king!" said the glovemaker.

"And yet—" said the shoemaker.

"Yes, and yet——"

"Yes, that is my opinion, friends," sighed Father Pricker. "The number of innovations and prescriptions. It frightens one to read them!"

"Every day there is something new and unexpected!"

"Yes, yes, it is not like the good old times," said Father Pricker; "not as it was under the dead king. That was a respectable, dignified life. Everyone knew what the next day would bring forth. He who was starving to-day knew he would be starving to-morrow. And he who was rich to-day knew he would be so to-morrow. It was a straight-laced, respectable, virtuous existence. Custom, morality, and discipline prevailed; the king was the best of husbands and fathers, and set us all a good example."

"It is true, there was danger of a beating now and then," said another, "and he who had the misfortune to be tall was in danger of getting seized for the guard; but that was all. In all things else people lived peaceably, one day like another; a man smoked his pipe, drank his glass of beer, and in both occupations could take the king for his pattern."

"But now!"

"Yes, now! Everything changes like the wind," said the glovemaker. "He who was poor yesterday is rich to-day, and the rich man of yesterday is cast out to-day, as Eckert was.

I worked for him and he was a good customer, for he used many gloves—nearly a dozen a month. This good customer I have lost in consequence of the innovations of the present government."

"But Eckert deserved it well, friend," said the fat brewer, thoughtfully. "He ground down the people, it is true, and was a puffed up, arrogant fellow, who greeted no one, not even me. I was glad when the new king took from him the fine house in the Jaeger Street; there was justice in that."

"But the dead king had given it to him; and the dead king's will should have been respected," said the glovemaker.

"Yes, that is true; the dead king's will should have been respected," they all agreed, with solemn gravity.

"Oh! We shall have much to endure," sighed Father Pricker. "Would you believe, my friends, that they are thinking of taking away our respectable pigtails?"

"Impossible!" "It cannot be!" "Never should we submit!" exclaimed the chorus, with pathos truly Grecian.

"They wish to force French fashions upon us," continued Pricker. "I see the day approaching when we shall have here French glovemakers, shoemakers, French barbers and brewers, and even French tailors; when French signs will be hung up before the doors, and no one will be beaten for soiling our pure German language with French phrases. The present king would never, like the dead king, have two girls arrested for saying 'charmant;' he will never, with his own exalted hands, chastise young lads for wearing French suits on the streets. All, all will be different, but not better; only more French."

"And no more beer is drunk at court. Aye, some day coffee will be the fashion, for not only has the café-owner in the Pleasure Garden, who has hitherto made coffee for the court and a few rich people, permission now to make coffee for all comers, but every other tavern-keeper can do the same," said the brewer.

"And have you heard," asked the glovemaker, darkly, "that the sole restaurateurs in Berlin—Nicolai, in the Herrenhouse, and St. Vincent—are no longer to be without rivals? Two French cooks have come already and opened what they call 'restaurations.'"

"Yes," sighed the shoemaker, "I went thither yesterday, and ate out of curiosity at the French cook's, in the Friedrich Street. Ah! friends, I could have wept with rage, for it was a better and finer meal than we have ever had at Nicolai's or St. Vincent's, and cheaper, too."

"Horrible! A Frenchman comes hither and makes better and cheaper dinners than a native Berliner!" sighed Father Pricker. "I tell you, we shall have much trouble yet; and not even my title of honor protects me from bitter humiliations, for it may yet happen that—" Father Pricker was silent, and stared into the middle of the street. The eyes of his friends followed in the same direction, and they, too, glowed with curiosity and astonishment. And indeed it was no common spectacle that met the worthy citizens' eyes. Drawn by two steaming, weary horses, a wagon was passing them, of new form and fashion, such as were now in favor at court, having been imported from France. The leather cover was down, and the occupants of the wagon were revealed to the public gaze. On the front seat were three persons. The first was a slender man of grave demeanor, imposing to look upon. He wore a black velvet coat with little silver buttons, its sleeves and breast trimmed with lace. His hair, already somewhat gray, was unpowdered, and in it he wore an enormous bow of ribbon. An extraordinarily dainty little three-cornered hat rested upon his wig and shaded his brow, grave and exalted as that of Jupiter himself.

At his side sat two women; the first an elder one, and the other a beautiful young girl with smiling lips, glowing black eyes, and rosy cheeks. The dainty and elegant toilets of the ladies differed extremely from the staid and respectable costume of the women of Berlin. The dresses were of bright-colored materials, with broad sleeves trimmed with white lace, and low necks, revealing, in the case of the younger, an exquisite throat and bust, and in the other the costliness of a cloth of guipure. Immense cushions of powdered hair decked their heads, upon the tops of which perched tiny velvet hats trimmed with long flowing ribbons.

On the back seat of the wagon were three other young girls in similar, though less costly, costume. Following this first wagon came a second, containing six young men, all in French costume, gazing with curious eyes about them, and laughing so loudly that the grave and respectable citizens standing near Father Pricker's house could readily hear every word which they said—hear, but, alas! not understand. "French," murmured Father Pricker, with a slight shudder; "French," murmured the friends after him, and stared at the strange apparition.

But what was that? Who stood by the wagon that now paused directly in front of Father Pricker's house? Who was it speaking with the pretty young girl that bent with a smile

to him, and jested and laughed quite unembarrassed? Could that be Father Pricker's son and heir speaking with these strangers, and speaking French at that? Yes, there was no doubt about it—it was his son William, the heir to his name. "How is this—does your son speak French?" asked the glovemaker in a reproachful tone.

"He wished it so greatly," sighed Father Pricker, with a shrug, "I was obliged to give my consent and engage a French teacher for him."

At that moment William, who had seen his father, hastened across the street. The young man's eyes glowed, pleasure beamed from his fine fresh face, he was all passion, movement, energy.

"Father," he cried, "come with me quickly. This stranger wishes to speak with you. Think what good-fortune! I was coming along from Charlottenburg when I met the strangers. They spoke to me in French, and inquired for the best hostelry in Berlin. A blessing that I understood and could at once recommend the City of Paris. Ah, father, what a beautiful girl this is; how friendly and unembarrassed! In all Berlin there is no girl so beautiful as this Blanche. I have been walking beside the wagon a good half-hour, and we have chatted and laughed like old friends, and when I learned who they are and why they have come to Berlin, I told them who my father is, and the old gentlemen was friendly and condescending at once, and his daughter quite frank and merry. But come, father, he longs to make your acquaintance."

"But I do not understand French," said Father Pricker, who, despite his repugnance to the French, was much flattered at this impatience to make his acquaintance.

"I'll be interpreter, father. Come, for you, too, will be astonished when you hear who this gentleman is," and William drew his father away to the wagon.

Father Pricker's friends stood stiff and motionless, awaiting with breathless impatience their friend's return. At last he came, but a strange change had taken place in him. His gait was unsteady and tottering, his face colorless, his lips trembled, and a deep fold furrowed his brow.

He approached his friends with wild looks. A pause followed. Their hearts beat wildly; the greatest tension was seen in every face. At last Father Pricker opened his trembling lips, but his voice was hollow and feeble.

"They are French, yes, French," he said. "It is the new French tailor whom the king has summoned. He brings six

apprentices and will work for the king, the princes, and the gentlemen of the court. But he is not tailor only, he is a dressmaker as well, and his wife and daughter are the most famous *modistes* of Paris; and they, too, have brought apprentices, and think that the queen and princesses will give them work."

"But it must not be!" shrieked the friends. "We have our guild-laws. No woman can work at dressmaking."

Father Pricker smiled uncomfortably. "The king has given them permission. Everything will be different, better. The king summons French tailors hither, and these monsters wish my counsel. Of me they would inquire as to their relations to the masters of guilds, etc. Me, the court tailor, the newly imported French tailor would have advise him. Ha, ha, ha! Is that not fine?"

And Father Pricker broke into a loud, wild laugh that made his friends shudder. Then he sank fainting into the arms of his friend the glovemaker. William, who had seen his father collapse, hastened to help carry him into the house. Pellissier with Jupiter brows gazed proudly from the heights of his chariot upon the fainting tailor.

"The good master has lost consciousness," he said, with an Olympian smile. "I cannot take it amiss, for he sees ruin staring him in the face. He is lost, for how could an unknown German tailor rival Pellissier, tailor to Louis XIV.? That were a degree of stupidity which I do not attribute even to the German mind."

Pellissier beckoned to the coachman to continue the journey, and the train moved with slow dignity up the Linden.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DOUBLE RENDEZVOUS.

The little maid of honor, Louise von Schwerin, paced up and down her room in intolerable impatience. She had bolted the door, for she wished to be entirely alone and unobserved, to read once more the mysterious billet which she had found in the bouquet that lay in her window. This note was from Fritz Wendel, the handsome gardener. So much she knew, for from him came the glorious bouquets which she always found upon her window-sill, here in Montbijou as at Rheins-

berg. It was brief and laconic, containing nothing but the earnest request to come to the greenhouse at eight in the evening and enter the dark grotto, where she would discover an important and dangerous secret.

"Does he think," she thought, with a roguish smile, "that his love is a secret? Dangerous it is for him and for me, but a secret it is not. Cruel it is to be two months so near one another and never find one moment for speaking together quietly; to be so laced up in this tedious court life, surrounded by spies! Never to have refused one's lover a kiss, because he never had a chance to ask for one! To be adored by a gardener, a youth handsome as a god, who has but the single fault of his lowly birth, that is new and piquant. Ah! Madame Brandt was jeering at me only yesterday for my innocent stupidity, my never having been kissed, never received a stolen embrace, the finest enjoyment in the life of a woman. And all the court ladies laughed at me as she spoke, and called me an unbaked bun that had never been in the fire. They shall laugh at me no more. I shall accept this mysterious invitation and go to the greenhouse at eight this evening."

Accident favored her ruin. Queen Sophia Dorothea desired to visit her royal daughter-in-law in Schönhausen, but without the pomp and splendor of a queen—informally, cosily, simply. Two ladies only should accompany her, and she had selected for that purpose the two oldest and most attached, with whom she could chat without restraint and jeer at the poverty-stricken home of the queen without fear of betrayal. Neither Laura von Pannewitz nor Louise von Schwerin were to accompany her, and Sophia Dorothea rejoiced that, for to-day at least, she was to be relieved for a few hours from the sight of the beautiful, sorrowful face, and melancholy eyes of Laura, whose soft, melodious voice, with its unconscious resignation, drove the irritable queen to the verge of distraction.

The king had gone to Potsdam, so there was no occasion for the queen to watch over Laura, and, besides, Sophia Dorothea had almost ceased to believe in that passion after watching in vain for any trace or symptom of it. The king seemed not to heed the beauty, had spoken to her but once since that day, and then only to jeer a little at her pale and sentimental appearance, and to ask her whether an unrequited passion was the cause of it. After that the queen had secretly reproached Madame Brandt for telling her a falsehood.

Madame Brandt had responded with a mysterious smile: "Your Majesty, I do not say that it is the king whom Laura loves. Your Majesty thought you had divined it, and I did not contradict you."

"Why not, when you knew that it is not the king?" asked the queen, passionately.

"Because I had vowed with a sacred oath not to mention the name of her beloved. If it is not the king, then so much the better for my poor Laura. Yet I venture to entreat your Majesty once more to cure my poor friend of her unfortunate passion by marrying her with Count Voss."

The queen was determined to do so, and wished for that reason to discuss to-day with the young queen at Schönhausen the most efficient means of effecting this end.

At last Louise von Schwerin heard a wagon roll out of the palace-court, the watch's call, and the trumpet-blast. It was the queen departing for Schönhausen. So Louise was free and unobserved, and nothing prevented her going to the rendezvous. And she went. With unsteady steps and palpitating heart, she slipped through the dark *allées* of the garden, and entered the greenhouse on the stroke of eight. Silence reigned; the dusk and the odor of orange-blossoms intoxicated her. Noiselessly, breathlessly she made her way to the grotto and sank upon the turf within, blinded by the sudden darkness.

"Thank God," she whispered, "no one is here. I shall at least have time to recover and come to a decision. Oh! how afraid I am! I ought not to have come. Perhaps the note was a trick of the maids of honor to enable them to laugh at me later. What a poor fool I am to believe that he would dare invite me to a rendezvous. He is far too shy and humble to venture such a thing. But there is time to escape, no one saw me come hither."

But it was already too late. Two arms clasped her as she was about to arise, and drew her gently back to her seat. Her shy glance met a pair of glowing, flaming eyes resting upon her with fascinating power. With a groan she let her head sink backward. Two glowing lips burnt upon her own in a passionate kiss.

"Leave me," she said, breathless, with trembling lips in which she felt every heart-beat. "Leave me, do not detain me; I must go. I dare not stay here longer. How dared you misuse my terror in this way? How did you come here, and what do you want?" And Louise, who had wished to go, stayed, nevertheless, to hear the reply.

"How did I come here?" repeated the handsome gardener, in a humble tone. "I have worked every night for four weeks

upon the way which was to bring me hither unseen. Like a mole have I burrowed a path in the depths of the earth, and, while all the world was asleep and dreaming, I was awake and at work. But I dreamed a blessed dream with open eyes of the day when I should come here unseen, to find an angel whom I worship, to whom I have consecrated every day, every hour of my life. See, Fräulein, there, behind the orange-tree. That is the entrance to the road that leads to my paradise. Through that opening I can reach a little flight of stairs that leads to the cellar, and from there another flight leads to a trap-door opening into my room, which is on the ground floor of the gardener's house. So you see it took a good deal of time and effort to make this path."

Louise had gone inquisitively to the verge of the opening. The sight affected her more than the most glowing speeches. It required a mighty love to carry out this giant task unaided.

"Truly a mysterious path," she said; "but sure to be discovered by anyone who may visit the grotto with a light, and you know her majesty has the greenhouse lighted occasionally to take tea there with her court."

"No one will find this path," said the young gardener, pushing forward a tub containing an orange-tree. "See, Fräulein, this tree will keep my secret. It stands on a board which I have arranged to revolve. Now my way is cut off, and now, if anyone came——"

"Open it—please open it."

"I will do so when you promise not to leave me at once."

"I promise; but do push the tree back."

Fritz Wendel did so. Then he turned quickly to the young girl again, and, lifting her in his powerful arms, carried her back to the turf, laid her gently down, knelt beside her to bend his head and, like a slave, kiss her feet.

"You are my ruler," he said. "I lay myself at your feet and accept my fate at your hands. If you say, 'Arise, I love you!' I shall have strength to combat the whole world and ask for your hand some day before God and the world. But if you say, 'Stay where you are, you are in your place—a wretched gardener who presumes to love a high-born Fräulein,' then I shall die in order not to go mad; for I would rather bless you dying than perhaps live to curse you in my madness."

He was silent, and raised his handsome, excited face to hers.

"You do not answer," he said, with a sigh. "But before you condemn me, reflect a little at least. You do not know what you have made of me already—what you can make of

me if you will only love me. I was a poor, ignorant gardener's boy when I first saw you, loving only my flowers, knowing no language, and understanding no book. But when I saw you I blushed for my ignorance. Since that day my life has been one uninterrupted period of study. All that I earned I have spent for teachers. I wished not to be ignorant, that Louise might not be ashamed of me. And now I have come so far that I can say, 'Louise, command me! Tell me how I can earn the right to you, provided you have love, patience, and courage enough to wait for me.'"

"Ah!" she said, with a sigh, "what would it avail if I did not reject you, when I come of a proud family, and the king would never consent to my becoming your wife?"

"Oh! the king," said Fritz Wendel, carelessly. "There might be a way found of winning the king, a secret for which we could get this consent from him, for which honor and distinction can be purchased."

"Ah! the secret that you spoke of revealing to me here?" asked Louise, with the curiosity of a child. "Tell me, what is the secret?"

"You will know at once. Listen! But do not betray us by any exclamation."

"I hear steps," whispered Louise. "My God! if anyone should find us here!"

"Have no fear. Look yonder."

There, under the laurel, sat Laura von Pannewitz, and before her knelt Prince Augustus William, covering her hands with kisses. "Laura, my betrothed, my beloved," he said, softly, "when will the barriers fall, when will you be mine for all eternity?"

"The day will come when I am dead," she answered, with a melancholy smile. "Yes, my prince, then I shall be free to love you, pray for you, hover about you as your good genius to protect you from every harm."

Louise was so wholly absorbed in this new and unexpected scene that she did not notice that Fritz Wendel had slipped his arm about her and was pressing her closer to his heart.

"See there," he whispered; "he is a high-born prince and she but a poor maid of honor, and yet he loves her and she accepts his love without fear."

Louise laid her finger upon his lip with an impatient gesture. Fritz Wendel covered her hand with kisses and she did not withdraw it, listening with bated breath to the passionate, tender, chaste, and innocent dialogue of the lovers.

But there came a moment when Laura sank into the arms of the prince, permitted his kisses, and answered with stammering voice the vows of love and fidelity which he whispered amid ardent embraces. When Louise saw this she leaned her head upon her lover's shoulder, closed her eyes, and did not resist when he pressed her to his heart as firmly as the prince his Laura. But the chaste and upright lovers came to the rescue of Louise's inexperience, for in all the excitement of the moment the child heard Laura begging her lover, in all the pride and fear of a pure passion, to take pity upon his heart and hers, and not wish her ever to have cause to blush and lose the right proudly to confess her love and sorrow before her conscience and her God.

"Promise me never to approach me again in this way," she whispered. "Promise to consider my weakness, not to lead my too tender heart into temptation again. Save us the right to weep over our love before God's throne when men condemn us and cast us out."

"No one shall dare do that, Laura—no one shall slight my bride. I promise what you wish. But the day will come when you will remove this curse, redeem me from this sentence, when before God and the world you will be my wife."

"I thank you, my beloved," said Laura, giving him her hand. "Now let us part."

"Part? You know that we shall not meet again in weeks, that I am condemned to accompany the king upon a pleasure journey, while for me there is but one pleasure—to be at your side."

"Go, none the less," she said, with a smile. "We can never lose, never forget one another."

"Ah! I see you always, hear you, think of you, speak with you, when you are not with me!"

"Then accompany the king upon his pleasure journey and find pleasure in it yourself, for our souls are always united and our hearts understand one another."

And, with a smile, they walked hand in hand down the greenhouse. Louise had long since freed herself from her lover's embrace. Now she arose as if about to go. Fritz Wendel tried to detain her, but Louise had found strength in Laura's words to withstand her own heart. "If you dare embrace me again," she said, "we shall never meet again and I will never come here."

But the more clever and experienced youth observed what favor she unconsciously showed him, for he had not asked her to come again.

"I shall never venture to touch you again," he said, humbly. "Will you come?"

Louise smiled. "I must come, to follow the development of this touching romance of poor Fräulein von Pannewitz."

"This romance can one day be of use to us, for if one day Fräulein von Schwerin should accept my humble devotion the king cannot decline his consent in exchange for this secret of State."

"My God!" cried Louise, in terror. "You could not be so cruel as to betray the secret of these poor lovers to the king?"

"If I could thereby purchase the hand of my adored I should do so."

"Poor Laura," sighed Louise, "you were right in saying it were better for you to die and hover about your beloved. You will never know the joy of doing it in the flesh."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE INTRIGUING COURTIERS.

"You are right, dear Fredersdorf," said Baron Pöllnitz. "Our Hercules is not to be mastered in this way. He has no heart, is incapable of love, and, I believe, despises women."

"He may not despise them, perhaps," replied Fredersdorf, with a smile. "But he is satiated, and that is worse. Women have advanced to meet him too willingly for him to care for them; hence no woman will ever have power over him."

"But, dear friend," said Pöllnitz, horrified, "for every living creature there is some means of taming it. And what are we if the king remains master of the situation? Beasts of burden for his whims, and nothing more; condemned to execute the will of our master and have no will of our own. Dear friend, it were an everlasting shame for us both to have this state of things perpetuated. It is unheard of for a king to have no favorites. Frederick must have them as well as another, and it is but natural that, the places being vacant, we should occupy them."

"You called the king a young Hercules. How was Hercules tamed?"

"Through his love to Omphale, I think."

"Not at all. Through Omphale's drawing him into a luxurious way of life, and lulling his ambition with festivities

But there came a moment when Laura sank into the arms of the prince, permitted his kisses, and answered with stammering voice the vows of love and fidelity which he whispered amid ardent embraces. When Louise saw this she leaned her head upon her lover's shoulder, closed her eyes, and did not resist when he pressed her to his heart as firmly as the prince his Laura. But the chaste and upright lovers came to the rescue of Louise's inexperience, for in all the excitement of the moment the child heard Laura begging her lover, in all the pride and fear of a pure passion, to take pity upon his heart and hers, and not wish her ever to have cause to blush and lose the right proudly to confess her love and sorrow before her conscience and her God.

"Promise me never to approach me again in this way," she whispered. "Promise to consider my weakness, not to lead my too tender heart into temptation again. Save us the right to weep over our love before God's throne when men condemn us and cast us out."

"No one shall dare do that, Laura—no one shall slight my bride. I promise what you wish. But the day will come when you will remove this curse, redeem me from this sentence, when before God and the world you will be my wife."

"I thank you, my beloved," said Laura, giving him her hand. "Now let us part."

"Part? You know that we shall not meet again in weeks, that I am condemned to accompany the king upon a pleasure journey, while for me there is but one pleasure—to be at your side."

"Go, none the less," she said, with a smile. "We can never lose, never forget one another."

"Ah! I see you always, hear you, think of you, speak with you, when you are not with me!"

"Then accompany the king upon his pleasure journey and find pleasure in it yourself, for our souls are always united and our hearts understand one another."

And, with a smile, they walked hand in hand down the greenhouse. Louise had long since freed herself from her lover's embrace. Now she arose as if about to go. Fritz Wendel tried to detain her, but Louise had found strength in Laura's words to withstand her own heart. "If you dare embrace me again," she said, "we shall never meet again and I will never come here."

But the more clever and experienced youth observed what favor she unconsciously showed him, for he had not asked her to come again.

"I shall never venture to touch you again," he said, humbly. "Will you come?"

Louise smiled. "I must come, to follow the development of this touching romance of poor Fräulein von Pannewitz."

"This romance can one day be of use to us, for if one day Fräulein von Schwerin should accept my humble devotion the king cannot decline his consent in exchange for this secret of State."

"My God!" cried Louise, in terror. "You could not be so cruel as to betray the secret of these poor lovers to the king?"

"If I could thereby purchase the hand of my adored I should do so."

"Poor Laura," sighed Louise, "you were right in saying it were better for you to die and hover about your beloved. You will never know the joy of doing it in the flesh."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE INTRIGUING COURTIERS.

"You are right, dear Fredersdorf," said Baron Pöllnitz. "Our Hercules is not to be mastered in this way. He has no heart, is incapable of love, and, I believe, despises women."

"He may not despise them, perhaps," replied Fredersdorf, with a smile. "But he is satiated, and that is worse. Women have advanced to meet him too willingly for him to care for them; hence no woman will ever have power over him."

"But, dear friend," said Pöllnitz, horrified, "for every living creature there is some means of taming it. And what are we if the king remains master of the situation? Beasts of burden for his whims, and nothing more; condemned to execute the will of our master and have no will of our own. Dear friend, it were an everlasting shame for us both to have this state of things perpetuated. It is unheard of for a king to have no favorites. Frederick must have them as well as another, and it is but natural that, the places being vacant, we should occupy them."

"You called the king a young Hercules. How was Hercules tamed?"

"Through his love to Omphale, I think."

"Not at all. Through Omphale's drawing him into a luxurious way of life, and lulling his ambition with festivities

and amusements. And you remember, too, how the Roman Emperor Heliogabalus disposed of the proud and imperious senators who endeavored to infringe upon his unlimited despotism?"

"I am not so learned as you, dear friend, and can confess without a blush that I know nothing about Heliogabalus."

"Then listen: Heliogabalus was tired of being the mere executive servant of the all-powerful senate. He wished to rule. But he concealed his intention and maintained a humble and contented demeanor toward the senators. He invited them to a banquet at his villa, delighted them with rare dishes and choicest wines, and when they were confused with the fumes of the wine he arose and said, with a subtle smile: 'I will go and prepare a little surprise for you, such as you have surely never experienced.' He left the hall, and the stupefied senators did not hear the bolts drawn behind him to cut off their retreat. Then suddenly the ceiling above them parted, and they heard Heliogabalus' voice crying: 'You could never attain honor and distinction enough. You sought ever-new laurels. Now you shall have enough of them,' and, as he spoke, a rain of laurel wreaths descended upon the heads of the senators. Then came masses of the most superb flowers, breathing an oppressive perfume. The senators protested that they had enough of honor and of the surprise; but the rain of flowers descended even more overwhelmingly upon them. Floor and table were buried under a carpet of blossoms. Then the terrified senators attempted to flee. They struggled to the door, but it was closed. They waded through the sea of bloom to the windows, but the hall was in the second story, and beneath the windows stood two Roman legions presenting arms. Escape was impossible. The senators prayed and besought that the rain of blossoms might cease. But it went on remorselessly, and soon all were buried below the exquisite petal masses, and all was silent. Heliogabalus had not murdered his senators—he had only buried them in flowers. What do you think of my tale?"

"It is pretty and piquant. But I do not see the connection between Emperor Heliogabalus, who was, by the way, of a most poetical nature, and ourselves."

"Aha! You do not grasp it," whispered Fredersdorf, mysteriously. "Let us intoxicate our giant with exquisite pleasures, bury his wilful spirit under masses of blossoms, render him effeminate with sensual enjoyment."

"But he has no senses," sighed Pöllnitz.

"None for the beauty of women, but other senses. He has

no heart, but a sensitive palate. That is one point. Another is his delight in extravagant splendor. He was so long compelled to live a frugal, unobtrusive life that he fairly longs to show himself a gold-scattering Jupiter now. His father hoarded millions; let us help the son scatter them. And while you are inventing new festivities with the king, I shall be reigning and bearing the burden of the affairs of State. You will help the king to scatter millions and I shall be collecting new ones to replace them."

"Let us hope a few drops of this rain may fall into my coffers," sighed Pöllnitz. "My finances are exhausted and my landlord threatens to seize my furniture and my few valuables because I have paid no rent for a year. So you see I really must get the house in the Jaeger Street, and I have calculated upon it with such certainty that I have already used it as security for some debts, and found some noble and credulous souls who were ready to accept it as such."

"You shall have the house," said Fredersdorf, confidently. "The king will give it you as a reward for the plans and sketches you have made for his new household."

"Have you communicated the plans to him?"

"The king has read and approves them. The papers lie in his cabinet only awaiting the royal signature."

"If they were but signed!" said Pöllnitz, with a smile.

"How Boden will rage when the millions hoarded under Frederick William are spent under Frederick for our festivities!"

"Boden," said Pöllnitz, reflectively, "is our most dangerous enemy. I have studied his face. He is a bold, determined man, capable of defying even the king when provoked. The rest of the ministers we may win for our plans, but Boden I can do nothing with. He will not understand my hints, flatteries, threats, and assurances of friendship."

"Oh! Boden need cause you no anxiety," cried Fredersdorf, with a laugh. "He is a lost man, about to fall of himself, with no help of ours. The king hates him and is only waiting for a chance to remove him. It may happen to-day."

"To-day?" queried Pöllnitz, amazed.

Fredersdorf nodded affirmatively.

"The king has to-day approved Knobelsdorf's plan for a new palace for the queen mother. It is to be a monster undertaking, a Capitol of the North, and its construction will require millions. The king has apportioned these millions between two finance reserves—that for general military purposes and the general reserve for public buildings—and

Boden will be constrained to respect these royal requisitions. If he does this he is an unscrupulous official and the king will not tolerate him in office. If he declines to do so, dares to oppose the royal command, he is guilty of high treason, and the king, who requires absolute obedience from all servants and officials, will have no more of him. Therefore, when the king gave me the signed requisitions for transmission to the minister of finance, he said, with a peculiar smile, 'This is a new pill for Minister Boden. Let us see whether he can swallow this, too.' So you see the worthy man is between two cliffs, whence he will scarcely emerge alive."

"If this be so," said Pöllnitz, rubbing his hands, "our success is assured. I can contract new debts *ad libitum*, and when my creditors grow intrusive I need no longer cheat them out of their money, but can simply smother them in flowers."

"And I, the low-born and despised body-servant," said Fredersdorf, with glowing eyes, "shall now be master."

At this moment Boden, the hated enemy, appeared. Without a greeting this man with iron features and stern expression approached the friends, who stared at him impudently.

"Be so good as to announce me to his majesty," he said to Fredersdorf, coldly.

"Has his majesty commanded an audience?" asked Fredersdorf, carelessly.

"No, but I have come to speak with his majesty upon matters of importance. Say this to his majesty."

Fredersdorf entered the adjoining cabinet. With a triumphant, malicious expression he returned to the finance minister.

"The king commands me to say to you, that if he desired to speak with you he would have you summoned. You may act accordingly."

The minister's face remained perfectly cold and calm. His lips trembled a little, however, as he said, quietly: "It may be that the king will not speak with me, but I have the most urgent reasons for wishing an audience. And I insist upon requesting him to receive me. I demand it as minister and official under oath. Go repeat this to his majesty."

"These are very proud and irreverent words," said Pöllnitz.

"Which I shall faithfully report to the king," said Fredersdorf, entering the king's cabinet.

"I fear your Excellency will pay dear for this bold speech," whispered Pöllnitz.

"Fear nothing," said Boden, with a scornful smile; "I am too good a financier not to save myself from heavy penalties."

Fredersdorf returned with a darkened brow. "The king awaits your Excellency," he said, standing in the door-way.

The minister strode through the hall, with head erect.

"The fox is caught," whispered Fredersdorf, as the door of the royal cabinet closed behind Boden.

"You think so?" sighed Pöllnitz. "It disturbs me a little that the king receives him."

"Fear nothing. It has doubtless been merely for the purpose of removing him at once from office. The king's eyes flashed lightning, and his clear brow was clouded. That means a thunder-storm. May it descend upon Boden's head."

They stole on tiptoe to the door of the cabinet and arranged the folds of the *portière* so as to see as well as hear.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE KING AND THE MINISTER OF FINANCE.

The king received the entering minister of finance with a grave, silent nod. He was leaning on his writing-desk with folded arms and his eyes were fastened upon Boden's face with a sharp, penetrating expression. But Boden did not shrink before the royal eagle-glance.

"You have *insisted* upon an audience," said the king, sternly. "Let me hear what you have to say."

"Much, your Majesty, and I shall have to claim the patience and consideration of my king, for I fear that what I have to communicate will seem to your Majesty dry and tedious."

"Speak. I shall judge for myself how far I can grant you patience and consideration."

"Your Majesty is a noble, learned, ardent ruler. Your Majesty is, moreover, young, and youth cherishes ever the bold intention to rejuvenate the old and push the world one step forward. Your Majesty will, can, and must do this, for God has bestowed upon you not the power alone, but the mind and strength for such a task. Hence I expected my dismissal, but it did not come. And I rejoiced that your Majesty left me in possession of my office. I said to myself, 'The king will not revolutionize, he will improve, and if he thinks he can do this with us let us do his will with holy zeal. I know the secret machinery of the State's finances—the dead king had no

secrets from me—and I shall have the joy of communicating all these secrets and intricacies and serving my king and country somewhat longer.'"

"These are very friendly and perhaps well-meant offers which you make," said the king, with a slight smile. "But I do not need them. I know all that I need to know, and, having found among my father's papers all the accounts of the sources of income and apportionment of expenditure, I know very exactly what I have to receive and expend. Besides, the whole matter is not so important that I need go into details concerning it. My time is limited. I have matters of greater weight to attend to than the discussion of the finances."

"No, your Majesty," cried the minister, ardently—"your Majesty has nothing weightier and nothing *better* to do. The finances are the arteries of the State, and the whole organism will fall ill and perish if the circulation be irregular."

"Then there must be some blood-letting done," cried the king, laughing. "I am the physician to this State body; you are merely the surgeon. When, therefore, I hold blood-letting needful, you shall cut a vein and let as much golden blood flow as I find good."

"Nay, that I will not do, your Majesty," said Boden, firmly. "Your Majesty can drive me away, but you cannot force me to do what is contrary to my conscience."

"Boden!" cried the king, in so wrathful a tone that the two eavesdropping courtiers trembled and turned pale.

"This man is as good as dead already," whispered Pöllnitz. "I scent already the refreshing odor of his corpse. We shall bury him and be his smiling heirs."

"Do but see the king's fearful looks," whispered Fredersdorf.

"Boden," said the king, after a long pause, "you forget that you are speaking with the son and not with the father. You were Frederick William's favorite, but you are not mine, and I shall not tolerate so confident a tone. Do not forget this, and now go on."

"So long as I am in office," said the minister, with a slight bow, "so long it is my first and holiest duty to speak my mind, and, with your pardon, to give your Majesty my advice to the best of my ability. It is then in your Majesty's discretion to discard it and act otherwise than has hitherto been the custom of the administration."

"The first and nearest duty of a servant is to give counsel when his master demands it. But I have not required it, and you might have dispensed with this useless trouble."

"Your Majesty has not requested my counsel, it is true," said the minister of finance, with a bitter smile. "Your Majesty recalled my existence only to command me to empty the royal coffers."

The king's brow grew darker, and he drew himself up more stiffly. "I let no one prescribe limitations for my actions, nor shall I, like my father, live frugally for the sole purpose of storing up millions."

"That the king never did," cried the minister. "The king lived frugally, but he did not hoard. Where there was need he could give with truly royal hands. This the Lithuanian provinces prove, and the cities and villages which he rebuilt out of their ruins; the half-million human beings who now live in peace and plenty where formerly a famine-wasted desert stretched. More than three million thalers the king expended upon Lithuania, while he carefully watched over the bill of fare here in his own palace. No, the king hoarded no millions; he knew how to expend them wisely."

"This man must be mad," whispered Pöllnitz, almost pityingly. "He ventures to praise the dead king to the king's face and at his expense. That is folly that must cost him his neck."

"The king has turned from him," said Fredersdorf; "see, he goes to the window, and is looking out, evidently to master his scorn and avoid knocking this impudent creature over with his fist."

"Do you know," said Pöllnitz, laughing, "I would give this Boden a hundred bottles of champagne from the cellar of my house in the Jaegar Street for the pleasure of seeing the king punish him with his own hand."

The king now turned again to the minister, who was watching him calmly, like a man prepared for the worst.

"Well," said Frederick, "since you praise my father for knowing how to expend millions, you will be content with me, for I shall vie with him in this. I shall begin by establishing my retinue upon a truly royal footing and by living as befits a King of Prussia. The necessary arrangements have been made and a detailed plan drawn up. It lies there on the table and I shall sign it to-day."

"May I read it, your Majesty?" asked Boden, approaching the table.

The king nodded. Boden took the paper and read it hastily, while the king paced up and down, his hands folded behind his back.

"I find the king amazingly patient," murmured Freders-

dorf. "It is not his custom to restrain himself so long toward a person whom he is about to crush."

"With what an impudent smile that man is reading my plan," said Pöllnitz, gnashing his teeth. "Verily, it looks as though he were venturing to scoff at it."

"Have you read it?" asked the king, watching him sharply.

"Yes, your Majesty, I have read it."

"What do you think of it?"

"That only Pöllnitz, who is famed for having nothing but debts, would have drawn up such a plan, for the realization of which not Prussian gold, but a flowing spring of precious metals out of the 'Arabian Nights' would be needed."

"I'll break his impudent neck, I swear I will," murmured Pöllnitz.

A scarcely perceptible smile flitted over the king's face. "Then you disapprove this plan?" he asked.

"Your Majesty, we have no reserves to which these expenditures could be apportioned, and if your Majesty should decide to sustain your retinue upon such a scale as this out of the State treasure it would be exhausted in one year."

"Let us leave this plan, and tell me first your opinion for the requisitions for the erection of the palace for the queen mother. Have you received my instructions?"

"I have received them."

"And appropriated the money?"

"No, your Majesty, I cannot do it."

"How so? You cannot when I, your king and master, command you?" cried Frederick, in a voice of thunder.

Boden bowed reverently.

"Your Majesty, there is a still higher master, and that is my conscience. But my conscience forbids me to take the money from the funds specified. Your Majesty requires four millions, and demands that they be drawn from the funds appropriated for the maintenance of the army and the assistance of localities needing help in consequence of disaster. I admit that the retinue of the dead king was somewhat needy, and that your Majesty may well find some changes necessary. But if for that purpose funds appropriated to other ends must be applied, your Majesty must either impose new taxes upon your subjects or diminish your army."

"Diminish my army!" cried the king. "Never will I do that!"

"Then deign to take the sum requisite for the erection of

the palace, if such be absolutely necessary, from the royal treasury. It contains, as your Majesty knows, seven million thalers, and, as there is no war in prospect, your Majesty may well venture to spend four millions of these seven upon a palace."

"No, that will not do. These millions are already appropriated to another purpose. The sum must be taken from the specified sources."

"I have had the honor of showing your Majesty the consequences of such a proceeding. Since, however, your Majesty insists upon not diminishing the army, nothing remains but to impose a new tax upon the people."

"Then do that," said the king, indifferently. "You give me the money from the sources specified, and then we can impose a new tax. To make it as effective as possible shall be your task."

The minister looked at the king in painful astonishment.

"If this be so, your Majesty," he said, bowing low, "the decisive moment has come for me. I am no longer young, your Majesty; I belong to the rigid old time and my ideas are old and rigid too. In all humility and devotion, I beg your Majesty to dismiss me from your service. Here are the papers which contain the requisitions for the palace. Your Majesty will readily find another who will execute these plans. I sue for my dismissal."

"At last!" cried the king, with gleaming eyes.

"At last!" repeated Pöllnitz. "Yes, indeed, it lasted long before the hardened creature could bring himself to this."

"Did I not tell you that the king was watching for a chance to dismiss Boden?" asked Fredersdorf, triumphantly. "But let us listen further."

"Not at all, my friend. Why hear more? Boden has demanded his dismissal and the king has accepted it. So much we know. My back aches with stooping. I need refreshment and shall go drink a bottle of champagne to the health of the new minister of finance."

"Not yet. The king asked for you when I announced Boden for the second time. He commanded us to wait until he should call us, as he had something of importance to communicate to us."

"He will doubtless give me the deed of my house to-day," said Pöllnitz. "Let us wait. See, there in the window-niche stand a pair of inviting chairs. Let us take possession of them."

"At last!" the king had said, when Boden demanded his

dismissal. Then, after a slight pause, he added: "It seems to me you delayed a little."

"It is true," said Boden, sorrowfully. "I had cause enough to take the step earlier, but I kept hoping to be of use to my king."

"And in this hope you were not deceived," said the king, striding to Boden and laying his hand upon the minister's shoulder. "I cannot grant the dismissal you demand."

The minister gazed at the king in amazement.

"Nay," continued the king "it were madness to rob myself of so noble and faithful a servant—madness to dismiss a minister because he has done what I commanded, placed the interests of my subjects above my own will, defied my anger to satisfy his conscience. Nay, Boden, I am not so great a spendthrift as to cast this treasure from me. But that you may know your king as he is, I will make a confession to you. You had been slandered to me. You as well as Eckert were made responsible for the people's starving, while the State treasury overflowed. They called you a flatterer, ready to execute the king's will unconditionally to retain your place, however unjust that will might be. I wished to test you. I therefore treated you disdainfully, imposed upon you tasks the fulfilment of which must have oppressed you; burdened your funds in an extravagant manner. Your patience has been extraordinary. To-day I took the last step, and had you executed my unrighteous instructions I should not alone have removed you from office, but have held you strictly responsible, for you would have been an unscrupulous official, injuring my people, whose prosperity is sacred in my eyes. God be praised, I can say that I have recognized my position. Would that all rulers did so. Did they but reflect upon the object of their appointment, they would see that the rank of which they are so jealous is but the gift of the people; that these thousands of human beings who are intrusted to them are by no means slaves of a single master to make him the mightier; that they have not subjected themselves to a single citizen to become the martyrs of his whim, the plaything of his notions. They would see that men choose him among them whom they hold most just to rule them, the best, to be a father to them, most humane, to feel with them in affliction, bravest, to defend them against their foes, wisest, to avoid complicating them in wars at unfortunate times—the man, in short, best fitted to represent the body politic, whom sovereign power serves as a support for the laws and for righteousness, but not as a means of committing crime unpunished or inflicting

tyranny.* This is my conception of the task of the prince. This I will fulfil, and in this you shall help me, Boden."

Tears of joy stood in the minister's eyes. He bowed low over the king's proffered hand, kissing it. "Ah!" he said, "how merciful has God been to my fatherland in giving it such a king!"

"Then you no longer desire your dismissal?" said the king, with a smile. "You are content to remain in my service provided I do not diminish my army or impose new taxes upon my subjects?"

"I shall be proud and happy to serve my king."

"But, I tell you, it will be no easy service, and less important, too, than gentlemen have perhaps supposed. I shall make heavy demands upon all my ministers, shall give them much work. But I, too, shall work hard, for an idle prince is a being of little use in the world, I think. I will serve my century—at least as much as I can. But I will do it alone, independently. My ministers will be the exclusive tools of my directing will. They will have much toil and little influence, for I shall never tolerate a favorite. Yet I shall ever require that they reply according to their conviction to all my questions and call my attention to any error into which haste or want of judgment may lead me."

"That I will do as surely as God helps me and gives me strength to serve my king and my country faithfully," cried Boden, deeply moved.

"Then continue to be my minister of finance. Come, let me embrace you. We kings are too poor to reward fidelity and love with aught but love."

The king opened his arms and Boden threw himself upon the king's breast, weeping loudly.

"Now," said the king, after a long pause, "we know one another. I will give you a proof at once that I am not deaf to the sensible suggestions of my minister of finance. The palace for the queen mother I shall not build. But in the royal household some changes are needed. Take these plans with you, strike out whatever is superfluous in them. See how much can remain, and tell me upon what scale my extra expenses must be adjusted."

* The king's own words.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DISAPPOINTED COURTIERS.

When the king gave to the finance minister Baron Pöllnitz's rich schemes the latter was sitting, in smiling security, with his friend Fredersdorf in the anteroom, discussing the rosy future and especially the festivities in his house in the Jaeger Street.

At last the door opened and the minister of finance came out of the royal cabinet into the anteroom. Pöllnitz and Fredersdorf arose, not to greet him, but to pass him by with contemptuous smiles and approach the king's cabinet.

Suddenly the smile died upon Pöllnitz's lips. He stood still in the middle of the room in front of the minister. "What papers have you there?" he asked, breathlessly, reaching out his hand as if to snatch them from the minister of finance.

Boden waved him back with a shrug. "They are papers which his majesty has intrusted to me to examine their contents and determine whether there is reason in them, or whether folly has written them."

"Sir!" cried Pöllnitz, beside himself; "these papers——" But he was silent, for the door of the cabinet opened again and the king entered the anteroom. His eye rested an instant upon the faces of the three gentlemen, and he seemed to have read the innermost thoughts of their souls, for he smiled, and darted a contemptuous glance at Pöllnitz, who had difficulty in swallowing his ire.

"One thing more," said the king. "I forgot a little surprise for you. You are, I know, not rich, in spite of your being minister of finance, and live in a way hardly suited to your rank. We must alter this, and I, fortunately, know of a house of which even Baron Pöllnitz has said that it is respectable and worthy of a nobleman. I give you this house with all that it contains. From this hour it is your property, and you, Baron Pöllnitz, may go with Boden at once to show him his house, conducting him through it and pointing out its advantages, as you have so often done to me."

Pöllnitz stood there, pale, trembling, confused. "I do not know of what house your Majesty speaks," he stammered—"of what house I can have said that it is worthy of Minister of Finance Boden."

"Not of the minister of finance, but of a nobleman, and

Boden is a nobleman, not in name only, but in thought and deed, and is therefore fully worthy to possess yonder house, which I herewith give him. You know it well, Pöllnitz. It is the house which my father had built for Eckert, the pretty house in the Jaeger Street."

"The pretty house in the Jaeger Street!" repeated Pöllnitz, beside himself, forgetting wholly the demeanor and self-restraint which the king's presence demanded of him. "No, no, your Majesty is pleased to jest. You surely do not mean the house in the Jaeger Street, that house which——"

"That house," interrupted the king, "which pleased you so much that, like a foolish child, taking your wish for the reality, you imagined it really yours. I could smile at this childish folly if it had remained a play of your idle fancy; but you have deceived others as well as yourself, and this is an offence for which you must atone to-day, unless you wish to be dismissed at once from my service."

"I do not know what your Majesty means. I do not understand of what offence I am accused, or whereby I have forfeited the favor of my king."

The king approached him one step and his flaming glance seemed to penetrate the abject courtier.

"You know very well, Baron Pöllnitz, of which offence, among the many that you daily and hourly commit, I spoke just now. You know very well that you have represented as your own the house in the Jaeger Street that I have just given to Boden, and have found credulous people to lend you money upon it, without your possessing the slightest possibility or intention of repaying it to them."

"Will your Majesty permit me to ask a favor?" said Boden, with a friendly, pitying glance at Pöllnitz, standing crushed and scarcely conscious beside them. When the king, with a silent nod, had assented, the minister continued: "Your Majesty has just made me so rich and happy that it is my right and duty to share my wealth and happiness with others. Baron Pöllnitz drew the plan of this house at command of the dead king and cared for all the brilliant and tasteful internal arrangements, and it is perhaps not unnatural that he believed this house, which so corresponds to his tastes and wishes, was meant for him. In any case, I am indebted to Baron Pöllnitz, for I am but a plain man and should not have known how to arrange the house so successfully. Permit me, therefore, your Majesty, to prove my thanks by taking up the trifling mortgage which Baron Pöllnitz has placed upon this house and having it transferred to me."

The king fixed his gaze upon the master of ceremonies, who was already recovering and raising his head with fresh courage.

"What have you to say to the finance minister's proposition?" asked the king.

"That I am ready to accept it with pleasure if your Majesty permit, and would only ask the finance minister whether he proposes to recognize only those creditors whom I have already secured with the hapless house, or those also whom I propose so to secure."

"Ah!" cried the king, laughing, "you are an incurable fool. If poor Boden should satisfy the new creditors whom you add to your old ones, the present I have just made him would probably bring him to beggary in a few months. Nay, nay, content yourselves with the holders of mortgages, which you, Boden, may redeem, since they are but a few thousand thalers—but out of my funds, not yours. And in order that there be no blemish in the gift which I bestow upon you, let Pöllnitz hold himself paid for the trouble which you say he took in the construction and arrangement of this house. But woe to you, Pöllnitz, if you let me hear of other such deceptions and follies—if you do not abandon a behavior which scoffs at all law and morals, and lead a life suitable to my servants and attendants. It is the last time that I shall pardon your pranks."

"Your Majesty plunges me into an abyss of despair," said Pöllnitz, wringing his hands. "Your Majesty demands that my future be pure and blameless, while the past rests like an Alp and casts dark shadows upon it; for how can I help making new debts without having money enough to pay the old ones? If, therefore, your Majesty most graciously desires to assist me to avoid future debts you must be so gracious as to pay my present debts, of which, unfortunately, a very small part was secured with the Jaeger Street house."

The king paced silently up and down once or twice; then he paused before Pöllnitz and said, with a smile: "You are so impudent a creature that one is obliged either to send you off or laugh at you. But I do not forget that both my grandfather and my father have laughed at you, as I laugh at the antics of Councillor, my ape. But even Councillor was beaten yesterday for being too arrogant with his ape tricks; so remember that, Baron Pöllnitz. Your debts I will pay this once, but if you venture to contract new ones I shall forget that you were jester to my grandfather and my father, and shall only remember that so frivolous a spendthrift cannot

remain in my service. And now go with the finance minister and show him his house. You are dismissed, gentlemen."

When the gentlemen had left the room the king remained some time lost in thought. He seemed not to know that he was not alone, Fredersdorf standing in the window-niche, whither he had retired, immediately upon the king's entrance, to be a despairing, trembling witness of the whole scene which destroyed his hopes and plans.

Suddenly the king crossed the hall and remained standing directly before Fredersdorf. "Fredersdorf," he said, with voice so soft that the man's heart bounded and his cheek turned pale, "is it really true that none of you ever see the man in me, but always the king only? that you have no heart for your prince, but only envy, hatred, malice, and deceit? And you, too, Fredersdorf, whom I have loved, not as a master loves his servant, but as a friend, believing that I had in you a man with a heart full of feeling for my sorrows and cares, with a little love, not for the prince only, but for the man in me! Why will you all make me cold-hearted and distrustful? A day will come when ye will all call me cold and loveless, and no one will know then that they whom I loved have made me so."

"Mercy—have mercy, my king!" prayed Fredersdorf, sinking at the king's feet. "Kill me, crush me with your wrath, only do not speak thus kindly, lovingly. Your Majesty does not know how I have loved you all my life, how my whole being is absorbed in yours. But I have a wild, ambitious heart. In the thirst of my ambition it was not enough to be the servant of my king. I wished to be a mighty and influential man, to mount high and see those far below me who now disdain me because I am but a body-servant and no distinguished gentleman. That, my King, is my whole offence, the whole remorseful confession of my fault."

"I know it," said the king. "You would not betray your master, you would only be your master's master. Poor Fredersdorf, did you believe it such happiness to be a king? But you are ambitious, and I will come to the assistance of this malady so far as I can. But give up trying to rule my will and influence my decisions."

Fredersdorf pressed his lips to Frederick's proffered hand and wept aloud.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BETROTHED.

REJOICING ran riot in the house of the rich silk factor, Orguelin. The proud daughter had consented to marry Count Rhedern, and the happy father, delighted with the prospect of speedily becoming father-in-law to a count, was busily preparing for wedding festivities the gorgeousness of which should make all Berlin talk. There was to be a banquet, at which his daughter should appear in the circle of her former friends for the last time, to take leave of them forever; for it was a matter of course that the Countess Rhedern must seek other society, form other friendships, than those known to Ma'm'selle Orguelin. But Father Orguelin wished to show his colleagues the manufacturers and merchants, the distinguished and resplendent gentleman now become his son. He wished to arouse the envy of his friends and impress them with the princely splendor of his house.

All this, however, failed wholly to suit the plans of Count Rhedern. Thanks to his debts and his creditors, he had been forced to decide to marry the rich factor's daughter, but he had no intention of entering upon relations, however distant, with the friends and relatives of his wife, and if he had had to resolve to recognize the rich father-in-law and show him the love and reverence of a son, this was far from being the same as appearing at his banquets to serve as chief decoration of the table. He shuddered to think of the cavaliers' jests, for whom it would be a bottomless spring of teasing fun that he, marshal of the queen, cavalier of the old nobility, had played the leading part at a banquet of the bourgeoisie, had dined and chatted, danced and made merry, with manufacturers and merchants. A nobleman might well decide, for the honor of his house, to marry a civilian possessing a million, but he must not humiliate himself so far as to count himself as a member of the family and take notice of this or that bourgeois.

So, with smiling face and tender greeting, he entered the brilliant boudoir of his betrothed, who was engaged at the moment in helping her father draw up a list of the wedding-guests. Count Rhedern seated himself beside his betrothed, and listened with horror to the barbarous names added to the list, whose possessors never could participate in a knightly tourney or a royal banquet.

"Well," inquired his father-in-law, triumphantly, "what do you say to our banquet? The richest and most respectable merchants of all Berlin will be present, representing more millions of thalers than Germany counts inhabitants. So you appreciate, my son, that to do honor to such guests requires especial preparation, for it is not easy to impress these proud gentlemen and arouse their wonder. It is nothing to surprise one of you counts and barons. You are happy if you are offered champagne or expensive Holstein oysters. But a rich merchant turns away with a sneer when turtle-soup or Indian birds'-nests are offered him. Yet I mean to astonish my proud guests with a dinner such as they have never eaten. I have ordered two of the best cooks of Paris, and they require two weeks for the necessary preparations. I pay them for this time a sum which, perhaps, excels the half yearly salary of a royal marshal. Besides this there will be fireworks, an illumination, music, and I had thought of engaging a French theatrical troupe for a comedy."

"But I fear," laughed his daughter, "that few of our guests would understand a word of the French comedy."

"It may be so, but what is French is the fashion at present, and it will create remark if we have a French play. But not a word do you say, my son! You even sigh and look sulky."

"I was sighing because you wish to postpone the wedding so long."

"A piece of flattery for you, daughter. Betrothed people are always impatient."

"But I was sighing, not only because I am to be robbed so long of the happiness of leading my dear Caroline to my house as my wife, but also because I lose the pleasure of introducing her at the largest and most brilliant ball of the court season, the opening one."

"But the king is still absent upon his pleasure journey," said Caroline.

"The king returns in a few days, and as the mourning is coming to an end he will give his court a masquerade, probably the only one for this season."

"A masquerade!" cried his betrothed. "I never took part in a masquerade."

"You would see a very brilliant one here. The queen mother had sent me an invitation for my betrothed and suggested that I should present her at court the same day."

"Is it impossible to hasten the wedding a little?" asked Caroline, impatiently.

"Quite impossible," replied Father Orguelin, solemnly.

"Why so?" asked the count, insinuatingly. "Might we not have the wedding a little earlier and the banquet later?—the wedding perfectly quiet, as is the custom in the aristocratic world, and the pomp and splendor apart? These noisy marriages are a trifle out of fashion, too, and at court it would be said that the rich and cultivated Father Orguelin scorns the customs of the young court and wishes to show his opposition by retaining with *éclat* the customs of the foregoing *régime*."

"Heaven forefend!" cried Father Orguelin, horrified.

"Father," said Caroline, with determination, "I hate boisterous festivities; I prefer a quiet wedding. Let no one say at court that Ma'm'selle Orguelin has jubilated with all her acquaintances over the monstrous luck of marrying a count. Later the count can give a gorgeous banquet and you respond to it. But let us be married quietly, according to the fashion."

Father Orguelin acquiesced, as he always did, in his daughter's determination. It was agreed that the wedding should take place next day, and a feast of Lucullus take place later at the house of the bride's father. "At that I shall, upon no condition, be present," thought Count Rhedern as he gave his assent.

But one thing was now wanting, a brilliant court toilet for the important day, and the count assured her with a sigh that it would be very difficult to obtain one duly, not because of the gold-brocaded train, but for want of a tailor.

"Pellissier, the new French tailor, declined to make even a little mantle for me," said the count, "and his ladies, now the most sought for dressmakers, have been for a week deaf to all entreaties."

"But I know that Father Pricker, tailor to the two queens, will make me the necessary dresses if he has to employ an assistant for the purpose."

"Then let us go to Father Pricker," said her betrothed, with a smile; "let us go at once, for the matter is pressing, and you will understand that I should be inconsolable if we were married and I could not present you at court at the first opportunity."

When the betrothed were alone in the carriage, a few moments later, Caroline Orguelin turned with a contemptuous smile to the count: "The wedding will take place the day after to-morrow," she said.

"Yes, my dearest Caroline, the day after to-morrow I shall be the happiest of men."

She shrugged her shoulders slightly. "Your creditors were very urgent, that you suddenly felt such longing for my dowery?"

"My creditors?" asked the count; "I do not understand you, dearest Caroline."

"You understand me very well," she said, with frosty coldness. "It is time for us to speak clearly. Know, then, that I have not been deceived by your tender assurances, nor your perfectly well played rôle of impatient lover. I am neither young nor beautiful enough to awaken the passion of so experienced a cavalier as Count Rhedern. You are poor in everything but debts, so you absolutely needed a rich wife, and as I accidentally possess more money than all the beautiful and aristocratic maidens of the nobility, you determined to take me with it. And I *bought* Count Rhedern with my million, because he can present me at court."

"Now, truly," said the count, with a forced smile, "these are most original confessions."

"But they are necessary, to save us from wearing ourselves in future with useless comedies, and with dissembling what neither of us feels. I still owe you an explanation of my urgent wish to become a court lady, for you surely will not hold me so insane as to have purchased a count for the mere purpose of being a countess."

"I should have found no insanity therein."

"Nay," continued his betrothed, "I wished to become a countess in order to be present at court, to enjoy a pleasure which thousands will envy me; though, like the poor, silly moth, I might flutter about the bright light only long enough to burn to death. I told you that I am no longer young; yet my heart is younger perhaps than that of many a court lady, for it has not been worn out and used up. It was hard and pure, and clear as mountain-crystal until——"

"Continue," he said, as she paused, "these are most enchanting admissions, such as are usually made *after* the wedding. You were speaking of your heart, which had been like mountain-crystal until——"

"Until I had seen the king," continued his betrothed, ardently.

"It was coronation day when you arrived at the bright idea of falling in love with the king?"

"Yes, it was coronation day when I first realized how proud, and high, and overwhelming a thing a true man is. I determined to be near him, and I, who had never wished to marry, decided in one moment to unite myself in marriage

with some cavalier. I asked my companion the names of the cavaliers standing behind the king and princes. Most of them were married, but you were not, and they told me you had many debts and no means. The same day I told my father I would marry the count, saying, 'Buy him for me as you recently bought this wonderful diamond-studded Nuremberg plaything.'"

"A most flattering and ingenious way of looking at it," said the count, with a forced smile.

Caroline continued: "My father confided the matter to a broker, who did the business most adroitly. Now, my count, you will understand why I made the condition that you must secure me access to the court before I could decide to become your wife."

"I understand it perfectly," said the count, sulkily. "You use me as a bridge to pass from the shop to the royal palace, as I let you pay my debts."

"But, my dear count, you will at times suffer a little *gêne* through me," said the millionnaire, laying her hand softly upon the count's shoulder. "It was not because of your creditors alone that you desired a speedy marriage, but still more because the count found it beneath his dignity to partake of a banquet with merchants and manufacturers, to be a comrade of the bourgeois. But I shall never forget that my father is a merchant, and all my friends are daughters of merchants and manufacturers. I shall force you to show my father reverence, my friends the respect which I shall never refuse yours."

"Force? you will force me?"

"You shall see that I can do so. My father promised you to give you a million with me, from which your debts and my outfit should be subtracted. Your debts are two hundred thousand thalers; my outfit, including my palace and my diamonds, costs quite as much; so there remains but six hundred thousand thalers, of which, according to the contract, you have joint use. But you will see that the interest of this little capital is too trifling for the daughter of a rich merchant to live upon, and that, cherishing the daring plan of entertaining the king in my house, I might use half our year's income in one evening for the purpose."

The count looked at his wife with admiration bordering upon reverence. "You think we cannot live upon the interest of six hundred thousand thalers?"

"I do not *think*, I know it certainly, for I used almost that sum as a girl. My father appreciates this, and

has therefore given me for pin-money a second million, which remains in his business, I receiving the interest in monthly payments. But this interest, mark well, belongs to me personally, not to my marriage portion, and I can, if I choose, pay your debts, buy horses and equipages, or I can give it to my father, who can make good use of it in his business. So often as you fail to show due consideration to your spouse, her father, and her friends, the pin-money returns to my father, and to your share falls the care for the necessary payments."

"But I shall ever be a tender and considerate husband, a devoted son of your father," cried the count, charmed with the thought of the second million.

"You will do well," said the bride, gravely, "for you will thereby have a surplus income of four thousand thalers a month. You see I am a true merchant's daughter, and good at arithmetic. I bought you because I recognized your value, but you shall never think you did me a favor in making me a countess, for you shall constantly be reminded that my father is a millionnaire whose daughter and sole heir liberally pays you for your amiability, your title, and her admission to court. But here we are. Let us put up our mask again and be the sentimental couple about to marry for pure love."

"And, indeed, you deserve to be loved," cried the count, pressing her hand to his lips. "You are the cleverest and most piquant woman I ever saw, and I do not doubt that I shall some day fall violently in love with you."

"Poor count," she said, with a laugh, "on that day you will be much to be pitied, for I shall never love you. A heart like mine loves but once and dies of its first love."

"May it be a slow death, at least," said the count, springing out of the wagon and offering his hand helpfully to his betrothed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TAILOR FAMILIES, OR THE MONTAGUES AND CAPULETS OF BERLIN.

Father Pricker was standing at the window, looking across at a house on the opposite side of the way, before which stood a motley array of beautiful ladies and distinguished cavaliers,

all entering with an air of importance; while stamping horses, gorgeous carriages, chattering jockeys and lackeys, awaited the return of their masters and mistresses. In this house dwelt Pellissier, the new French tailor, and for his sake was this throng.

Pricker felt this like a dagger thrust into his heart, for no one came to him and no throng was ever seen before his door. Since the arrival of the French tailor, Pricker was a lost and unfortunate man, wounded in his ambition, his feelings, his just claims upon the gratitude of mankind. Of what use was it that he was tailor to the two queens? The court had no work for him since he had declined to employ French assistants, and none of all the ladies who had formerly confided to him the mysteries of her toilet and her figure now remembered his discretion and his skill in concealing what was defective, replacing what was wanting. The weathercock world had deserted him, the Hohenzollern family had no recollection of all the heroic deeds and valuable services of the Pricker family, no longer appreciated its services, but scorned old customs and the habits of centuries.

Since Pellissier had come to live opposite his rival, Father Pricker was a broken-hearted man. Without a murmur he concealed his wound, and bore his affliction with a smile. But one eye was not to be deceived, one heart guessed his grief. Frau Pricker mourned in secret as her husband grew more and more silent, yet she never ventured to comfort him or speak a word of encouragement. At times he had thought of selling his house and moving to another part of the city, but the next moment he blushed at such unmanly weakness and accused himself of cowardice. It was a mortal combat to which Pellissier had challenged him, and it should never be said that Pricker had beat a retreat. He represented a principle, the maintenance of good old German custom against frivolous, changeable French fashion. He must prove to the world that there were people still who scorn the passion for change and cling to use and wont and ancient custom. So he stayed with his family in his respectable old mansion, that had so long sheltered the court tailors of the Prussian princes. But he carried death in his heart.

As he stood in the window, staring at the house of his hated rival, he saw to his grief another equipage rolling up. But this one halted before his own door. In the joy of his heart he was tempted to open the door, but he recollected himself in time and waited until his wife came to tell him, her face

radiant with pleasure, that rich Ma'm'selle Orguelin and her betrothed desired to speak with him.

Father Pricker approached the twain in proud silence, but could not help it that his eyes brightened, and a happy smile played about his pale lips.

"You will be surprised, my dear court tailor, that we come to you instead of summoning you to us. But it would have taken too much time, and our business demands great haste."

Pricker made a slight, proud bow.

"My house is accustomed to receiving distinguished persons," he said. "My great-grandfather had the good fortune to welcome the elector himself here. Let me hear how I can serve you."

"I need two complete court costumes," said Ma'm'selle Orguelin, with a proud smile. "One costume for the presentation, and the second for the great court ball."

"One robe with a brocade train and one stuff dress," said Pricker, solemnly. "I would recommend a robe of blue velvet, which is becoming to blond complexions."

"Let us take sky-blue velvet with a silver brocade train," said the millionnaire. "As to the dress for the court ball, my father has given me a piece of beautiful goods, velvet shot with gold, such as are made only in India."

"Then we shall have a thoroughly suitable and distinguished costume, and I am assured that Countess Rhedern's first appearance at court will do honor to the house of Pricker."

"And I do not doubt that your work will do honor to my house in turn," cried the count, with a laugh; "but you will have to bind yourself, my dear master, to be ready in one week."

"In four days, if necessary," said Pricker, taking pompously the measure which his wife offered him, and approaching the lady.

"The pattern and trimming I leave to your taste," she said, "except that the dress must, of course, be of the latest French style."

Pricker let fall the measure, which he had just laid upon the lady's slender waist, and gazed at her in horror.

"From French patterns shall your dresses be made?" he asked, roughly.

"I think that is a matter of course," she answered, with a smile. "No respectable tailor works nowadays from antiquated German patterns."

Pricker rolled up his measure decidedly, and laid it upon the table.

"Then the dresses will not be made in my house," he said.

"How so?" said Ma'm'selle Orguelin, in amazement. "You will not do my work?"

"With pleasure, but not from French patterns. That were a disgrace to my house and my ancestors."

"But remember that you lose," said the count, "not only the custom of my future wife, but of all the court; for no one will want your work until you bring yourself to work after French patterns."

"No one will wish me to work for her, that is true. But I shall remain true to my principles. I have lived a German man, and I shall die a German tailor!"

The count offered his arm to his betrothed, and said, with a smile:

"I am not at all convinced that a German tailor may not be a thorough-going fool as well, who would do well to remember that Frederick William is no longer alive to rejoice at such stupidity, but a young king who dresses in the French fashion, speaks French, and has more Frenchmen than Germans at his court. Come, my dear Caroline, let us go to Pellissier; he will not be so silly as to decline your patronage. Farewell, Pricker."

Pricker remained alone, proudly erect in the middle of the room, staring at the portraits of his ancestors. From the next room the trilling song of his daughter reached his ear. She was studying a new Italian aria with Quantz, the king's music-teacher.

"Nel tue giorni felice, ricordati da me!" sang pretty Anna, and Father Pricker ran frantically up and down the room, closing his ears to avoid hearing the shame that had come upon his house, and cursing his weakness in granting his daughter's prayer for music-lessons.

"My own heart I have closed to the enemy, but he will have power over my children."

Anna went on trilling her Italian aria with her silvery voice, and he heard the delighted teacher calling, "Bravo! bravo!"

"They are murdering me; they wound me to the heart!" he murmured, sinking into a chair exhausted, and leaning his head upon the back, so that his stiff, little pigtail, caught between his head and the chair-back, waved like an exclamation point above his pale, trembling countenance.

Presently the lesson came to its end, and Anna entered the room with dancing eyes and flaming cheeks.

"Father," she said, "my warmest wish is about to be fulfilled. This dear, noble Quantz, who has undertaken my

lessons because Graun is busy with an opera at the king's command, has managed an invitation for me to sing at the next court concert. The king returns next week, and I, the happiest girl in the world, am to sing my Italian aria before him."

"She will sing Italian," murmured her father. "I shall be dead before this calamity befalls my family."

Anna paid no attention to him, but sprang to her mother, who just then entered the room, and drew the little woman into a warm embrace.

Then approaching her father, she said, defiantly:

"It is high time to think of my costume. I must have a new and splendid dress to appear before the king and his court."

"That you shall have!" cried her father, solemnly. "To sing before the king is certainly an honor from which I must not hold you back. Your mother's wedding-dress we still have, and we'll make a court costume of it."

Anna laughed loud and long.

"Nay, father. The day is past and gone when women might wear the gowns of their grandmothers. Besides, the skirt is far too narrow to make a crinoline skirt of it."

"Crinoline!" shrieked her father.

"Why not?" asked Anna, amazed. "No lady with any claim to elegance can go without a crinoline now."

Just then rapid steps were heard before the door.

"O quel plaisir d'être amoureux!" sang a fresh male voice.

"French!" exclaimed Father Pricker, beside himself with rage. "William sings French!"

William appeared in a costume of the latest and most faultless cut, such as a few cavaliers of exceptional elegance were wearing—a tightly fitting blue coat with short waist and long tails, wide sleeves, and mother-of-pearl buttons; the coat-tails lined with scarlet silk, the small, high, standing collar and narrow cuffs decorated with embroidery in silver. Below the short waist of the coat a long, flesh-colored satin vest, richly embroidered in silver, more than half covered the short, black hose, fastened below the knee with silver buckles that held the scarlet and white-striped hose as well, which in turn gave place to silver-buckled shoes. Instead of a pigtail, young Pricker had done his hair into a cushion at the back and several heavily powdered curls at the sides. At the end of the cushion was fastened a broad, black ribbon, folded about the neck and fastened again in front to the broad lace jabot that welled forth from the vest. A tiny three-cornered

hat perched, soldier-fashion, toward the right side of his brow. On the left hip dangled a little sword, upon the handle of which was a great bow of dark-blue ribbon embroidered with gold, and his hand played with a tiny cane with amber head.

"Well?" inquired William; "do I not please you? Is not that a suit worthy of the finest nobleman, except that I cannot, like the proud cavaliers, wear the white plume, which they claim as the privilege of their rank? Otherwise my costume is faultless, and as I went along the street the ladies opened their windows to stare after me."

"Where did you get this suit?" asked his father. "Who gave you the money for this blamable suit, and who made it?"

"The money you will give me, dear father, for it is not yet paid for. The name Pricker has a substantial sound, and Pellissier gladly gave me credit, though at first he did not wish to work for me at all."

Old Pricker groaned with grief and rage. Then, feverishly seizing his son's long coat-tails and shaking him from side to side, he shrieked:

"Pellissier made it? The miserable botching creature has made such a caricature of *my* son! And thou, William, wert shameless enough to go to the enemy of thy house and accept from him this suit! Hadst thou no fear that thine ancestors would turn in their graves? Away with this ridiculous mummery. Away with these piebald garments. I will have my son again, my good, honorable, German son!"

And Father Pricker began to tear and drag his son's clothing with crazy violence. He knocked off the three-cornered hat and stamped upon it, clutched the lace jabot with clinched fingers, and laughed aloud at the tattered fragments. William was petrified with terror. His father's violence stupefied him. His sister's laughter and his mother's tears first restored his presence of mind.

"Father," he shrieked, furious at such treatment, "I am no longer a child, and I shall endure your ridiculous despotism no longer. I shall dress as I please, and wear a costume such as the fashion prescribes."

"Well said, brother," cried Anna, springing to his side. "We are children of the new age, and shall dress as our generation demands. Youth cannot be restrained like old age, and our parents must not require of us that we accept their views in preference to our own."

"'Honor thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee,'" said Mother Pricker, solemnly.

Anna laughed.

"Another text! But that is all antiquated. Nobody quotes the Bible nowadays. It is not nearly so amusing as Voltaire!"

"Enough!" said Father Pricker. "Listen to my final determination. I command you so to live and so to dress as your father and mother have lived and dressed. Woe to you if you disobey my commands and defy your father, for then I shall disinherit you, and my curse shall rest upon you. If you enter yonder house across the street, or hold intercourse with the French tempters who dwell in it, or if you dress yourselves in the French fashion, you cease to be my children, and have nothing more to hope from me."

He took his weeping wife by the arm and left the room. The brother and sister remained *tête-à-tête*.

"Well," said Anna, after a long pause, "will you obey and go back to your pigtail and coarse cloth coat?"

"To be laughed at and have Blanche Pellissier scoffing at me? Ah! you do not know how we love one another, and she has vowed that she will be my wife."

"Then you will obey our father, and become a respectable tailor like all our ancestors?"

William laughed aloud.

"A tailor? Follow a miserable trade, when my father has bestowed upon me the education of a nobleman? Nay, nay, Anna, that cannot be a serious question."

"But our father means it seriously, for you know very well the Prickers have been tailors for centuries. I warn you, brother, be prudent and careful, and do not irritate our father to the point of really disinheriting you."

"Oh, he will have to bow to the inevitable as well as Father Pellissier, who will be furious, too, when he learns that I am Blanche's husband. But we shall marry in spite of them both. Ah! Blanche is an angel of beauty and amiability."

"Nevertheless, she is but a tailor's daughter, after all," said Anna, with a shrug.

"Like my pretty and amiable sister Anna."

"I shall soon be a famous singer, and the wife of a nobleman."

"Well, who says Blanche may not be the wife of a famous man, and that you may not all be proud of me yet?"

"Will you be a tailor or a dressmaker?" asked Anna, pertly.

"Neither. I shall be an actor. But keep this secret, Anna!"

CHAPTER XL.

IN RHEINSBERG.

The deserted castle of Rheinsberg was inhabited once more. Merry greetings and laughter filled its halls. The happy days of old, when Frederick was crown prince, seemed about to be repeated. The same company, the same amusements, all as of old.

But nearly all those who had left Rheinsberg with proud hopes and aspiring wishes had returned disappointed, their wings thoroughly clipped.

They were still good friends, welcome companions of the king, but none had overstepped the bounds of submission and dependence which the king had laid down, within which, sufficing for himself in his strength of character and will, he stood wholly isolated.

They had gained nothing by Frederick's ascent to the throne, but none of them had lost by it.

One heart only was broken, bleeding in unseen, unmurmuring resignation. That was the heart of Elizabeth, the poor rejected, widowed woman, who was nevertheless called the reigning queen, Frederick's spouse.

The king, returning from his pleasure journey to Strasburg, had reminded her of her promise to accompany his court to Rheinsberg, and the poor sufferer, though she knew the king's presence would be a daily and hourly torture for her, had not had courage to withstand the urgency of her longing. She had accepted his invitation, saying to herself, "I shall, at least, see him, and if he does not even speak to me, I shall hear his voice. My sufferings will be greater, but my joys also. *Soffri e taci.*"

And she was right. He never spoke with her, never looked at her. With a silent bow he bade her welcome daily, but he did not accompany her to the table, nor sit beside her. The presence of the Margrave and Margravine of Baireuth gave the king the pretext of a duty in giving to his favorite sister precedence over the queen as his guest. So the queen endured in silence. She grew daily paler, but she concealed her pallor under a mask of artificial rosiness—laid upon the furrows which sorrow was already ploughing in her youthful face the tiny *mouches* which the French fashion had imported, in company with cosmetics and crinoline. No one

should know that she suffered, not even the king. She took part in all amusements, laughed at Bielfeld's jests and Pöllnitz's anecdotes, let Knobelsdorf describe all the great plans for splendid new buildings, and gave her whole attention to Jordan's stories of the king's care for the poor and needy in his kingdom. She even took active part in the preparation for theatricals. Voltaire's "Death of Cæsar" and Boissy's "Frenchman in London," had been selected for the impromptu amateur theatre in Rheinsberg, and the king was to play a leading rôle in each piece. She was present at every rehearsal, helped the court ladies with the selection and arrangement of their costumes, viewed daily the work of the painter charged with the preparation of the scenery and curtain.

Meanwhile, the king was less often present in the circle of his friends, and his flute was less often heard. He spent the whole day in the library, where no one might disturb him, not even Quantz. Madame Brandt, who had accompanied the court to Rheinsberg, observed, with a sigh, during one of her secret interviews with Manteuffel: "The king has become unfaithful to the last of his sweethearts. He has abandoned even the flute."

"But how does he occupy himself the whole day?" asked the count.

"With scientific studies," said Madame Brandt, with a shrug. "Fredersdorf tells me that he spends the whole day over his maps and plans, surrounded with works upon military science, making measurements like a civil engineer. A harmless occupation, you see, having no bearing upon our affairs. The king will not separate from his wife further than has already taken place, and as to the marriage of Prince Augustus William, my mines are laid and will explode at the proper moment, sending the amour of pretty Laura von Pannewitz into the air. All goes well, and we have nothing to fear from the king's scientific studies."

"You call these harmless studies!" said the count, with a shrug. "But I assure you that they will greatly disturb the Austrian court, and I must report them instantly to my friend Seckendorf."

"You make a mountain of a molehill!" laughed Madame Brandt. "The king never absents himself from the evening gatherings, and is as care-free as in the merriest crown-prince days. Who knows? Perhaps he uses the solitude of the library to study his part, for we play the 'Death of Cæsar' tomorrow and the king appears as *Brutus*."

"Yes, it seems to me that the king plays the rôle of *Brutus*," said Manteuffel, reflectively; "outwardly he is cheerful, but who knows what sinister, fateful thoughts he buries in the depths of his soul?"

"You are always seeing ghosts," cried Madame Brandt, impatiently. "I tell you the king plays *Brutus*, but he is not *Brutus*."

Madame Brandt took leave of her confidant and hastened lightly toward the castle. But it was not necessary to dress for the last rehearsal that day. The king could not appear as *Brutus*, for he was ill. The intermittent fever which had been hanging about him all through the summer, and prevented his going to Amsterdam, and even fastened him to his bed at Castle Moyland, where Voltaire was making him the long-wished-for visit, had now returned with frightful violence. The king was scoffing at his physician for having no means of working a cure.

"There is a remedy," said Ellert, with a shrug, "but I dare not prescribe it for your Majesty."

"Why not?" asked the king.

"Because we must first test it upon some patient upon whose recovery the weal or woe of millions does not depend."

"A human life is always sacred, and if you are not sure of your remedy it is as unscrupulous to give it to a beggar as to a king."

"I believe in the remedy," said Ellert, "as did Louis XIV., who purchased it from the Englishman Talbot as an arcanum, for one hundred louis d'or a pound."

"Give it to me!" commanded the king.

"Pardon, your Majesty, I dare not, though I have a small quantity with me which I brought to show your Majesty as a curiosity. See this fine brown powder, prepared, not by an apothecary, but by nature herself."

"Then I have faith in it," said the king; "nature is the best apothecary and the best physician. What is your remedy called?"

"It is quinquina in the language of Peru, and kindly nature lets it grow in that home of fevers."

But the king was too ill to listen; his eyes closed and his dry lips murmured confused and disconnected sounds.

At that moment the door opened and Fredersdorf inquired, "How is the king? Is he in a condition to hear important news?"

"Not now; wait an hour, then he will be free from fever

and collected. Is it bad news?" inquired the physician. "In that case I would advise waiting until to-morrow."

"I think the king will not call it bad news," said Kaiserling, with a smile. "You, Bielfeld, as a diplomatist, must know how to interpret it."

"I think he will call it good; not because I am a diplomatist, but because the king is a hero slumbering and waiting to be awakened."

At last the king awoke, and Ellert pronounced his pulse wholly normal, adding, "You may communicate your news to the king."

Pöllnitz, as master of ceremonies, approached the bed.

"Sire, an hour ago a courier arrived, bringing news of importance."

"From whom does the courier come?" asked the king, quietly.

"From your Majesty's ambassador in Vienna, Baron von Borke, who sends his own body-servant as courier."

"Is the empress, our exalted aunt, ill again?" asked the king.

"The empress is perfectly well, but her husband the emperor—— "

"Finish your sentence, Pöllnitz. What of the Emperor of Austria?"

"Sire, Emperor Charles VI. is no more; he died, October 20th."

"Indeed," said Frederick, letting his head sink slowly back to its cushion. "It is not worth the trouble to make so much of such trifling news. If the emperor is dead Maria Theresa will be Empress of Austria, and the matter does not further concern us."

He closed his eyes. The physician felt his pulse. "Perfectly normal," he said.

"Right," said the king. "On the day on which I receive the news of the emperor's death I must have no fever, or they may say in Vienna that fear has made me ill. Give me a quinine powder, Ellert."

"But I told your Majesty that I cannot do this because we have not tested the remedy sufficiently to be sure of its effect."

"Then try it on me," said the king, decidedly. "Give it to me."

In vain did the physician appeal to the cavaliers for support. In vain did they all beseech him not to endanger his life thus needlessly.

"Give me the powder at once. I command it."

"When your Majesty commands, I must obey," said Ellert; "but these be my witnesses that I acted under compulsion."

"Now you must rest, your Majesty," he added, when the king had taken the powder. "And you must not dream of returning to Berlin. In my capacity as physician, I have the right to forbid that."

"Why should we return to Berlin? A trifle like the death of the emperor involves no great changes. Now, gentlemen, you may go. I feel quite well and will arise. Fredersdorf may remain to dress me, and, Jordan, send me Eichel that I may dictate to him some necessary letters. Then we will all meet in the music-hall, where Quantz and I shall play a duo, to which I invite you as listeners."[1]

The king dictated three letters: One to Field Marshal von Schwerin, the second to the Prince of Anhalt-Dessau, the third to Minister von Podewils. All contained the same word—the command to break up at once and come to the king at Rheinsberg instantly.

Then he went to meet his court in the music-hall, and never had he played more enchantingly or entertained his friends more genially than on the day of the death of the Emperor of Austria.

The next morning the three gentlemen arrived from Berlin, and were immediately received by the king in the library.

"The Emperor of Austria is dead," said Frederick, after greeting the new-comers, "and I have therefore summoned you to confer with you as to the benefit to be derived from his death."

"Your Majesty will hardly think of deriving benefit from a death which inflicts mourning upon a nearly related house and robs the reigning Queen of Prussia of her uncle!" cried the old Prince of Anhalt-Dessau with some warmth.

"It is a well-known fact that your allegiance is to the imperial family," said the king, with a smile.

"Nay, to the King of Prussia," cried the old prince; "a dissension with Austria were a misfortune for Prussia."

Frederick gave a slight shrug and turned to the other gentlemen.

"I wish to hear your opinions also, gentlemen," he said. "You are, all three, men of experience, heroes in war, and men of state; you must therefore not deprive my youth of your experience and counsel."

With a quiet smile he listened to the peaceful proposition

[1] The king's own words.

of the field marshal and the minister, in which the Prince of Anhalt warmly acquiesced.

"Then you doubt my claim to Silesia?" said the king, after a slight pause. "You doubt my right to demand the cession of Silesia, which the Hapsburgs wrongfully wrested from my ancestors?"

"Your ancestors did not break the peace for its sake, preferring to leave the Imperial House of Austria in possession of Silesia."

"But while they did so," cried the king, "while my ancestors bowed to necessity and were robbed by the intrigues of the Imperial House of Austria, rewarded with rank ingratitude for service rendered, they called upon posterity to avenge them. Frederick William, the great elector, exclaimed, when the Austrian House faithlessly abandoned him, 'An avenger will arise out of my ashes.' When his son, the first King of Prussia, was compelled to surrender the town of Schwiebus to Austria he said to his ministers, 'My posterity will know what they have to do.' And, finally, when my father recognized the thanklessness of the Austrian House, he felt that between the House of Austria and Brandenburg there could never more be peace, and left to me the holy task of punishing and humiliating the haughty House of Austria. He showed me to his ministers, and said, 'There stands one who will avenge me.' The time has come when I must open the eyes of the Austrian family, and show them that the little Marquis of Brandenburg, of whom they said that his duty lies in offering the king napkin and finger-bowl at the close of the banquet, has become a free, independent, and equal king, who will neither permit himself to be insulted by Austria, nor recognize any master other than his God. Will you help me with your counsel in my work?"

"Yes," they all cried, with joyful enthusiasm. "Our life-blood belongs to our king and our country!"

The king offered them his hand.

"I counted upon you. Ziethen and Winterfeldt, too, will not be wanting, and we shall not open hostilities hastily or unprepared. Everything has been foreseen and arranged, and the only point remaining is the execution of plans which I have long cherished. Here are march-routes and plans of attack. And in order that the people may know that their king makes war only to regain his own good rights, I have charged Chancellor von Ludewig with the task of publishing a work explaining our claims to the dukedoms and princedoms of Jägerndorf, Liegnitz, Brieg, Wohlau, and all

that belongs to them in Silesia. War is inevitable, but let us keep our own counsel and surprise the Austrians. And now, gentlemen, let us consider the details."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE KING AND HIS FRIEND.

The king spent several hours closeted with his counsellors in earnest conference; and when they had left him he summoned Jordan, offering him his hand with a face glowing with enthusiasm.

"Now, Jordan, rejoice with me. The times of peace and rest are over, and life and movement come at last into the rusty machine of state. You often call me a bold eagle. Now we shall see whether my wings have strength for a bold flight."

"Then my surmises are correct and the king's crusade is directed against Austria?"

"Yes, against Austria."

"But for you, too, my king, peace, quiet, art, poetry, and study will be things of the past. Apollo's darling becomes a son of Mars, and we who are left behind can only watch with mourning eye the departing one, unable even to place ourselves between him and the danger of death."

"Away with sad thoughts, friend. Death awaits us all, and if he find me upon the field of battle, at least it is a bed of honor, and my friends, my people, and history will not forget me. I must achieve something great. It is not enough to be king by birth and inheritance—I must deserve it by my deeds. Silesia offers me the finest opportunity, therefore, under conditions which may form a solid foundation for my fame."

"I see," sighed Jordan. "Your Majesty is not satisfied with the love of your subjects, the enthusiastic, devoted love of your friends. It is fame for which you long."

"Yes, you are right!" exclaimed Frederick, with a smile. "The gleaming phantom known as fame appears before me every day. I know it is folly, but folly from which a man frees himself with difficulty when once possessed by her. Do not speak to me of dangers, cares, wear, and tear; what are they all in comparison with fame? It is so mad a passion

that I cannot comprehend why it does not turn everyone's head."

"Your Majesty, for thousands this passion has not only turned their heads, but cost their heads," said Jordan, sadly. "The battle-field is, of course, the golden book of the heroes, but their names are written in it in blood."

"It is true," said the king, reflecting, "a battle-field is a sorry sight for a poet and philosopher. Were I not born a prince I would fain be a philosopher. But every man must follow his trade, and I propose to do nothing by halves. I love war for the sake of fame. So do not mourn, dear friend, that the days of leisure and enjoyment are over, that I must march to the field while you amuse yourself with Horace, study Pausanias, laugh with Anacreon. I do not envy you. My youth, the fire of passion, the longing for fame, and, not to hide it from you, a share of curiosity; finally, an irresistible inward impulse, all together, have torn me from the calm repose of life, and the wish to see my name in the papers and in the books of history urges me to the field of war. There I will earn the laurels which not even a king finds in his cradle or upon his throne, but must win as a man and a hero."

"And which will one day crown the shining brow of my Frederick!" exclaimed Jordan, with tears in his eyes. "I see a glorious future before you. Perhaps I may no longer be here. But, wherever my spirit may be—and when I stand before you, my king, I feel the immortality of the soul—wherever my spirit may be, its noblest, most divine, most God-like essence will ever be with you, my king and master."

"Oh! do not speak of dying," cried the king, and his ardent glance was veiled with a tender emotion. "Nay, my friend, I need thee, and I think true friendship must be so strong as to conquer even death. We, Jordan, cannot desert one another. It were really cruel of thee to rob me of a possession which we poor kings so rarely boast—a faithful, trusty friend. Nay, Jordan, thou must not die. And though I go to the war I shall not perish; I shall need thee there. Thou shalt be my Cicero, defending the justice of my cause, and I thy Cæsar in its victorious defence."

Jordan was speechless. He shook his head sadly, and two large tears rolled slowly down his face. The king observed him anxiously. He saw the deep, feverish, purple spots, those roses of the grave, upon the hollow cheeks of his friend, saw that he grew daily weaker, heard the hot, feverish breath panting from his breast. A sad presentiment took possession of

his heart, the smile died away upon his lips, he could not conceal his emotion, and, walking to the window, leaned his hot brow upon the pane, shedding tears which none but God should see.

"My God, my God!" he murmured. "How poor we princes are. I have so few friends, and these perhaps but for a brief time longer. Suhm lies ill in Warsaw, and who knows whether I shall ever see him again? Jordan is here beside me, but I see death undermining his life and perhaps about to tear him from me!"

Jordan stood motionless, watching the king, who was still resting his head upon the pane. He did not venture to disturb him, and yet he had a piece of important and melancholy news to communicate. At last he approached the king, laying his hand lightly upon the shoulder of his royal friend.

"Pardon, my King," he said, in a tender, trembling voice—"pardon that I interrupt your reflections; but a hero must not yield to melancholy, and if he think of death, must greet it with a smile, even though Death stretch out his greedy hand toward the best and dearest friends; the hero and warrior must yield them as a sacrifice that he makes for his victories."

The king turned suddenly upon the speaker and his penetrating glance seemed to read his friend's innermost thought.

"You have news of a death to communicate, Jordan?" he asked, curtly, retiring from the window and leaning for support upon the high back of a fauteuil. "You have news of a death to communicate, Jordan?" he repeated, passionately, as Jordan kept silence.

"Yes, news of a death, my King," said Jordan, at last, deeply moved. "Destiny will accustom your Majesty by degrees to such sad news, so that your heart may not fail when in battle several friends perish at once."

"It is a friend, then, who is dead?" said the king, turning pale.

"A friend, sire—the dearest of them all."

The king did not respond at once. He sank into the fauteuil, leaning his head back and clutching the sides spasmodically. Then he asked, in a loud, hollow voice: "Is it Suhm?"

"Yes, it is Suhm, my King; he died in Warsaw. Here is his last letter to your Majesty; his brother sent it to me to be placed in your Majesty's hands."

The king uttered a cry and buried his ashy face in his hands. Great tears rolled between the slender fingers. Then,

brushing the tears from his eyes with a hasty movement, he opened and read the letter. "Suhm is dead," he murmured in a low voice, so plaintive that Jordan's heart ached—"Suhm is dead. This one friend who loved me as sincerely as I loved him, this noble friend who united so much talent, so much sincerity, so much feeling. I had lost millions rather than this one friend. I shall mourn him all my life and his memory will live in my heart while one drop of blood flows in my veins. His family shall be my own. Ah! my heart bleeds, and this wound is deeper than ball or sword inflicts."

Overcome by his sorrow the king laid his face upon the back of the fauteuil and wept aloud. After a long pause he arose and stood erect and proud before Jordan. His features had assumed a firm, almost iron expression, his eyes glowed like two sword-points.

"Jordan," he said, in a loud, full voice, "death can demand nothing further of me now. He has laid an iron coat of mail around my heart, and when I go to battle I shall be victorious over all my enemies, for death has taken my friend as the sacrifice of victory, and, because he would not strike me upon the field of battle, he has struck me in advance in the person of my friend. Jordan, Jordan, this wound bleeds sorely. But we will bind it up and no one shall see the blood-stained cloths. I have conquered death. Now I shall fight and conquer as a hero and a king. What cares the world whether I suffer? The world shall know nothing about it. A mask before our face; a disguise for our sorrows. Let us laugh and make merry while we mourn our friend, while we arm ourselves against the enemy. Let us play *Cæsar* and *Antony* quietly here until the time comes for imitating them more earnestly. Come, Jordan, come, we will go and rehearse *Cæsar's* death.

CHAPTER XLII.

FAREWELL AUDIENCE OF THE AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR, MARQUIS BOTTA.

Pomp and splendor reigned in the palace in Berlin. A brilliant banquet was to be given by the king, then the court would drink coffee in the newly furnished rooms of the queen mother, and a masquerade was announced for the evening, when the court, the nobility, and the higher officials would be present.

The official mourning for the emperor's death was at an end, and people could devote themselves to the pleasures of the Carnival, now beginning. Never had the court led a more luxurious life than now; feast followed feast, and even the old-fashioned philister citizens of Berlin began to make friends with this new-fangled government that strewed money about and encouraged trade. People saw that a luxurious and extravagant court spent more money among the citizens, and reconciled themselves to lackeys in gold braid, to the gorgeousness of the new decorations in the royal palace, and even to the fact that one room among the apartments of the queen mother was decorated in massive gold—the tables, fender, chandeliers, candelabra; in short, all that could be made of gold. People told each other with pride that the French and English ambassadors had been amazed at the splendor of the queen's boudoir, and both had declared that such gorgeousness was scarcely to be found in all the world.

The king had carried his point. No one suspected the deep earnestness hidden behind his idle play. No one thought that this smiling prince was about to reverse all previous European politics and give to Germany a new map. He had not dropped his mask one moment, and his plans had ripened in inviolate secrecy. The moment for their execution had now come, and to-night, during the masquerade, the king, with his regiments, would leave Berlin to proceed at once to Silesia. The troops themselves were ignorant of their destination. The papers had announced that they were about to leave Berlin to take up new winter-quarters, and the story had found universal acceptance. Only a few trustworthy persons, besides the generals in charge, knew the secret. And with the generals the king had had a last conference in his work-room after the brilliant farewell dinner. He gave them the necessary orders, fixed the hour of their departure, and commanded the officers of all marching regiments to assemble in the palace square at the last moment.

"And now, gentlemen," he said, "having disposed of our business, let us devote ourselves to pleasure, from which we are taking leave we know not for how long. Let us dance with the ladies at the masquerade, before we begin the dance of arms."

When the generals had left him, the body-servant came to make the royal toilet, for which Pellissier had furnished a splendid new costume of the latest Parisian cut. Never had the king expended more care upon his dress, never more patiently submitted to the barber than to-day. At last he

stepped to the mirror, and examined the *tout ensemble* with critical care.

"Well," he said, softly, "if Marquis Botta is not deceived by the fop in yonder mirror, it is truly no fault of mine. The worthy Austrian ambassador would need a fine nose, truly, to find a soldier behind this lace-trimmed doll. I think he will have nothing to report to my good aunt, Maria Theresa, beyond this, that the King of Prussia dresses well, but is no soldier." And he betook himself to to the queen mother, in whose apartment the whole court was assembled, and where he meant to grant the ambassador of the young empress of Austria a farewell audience.

Frederick had been quite right. The Marquis was wholly deceived by the mask of harmless pleasure-seeking which, the king had fastened upon his whole court. He had been sent by the empress with secret instructions to sound the Prussian king's intentions, while officially charged to convey to the king the empress' thanks for the royal congratulations upon her ascending the throne.

"I go with the firm conviction," he said to Count Manteuffel, with whom he had retired into a window-niche while awaiting the king's arrival; "I go with the firm conviction that the king cherishes only friendly intentions, and does not think of breaking the peace."

Manteuffel shrugged his shoulders. "Your conviction will be shaken to-morrow, for the king leaves Berlin to-night to march with his army into Silesia."

At that moment there appeared in the door of the golden boudoir the diamond-glittering figure of the king himself. Sudden silence fell upon the company; everyone bowed in reverence before the gorgeous apparition. Frederick bowed and smiled, but remained standing in the open door. It seemed to give him pleasure to exhibit himself, as it were, to his court. Like a precious, living picture of youth, beauty, manhood, he stood, framed by the door-way, gleaming as though in a sea of light; while from above, the queen's golden chandelier illuminated his blue-velvet suit, with its costly silver embroidery, and silver-brocade waist, with huge diamond buttons burning and shimmering.

"Do but look at this amazingly gorgeous, handsome young man," whispered Marquis Botta. "See the face glowing with youth and pleasure, his fingers laden with diamonds, his hands in their lace-trimmed cuffs, white and delicate enough to do credit to the daintiest lady. See the tiny foot in its resplendent shoe, and then try to make me believe that foot will

march with a soldier's tread, instead of tripping a minuet; that that hand, fit for managing a smelling-bottle, or a pen at most, will carry a sword! Ah! my dear count, you make me laugh with your sinister forebodings."

"And yet, I beseech you, believe me, and hasten, as soon as this audience is at an end, to your hotel. Return with courier horses to Vienna. Do not allow yourself an hour's sleep, a moment's refreshment, before reaching Vienna, and inducing her Majesty to send her whole army, with forced marches, to Silesia, to Breslau. If you scorn my counsels, the King of Prussia will be in Breslau before you reach Vienna, and the empress will receive from the fleeing inhabitants of a province conquered without a blow the news you refuse to believe this night."

The count's deep earnestness was so convincing that Marquis Botta was shaken in his confidence, and looked with a surprised and baffled expression across at the young king, chatting and laughing with a group of ladies.

The king had not for a moment lost sight of the two gentlemen, reading their thoughts in their gestures and expression. He met the marquis' eye, and beckoned the ambassador to himself. The marquis solemnly approached the king, who had advanced to the middle of the room, standing surrounded by his generals and trusted counsellors.

A deep silence fell upon the company. All eyes were turned, with expectant attention, upon the brilliant group of which the young king was the gorgeous central figure. For those who knew the king's purpose, the scene was an interesting drama, a piquant jest; while for those who had not been initiated, and had but a dim suspicion that something portentous was about to take place, it was a moment of tense observation, capable, perhaps, of confirming or destroying their surmises.

The Austrian ambassador, standing directly opposite the king, made his ceremonious bow. The king nodded slightly. "You really come to say farewell, Marquis," said he, negligently.

"Sire, her Majesty, my exalted empress, calls me, and I must obey her commands, happy as I should be to sun myself longer in the presence of so noble and exalted a monarch."

"It is true, a little sun would do you good. You will have a cold homeward journey, Marquis."

"Oh! your Majesty, the cold might easily be borne," sighed the diplomatist.

"Are there other difficulties which disturb your journey?"

"Yes, sire; there are the fearful roads through that lamentable Austrian province, Silesia. Those are highways such as no one can imagine in your happy country, and which are impossible in the other Austrian provinces, too. This poor Silesia is the chief source of sorrow and anxiety of my exalted empress, and perhaps for that very reason she loves it, and would gladly help it. But nature herself seems determined to hinder her noble plans. Frightful rain-storms have again devastated highways which had just been made passable, and, as I learn to my horror, it is scarcely possible for a single traveller to journey over them without danger to life and limb."

"Ah," said the king, with condescension, "the worst that can happen to him who has to pass such roads, after all, is getting fast in the mud."

"Pardon, sire," cried the marquis, "health, life itself is at stake in these wretched roads, with their swampy beds. And the traveller runs the risk of plunging into an abyss of mud, just as among the Alps the snow-chasms await the unwary."

The king was weary of this crafty diplomatic play, was tired of having his face watched by the ambassador. In his assurance of victory, and the noble pride of his truthful nature, he longed to let fall the mask which hid his face from the marquis. The moment of action was come. There was no further need of secrecy.

"Sir," said the king, in a loud, firm voice, "if you so greatly dread the Silesian roads, I would advise you to stay here in Berlin. I will go to Silesia in your stead, and send word to my exalted relative, Maria Theresa, by the voice of my cannon, that the Silesian highways are dangerous for an Austrian, and full of risk for the King of Prussia, but direct and good for the march of an army to Breslau."

"How so? Your Majesty marches to Breslau?" asked the marquis, horrified.

"Yes, to Breslau! And since the Silesian highways are, as you observed a moment ago, dangerous for a single traveller, I shall take my army with me, to protect my wagon from mishap."

"Oh!" cried the marquis, sadly, "your Majesty intends invading the domains of my exalted monarch?"

The king darted a look of wrath and contempt at him. The courtiers murmured, the generals laid their hands on their swords, and glared threateningly at the Austrian who presumed to reproach the King of Prussia.

With a smile and a wave of the hand to his generals, the king said, turning again to the marquis:

"You express yourself wrongly, Marquis. I do not invade the domain of the Empress of Austria. I reclaim what is my own. My own by acknowledged right, mine by inheritance and ratified treaty, the parchments of which are buried under the dust of the Austrian State Department. We shall blow away some of this dust with the good lungs of our soldiers, that the empress may read the parchments once more, and convince herself of my good right to the province of Silesia."

"Your Majesty may, perhaps, destroy the House of Austria, but will most certainly destroy yourself."

"It rests with the empress to accept the offers I am now making her through my ambassador in Vienna," cried the king.

"Sire," said the marquis, "I must confess your troops are beautiful; the Austrian troops have not the outward splendor, but they are tried. They have often stood under fire."

"You find my troops beautiful," said the king. "*Eh bien!* I will convince you of their courage."

So speaking he nodded dismissal to the ambassador. The audience was at an end, the ambassador made his bow, and left the room, amid the profound silence of the court.

Scarcely had the door closed behind him when the king's face resumed its wonted expression.

With a smile and bow he said:

"Mesdames et messieurs, it is time to dress for the masquerade. We have laid our mask aside for a brief space, but you will doubtless find it time to don your own. Until then, farewell."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE MASQUERADE.

The halls of the palace were radiantly illuminated, and through them moved a procession of fabulous, fantastic figures. Representatives of all nations were there to greet the young hero and king. Greek and Turk and Russian, peasant maidens, Spaniards, odalisques, fairies, witches, monks and nuns, German girls of the mediæval city, knights in silver mail, and gypsies—a many-colored, charming scene.

In the farthest hall there was a group without masks. Both the queens, glittering in gold and jewels, sat there, for Sophia Dorothea needed no longer conceal her diamonds, and Elizabeth Christine, knowing that the king desired the Queen of Prussia to appear in magnificence befitting her dignity, wore her tiara of emeralds and diamonds, which Bielfeld had pronounced a wonder of beauty and richness.

With the queens and the Princesses Amalie and Ulrica stood the king, who had retained his gorgeous costume, and back of the royal family stood the ladies and gentlemen of the retinue, all unmasked, but mask in hand, for no one might enter masked the room in which the queens and the royal family were.

The king and the queen mother were about to keep the promises which they had reciprocally made. Sophia Dorothea was about to permit the presentation of Count Néal, while the king bade the newly married Countess Rhedern welcome.

Pöllnitz's loud, ironical voice proclaimed the arrival of Count and Countess Rhedern and of Count Néal, and the personages thus solemnly announced entered the hall, that sanctuary which opens only to the privileged, to those near the royal family by birth, favor, or service.

Leaning upon the arm of her noble spouse, the newly created Countess Rhedern, *née* Orguelin, entered the sacred precinct. Her face was perfectly calm, cold, and grave, an expression of firm determination manifested itself in her features, which no longer possessed the charm of youth or beauty, yet were not wanting in interest. Extreme kindliness seemed to speak from her somewhat large but well-formed mouth. And out of the large dark eyes, which were not modestly cast down, but calmly directed toward the royal family, so much spirit, passion, and boldness spoke that the beholder saw at once here was no ordinary woman, but a strong, fiery determined nature, with courage to challenge her destiny, and, if it must be, bend it to her will.

But the proud and imperious Sophia Dorothea was unpleasantly impressed by the countess' serious and direct observation of herself. If the countess had approached her with downcast eyes, trembling, overwhelmed by the unheard-of royal condescension, the queen mother might have been inclined to pardon her the blemish of her nameless origin. But this calm, unembarrassed demeanor enraged her. Moreover, the countess' brilliant and costly costume offended her. The silver-embroidered train, which, fastened with diamond agrafes at the shoulders, fell in rich folds to the floor was of costlier stuff than the queen's robe. The necklace, bracelets, and diadem bore comparison with the queen's own, and the huge fan, which the countess carried half open, was of real Chinese

workmanship, with such incomparable ivory carving and delicately painted decoration that the queen felt a sort of envy at sight of the rare work of art to which she possessed no mate.

She therefore responded with curt nods to the threefold reverential courtesy of the countess, executed according to all the rules of etiquette ; while Queen Elizabeth Christine, who sat next to the queen mother, greeted the countess with a gracious smile. The king, observing the cloud upon his mother's brow, and well knowing its source, found keen amusement in the scene. It pleased him to see her, who had so energetically worked for the reception of Countess Rhedern, receiving her so brusquely, and he wished to tease his royal mother a little with her quickly evaporated enthusiasm for the nameless countess who had no other claim upon the privilege of appearing at court than the debts of the count, her husband, and her own millions. He therefore greeted the new countess with gracious and kindly words, and, turning to his mother, said, half inaudibly, "Indeed, your Majesty, you did well to invite Countess Rhedern to our court ; she will be a real ornament to it."

"Yes, a real ornament," said Sophia Dorothea, who now regarded the countess' dignified and unembarrassed bearing as impudent and wanting in respect to royalty, and had determined to punish this obtrusive woman. Casting proud and scornful looks upon her, she said :

"What a strange train you wear, Countess ! "

"It is an Indian product," replied the latter, undisturbed. "My father has connections with certain Dutch importing houses, and one of them procured us this rare stuff which has the honor to attract your Majesty's attention."

Sophia Dorothea blushed with shame and rage. This countess, scarcely emerged from the lowly estate of the tradesman, had the audacity not to blush for her past, not to conceal it under an impenetrable veil, but to speak in the presence of two queens of the business connections of her father ; while royalty had meant to be so gracious as to bury this blemish in eternal oblivion.

"You are wearing an article in which your father deals. That is, indeed, a very ingenious method of recommending it, and, in future, when we behold the toilet of the Countess Rhedern, the whole court will at once know which is the newest article for sale by Orguelin, the silk factor, the countess' father."

A scarcely suppressed laugh of the cavaliers and ladies who had heard the queen's words rewarded this cruel jest.

All eyes were contemptuously directed toward the countess, whose husband, trembling and deathly pale, stood by her side, not having courage to raise his eyes from the floor. The young Countess Rhedern alone remained perfectly quiet and unconstrained.

"Pardon, your Majesty," she said, in a full, clear voice, "if I venture to contradict you. My father's business is too well known for me to assume that anyone is ignorant of the kind of goods in which he deals."

"Well," asked the queen, angrily, "in what does he deal, then ? "

The countess bowed reverently. "Your Majesty," she said, "my father deals with understanding, dignity, generosity, and modesty."

The queen's eyes flashed lightning. A tradesman's daughter dared to snub the queen, and to defy her anger. Sophia Dorothea arose in the full majesty of her royal dignity. She was about to crush this arrogant "new-born" countess, and her lips parted for a sarcastic remark, the more annihilating from royal lips because no retort is possible. But the king saw the rising storm and wished to ward it off. His generous nature resented seeing a poor defenceless woman thus tortured, and he was too high-minded and free from prejudice to be displeased at the calm and dignified bearing of the poor countess. That which had irritated the queen mother had won the king's approval, and he forgave the countess her nameless birth in favor of her spirit and intelligence.

He laid his hand gently upon his mother's shoulder, and said, with a kind smile : "Does not your Majesty think that Countess Rhedern does credit to her birth ? Her father's dealings are carried on with understanding, dignity, generosity, and modesty. The countess seems to me to continue her father's business as an efficient heiress, worthy of all respect. My dear countess, I shall ever be a faithful patron of your house, provided you promise not to forget as Countess Rhedern what you say characterizes your father."

"I promise, your Majesty," said the countess, bowing low, an expression of pure delight illumining her face and making it almost beautiful. "I hope your Majesty may be so gracious," she replied, taking her husband's hand, "as some day to convince yourself that the house of Rhedern & Co. does honor to the king and is able to meet his demands."

The queen mother could hardly suppress a cry of anger and indignation. Countess Rhedern dared to give the king an invitation. This was an offence against the etiquette of the

court such as great ignorance or insolence alone could commit, and for which the king would doubtless punish the presumptuous woman with his proudest contempt. But Sophia Dorothea was mistaken. The king bowed, and, with an inimitable expression of kindliness, said, "Madame, I shall come very soon to see whether your establishment does credit to my patronage."

Sophia Dorothea almost fainted; she could endure this scene no longer, and, giving way to her stormy nature, was guilty of the same breach of etiquette which Countess Rhedern had committed in ignorance; she did that which her king or the reigning queen should, according to court etiquette, have done. She broke up the formal presentation. Rising with unwonted celerity from her fauteuil, she said, impatiently, "I think it is time to go and look at the dance in the large dancing-room. Listen, your Majesty, the music is most enticing. Let us go."

But the king laid his hand upon the queen's arm.

"Madame," he said, "you forget that there is a happy man waiting to be irradiated by the light of your countenance. You forget that you have consented to Count Néal's presentation."

"This, too," she murmured, sinking back into her fauteuil. She scarcely heard the solemn presentation of Count Néal, responded with a curt, silent nod to the poor count's reverent greeting, not seeing how he beamed with joy at having carried his point and being received by the queen mother.

The king was in the mood for playing peace-maker, and came to the assistance of his mother's angry silence.

"Madame," he said, "Count Néal is a man to be envied. He has seen what we shall probably never see, the sun of India. And in Surinam he was governor for a time."

"Pardon, your Majesty, I was not governor only, I bore the title of vice-regent," said the count, with a proud smile.

"Wherein consist the honors of the vice-regent?" asked the king, negligently.

"I was esteemed there as your Majesty is here," replied the count.

"Indeed," said the king, with a smile, "you stood upon an equality with the King of Prussia?" and, turning to Pöllnitz, who stood near, he continued: "You have been guilty of a grave breach of etiquette, you have forgotten to place a fauteuil for my half-brother, the vice-regent of Surinam. You must make allowance this one day, my dear step-brother. At the next masquerade we shall not forget that you are vice-regent of Surinam, and woe to the baron if he forgets to give you a fauteuil then."

So speaking, he offered his arm to the queen mother, and beckoned to Prince Augustus William to follow with the reigning queen into the dancing-room.

"If it is agreeable to you, madame," said the king, releasing his mother's arm, "we will dispense with ceremony for a half-hour and mix at ease with the dancers."

And without awaiting her reply, the king bowed and hastened through the room, accompanied by Pöllnitz, into the adjoining cabinet, where a domino and mask awaited him.

The whole court followed the king's example; the prince and princesses, even the reigning queen, availed themselves of the permission to forget etiquette for a half-hour.

The queen mother suddenly found herself alone in the middle of the great hall, deserted by all her court. Only the marshal, Count Rhedern, his wife, and the train-bearing pages remained. Sophia Dorothea sighed deeply, felt that she was no longer a queen, but only a poor widow, descended from the throne to the second rank. Luckily Countess Rhedern was there, and upon her the royal anger could be vented.

"Madame," said the queen, "your train is too long. You should have brought some boys from your father's shop to serve as train-bearers. Your father's ware could have been more minutely examined."

The countess bowed. "Your Majesty will kindly pardon me that I cannot obey your behest this time; I have no right to appropriate the boys in my father's store for my personal service. But if your Majesty seriously thinks that I need train-bearers, I would suggest that my father's principal debtors would gladly serve as such if my father would grant them a respite. Your Majesty may rest assured that, should you accept my proposition, I could at once select two of the most distinguished cavaliers of your Majesty's court, and should no longer put your court to shame."

The queen did not reply—she darted a hateful glance at this unconquerable woman standing beside her with undisturbed composure, and then stepped rapidly toward the throne erected for the royal family.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE FANCY BALL.

The king meanwhile had completed his toilet with Pöllnitz's help, and was now such a figure as were wandering by hundreds through the room.

"You do not think I shall be recognized?" asked the king, donning his mask.

"Sire, it is impossible! But you must graciously push the mask a little farther over your eyes, so as to shade them, otherwise your Majesty will surely be known, for no other human eye is like your own."

"I think these eyes will see some things presently that have been seen by few human eyes," said the king, with a smile. "Have you ever seen a battle-field covered with the fleeing enemy, or stood a victor among corpses?"

"Heaven defend me from it, sire! The enemies I have seen have never fled, but always put me to flight; and it is a miracle that I have always succeeded in escaping them!"

"Who are these victorious foes?"

"My creditors, sire; and your Majesty may well believe me when I say that they are for me a more fearful spectacle than a field full of corpses, for they are unfortunately not dead, but alive to torture me."

The king laughed. "Perhaps you may yet succeed in slaying them," he said. "When I have seen my battle-field as I describe it to you, when I return victorious, we must give our attention to slaying your foes as well. Until then, keep up a brave defence! But come, let us go into the dancing-hall; I have but one little half-hour left for pleasure!"

The king mingled with merry jests among the dancers, while Pöllnitz stood near the cabinet door watching for some one in the throng. At last a contemptuous smile played over his face, and he murmured softly: "There they are, all three! This nun, in whom no mortal could recognize the Morien. There is the card-king, the quinze-vingt Manteuffel, who does not dream that he has already lost the game, playing his trump in vain. And the gypsy there, telling fortunes from the maskers' palms, is the Brandt. How one small piece of paper can unmask three human minds!"

"Now, Baron Pöllnitz," whispered the nun, "will you fulfil your promise?"

"Dearest Madame Morien," replied the baron, with a shrug, "the king has most strictly forbidden me to betray him. His Majesty desires to remain unknown."

"Pöllnitz," whispered the nun, with a trembling voice, "have pity upon me; tell me the king's mask and win my undying gratitude! I know you love diamonds; see the costly brooch that I have brought you in exchange for this far costlier information."

"It is impossible to withstand you," cried the baron, reaching out his hand for the pin. "Listen. The king wears a sky-blue domino embroidered with narrow silver bars. In his hat is a white feather with a ruby pin, and his shoe-buckles are diamonds."

"I thank you," whispered the nun, hastily giving him the brooch and vanishing again into the throng.

Pöllnitz was still busily fastening the needle in his lace when the card-king laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Now, Baron, you see I keep our rendezvous. Answer the question I asked you yesterday, and I'll give you for it news that assure you a rich and happy future!"

"Accepted, Count. You wished to know from me what route the king proposes to follow and the strength of his troops. Here is a detailed schedule of the troops, and here a map of the route. I have both from an influential friend who is the king's most trusted servant. But I had to pay this friend a thousand crowns for the two papers, as I told you in advance."

"Here is a check for four thousand thalers," said the count, handing him a paper. "You see I have not forgotten the price."

"And the important secret?"

"Listen! In Nuremberg lives a family of friends of mine with an only daughter. The daughter is heiress to a million. The family is of civil rank, but longs to marry the daughter to a Prussian nobleman! I proposed you to them, and you are accepted. You have but to journey thither, give up this letter of introduction, and make your offer. You will be accepted, and at the wedding come into a million!"

"Hum, a million is not so much!" said Pöllnitz, with a shrug. "If I must marry a civilian to get my million, I know a girl that has as much and is in love with me, besides being young and pretty—which may not be the case with the Nuremberger."

"Take my letter, none the less," said the count, laughing, "and consider my proposition. You must at least admit that my secret is worth its price. Au revoir!"

And the count was about to depart when he turned about: "One thing more, my dear Baron! I forgot one little condition which goes with marrying the pretty Nuremberger. The family is strictly Protestant, and demands a Protestant husband for the daughter. If you should wish to marry her, you would therefore have the kindness to get yourself baptized, for, if I am not in error, you are at present of the Catholic faith."

"Yes, for the moment. But that would present no difficulty. I used to be a Protestant, and felt just as well as at present."

The count laughed and slipped away into the throng, while Pöllnitz looked reflectively into the paper which the count had given him.

"I think Anna Pricker must possess at least half a million thalers," he said, softly; "and half a million thalers are worth nearly as much as a million of those light Nuremberg gulden! Old Pricker is fatally ill with grief for the sudden death of his wife. If he dies, Anna will be a rich heiress as well as the Nuremberger. And if our plan succeeds she will really be a great singer, according to Quantz's opinion, so gaining influence over the king and making people forget that she is a tailor's daughter. I think I prefer Anna Pricker to the Nuremberger, whom I should have to take like a cat in a bag. But we will keep her in reserve in case Anna's fortune should be smaller than I think. Then I'll turn Protestant again and marry the Nuremberger."

At this point the gypsy stood before Pöllnitz, eying him with a roguish glance. At once he was the smiling cavalier again, answering the saucy gypsy with pert jests. But Madame Brandt, in the impatience of her feminine curiosity, was soon weary of the tourney of words.

"You promised me news of the letter which I lost at the court banquet," she said.

"Ah! the portentous letter which might well have compromised a gentleman and two ladies beyond measure. The owner must be most desirous of recovering that letter; even at some sacrifice."

"Oh yes, even at heavy sacrifice," she cried, impatiently. "You demanded a hundred louis d'or for the letter, I have brought them. Have you the letter?"

"I have it."

"Then take these rolls of gold pieces quickly and give it to me."

The baron hid the rolls in his bosom.

"Now the letter, give me the letter quickly!" urged Madame Brandt.

Pöllnitz searched his breast-pocket. "Heavens!" he said, "that letter seems to have wings and to vanish whenever it is most needed. Perhaps I have lost it in the dancing-room just as you did yourself. Let me hasten to seek it."

Pöllnitz wished to retreat at once, but Madame Brandt detained him.

"Be so good as to give me my money until you have found the letter," she said, trembling with rage.

"Your money?" said Pöllnitz, with an appearance of surprise. "Your money? I do not remember your ever giving me money to take care of. Let me hasten to seek the letter."

He tore himself away hastily, while Madame Brandt, speechless with anger, leaned against the wall to keep from falling. But Pöllnitz grinned as he counted his gains. "This evening has brought me a thousand crowns, two hundred louis d'or, the prospect of a rich bride, and possession of a diamond brooch. I think I may be content, and can live for a few months longer. Moreover, I stand well with the king despite all these intrigues, and who knows whether he may not give me a house after all, though Eckert's is unfortunately no longer vacant? Ah! there he is among the maskers."

Suddenly Pöllnitz heard his name whispered, and turning, met a lady in a black domino, her capuchin drawn low over her brow, her face concealed by an impenetrable mask of lace.

"Herr von Pöllnitz, one word, if I may ask it," said the lady, beckoning with her hand and passing through the crowd in advance of him. Pöllnitz followed her, studying her costume to find some mark by which to recognize the wearer. But in vain. They reached a vacant window-niche, and the lady entered it, beckoning Pöllnitz to follow.

"Baron von Pöllnitz," she said, in a low, timid voice, "they call you the noblest and most skilful of all the cavaliers. You will not refuse a favor to a lady?"

"Command me," said Pöllnitz, with his unfailing smile. "What lies in my power I will do."

"You know the king's disguise, doubtless. Tell me which it is."

Pöllnitz started backward, indignant. "That you call a favor, my beautiful domino? I am to betray the king's disguise to you? His Majesty has most strenuously forbidden me to betray his disguise to anyone, and if I should describe it to you that would be, not, as you call it, a favor, but an of-

fence against his majesty. You will not require such a crime of me?"

"Yet I beseech you, grant my request," she cried. "Believe me, it is no mere curiosity, it is the ardent and justifiable wish to speak a word with the king before his departure for the war, from which he may never return."

The lady, carried away by her eager desire, had spoken in her own voice, which seemed to Pöllnitz familiar. A vague suspicion awoke in his mind. But before speaking, he must be certain. He approached the lady more closely, and, watching her narrowly, said:

"Who vouches for it that you are not some Austrian enemy trying to tempt the king into God knows what dangers?"

"The word of a woman who has never uttered a falsehood," cried the lady. "Nay, Baron von Pöllnitz; God, who hears us and protects the dear life of our king, knows that in my heart there dwells no thought of wishing the king harm."

"Will you swear to this?"

"I swear it as truly as there is a God in heaven!" cried the lady, raising her arm to heaven. Pöllnitz followed the movement with eager eyes. He saw, as the long, broad sleeve of the domino glided back to the elbow, the wondrous bracelet of diamonds and emeralds clasped about the lady's arm. There was but one such bracelet at the court, and it belonged to Queen Elizabeth Christine. Pöllnitz, however, was too crafty a courtier to betray his surprise. He bowed calmly before the lady, who, terrified at her own thoughtlessness, had dropped the sleeve hastily over the traitorous ornament.

"Madame," he said, "you have taken a solemn vow which fully satisfies me. I am ready to accede to your wish. Meanwhile I must keep my word, not *telling* anyone the king's disguise. I must content myself with showing you the king. Be so good as to follow me. I am about to look for the king and shall speak with no one save himself. The domino whom I shall first address and before whom I shall bow, is the king."

"I thank you," whispered the lady, wrapping herself more closely in her domino. "I shall remember this hour, and if it is ever in my power to render you a service, I shall do so. You may rely upon me!"

"A fortunate evening, indeed," thought Pöllnitz, "for now I have won the favor of the queen, who has hitherto been disinclined toward me!"

He approached Frederick, who, recognizing him, greeted him instantly. Pöllnitz bowed, the lady stood behind him.

"You have kept me waiting a long time," said the king, in a low tone.

"I had to wait for our three masqueraders."

"Did all three come?"

"All three, your Majesty! Morien, Manteuffel, and Madame Brandt. Count Manteuffel is true to his rôle; he is always the harmless quinze-vingt, whom no one need fear, and to signify that, he appears to-day in the costume of a card-king!"

"And Madame von Morien?"

"Here as a nun, consumed with longing to speak with your Majesty. She begged so long to know your costume that I betrayed it to her, and if you care to go into the dark room which the gardener has transformed into a grotto, the repentant nun will doubtless willingly follow you thither, sire!"

"It is well. What costume is Madame Brandt wearing?"

"She is a gypsy, sire! A yellow skirt with hieroglyphics, a red, gold-embroidered waist, a tiny cap studded with diamonds upon her curls, and a huge mouche upon the left temple near the mask. She wanted the famous letter, and I sold it to her for a hundred louis d'or."

"Which you could not earn, because you had not the letter."

"Pardon, your Majesty, I deserved them, for I got them first and then declared I had lost the letter."

The king laughed.

"Pöllnitz, Pöllnitz," he said, "it is truly good luck that you are not married. Your sons would all be good for the gallows! Did you give Manteuffel the plan and schedule of troops?"

"I did so, sire! and the worthy count was so rejoiced thereat that he made me a present of four thousand thalers. I took the sum, and your Majesty will prescribe what I shall do therewith."

"Keep your booty. You've talent as a highway robber, and I prefer your exercising it upon the Austrians. There is no harm in the noble count giving four thousand thalers for his false news. For false plans it is enough. For true ones it were a ridiculous trifle! Go now, my Baron, but take care that I find my uniform in the cabinet yonder!"

CHAPTER XLV.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT.

The king had forgotten for the moment that he had any other business than that of amusing himself. But now he was reminded of it, for at his elbow stood the card-king, his once loved Count Manteuffel.

"I was looking for you," he said, in a low voice, laying his hand upon the count's shoulder. "You were wanting to my game, but now that I have you in my hand I shall win."

The count's ear was too well trained to mistake the voice, despite the disguise, but he was too skilful a diplomatist to betray his recognition.

"What game would you play with me, domino?" he inquired, rapidly following the king through the hall to a small deserted room.

"A wholly new game, the play of war, my card-king," answered the king, roughly.

"War?" repeated the count. "I am not acquainted with the game."

The king was pacing rapidly up and down.

"Count," he said, pausing before Manteuffel, "I am your friend and give you a piece of good advice. Leave Berlin to-night, never to return."

"Why do you give me this advice, domino?" asked the count, apparently unconstrained.

"Because, otherwise, you run the risk of imprisonment as a traitor and hanging as a spy! Do not reply, do not defend yourself. I am your friend, but I am the king's friend too. The king does not know that you are an Austrian spy in the service of Seckendorf and the empress. May he never know it, for his wrath would be the more terrible because he once loved you. The poor young prince was credulous and inexperienced enough to believe in your love and take you into his heart. It was a tender heart in those days, and is not yet hardened enough to bear with calmness the blows the king's traitorous friends inflict on it. A day will come when the work will be complete, when King Frederick will wear about his heart a coat of mail impenetrable, perhaps, even for true love. Then he would see in you, not his former friend, but a traitor and a spy only. Therefore flee before vengeance descends upon you, beyond the punishment of your own guilty conscience."

"But what if I should stay? should try to justify myself to the king?" asked the count, timidly.

"Do not attempt it, it would be vain. The moment you tried that, the king would be informed of all your intrigues, bribery, and treachery; he would know that you correspond with his cook, that Madame Brandt's diary is written for you to send to the Austrian court, and why you paid Madame Brandt considerable sums of money."

"Do you advise me to go before applying to his Majesty for dismissal?" asked the count, stupefied.

"I do not counsel you, I command you!" exclaimed the king, forgetting his disguise. "I command you to leave this palace without one word, one greeting, silent, as befits a detected criminal. Go!"

The count obeyed. Silently he bowed before the king, and, with tottering steps and bowed head, broken and humiliated, he quitted the dancing-hall.

The king watched him as he vanished into the throng. "For such men must we lose our trust in man," he murmured. "Is it true, as the wise men of old said, that we princes are condemned to solitude? But there is the coquettish gypsy, the worthy friend of our good Manteuffel. We will reverse matters, and I'll forecast her future."

The king hastened to overtake the gypsy. "Pöllnitz has found the letter," he whispered in her ear, "and is hurrying to give it to you."

"Where is he?" cried the gypsy, eagerly.

"Follow me!" answered the king, retiring to a window-niche, whither Madame Brandt followed in impatient haste.

"Here we are alone and can chat unobserved," he said.

Madame Brandt laughed. "To chat requires two. You enticed me here by mentioning a letter which Pöllnitz was to give me, but I see neither Pöllnitz nor the letter."

"Pöllnitz charged me to give you the letter. But first give me your hand, I will tell your fortune."

Madame Brandt gave her hand in speechless terror. She had recognized the voice. The king looked at the hand without touching it. "There are wonderful things to be read in this hand. According to them you are a dangerous intrigante, a treacherous subject, a cruel coquette."

"Do you believe this?" asked the gypsy, with a forced smile.

"I do not believe it, I know it. Fate never deceives, and

fate has written upon your hand and your brow—see, you may read it—that you received for traitorous services a large sum of money from a foreign country. Here I see diamonds, there a promise of twenty thouand thalers for the maintenance of a certain marriage. How you tremble! hold your hand still, that I may read your future. Here I see a dangerous letter that got into wrong hands through your imprudence. Should the king read it your ruin is inevitable. He will punish you for treason, banish you from court, shut you up in a fortress according to the custom when, in war times, a subject conspires with the enemy. So rejoice, for if you are wise and prudent the king shall know nothing, and you are saved!"

"How can I avoid this misfortune?" asked Madame Brandt, breathlessly.

"By banishing yourself from court and leaving Berlin upon some pretext. Retire to your husband's estate and reflect there upon your offence, in solitude. Leave Berlin to-morrow, and do not venture to return until the king summons you."

He left the window-niche, where Madame Brandt stayed, weeping with rage and humiliation, and went to the dark grotto. He saw the nun stealthily following him into the shrubbery. He tore away his mask and, turning to the nun, said roughly, "What do you want of me?"

"Your love!" she answered, sinking on her knees; "that love without which I shall perish, without which I suffer the tortures of the damned in the fires of hell."

"Then go and be d——d," answered the king, pushing away the arm she stretched to him and retreating a step farther from her. Go and suffer in the flames. God will not redeem you, and neither will I."

"To hear this and live!" she murmured through her tears. "Oh! my king, have mercy! Remember what intoxicating poison your looks and words and kisses poured into my veins, and do not punish me because that sweet poison has made me ill unto madness, unto death. See what it has made of me, how poor Leontine has changed since she no longer basks in the sunshine of your love!" With trembling fingers she drew aside the white veil which had covered her face. The king looked at her with stern, calm eyes.

"You have aged, madame," he said, "enough to enter without encountering remonstrance the path you have so wisely selected; enough to become a heroine of virtue after being so long a devotee of love. Accept the Order of Virtue which the Empress of Austria promised you, for the king will not divorce his

wife, and, this being wholly due to you, I think the empress cannot refuse you the promised decoration."

"He knows all and despises me," moaned Madame Morien, sobbing aloud, her hands before her face.

"Yes, he despises you!" repeated the king. "He despises you and has no pity upon you. Farewell."

Without a glance at the kneeling, weeping figure, he strode away. Suddenly he felt a hand lightly touching his shoulder.

"One word, King Frederick," whispered the disguised woman.

"Speak! what do you want of me?" he asked, kindly.

"Nothing," replied a gentle, trembling voice, "except to see your face once more before you go forth to battle and danger. Only to beg you to spare yourself a little. Remember, my king, that your life is an immeasurable treasure for which you are responsible, not to God only, but to your people. Oh! my king and master, do not rush into danger; preserve yourself for your family, your people, your country, to all of whom you are indispensable."

The king shook his head with a smile.

"No one can say that he is indispensable," he said. "Man is like a stone thrown into the water. For a moment there is a ripple, then all is as before. But I shall not vanish away without a trace. Should I perish in the war to which I march this night, my death shall be a glorious one, my grave wreathed with laurel, though no one will come to pay tribute of love and tears; for a king is never loved, and when he dies is never wept for, all the world being too busily engaged in greeting his successor."

"But you are loved," cried the disguised woman, carried away by her emotion. "I know a poor woman who lives only by your glance, your words, the sight of you. A woman who would die of joy if loved by you, as she would certainly die of grief if death should seize her hero, her god, her ideal. For the sake of this woman, who has laid her love at your feet, and day by day sacrificed her own heart, thanking God that she may at least lie at your feet—for her sake, have mercy and spare yourself, not plunging wilfully into danger."

The king laid his hand lightly upon the folded hands of the supplicant, whom he knew but too well.

"Do you know the queen so well that you know what transpires in her inmost soul?"

"Yes, I know the queen," she whispered, "and I may read her heart, for she has but one confidant in her misfortune,

and I am she. I alone know how she suffers, and how she loves!"

"If this be so, pray go to her and carry my farewell. Tell her that the king reveres no woman more than herself; that he esteems her so highly as to place her side by side with the women of antiquity; that he is convinced she will say to the king, departing for the field of battle, as the Roman matrons said to their fathers, husbands, and sons, when giving them their shields, 'With it or upon it.' Elizabeth Christine feels and thinks as the Roman matrons did, knows that the King of Prussia can return home only as a victor or a corpse, from the struggle upon which he now enters with his hereditary enemy, the House of Austria. His life is worth little, his honor everything, and this he must maintain though he pay for it with his blood. Say this to Queen Elizabeth Christine, and tell her that her brother and friend will think of her on the day of battle, not to spare himself, but to remember that in that hour a noble soul is praying for him. And with these words, farewell! I must go to my troops. Go to the queen!"

He bowed low before the poor, sobbing woman, and hastened into the dancing-room, where the music was just striking up a waltz.

While the queen retired to her apartment to weep and pray, and the king was hastily donning his uniform, the officers were assembling according to orders in the square below, and Prince Augustus William lingered in the dancing-room; but he was not dancing, and no one suspected that he was there. For he had been seen in costume, unmasked, and had left the dancing-hall to make, as he said, the last preparations for his departure. He had, however, returned in an inconspicuous domino with a mask. No one except Laura knew this, and with her he now stood in a window-niche, concealed by heavy damask curtains from the company.

The moment of parting had come. The officers were taking up their positions in the square, the trumpet blast sounded from the adjacent streets, calling the troops together.

"I must go, dearest," whispered the prince, clasping his weeping sweetheart in his arms.

"Never to return," sighed Laura.

"I shall return, Laura," he said, with a faint smile. "I am not born to die a hero on the field of battle. I know it, I feel it; and still it were, perhaps, much sorrow spared, for that is the quickest, least expected death, much to be preferred to our daily death in life. Yet nothing shall part us," he cried, passionately. "My honor demands to-day's departure, but

this shall be the last. When I return, I shall remind thee of thy holy vows."

Laura shook her head sadly. "I have no cheerful confidence in the future, nor yet the courage to bear the thought of separation from thee," she whispered. "Sometimes when I have been praying it seems to me that God will give me strength to bow in obedience to the commands of the queen mother and marry Count Voss. But when I try to speak the decisive word my lips are closed as if with seals and I can open them only to utter a cry of despair."

The prince clasped her passionately in his arms. "Swear to me that thou wilt never be so faithless and cowardly as to submit to my mother's threats," he said, almost savagely. "Swear to me that thou wilt be true to thy oath which thou hast taken as my bride."

"I swear it," she said, looking, with eyes full of love and tenderness, into his excited face.

"They will make the most of my absence to torture you," he continued. "My mother will storm you with threats and pleas, but if you love me you will find strength to resist them. My mother does not yet know that it is I whom you bless with your love. She thinks it is, if not the king, then one of the margraves or the young Prince of Brunswick who holds your heart in his possession. But any accident may betray our love and then her rage will be frightful. She will do anything, everything to separate us, will scorn no intrigue to attain her end. Believe no report, no letter, no message—believe me only, my spoken word. I shall not write, for my letters might be found. I shall send no messenger, for he might betray me. If I should fall in battle I shall, if God is merciful to me, find strength to give some pitying friend a greeting for you, for then our love need no longer fear the eye of the world, the wrath of the king, the cunning of my mother. I shall not write, but my thoughts will be with you constantly."

"And if you should fall, God will be merciful to me and deliver me out of this world which is but a grave for me," she whispered, clinging to him.

The prince kissed her brow reverently, and, drawing a ring from his finger, fastened it upon hers.

"This is our betrothal ring," he said. "Now you are mine, for you wear my ring. It is the first link in the chain which shall bind you now to me for all our lives. But listen! Do you hear the trumpets, the officers' hurrahs? The king is in the square and must be looking for me in amazement. I must go to the king. Farewell, beloved, farewell!"

He did not look at her again. He emerged carefully from behind the curtains, attracting no attention, passed the procession of masqueraders, who, obedient to the king's express command, continued their merriment undisturbed by the military preparations below. In the cabinet he threw off the domino which had concealed his uniform, and, seizing his helmet, hastened through the halls and down the stairs to the square. There stood the king, surrounded by his generals and officers. All eyes were fastened upon him. Every eye, every will, every trifling wish, was subordinated. He alone ruled.

Tall and brave, he stood in their midst, his handsome face beaming enthusiasm, his eyes gleaming, a smile playing upon his lips. Behind him stood the princes and generals, Prince Anhalt-Dessau, old Zoethen von Winterfeldt, and the adjutants, and above them all, illuminated by countless multitudes of torches, waved the flags whose new gold-embroidered inscription, "Pro gloria et patria," shone like a star in the dark background.

Frederick raised his sword, greeted the fluttering flags, and opened his speech.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am about to enter upon a war in which I have no allies beyond your bravery and good-will. My cause is just and I seek the support of fortune. Remember the glory which your ancestors won upon the battle-fields of Warsaw, Fehrbellin, and in the invasion of Prussia. Your fate is in your own hands. Honor and distinction await you. But I need not awaken your ambition. It inspires you sufficiently. We shall attack troops which, under Prince Eugene, enjoyed the greatest reputation. True, that prince is no more, but our fame as victors will be the greater because we have to measure our prowess with such a foe. Adieu. Depart. I shall follow you without delay to the field of glory."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE RETURN.

The young king's invasion of Silesia was a bloodless one. No other attack was made than that of a single general upon the cheek of a guardsman of the gate of Breslau, who refused the officer admission to the city. The general punished him with a sounding box upon the ear, and the vanquished

private tumbled backward, permitting the general with his staff to enter unhindered the conquered capital of Silesia, a province which was made to feel, only by means of countless taxes, that it belonged to Austria, and which for more than a century no member of the royal House of Austria had visited. Nor did Breslau decline to accept the handsome young king who greeted everyone so kindly as he marched into the city, had a winning smile for the ladies at the windows, and assured the Silesians in a manuscript proclamation that he was come with no hostile intention, and would maintain the rights, privileges, and liberties of each and all.

The bond that united the rich and fruitful province of Silesia with Austria had long been loosened, and the prophecy of the King of Prussia made in Krossen had found prompt fulfilment. As he entered Krossen from Berlin with his army, the great bell of the cathedral came crashing down, carrying with it a part of the old church. A superstitious terror ran through the Prussian army. Even the old generals were troubled, and interpreted the omen unfavorably for Prussia.

The king alone smiled, and as Cæsar exclaimed, "I hold thee, Africa!" when he stumbled on landing, so Frederick, when the bell fell, exclaimed, "This fall means that the mighty, the House of Austria, shall be laid low!"

The Prussian army had been welcomed in Breslau not alone by the Protestant inhabitants, who had long suffered under the heaviest religious compulsion, and to whom the Prussian King immediately granted complete freedom of conscience, but by the Catholics as well, including the priests and even the Jesuits, whom he had won over by his spirit and amiability. No one cherished a regret for the lost Austrian supremacy, and the Prussians soon became the favorites of the Silesian people, especially of the women, who welcomed the sturdy Prussian soldiers to their hearts and hastened to ratify the prompt alliance before the priest. Hundreds of weddings took place in the six weeks which the king spent in Silesia. It soon became the fashion for a Silesian maid to claim a Prussian lover, and the taller and statelier he was the prouder and happier the maid. Thus Bielfeld met one day a pretty young woman, weeping bitterly and wringing her hands. When he asked her the cause of her tears she answered, naïvely, "I promised a week ago to-day to marry a Prussian grenadier five feet nine inches tall, and I was happy and proud of him. But to-day I might have had a guardsman full six feet two—such a beautiful giant and so rare—and I cannot accept him!"

The King of Prussia won the hearts of the women of the people through his handsome soldiery, those of the ladies of the aristocracy by his own beauty, amiability, and eminent intellect. When he gave the aristocracy of Silesia a ball at Locatelli's, in Breslau, the most distinguished families, formerly most deeply devoted to Austria, all hastened to be present, vying with one another in homage to the young king, who united in his own person the qualities of the hero, the poet, the cavalier, the warrior, the sage, and the youth; who did not drape himself in ceremonies, but seemed to forget, in the presence of the ladies, that he was king, and when he invited one of them to dance, did so as if seeking a favor himself.

And as he won the ladies of the aristocracy by his amiability, he bound the gentlemen with titles and decorations, which he strewed with lavish hands among them. "I dreamed last night," he said, laughingly, to Pöllnitz, "that I created several princes, counts, and barons here in Breslau. Help me make my dream a reality by naming some families whom I can ennoble." Pöllnitz named several families, and the Prince of Pless, the Count of Hochberg, and several others were the products of this work of royal creation.

Silesia and Breslau were for the present the undisputed possession of Prussia. The king might return to Berlin, the prologue of the great drama known as the Seven Years' War was at an end, and the king could repose among the arts and sciences in the quiet enjoyment of social pleasures, collecting his forces for the approaching first act of the tragedy whose hero he proposed to be.

Berlin received the returning king with loud rejoicings, greeting with pride the ruler who was, in the eyes of arrogant Austria, no longer the little Marquis of Brandenburg, but a king who would accept no more Austrian prescriptions, being, on the contrary, about to dictate to the daughter of the Cæsars himself.

With gleaming eyes the queen mother, accompanied by the princesses, proceeded to meet the returning victorious sons. With eyes veiled with tears did Elizabeth Christine welcome her returning husband, who had for her only a cold, ceremonious bow.

Graun had composed a cantata for the day, and not the newly arrived Italian singer Laura Farinella only, but the pupil of Graun and Quantz, the German singer Anna Pricker, was about to make her *début* at the court concert.

This was the decisive day for Anna. What cared she that

her father lay groaning in his mortal illness? What cared she that her brother William had not entered the parental house for nearly three days, while no one knew where he was? Nor did she mourn her mother's recent death. She had but one thought, one longing—to become a famous singer, not for her own sake, but only to win the heart of a man—whom she neither loved nor respected, however—who possessed the great advantage of being a baron and influential at court.

The king had been back in Berlin two days, and Pöllnitz had already called upon Anna. He had never been so tender, for he now regarded as a very desirable possibility that which had formerly seemed to him inconceivable—a marriage with the tailor's daughter, Anna Pricker. Count Rhedern's example had given him courage. What the king had granted the merchant's daughter he would not refuse to the daughter of the court tailor, especially if she had opened the palace doors in advance by her exceptional musical gifts.

If, therefore, Anna's voice should please the king and receive his praise, Pöllnitz would marry her as soon as possible, for his creditors were most intrusive, persecuting the poor baron in every way, and even threatening him with prosecution and imprisonment. So Pöllnitz had ventured to remind the king of the help promised on the return from Silesia, but in vain. The king had replied, "I have not yet seen a battlefield and am only at the beginning of the war, for which I shall need more money than my treasury contains. So wait until the day comes that I described, for then first can I think of keeping my promise."

The king was unusually gay and condescending. He had met his books and flute with real delight, and on entering the library felt that he was returning to his dearest home. He wrote verses; enthusiastic letters to Voltaire, whom he still revered and in a measure worshipped, though Voltaire's six days' sojourn in Rheinsberg, whither the king had come from the march from Breslau, had somewhat modified Frederick's deification of the French poet. The king, who had said of Voltaire after the first meeting at Castle Moylan, "He is eloquent as Cicero, delightful as Pliny, wise as Agrippa; in a word, he unites in himself all the virtues and all the talents of the three greatest men of antiquity," now called the author of the "Henriade" *un fou*. It grieved him to find that the great mind was united with a mean and selfish heart. He who had loved Voltaire as a friend was compelled to admit that the great man's friendship was a possession to be purchased with gold, not love. And he who, a few months before, had com-

pared Voltaire to Cæsar, Pliny, and Agrippa, now said to Jordan: "This miser, Voltaire, shall drink the dregs of his greed. He has thirteen hundred thalers to receive from me. Each one of the six days he spent with me cost me five hundred and fifty dollars. I call that paying *un fou* over much. I think no court fool was ever paid so well."

To-day the king was to have the pleasure of hearing his own Italian singer. He need now no longer engage Italian singers from Dresden, as he had had to do at the time of his father's funeral obsequies.

At last Graun gave his orchestra the signal for the overture. The king was so eager for the songs that he had no ears for the simple and touching music of his court composer, while Quantz's masterly solo won but a single bravo from him. At last the singers came, and the chorus began.

Pöllnitz's heart beat loudly as he gazed at Anna, standing, proud and grave, dressed in a most resplendent French costume, near Laura Farinella, and observing the company as calmly as though the sight were an accustomed one. The chorus came to an end, and Laura Farinella had the first aria. Anna Pricker would gladly have slain her for having the presumption to sing before herself, and she nearly cried aloud with rage as she saw the king nod and smile, while the whole company dutifully looked charmed, and even Pöllnitz forced a happy expression. The Farinella saw it too, and the royal approval inflamed her still further.

"Delicious! superb!" said the king, aloud, when the song died away.

"Glorious! divine!" cried Pöllnitz, and, the signal thus given, the court chimed in with half-suppressed murmurs of applause.

Anna Pricker felt herself turn pale, her feet tremble. She would have strangled the Italian with pleasure. But she had courage to take up the challenge. She said to herself, "I shall conquer her yet, for she is but a wretched charlatan, and her voice is thin as a thread and sharp as a needle, while mine is full and mighty as an organ. And as to her *fioritures*, I understand them as well as she does."

So she took up the notes with calm assurance, to await the moment when the *ritournelle* should cease. She fixed her eyes upon the leader's baton and smiled at his anxious face. The song began. The voice rose full and mighty above the orchestra, but the king sat silent and motionless, giving no slightest sign of approval. Anna saw this, and the voice which had not trembled with fear shook with rage. But she meant

to awaken the king's admiration at all costs, if only by the power and scope of her voice. He should applaud her as he had applauded the Farinella. She summoned all her forces and sent forth the tones from her chest with immoderate power, making such effort that she felt as though her poor chest must burst. At last she had the proud triumph of seeing the king smile. But it was still not the smile with which he had greeted the Farinella. He turned to Pöllnitz. "What is the name of the female who is roaring so atrociously?" he asked.

Pöllnitz shrugged his shoulders. He felt as though all his creditors were seizing him by the throat.

"Sire," he said, "I think it is Anna Pricker."

"The daughter of the court tailor?" asked the king.

"I think so, your Majesty," panted Pöllnitz.

The king did not smile now. He laughed in spite of the *fioritures* of the singer, who had seen Pöllnitz's shrug and vowed sanguinary vengeance upon him for it. He laughed, but let Anna Pricker toil and perspire as she might, he would not and did not applaud.

The last note had died away, and with palpitating heart she waited for the king's applause. It did not come. A deep silence reigned. Even Pöllnitz was mute.

"Are you certain that the roaring signorina is the court tailor's daughter?" asked the king, and, as Pöllnitz replied in the affirmative, the king continued, with another laugh: "Poor Pricker can force a camel through the eye of a needle more easily than he can make a songstress of his daughter. The Germans cannot sing, and it is an incomprehensible blunder of Graun to bring such a singer before us."

"Sire, she is a pupil of Quantz," said Pöllnitz, "and Quantz has often assured me that she would make a great singer."

"Ah! she is a pupil of Quantz!" repeated the king, looking at the teacher, who sat before the leader's desk, with a frightful frown. "We must try to pacify Quantz, and if this ma'm'selle sings again, I'll applaud a little out of consideration for him."

But Anna Pricker sang no more. She had sunk into her chair, struggling to keep down the tears that *would* rise to her eyes. With a cry, she sank fainting to the floor.

"What cry was that?" inquired the king, "and what is the meaning of the movement there among the singers?"

"Sire, the singer, Anna Pricker, seems to have fallen in a fainting fit," said Pöllnitz.

The king thought this a good opportunity for mollifying Quantz a little by manifesting some interest in his pupil.

"That is indeed a lamentable incident," said the king. "Make haste, Pöllnitz, to inquire, in my name, after the health of this talented young singer, and if she is still suffering, take a conveyance and accompany her to her home. Do not return until you can bring me satisfactory news of the health of Quantz's pupil." So saying, the king stole a side glance at the dreaded Quantz, whose brow had already begun to clear.

The king seated himself and gave the sign for the concert to proceed, having seen that the fainting singer had been carried out under the escort of Pöllnitz.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE DEATH OF THE OLD TIME.

The music continued, while Pöllnitz, horrified and filled with secret fears, called a court equipage and drove away with the fainting Anna.

"The king little knows how fearful a task he has imposed upon me," thought Pöllnitz, watching her face in deadly anxiety. "If she revives, the whole storm of her rage will burst upon me, and I am a lost man. She is capable of scratching out my eyes or strangling me."

But this fear was groundless. Anna did not stir. She was still unconscious when they reached her father's house. But no one came to meet them, though Pöllnitz commanded the lackey to open the house door, and the bell thereupon jangled, its sound reverberating loud and long. No one appeared when Pöllnitz, with the help of the lackey, lifted the fainting girl out of the wagon, and bore her to her room. But as Pöllnitz carefully placed her upon the sofa she made a slight movement, and a deep sigh broke from her.

"Now the storm is coming," thought Pöllnitz, and he ordered the lackey to go down to the wagon and wait for him there. He wished to pass alone and unobserved through the scene which now awaited him.

Anna opened her eyes. Her first glance fell upon Pöllnitz, who was bending over her with a smile.

"What bliss, dear Anna," he whispered, "that you open your lovely eyes once more. I nearly died of fright."

Anna did not reply at once. Then a lightning flash seemed

to play over her face, a ray of consciousness gleamed in her eye. With a sudden, mighty movement her palm struck the face of her tender adorer, who tumbled backward in horror.

"Why did you shrug your shoulders?" she asked, rising and approaching Pöllnitz with a threatening mien.

"I did not know that I did it, my Anna," stammered Pöllnitz.

She stamped her foot impatiently. "Do not call me your Anna!" she cried, passionately, "You are a faithless, traitorous man, and I loath you from the depths of my soul, for you are a coward, and have not even the courage to defend those to whom you have sworn your love a thousand times. When I had finished singing and no one applauded, you ought to have had courage to applaud your beloved publicly."

"But, dearest Anna," said Baron Pöllnitz, "you do not know the law of etiquette, that at court the king alone may applaud!"

"And yet they broke into a storm of applause when the Farinella had sung!"

"Because the king had given the signal."

Anna shrugged her shoulders scornfully and walked hastily up and down the room. "All my hopes, my proud dreams for the future, are crushed," she murmured, with trembling lips, while the great tears rolled down her cheeks. "The king and the whole court laughed while I sang, and that presumptuous Italian, with her scornful smile, saw it all. Oh! I shall suffocate with rage."

She buried her face in her hands and sobbed and wept.

Pöllnitz had no sympathy with her tears, but remembered his creditors, and the thought of them fanned the dying embers of tenderness once more to a flame. He laid his arm around her neck. "Dearest Anna, why do you weep? How can this small mischance make you unhappy? Do we not love one another? Are you not still my beauty, my adored betrothed? Have you not sworn that you love me, and demand no higher fortune than to be indissolubly united with me?"

Anna dried her tears to look at this dear, smiling, tender Pöllnitz.

"True, you have not achieved the triumph you deserved this evening. The Farinella was in your way. The king has a prejudice against German singers—thinks the Germans cannot sing, can only write music. If you had an Italian name he would have been delighted with your marvellous voice, but since you have the misfortune to be of German birth he refuses his approval. But what you did not receive here you

can conquer elsewhere with ease. Let us leave this thankless Berlin together, beloved; let us go abroad and begin a new, delightful life. Assume an Italian name; I shall be your cavalier, and through my connections at all the courts it will be easy to secure you star engagements everywhere. You will earn fame and money and we shall live together the happiest of married people."

"Ah!" said Anna, shaking her head, "it is no question of money with me; I am richer than I supposed. My father told me himself to-day that he possesses nearly seven hundred thousand thalers and means to disinherit my brother William. I shall therefore be the sole heiress, for my father is mortally ill and the physician gives him but a few days more to live."

"Has your father made his will? Has he made you sole heiress?"

"He meant to do so to-day. He had engaged the attorneys, and I think they were with him when I started for this luckless concert. So it was not for money that I wished to become a singer—it was for fame. But now I renounce the project. This evening has demonstrated to me that there are thorns in the path of art, which I thought strewed with roses only. I renounce glory and honor and desire nothing but to be happy in our love. Yes, Pöllnitz, you are right, let us flee from this faithless, heartless Berlin to more beautiful regions. There we can buy villas, castles, palaces, estates, and the world shall know no happier pair than Baron and Baroness Pöllnitz." The baron felt no resentment now at the tailor's daughter's plan of becoming his wife. He forgave her ambition for the sake of her seven hundred thousand thalers. He assured her in passionate terms of his love, and Anna listened with gleaming eyes and a happy smile, when suddenly loud laments were heard in the next room.

"It is my father!" cried Anna, terrified, hastening into the adjoining room of the ancestors' portraits, whither Pöllnitz followed her. There, in the midst of his ancestors, the worthy and respectable court tailors, lay the court dressmaker of two queens, heir and descendant of a glorious race, upon his bed of pain. Pale and colorless as the pictures of his ancestors was Pricker's face. His eyes were not fixed, like theirs, but rolled in wild, feverish activity. When he saw Anna in her brilliant court costume a laugh so terrible broke from his lips that even Pöllnitz shuddered.

"Come here to me, worthy sister of your brother," said the old man, in his trembling voice, beckoning his daughter to his couch. "Come here and listen to what I have to say to you.

You and your brother have broken my heart. You have given me a drop of poison day by day, and day by day it has killed me. Your brother has left his father's house like the prodigal son, but he has not, like him, returned repentant. With all impertinence he boasts of his crime and casts his shame in my face. See, there is his letter, in which he writes me that he has eloped with the daughter of my murderer, the Frenchman Pellissier, to become a play-actor and drag the name of his fathers in the dust. For this noble work he demands his mother's portion. He shall have it—five thousand dollars—but from me he shall have nothing more—nothing but my curse; and I will pray God to let it sound in his ears unceasingly."

The old man, exhausted, let his head sink into the cushions and groaned aloud. Anna stood with tearless eyes by her father's bedside, and thought only of the brilliant and wonderful future which was drawing nearer every moment. Pöllnitz had withdrawn into a window-niche and was considering whether he should await the death of the old man or return at once to the king. Suddenly Pricker opened his eyes again and his glance rested with a tantalizing expression upon his daughter's face.

"What a beautiful, aristocratic lady you are, nowadays," he said, with an unpleasant grin—"rigged out in the latest fashion, and a great singer at that singing before the king and the court. Such a great lady must be ashamed of a father who is a court tailor. I understand that, and betake myself to my grave in order not further to embarrass my aristocratic daughter. Yes, I am going, and nothing shall remind her of me—neither my house nor my money. Oh! a great singer cannot be the heiress of a tailor; a lady who wears French dresses cannot take the money that her father earned by making old-fashioned suits."

And the old man broke into a crazy laugh, while Anna stared at him in horror, and Pöllnitz emerged from his retreat to see and hear the better.

"I do not understand you, father," she said, trembling.

"You will understand me," he mumbled, with a hoarse laugh. "When I am dead and the attorneys come to read aloud to you the will I made to-day, you will understand me; you will know that I have left all my possessions to the poor of the city, and not to the lady who does not need my money, because she has a million in her throat. Disinherited are ye both, the poor are my heirs, and ye shall have nothing but the inheritance from your mother, which I, alas! cannot keep from you."

"Father! father! It is not possible. You are not in earnest," whined Anna. "It is not possible that a father can act so unnaturally, so cruelly!"

"Have you not been unnatural and cruel to me?" asked the old man, grinning. "Have you not tortured and misused me, murdered me amid your smiles as you murdered your mother—that mother who died of grief for you? Nay, nay, no pity for unnatural children; you are disinherited, disinherited, disinherited!"

With a cough the old man sank back upon his bed, groaning and panting, while his features assumed that peculiar, fixed, brazen expression, the harbinger of death coming to meet his victims.

"He is dying, he is dying!" screamed Anna, throwing herself upon her father's bed; "he is dying, and he has disinherited me!"

"Yes, disinherited," mumbled the dying man's thick tongue.

Pöllnitz's heart failed him at this sight. He plunged out of the dreary chamber and down the stairs, opening the door so violently that the bell rang with a wild, loud, crashing jangle through the silent house. As he sat in his wagon, hastening to the palace, he found peace and composure once more, and, leaning comfortably upon the silk upholstery, he said: "I will petition the king for my dismissal, turn Protestant, and go to Nuremberg to marry the rich patrician."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE DISCOVERY.

They were together once more in the quiet, perfumed greenhouse. Heart to heart, after long separation, they looked into one another's tearful eyes, and, smiling happily, asked whether it was not all a dream. It was the first time since his return from Silesia that Prince Augustus William had seen his Laura alone. And now there were two pairs of ears listening, two pairs of eyes peering; there were Louise Schwerin and her lover, handsome Fritz Wendel, sitting arm in arm in the grotto eavesdropping.

"How happy they are," sighed Louise.

"Are not we happy too?" asked Fritz Wendel, tenderly, pressing his arm more firmly about her waist. "Do we love one another less warmly, passionately, purely than those two there?"

"Yet people would shed tears of pity for them and only laugh at us," sighed Louise.

"It is true, the poor gardener is a ridiculous lover for the beautiful Fräulein von Schwerin," murmured Fritz Wendel. "But that shall all be different, and I shall soon enter upon the new career which I have mapped out for myself. My Louise shall no longer have cause to blush for her lover. I have the means of purchasing rank and distinction, and I shall apply it."

"Tell me this means; let me share your plans," begged Louise.

He pointed with a cruel smile to the prince and his beloved. "There is my price," he whispered. "I will betray them to the king, who will grant me rank and riches for the information, for upon this secret depends the future of Prussia. Let us hear, therefore, what they are saying——"

"Nay, let us not hear," interrupted Louise, passionately. "It is cruel and ignoble to wish to buy our own good fortune at the cost of the misfortune of others. It is——"

"For heaven's sake, be still and listen," said Fritz Wendel, laying his hand upon her lips.

The conversation of the couple among the laurels had taken another turn.

"Is it really true?" whispered Laura, deeply sorrowful. "Are you betrothed to the Princess of Brunswick?"

"It is true," answered the prince. "There was no other way of keeping our secret than by acquiescing with apparent equanimity in the king's command. It will serve as a concealment for our love until we can reveal it to the whole world. And this, beloved, lies in your hands. Remember that you wear my ring upon your finger, are my bride."

"Yet you are betrothed to another, wear another betrothal ring upon your finger."

"But this princess to whom I am betrothed knows that I do not love her. I laid bare my heart before her. I told her that I shall never love another than yourself, shall never call another than Laura von Pannewitz my wife; and she was noble and generous enough to enter upon this masquerade and figure as my *fiançée* until our alliance no longer needs such protection. Therefore, Laura, I beg you, have the courage to defy the world and its prejudices. Come with me, my beloved, fly with me, decide to be my wife!"

He looked at her with such beseeching love that she had

not the courage to resist him decidedly. Her own heart appealed for him, and now, when she was in danger of losing him if she longer resisted, when he was the betrothed of another, the thought filled her with torturing jealousy; she was conscious now that it was easier to die than to renounce her love. Her noble, maidenly conscience gave her strength to master the tempting voices in her own heart. But when, driven to despair by her silence, her resistance, the prince finally burst into tears, accusing her of hardness, as she looked into his face full of pain and sorrow, she no longer found courage to withstand him, and, throwing herself into his arms, whispered:

"Take me, take me! From this moment I am wholly thine forever. I take thee to be my husband. Thy will shall be mine. What thou will'st shall be. To the ends of the earth will I follow thee, and naught save death shall part us!"

"God bless you, my beloved—God bless you for this decision!"

Fritz Wendel pressed Louise to his heart, whispering:

"Louise, you say Laura is an angel of virtue and purity, and still she has not the cruel courage longer to withstand her lover. Art thou less human than this tender, virtuous Laura? Oh, Louise, fly with me, marry me secretly, and then I will conceal thee in a place of safety and go make my own terms with those who would now reject my suit with scorn."

"I will do whatever she does," whispered Louise. "Now be still, and listen."

"Now, my Laura, listen well to every word," said Prince Augustus William, gravely. "I have made all the arrangements and preparations, and in a week you will be my wife. I have a good, trusty priest upon one of my estates who is wholly devoted to me. He has consented to perform our marriage ceremony. To him, therefore, we shall hasten when we leave Berlin, and when the union of our hearts has there received, by night, in the village church, the blessing of this father, when you have become my wife, a wagon will await us to bring us at courier speed to the Prussian border. I have a pass from the English ambassador, who is my devoted friend, and this will bring us, under an assumed name, safely to England. There my uncle, the King of England, will not refuse us his support and assistance, and with his mediation we shall bring about a reconciliation with my brother the king. When he sees that our union is indissoluble, he will give up the vain attempt to destroy it."

"But he can and will punish you for this action. He will deprive you of your claim to the throne, and you will have to renounce your brilliant future for my sake."

"Let it be so," said the prince, with a smile. "I do not long for the crown, and would not sell my love for it. It is enough for me to reign in thy heart. If I can buy the undisputed possession of my beloved by renouncing the throne, I shall do it joyfully, and never experience one moment's regret."

"But how can I, a poor, insignificant girl, compensate for what you sacrifice for me?" asked Laura.

"You will love me, and that is more than compensation—that is reward. But you must hesitate no longer. You know our plan. All the preparations are made; do your part. Pastor Hartwig in Oranienburg will marry us. Send thither whatever you need, but without any comment. Your trunks will stand unopened. Next Tuesday, one week from to-day, the king gives a ball. You will keep your room two days in advance, complaining of serious illness. I shall accept the invitation, but not appear at the ball, for I shall be awaiting you at the palace gate at Montbijou. The ball begins at eight. At nine you leave your room and the palace, where I await you at the gate. A hundred steps thence there will be a wagon waiting to convey us to Oranienburg. In the village church, before the altar, the priest will await us, and the moment he has given us his blessing we shall depart for Hamburg, where a ship, provided by the English ambassador, lies ready to bring us to England. You see, dearest, every contingency is provided for. In a week, my Laura, in one short week!"

"In one week," she whispered. "I have no will of my own, I am wholly thine."

"Until then we shall not meet again, lest some trifling word arouse suspicion, and the spies by whom we are surrounded find some connection between my actions and thee. No word, no letter, no message, no sign shall pass between us; but next Tuesday, at nine o'clock sharp, I shall be at the palace door, and you will not let me wait in vain."

"No, I will not let you wait in vain," whispered Laura, with a rare blush, laying her cheek upon the heart of her beloved.

"And you, will you let me wait in vain?" asked Fritz Wendel, gazing into Louise's dreamy eyes.

"No, I will not let you wait in vain," replied Louise von Schwerin. "We, too, shall have our wagon, but we shall go a few hours earlier than the prince and his Laura. We, too, shall go to Oranienburg and await the princely pair before the

church door. We will tell him that we knew his secret, and did not betray it. Laura will plead for us, and the priest will marry two pairs instead of one. Then we will accompany the princely pair to London. As the prince sues for the king's pardon from the safe refuge of London, we will do the same with my family. It is a glorious plan. I shall have an elopement, a night wedding, a long journey. But what is that? Did you hear nothing? I thought I heard the outer door of the greenhouse open."

"Still, still," said Fritz Wendel. "Let us be on our guard."

The prince and Laura had heard the sound too, and were staring at the door, which opened, a tall female figure peering cautiously about.

"The queen!" whispered Laura, shuddering.

"My mother!" muttered the prince. His eye fell upon the grotto, and, pointing thither, he whispered: "Quick, quick, hide there. I will await my mother!"

The tall figure was approaching. The angry face and flashing eyes were already clearly discernible.

"Quick, quick, or we are lost!"

Laura darted through the shrubbery and reached the grotto, leaning, deathly pale and trembling, upon its inner wall. Blinded by the sudden darkness, her eye could distinguish nothing; her brain, still stunned with fright, was incapable of framing any thought.

Suddenly she heard a faint whisper. "Laura, dear Laura, fear nothing. We are true friends, who know your secret and would save you."

"Follow me, my Fräulein," whispered a second voice. "Trust us as we trust you. We know your secret. You shall know ours. Give me your hand. I will lead you forth from here unseen, and you can return undiscovered to the palace."

Laura seemed stupefied, scarcely conscious. She felt herself drawn gently forward, saw a smiling, friendly, girlish face near her own, and recognized at last the little maid of honor, Louise von Schwerin.

"Louise," she asked, "what is the meaning of all this?"

"Hush," was the reply, "follow him. Go down the steps, so; I'll stay here and cover the retreat."

Fritz Wendel had vanished with Laura. Louise quickly covered the opening. Then she glided behind the Indian shrubbery at the opening of the grotto to watch what might happen further. It was, indeed, Queen Sophia Dorothea who had come to the greenhouse alone at this unwonted hour.

It was the time at which the ladies in waiting usually had entire freedom, the noon hour, when the queen habitually endeavored to make good the lost hours of the night's repose. But to-day she had not found the customary rest. Vexed at this, she had arisen and gone to the window, gazing dreamily into the empty garden that the winter was now wrapping in its shroud. After a moment she thought she saw a female figure walking rapidly down one of the *allées*. It was none of the palace servants, rather one of the ladies in waiting, and although Sophia Dorothea could not see her face, she was instantly convinced that it could be none other than Laura von Pannewitz on her way to a rendezvous with the unknown lover whom the queen, with endless endeavor, had nevertheless not succeeded in discovering. Her mind was quickly made up. She called her lady in waiting, put on furs and hood, declared herself overwhelmed by a sudden desire for a walk in the garden, declined all escort, and hastened to enter the path along which the figure had taken its way. She saw fresh footsteps in the snow, and, following them, reached the greenhouse. Without delay she entered it, to discover at last the secret of her maid of honor and stand before her as her condemning judge.

It was fortunate for the poor lovers that the daily increasing corpulence of the queen and her troublesome right foot made her gait a slow one. When, therefore, she reached the lower end of the greenhouse she found no one there but her son Augustus William, who, however, received her with such embarrassment that the queen clearly perceived that her arrival was not only unexpected, but most unwelcome.

She therefore sternly asked him the cause of his unusual visit to the greenhouse, and as he answered, with a smile, that he had been waiting for the queen to arise from her siesta before visiting her, she inquired, passionately: "And who, my son, gave you her society during your tedious waiting?"

"No one, dear mother," said the prince, but dared not meet his mother's piercing eyes.

"No one," she repeated. "But I heard voices when I entered the greenhouse."

"Your Majesty knows that I have inherited my father's habit of speaking to myself," replied the prince, with a forced smile.

"But the king, my husband, did not interrupt his soliloquy when anyone approached him," said the queen, angrily. "He had no secrets from me. When I came he continued, thus permitting me to share his innermost thoughts."

"The king, my exalted father, cherished great thoughts, worthy that Queen Sophia Dorothea should participate in them," said the prince, bowing reverently.

"God forbid that the thoughts of my son should be less worthy," cried the queen, with flaming eyes. "My son should at least be too proud to soil his lips with a lie, and when he has courage to do a wrong he should have courage to confess it, too."

"I do not understand you, dear mother," said the prince, meeting calmly the queen's penetrating stare. "I am conscious of no wrong and have no offence to confess."

"By heaven! this is an assurance that deserves to be unmasked!" cried the queen, who could no longer control the rising storm of indignation. "Know, my prince, that I am not deceived by your ease of manner. I know you were not alone; I myself saw a lady coming hither to give you her company until I should awake, and I followed her hither."

"Your Majesty seems to have followed a Fata Morgana," said the prince, with a constrained laugh, "for you see that I am alone." As he spoke his eye wandered involuntarily toward the grotto that concealed his secret.

Queen Sophia Dorothea caught the glance and grasped its meaning instantly. "There is no one in the greenhouse, but let us see whether there may not be someone in the grotto," she said, stepping rapidly in that direction. The prince seized her hand and held her back.

"I beseech you, mother, do not go too far. Remember that your suspicion is an insult for me, and your investigations place me in the position of a little boy."

The queen cast a wrathful look upon him. "I am upon my own property here," she said, repulsing his hand. "No one may limit my will here."

"Then, madame, I bow before your will," said the prince, decidedly; "I wished to spare you an irritation, but since your Majesty will have it so, come, and if trouble and sorrow follow, your Majesty, being inexorable, will find me determined. Let us go to the grotto."

He gave the queen his arm and led her to the grotto. She was disarmed by her son's decision, convinced in advance that she had really wronged him, and should find no one in the grotto. She turned to him with a kind smile to say some mollifying words, when she suddenly heard the light rustle of a dress behind the Indian shrubs and saw a white shimmer through the leaves.

"And you said I was deceived by a Fata Morgana, my son,"

said the queen, striding suddenly forward and raising her hand imperiously. "Come out, my Fräulein," she said, "and spare yourself and us the shame of being obliged to drag you out by force."

The queen had not been mistaken. There really was some movement behind the Indian shrubbery, and a female figure in white drapery now emerged and threw herself at the queen's feet.

"Mercy, your Majesty, mercy," she cried; "I am not to blame for intruding upon your Majesty. I fell asleep in the grotto and only awoke when your Majesty entered, and I could not escape. So I have been an involuntary witness of your interview. This is my whole offence."

The queen listened in amazement, while the prince gazed in utter horror at the kneeling figure thus presenting itself in the place of his beloved.

"This is not the voice of Fräulein von Pannewitz," said the queen, and, stepping back past the kneeling maid of honor into the brighter greenhouse, she added: "Stand up and come hither. I wish to see your face."

The lady arose and came forward. "Louise von Schwerin!" cried the queen and the prince in one breath, while the little maid folded her hands and said, with an appearance of childish innocence: "Oh! your Majesty, have mercy upon me! I was so very tired after the ball, I came out here to sleep a little, though I had not forgotten that your Majesty prefers not to have us come alone to the greenhouse."

Sophia Dorothea did not deign to look at her; her eyes rested with a forbidding, contemptuous expression upon her son.

"I really thought better of you," she said. "To lead a child astray is a very easy, but a very contemptible, action for a royal prince."

"Mother," he cried, horrified, "do not believe——"

"I believe what I see," interrupted the queen. "Make an end of your protestations of innocence and bow before the truth, which condemns you in spite of your denials. As to you, my Fräulein, I command you to follow me and obey my commands implicitly. Assume your wonted cheerful expression. My court shall not learn of this scandal and read your guilt in your terrified looks. I shall see to it that you do not betray yourself in words. Come!"

The prince stared after them in blank amazement. "Well, however this riddle may solve itself," he murmured, "Laura is safe, and in a week we shall be gone."

CHAPTER XLIX.

REVELATIONS.

THREE days had passed and Fritz Wendel was still waiting in vain for a sign, a message from his sweetheart. Day after day he crawled in vain through his subterranean way to the grotto, night after night he lingered in vain under her window. No one among the servants could give him tidings of the fate of poor Louise von Schwerin, who was kept in her room under the strict surveillance of a trusty chamber-maid. The queen had told her ladies that Louise von Schwerin was ill of a contagious rash, and the court physician confirmed the statement, warning the ladies against visiting the patient. So Louise was a neglected, abandoned prisoner, past whose door all the ladies hastened anxiously, fearing scarlet fever. The queen alone seemed to have no apprehension of contagion. She visited the suffering maid of honor daily, remaining a long time in the sick-room. No one suspected the torture which this tender sympathy inflicted upon the little maid of honor, whom the whole court envied for its sake, or what terror seized her whenever the queen entered her room. No one heard the stern threats, or suspected that the queen came, not to minister to the patient, but to subject her to an inexorable cross-questioning.

Louise had consistently defied the queen's threats. She had found courage to keep silence, maintaining an aspect of perfect innocence. She knew very well that she could not betray Laura's secret without seriously compromising herself, and that if the queen should discover Laura's flight, Louise's own relations to poor Fritz Wendel, and the secret meetings, rendered possible by the subterranean path, must all come to light. Louise dreaded being made ridiculous before the whole court by the discovery of her first adventure, and her fear gave her strength to endure the tedium of her imprisonment.

"This cannot last forever," she said to herself. "If I confess nothing and can, therefore, be convicted of nothing, the queen will be convinced some time of my innocence and will let me go."

Fritz Wendel, however, was less patient than his clever sweetheart. He could not endure the anxiety, and when the

fourth day brought him no tidings he determined to speak to the king.

With pert assurance he announced that he had important information to communicate. The king received him at once, dismissing his adjutant at Fritz Wendel's request.

"We are now without witnesses, speak!" said the king.

"I know a secret, your Majesty," said Fritz Wendel, "which affects the honor and the future of the royal family. Your Majesty will pardon me if I sell such a secret only for a high price."

The king's eyes rested with an annihilating glance upon Fritz Wendel's pert face. "Name the price, but do not forget that, if the secret prove not worth it, you may answer with your head, and most certainly with your freedom, for the offence."

"My secret is worth a heavy price, for it will save the Hohenzollern dynasty," said Fritz Wendel. "I will communicate it to your Majesty whenever your Majesty is so gracious as to grant me my price."

"Before I do that I must know what you demand," said the king, restraining his anger with difficulty.

"I demand the commission of a major and the hand of Fräulein von Schwerin."

At first the king looked at the impertinent boy almost with horror. Then an expression of pity spread over his features. "He is mad," thought the king; "I must be considerate of his whim!"

"I grant your price," he said aloud. "Speak!"

Fritz Wendel began. He betrayed to the king Prince William's engagement and his plan of flight. He was so exact and so positive in all his statements and explanations that King Frederick perceived the mistake of supposing him mad, and recognized in his story a threatening and terrible danger.

When, therefore, Fritz Wendel finished, the king paced several times up and down the room, his arms folded behind his back. Then he paused before Fritz Wendel, seeming to read the lad's inmost thought with his penetrating glance.

"Can you write?" asked the king.

"I can write German, French, English, and Latin," replied Fritz Wendel, proudly.

"Sit down there, and write in German what I dictate. Does Fräulein von Schwerin know your writing?"

"She has at least thirty letters from me, sire."

"Write her the thirty-first as I dictate it,"

It was a brief, concise, but very loving and urgent letter that the king dictated. In it Fritz Wendel begged his sweetheart to keep her word, and flee with him on the same day on which the prince and Laura had agreed to depart, to win the prince's assistance at Oranienburg, and secure the pastor's blessing. He fixed the hour for the flight, and called upon her to leave the palace at the time assigned and meet him at the gate.

"Now sign it," commanded the king, "and seal the letter as usual. So! Give me the letter, I will myself forward it to its destination."

"And my price, your Majesty?" asked Fritz Wendel, timidly, for the king's frowning brow threatened a storm.

"You shall have the price which your treachery and madness deserve," said the king, in that dreadful tone which made all tremble who heard it. "Were all these things true which you have had the impudence to relate, you would deserve to hang for a double crime—for treason to a royal prince, whose secrets you had learned by eavesdropping, to buy your own prosperity at a cost of the happiness of two noble souls. And you would be guilty of the shameful and unpardonable crime of seducing and ruining an innocent child far above you in birth and breeding. But, luckily for you, all these things are mere outgrowths of a sickly fancy, and instead of punishing I simply cure you. You will be placed in an insane asylum until you recover enough to recognize these mad lies as such. Then I shall pardon you when you are well, but not until then!"

So speaking the king rang the bell, and, turning to the adjutants who entered at once, he said: "Convey this person to the nearest sentinel and have him sent instantly to the military hospital, where he must be placed in the insane department. Let no one speak with him. Should he begin his crazy prating again, inform me at once of the fact. Now go!"

"Have mercy, your Majesty! Have mercy!" stammered Fritz Wendel. "Do not put me in an insane asylum; I will retract, will believe that I only dreamed it all."

The king signalled the adjutants, and they conducted the weeping Fritz Wendel out of the royal presence, to give him over to the sentinel. The king looked after him with an expression of profound sorrow.

"So it is reserved for a wretched gardener's lad and a licentious maid of honor to rescue the house of Hohenzollern from a catastrophe, and to rob the crown prince of the joy of life!

In spite of all my power, my greatness, and my army, Prince Augustus William would have made his escape to commit a crime which God and his conscience might well condone, but the king never. Poor William! Your heart will be down-trodden as once my own. Once, scarcely nine years ago. And I seem to have lived a century since then, and to have a coat of ice about my heart. And this coat grows harder day by day, and the very men do most to harden it whom I would so gladly love, and am forced more and more to despise."

Sorrowfully, with bowed head, he paced up and down, his features twitching with excitement. It lasted but a short time, however. "I will not be cruel," he said. "Though I must destroy his happiness, I will not drag it into the dust and dirt as they did mine, when they thrust my friend upon the guillotine, and lashed a poor, innocent child through the streets for the crime of loving the Crown Prince of Prussia. No, no, Fräulein von Pannewitz shall never know the fate of Doris Ritter."

He rang again, called for his carriage, put into his pocket the letter Fritz Wendel had written, and drove to the queen mother. A long, secret conference followed. The ladies in the adjoining room repeatedly heard the loud tones of the queen's voice, which, however, she instantly lowered, baffling all their attempts at eavesdropping. They even thought they heard her weeping, not with pain but sheer rage, for she uttered dreadful threats, and her voice became loud and harsh.

At last the bell rang, and Laura von Pannewitz was summoned to the queen. The page returned with the information that the maid of honor was not in her room, having gone to Schönhausen to Queen Elizabeth Christine.

"Then I will go thither," said the king, "and your majesty may be convinced that the queen will support me in the effort to separate this unfortunate couple in the most tender way."

"Ah! you sympathize with them even yet, my son?" said the queen, with a shrug.

"Madame, I sympathize with those who are forced to sacrifice their best and noblest human feelings to their royal duty," and he took his leave.

The king reached the palace gate just as the maid of honor was entering the grounds. He stopped, ordered the coachman to pace up and down the highway, and entered the grounds alone and unseen. With quick steps he crossed the park, and approached the small side-door through which, as

he well knew, a series of unoccupied rooms gave access to the queen's apartment. Expecting to find her in her boudoir, he was about to lift the portière, when he heard a woman's voice, broken and tearful, and another apparently comforting and consoling the first speaker.

The king withdrew his hand from the portière, and seated himself in the arm-chair near the door.

"Let us listen a little," he thought. "Women are always coquettes in the presence of men, let us hear what they do when alone. I shall become better acquainted with this dangerous Laura, and learn better how to work upon her, than in a long interview."

"Madame," said Laura, "your prophecies are promptly verified. The flowers of our love are faded, and that love itself on the verge of its tomb!"

"Poor Laura," said the queen, with a wan smile, "it required no prophetic gift to foresee this. No flowers grow beside the throne, but thorns only, and you were so blinded that you mistook them for flowers."

"My heart is torn and wounded by the thorns, and I hope it may bleed away. Oh! my queen, if you could fathom my despair you would have pity, and not be so cruel as to command me to renounce my happiness. If it were I alone and my mad wishes, I should not listen to the cry in my soul, but should go and do my duty. But the prince loves me. Oh! madame, think how great and strong that love must be when I have courage to boast of it. Yes, he loves me, and if I abandon him I shall not be unhappy alone. His tears and his despair will be my accusers, for I shall have robbed him of his happiness. Oh! I cannot bear the thought that his lips might pronounce a curse upon me."

"If they did so now, they would one day bless you the more," said the queen, "for he will perceive that you grieve him now because your love was great and holy enough to sacrifice itself to spare the beloved one misfortune in later years. For, however you may love one another now, a day will come when he will require of you the future and the claim to the throne sacrificed for your sake. He will make his loss a cause of reproach, and never pardon you the weakness of yielding to his wishes. For, believe me, in the hearts of men there is but one lasting passion, and that is ambition. Love is for them the amusement of the passing hour, nothing more."

"Then let me die, for life is not worth having if this be true!" cried Laura.

"Life, my poor child, is not a pleasure, but a duty we must bear. You must not try to escape it, but if your sorrow is great your will must be yet stronger."

"What must I do? what is the duty I must take upon me? My fate is in your hands. Tell me, what shall I do?"

"Conquer yourself, Laura, renounce your love, follow the voice that spoke within you urging you to come to me."

"Ah! madame, you do not know what you require. Your pure heart knows no love."

"You say I know no love!" cried the queen, passionately. "You little know that my life is one long renunciation! Yes, I have loved, Laura, a sadder love than you will ever know, for I love and my love is not requited. I am telling you what no one save God alone has ever known. And I speak of this to you to comfort you and give you strength to bear your sorrow. I love my husband with the passion of a young girl, with the torture of the condemned who see Paradise before them and may never enter it. All my thought and all my heart are his. But he is not mine, my passion leaves him cold. There was a time when I thought it impossible to bear this torture, when my youth rebelled at being forced, like Tantalus, to bear and suffer, a time when I longed to give my crown for the right to weep in solitude. But the king willed it otherwise. He required me to remain at his side as his queen only, not his wife. And I, Laura, loved him so that I found strength to make this frightful sacrifice, not letting him know that my own heart lies crushed beneath his throne. Now, Laura, would you tell me still that I know nothing of love, have no means of measuring the sacrifice I demand of you?"

With tear-stained face the queen spread her arms and pressed the young girl to her heart, both weeping bitterly.

In the anteroom sat the king. His face was pale and his eye less clear than usual. He bent low over the knob of his stick, and suddenly upon its gold there gleamed a diamond, costlier, rarer than any jewel.

"Verily," he murmured, softly, "there is something exalted, noble in the heart of woman. I bow in all humility before it, but I cannot compel my heart. What is dead cannot be revived, and the buried comes nevermore to life!"

"You have conquered me, my Queen," said Laura, after a long pause. "I will deserve your friendship and respect. My love shall never reproach me with selfishness. I am ready for renunciation. I shall not obey his call, not flee with him, and when I know that he is waiting for me will lean upon you

and beseech you to pray God with me soon to deliver me from this torture."

"Not so, not so, my Laura," said the queen, with a sad smile. "You must make no half-sacrifice. It is not enough to renounce your beloved, you must build up an eternal barrier between yourself and him. You must marry, and set the prince an example of self-abnegation."

"Marry," sighed Laura. "Oh! Queen, it is a frightful sacrifice that you demand of me. To marry without love, and, doing so, bear the prince's reproaches of infidelity!"

"But I shall not be silent," said the queen, "I shall tell him of your sorrow and your great soul; and though he must cease to love his betrothed, he can revere her still as the guardian angel of his being."

"You promise me this? You will tell him that I was not faithless? that I do not marry him because I love him more than my own self?"

"I promise you this, Laura!"

"Then I will bow my neck under this yoke and bear my fate. I will accept Count Voss, and I leave you now to go to inform the queen mother that I yield to her wish."

"And I will accompany you to the queen mother," said the king, pushing back the portière and approaching the ladies, who were staring at him breathlessly. He approached Laura, and, bowing low before her, said:

"My brother is truly to be pitied that he is but a prince, and not a free man to live according to the promptings of his heart. For a wretched crown he must sacrifice the holiest possession, a noble woman's heart. You, Fräulein, will never envy us. But when, one day, you see my brother in the purple mantle of his kingship, when his people greet him with rejoicings, you will say to yourself 'It is I who made him king.' Come, I will escort you to the queen mother, and we shall tell her we should count ourselves happy were you our sister. I shall tell her too," turning to the queen, "that it was not our will which determined Fräulein von Pannewitz, but the noble eloquence of Queen Elizabeth, whom the Prussian folk already call their guardian angel, and who has now become one for the Royal House of Prussia."

He offered the queen his hand, but she did not take it; she looked at him, deathly pale, and, pointing to the portière, asked, breathlessly:

"You were there? You heard all that we said?"

The king approached her, and, placing his arm about her neck, whispered:

"I was there and heard all. I heard that I am a poor, blind man, to whom a kingdom is offered and who cannot accept it."

The queen, pale and faint, uttered a cry and leaned her head upon his shoulder for support.

"You will despise me," she said.

He looked long and silently at the pale face quivering with pain, and a ray of boundless pity lighted up his eyes.

"I have learned a noble secret this day," he said. "A secret which ought to be known, perhaps, to God alone. From this day I feel myself a priest of the holy of holies, and I will keep your secret as my most precious treasure. I swear it to you, and seal my promise with this kiss pressed upon your lips by a mouth which never again will touch the lips of a woman."

He bent over and pressed a warm kiss upon the queen's lips. Elizabeth, who had so often bravely met misfortune, had no strength to resist the painful bliss of this moment. She uttered a slight cry and fainted away. When she revived she was alone. The king had called her women about her, and, offering Fräulein von Pannewitz his hand, led her to the wagon and accompanied her to Berlin.

Elizabeth Christine was once more alone. But her eyes beamed with a holy joy, and she whispered:

"I thank thee, my God, for the joy of this hour. I feel his kiss upon my lips, and with it he has consecrated them, that they never again complain or murmur. He shall be reminded of me now and then," she said. "I shall become an author and an artist, to be something more than a poor, outcast queen. He shall find my books upon his table, my pictures upon his walls. Will that not force him to think of me kindly, now and then?"

CHAPTER L.

SURPRISES.

On the day of the king's conference with the queen mother the retinue was suddenly surprised by the news that the court physician had made a mistake in his diagnosis of Fräulein von Schwerin's illness; that it was not scarlet fever, but a mere nettle rash, of which she was now wholly cured. The little maid of honor therefore resumed her usual place in the circle

of ladies in waiting, and, except a slight pallor, there was no change in her outward appearance. No one was more astonished at this sudden cure than the little lady herself. With a sort of horror she observed that the queen had resumed her former gracious aspect, that the events of the past few days seemed wholly forgotten, and all former suspicion banished as by a miracle. At first Louise thought this all a trap, was very cautious, avoided going alone into the garden, and was very glad Fritz Wendel was so prudent as never to pass her window, and no longer to deposit his daily bouquet there. She soon observed, however, that she was subjected to no surveillance whatever. She therefore soon abandoned herself once more to her careless whims and childish fancies, and resumed her walks and greenhouse visits. But nowhere was Fritz Wendel to be seen. His sudden disappearance troubled her, awakened her longings afresh.

Louise von Schwerin, who had in the lonely stillness of the past few days begun to blush for her flirtation with the poor gardener's lad and repent of her mad love, now experienced all the fervor and might of her former passion.

"I shall conquer all obstacles," said the young girl. "I will play my romance to its end. Fritz Wendel loves me more passionately than any count or baron will ever love me, and the only reason for my not seeing him now is that he is suffering for his love. He is certainly shut up somewhere. But I shall free him, and flee with him far away into the wide world where no one will scoff at our love."

Her head filled with these thoughts, she returned from one of her walks in the garden, when, on entering her room, she observed one of those splendid bouquets upon her table which the handsome gardener had always brought her. In the midst of the bouquet was the letter which the king had dictated and Fritz Wendel written, calling upon her to flee with the gardener's lad. This was the appointed day. To-night at nine they were to depart. Louise hesitated not a moment. But how should she escape attendance at the toilet of the queen mother before the ball? At the hour for the morning walk she became suddenly ill, excused herself, and went to bed. The queen herself came to inquire for the little maid, expressing so much sympathy that Louise felt perfectly safe, and accepted, without a suspicion, the queen's proposition that she remain in her room instead of going to the ball. She had, therefore, no obstacles to overcome, and could busy herself with her preparations for the flight. When evening came an indescribable, vague apprehension of evil overwhelmed the

little maid. So near the final step, she experienced an anxious hesitation, and trembled at her own daring. Then the decisive hour came. She seemed to see her sweetheart's beseeching eyes, to hear his urgent voice. Forgetting all other considerations, she wrapped herself in her mantle, drew her hood tight over her head, and flew along the corridor and down the stairs to the gate of the palace.

Her heart beat high as she stepped into the street. There was a tall figure coming directly toward her. She could not see its face, but it was certainly he. Now he was at her side, whispering the word agreed upon. She answered with a trembling voice. The young man grasped her hand, drawing her rapidly toward the right hand corner of the square. There stood a wagon in readiness. The young man lifted her in, sprang in after her, and slammed the door.

"Forward!"

The wagon rolled away as if on the wings of the wind. Not a word was spoken. The twain sat with palpitating hearts, side by side. But Louise found her lover's silence painful and did not understand how he, who was always so tender and loving, could sit there so cold and indifferent. She felt as though she must escape from this unfeeling lover, who had not a word for her, who certainly must despise her for having followed him. When she thought of that a slight cry escaped her, and she sprang up to open the carriage door. His powerful hand checked her.

"We are not there yet, my Fräulein," he whispered.

She shuddered. Fritz Wendel called her "my Fräulein," and his voice sounded cold and strange. She leaned her head back upon the cushion of the carriage, stretching out her hand, pleading for help. The lover felt the hand upon his shoulder, seized it, pressed it to his lips, and remained silent. A horrible anxiety settled down upon the girl. She buried her face in her hands and wept aloud. The young man did not attempt to quiet her.

At last the horses stopped.

"We are at the place," whispered Louise's escort, springing from the wagon and lifting her out.

"Where are we?" she asked, trembling, and quite convinced that they were about to enter a prison or some remote place of banishment.

"We are in Oranienburg, and there is the church where the pastor awaits us."

He led her hastily to the church. The door was open and Louise saw candles burning in the chandelier above the altar.

The pastor stood with open book before the altar and from the organ came the first notes of the choral. The young man led Louise not to the altar but to the sacristy. There were candles burning there and a myrtle-wreath and lace veil lay upon the table.

"This is your bridal outfit," said the young man, the hood of his mantle still concealing his face. He loosened his mantle and reached her veil and wreath. Then at last he let his hood fall and took off his mantle. Louise uttered a cry of amazement and horror. It was not Fritz Wendel who stood before her, but a totally unknown young stranger in full-dress uniform.

"Pardon," he said. "It is by command of the king. He ordered me to be silent, to come here, and to give you this note before the ceremony. It is from the king's own hand."

Louise seized the king's note and opened it hastily. It was very short and concise. But it filled the maid of honor with horror. It read as follows:

"Since you wish to marry at all costs, I will fulfil your wish with consideration for your family. But the natty gardener's lad, Fritz Wendel, is unable to become your husband, because he is in the insane asylum. I have, therefore, selected a nice-looking young officer of good family, with a considerable fortune, and commanded him to marry you. If he pleases you the pastor will unite you at once and you will accompany your spouse to his garrison at Brandenburg immediately; if he does not please you, he has orders to re-enter the wagon and escort you to your mother, where you will have time to reflect upon your recklessness. FREDERICK."

Louise read and reread the king's letter, and then read it again. Then she looked at the young man standing opposite her and watching her with smiling, questioning glances. She found him young, handsome, and apparently amiable, much more imposing, too, in his uniform than the young gardener in smock-frock, while Fritz Wendel's eyes were not a whit more sparkling and eloquent than those of the young cavalier.

"Well?" he asked, with a smile. "Have you decided, my Fräulein? Will you confer upon me the happiness of becoming the envied and happy groom of Fräulein von Schwerin, or do you reject me, thus robbing me of that great happiness?"

She looked into his eyes and heard his words with bated breath. His voice was soft and gentle, not rough and hard like Fritz Wendel's, and it touched Louise's heart like music.

"Would you wish to marry me, even without the king's command?" asked Louise, with a smile.

"I would marry you in spite of the king and the whole world," said the young officer, "for the moment I saw you I fell in love with you."

Louise gave him her hand with a smile. "Very well," she said; "let us obey the king's command. He orders us to marry. Let us begin with that. Then we will see whether we can love one another without the king's command."

Young Captain von Kleist kissed her hand and laid the myrtle-wreath upon her head.

"Come," he said, "the priest is waiting, and I long to call you my wife." He led the fourteen-year-old maid of honor to the altar; the priest opened the sacred book and performed the marriage ceremony.

In the chapel of the king's palace in Berlin another wedding took place at the same hour. Before the altar stood Laura von Pannewitz and Count Voss. The king himself conducted the bride and Queen Elizabeth Christine had given her hand to Count Voss. The whole court witnessed the ceremony.

Prince Augustus William alone was absent. While Laura von Pannewitz was vowing eternal fidelity to Count Voss in the chapel, the prince was awaiting her appearance at the palace gate. The appointed time was past and gone. A torturing fear fell upon the lover. Had the king discovered the plan? Was it he who kept Laura back? Or had she forgotten the hour, turned faithless to her vows? Trembling with rage, anxiety, and fear, the prince mounted the palace stairs to return to the halls and find his beloved at all costs. In his anger and love he had even determined to carry her off by force.

Throwing off his mantle he entered the anteroom. No one noticed him. All eyes were turned toward the great hall. Thither the prince betook himself. The whole gorgeous court company was assembled, glittering with diamonds, orders, and gold and silver embroidery. The prince, however, saw nothing of all this. He saw only the tall figure and pale face beneath the myrtle-wreath and drooping bridal veil in the middle of the room. It was she, Laura von Pannewitz, and the sweetly smiling young man at her side was Count Voss.

What did it all mean? Why was the royal family surrounding Augustus William's betrothed, and why was she here in such array? Why is Elizabeth Christine giving her a

kiss and a diadem of diamonds? Why is the king giving his hand to Count Voss, who forthwith presses his lips to the same?

Prince Augustus William understood no single feature of the whole scene; he seemed paralyzed, tortured by evil dreams. With staring eyes he watched the newly married couple receiving the good wishes of the court. But the king's sharp eye had caught sight of him, and, rapidly passing through the crowd of courtiers, who reverently made way, he hastened to the prince.

"One word, brother," he whispered, and slipping his hand through the prince's arm drew him to the cabinet. "Now, my brother," he said, when the door closed behind them, "show yourself worthy of your ancestors and your royal avocation. Show that you deserve to be the ruler of a great people by mastering yourself. Fräulein von Pannewitz can never be yours. She is the wife of Count Voss."

The prince uttered so heart-rending a cry that the king himself turned pale and was filled with deep compassion.

"Courage, my poor brother," he said. "What you suffer, I, too, have suffered; everyone must suffer more or less who is called to assume a conspicuous place in the world. A prince has no right to live according to the dictates of his heart. He belongs to his people and to history, and must subordinate himself to both."

"It is not true, not possible!" stammered the prince. "Laura is mine; she can never belong to another. I demand no crown, no throne. I wish my Laura. It is not true that she has married Count Voss."

"It is true," whispered a broken, tearful voice behind him. The prince turned hastily. His wild glance met Laura's calm, sad eyes resting upon him with an expression of indescribable love. Queen Elizabeth Christine had brought the young Countess Voss thither in accordance with an agreement with the king, and had then withdrawn into an adjoining apartment.

"I will grant your dying love its parting glow, brother," the king had said, gently. "Take leave of the departing sun, but do not forget that when the sun has set the stars remain." He nodded kindly and followed his wife into the adjoining room.

The prince was alone with Laura. What they said no one ever knew. At first the king heard the angry voice of his brother. Then the same voice grew soft and mild. In half an hour they re-entered the cabinet. The prince stood in the middle of the room, Laura opposite him. Each looked into the pale, tearless face of the other; their hands were clasped.

"Farewell, my prince," said Laura, sadly. "I go away at once with my husband. Farewell; we shall never meet again."

"We shall meet again," said the prince, with a wan smile—"we shall meet again, but in another world. I shall await you there, Laura."

One more pressure of the hands. Then they both turned away. Laura returned to the adjoining room, where Count Voss awaited her.

"Come, my husband," she said, "I am ready to follow you, and, be assured, I shall be a true and devoted wife."

"My brother," said Prince Augustus William to the king, "I rebel no longer. Make the arrangements. I shall marry the Princess of Brunswick, according to your wish."

CHAPTER LI.

DISMISSAL OF BARON VON PÖLLNITZ.

The morning after the ball, Baron Pöllnitz entered the king's cabinet. He was embarrassed and depressed, and for the first time in his life he could find no words for what he wanted to say. The king's eyes rested upon him with contemptuous irony.

"I believe Pöllnitz is about to make me his father confessor; his face has a poor, miserable-sinner expression."

"Sire," said Pöllnitz, "I should not mind that if I were not a *poor* sinner," answered Pöllnitz, with a shrug.

"Oh! the debts again. I am really weary of this litany, and forbid all further complaints. What one has brought upon himself one must bear."

"Then your Majesty will not be so gracious as to assist me?"

"God forefend that I should misuse money for a Pöllnitz that I need for soldiers and cannon," cried the king, gravely.

"Then," said Pöllnitz, softly and with hesitation, "I am obliged to beg your Majesty, most graciously, to confer my dismissal upon me."

"Your dismissal! Have you, then, found in the moon an idiotic prince willing to pay still higher for your wretched jokes and malicious tale-bearing than the King of Prussia?"

"Not in the moon, sir, is the foolish creature to be found, but in the German Empire, and it is no prince, but a pretty young girl, who thinks herself fortunate to become the Baroness Pöllnitz, and have the privilege of paying my debts."

"And they leave her at large!" cried the king. "But perhaps they reckon the house of Baron Pöllnitz an institution calculated to cure her. Has the girl who is rich enough to pay Pöllnitz's debts no relatives?"

"Both her parents are living, sire, and both bid me welcome as their son. My betrothed lives in Nuremberg and is the daughter of a distinguished patrician family."

"And buys you because she finds Baron von Pöllnitz a charming toy. Well, I have no objection, and as to the dismissal, I grant it with all my heart. Sit down. I will dictate it and you may write the document."

He beckoned Pöllnitz to the writing-table, and dictated the following to the baron, who wrote it, shaking with fury:

"We, Frederick, etc., hereby make known that Baron von Pöllnitz, native of Berlin, descended, so far as we know, from honorable parents, body-servant to our sainted grandfather of worthy memory, servant to the Duchess of Orleans, also departed, captain in the Spanish service, riding-teacher in the army of the deceased emperor, body-servant to the pope, also the Duke of Brunswick, standard-bearer to the Dukes of Weimar, body-servant to our blessed father of happy memory; finally, master of ceremonies in our service, being wholly overwhelmed by the stream of most honorable military titles deluging his person, weary of the world, and tempted by the bad example of Chamberlain Montaulieu, who ran away from our service a short time since, has requested his honorable dismissal, with a recommendation for the maintenance of his good name and reputation.

"Since we see no reason for declining to give our testimony to his worthy behavior and the important services which he has rendered the royal court by his jests, and to the pastime he has afforded our blessed father during nine long years, we do not hesitate to declare that during the whole time that he has passed in our service he has been neither a highwayman nor a pickpocket, nor has he dealt in poison; has neither robbed nor otherwise molested maidens, nor seriously injured the honor of any man, but has always comported himself as a gallant gentleman and made fitting use of the gifts which heaven bestowed upon him, attaining the end laid down as a principle for the stage, namely, reproducing the ridiculous in men in an amusing and pleasing manner for their improvement.

"The counsel of Bacchus, too, he has followed in moderation, and carried Christian love so far that he has always left to the peasants the text of Scripture, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' He knows most exactly the anecdotes of our castles and places of recreation and has impressed upon his memory a precise schedule of all our old house-furnishings and has always known how to make himself agreeable and useful to those who perceived the malice of his mind and his lack of goodness of heart.

"We further confer upon the aforementioned baron our certificate that he has never provoked us to anger save when, overstepping in his impudence the limits of respect, he sought to dishonor, in an unworthy and unendurable manner, the ashes of our glorious ancestors.

"Just as, in the most beautiful regions, unfruitful and barren places are to be found, the most beautiful figures have their deformities, and the paintings of the greatest masters are not without their defects, so we accept the foibles and weaknesses of the aforementioned baron and unwillingly grant him the desired dismissal. At the same time we abolish the office which he has filled, in order to destroy the memory thereof among men, being of the opinion that the man does not live who is worthy to occupy it as successor of the aforementioned baron."

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