"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?"

"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 shame-faced, 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-