

"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,



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 un-set 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 Suhl!" 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, to-day 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 Ruppín 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 tourbillon, 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 ante-room, 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 Fräulein 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 she