

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 inter-

IN THE GARDEN AT MONTBIJOU.

ruption 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 should 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

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 al-

ready, 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 strug-

gles. 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