

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

called, and was a little vexed that, except the princesses, Fräulein von Pannewitz alone must form her retinue, because the maids of honor had not yet returned from their promenade, and the two cavaliers were already with the king in the gartensalon.

At last all the preparations were finished, and Baron von Pöllnitz leading the way, the queen traversed the halls to enter the gartensalon.

The king stood at the window, drumming impatiently on the pane with his long, slender fingers. He thought that his mother showed little impatience to see the son who had hastened in the warmth of a child's love to greet her. He began to speculate as to the motives which could induce her to act in this way, and had already fathomed her intention, when the door opened with a noise, and the master of ceremonies announced, with a solemn voice, "Her majesty, the queen-dowager."

A slight, scornful smile played for a moment over Frederick's lips as he saw his mother enter in brilliant court array; but it vanished again, and he strode toward her with reverent aspect, hat in hand and head bowed.

Sophia Dorothea received him with a gracious smile, and reached him her diamond-clad hand, which he reverently placed to his lips.

"I bid your Majesty welcome!" she said, with trembling voice, for it hurt her to the heart to be obliged to call her son "Your Majesty."

Perhaps the king guessed her feeling. With a sweet smile he looked up to her. "Call me your son, mother, for to your Majesty I will never be anything else than your obedient and grateful son!"

"Then welcome, my son!" she cried, with an undisguised expression of delight, laying her arms about his neck and kissing his brow. "Welcome to the modest house of a poor, sad widow!"

"I hope, mother, that you may feel yourself not only a sorrowful widow, but as the imperious ruler and mother of a king," said Frederick, tenderly. "I wish, therefore, that your Majesty be not continually reminded of the past, not constantly led to think of the great loss you have suffered, and which God has unalterably visited upon us. Your Majesty is not alone a widowed queen; belongs not to the past alone, but yet more to the present. I beg you, therefore, to permit us to call you henceforward, not the queen-dowager, but the queen-mother. You, Master of Ceremonies Von Pöll-

nitz, have care that the court learn my will, and act accordingly."

The queen had for a moment lost her solemn mien. She was really touched, really thankful. The king's tender attention had touched her mother-heart, and love silenced, for the moment, her imperious wishes.

"Ah, my son, you know how to dry tears, and change the mourning widow into a proud and happy mother," said Sophia Dorothea, offering him both her hands, with a warm expression of love.

The king was so happy at the pure and undissembled tenderness of his mother that he was ready to gratify her every wish, her every whim.

"Oh," he said, "you have not me, but I you, to thank for your so ready acceptance of my wishes. I too will tax your royal patience further and explain still other desires to you."

"Do but tell me your wishes, my son," said the queen; "but first grant me one request: let us be seated."

The king took her hand, and led her to an arm-chair placed by a window that afforded the loveliest outlook over the garden. The queen seated herself; the young king sat with bowed head, holding his hat in his hand, before her. Sophia Dorothea noticed this, and the new triumph delighted her heart still further. She cast a hasty glance at the two princesses, who had withdrawn with Prince William to the next window-niche and were watching in astonishment this scene that contrasted so strangely with the harsh, paternal rudeness to which the royal family had hitherto been accustomed. Sophia Dorothea read these thoughts and this astonishment in the frank faces of her children, and found a reflection of the same emotion upon the faces of the cavaliers. Even that of the much-experienced courtier Pöllnitz betrayed a little of his surprise, and possibly of his anger, for a cloud rested upon his brow, and his eyes were dark and sullen.

The queen turned to her son.

"I pray you let me know what you call your wishes," she said, "but which I shall receive as your commands, and with great pleasure."

"I wish that your Majesty may have the grace to surround herself with a larger and more brilliant court; for the Queen Mother two ladies in waiting are by no means enough; for if by accident one should be ill, and the other ill-tempered, your Majesty would have no one to amuse you. I wished,

therefore, to propose that your Majesty, instead of two maids of honor, should surround yourself with six."

The queen looked at her son in tender astonishment.

"My son, you are, indeed, a magician, for you guess all my wishes. I thank you from my heart. But, your Majesty," she continued, apparently observing for the first time that the king still held his hat, and stood bowing his head before her; "your Majesty has still not seated himself."

"Madame," said the king, smiling, "I was waiting for your permission." He took a chair and seated himself at the queen's left. "You accept my proposition then, Mother?"

"I accept it, and beg you to name the ladies whom your Majesty appoints maids of honor."

"Not at all, your Majesty must make her own free choice, and as soon as you have decided I only beg you to let me know."

"I only fear that I shall be greatly cramped in Montbijou with my increased court, and shall scarcely be able to give each lady her own room."

"Your Majesty must not live much longer in this house," answered the king, smiling. "It is large enough for a passing sojourn, but not sufficient for the residence of the Queen Mother. I have therefore conferred with Knobelsdorf, and he is already sketching a plan according to my suggestions, for a handsome and comfortable palace for your Majesty; and I think work can be begun upon the construction of it next week."

The queen blushed with pleasure. All her wishes seemed destined to be fulfilled to-day. The only question now was whether the greatest of all of them should be fulfilled, whether Sophia Dorothea was to be, not queen mother only, but queen regent, too.

She reached both hands to her son, and thanked him tenderly for this new proof of his love and devotion.

"And I ought, perhaps, to decline your kind proposition," she continued, sighing. "The death of my spouse should remind me of the brevity and transitoriness of human life. And is it not challenging fate, to build for me a great and stately mansion, while death is perhaps fashioning a small and simple chamber that may be earlier finished than the great palace which human hands alone can fashion?"

The king looked at her with such alarm that she almost regretted having given the conversation this direction.

"It is cruel, Mother," he said, tenderly, "not to let me enjoy the pleasure of seeing you without this touch of worm-

wood. But I see in your rosy cheeks and cheery smile that you are only worrying me a little. Let the builders get to work; God will be merciful to me and spare me the noblest and most beloved of mothers."

He kissed the queen's hand and arose. Sophia Dorothea was horrified. He was about to leave her, and she had not ascertained how far her influence reached, and where its boundaries were to be found.

"Will you leave me already, my son?" she asked, tenderly.

"I must, your Majesty, for I hear the engine of government creaking and groaning, and I must hasten to oil it and set it in motion once more. Ah! madame, it is, indeed, no slight task to be king. One must arise early and retire late to perform all his duties, and I truly think it is much pleasanter to be ruled than to have to reign."

The queen scarcely succeeded in suppressing a joyous smile. "I am sure it must be a difficult task," she said; "but I think the king, too, has a right to quiet and recreation. And I think, further, that a mother has some claims upon her son, though that son be a king. You must not leave me yet, my son. You must at least grant me the pleasure of a walk in the garden to survey the new greenhouse. Give me your arm and grant my request."

"Madame, you see what power you possess over me," said Frederick, smiling and offering her his arm. "I forget that I am the servant of my country, because I would fain be yet more the servant of my queen."

The great glass door of the salon opened and, leaning upon his arm, the queen went down the terrace into the garden with him. At a slight distance the princesses, their brothers, and the ladies and gentlemen of the royal company followed them. All were silent, listening intently to the conversation of the royal pair. But the queen no longer desired to be heard and understood by her court. The court had seen her triumph, but it should not see her possible defeat. She therefore spoke softly, and hastened her steps to be a little farther removed from the listening ears of the ladies and gentlemen. She chatted with the king about the new parts of the garden, and then asked whether he proposed to go to Rheinsberg for the summer.

"Unfortunately, I cannot spare the time," he said, with a shrug. "A king is, after all, nothing more than the first employé of his state, and as I accept my salary, I must perform my duties faithfully."

"But I think your Majesty takes it a little too seriously

with your duties," said the queen, with a smile. "You ought to grant yourself more leisure, and not take all the business of reigning upon your own shoulders. One accustomed to dwelling among poets and artists, in an atmosphere of science, must find it difficult to bury himself among acts and documents and rescripts, and the rest of the dusty things. You should leave that to others at times, and not manage the engine of state yourself, but only guide and direct it according to your will."

"Madame," said the king, with a subtle smile, "that engine has its own peculiarities and secrets which its builder may not confide to any employé. Hence he must himself manage and order all, and then he has only himself to thank if the wheels sometimes creak and the machine is not always in full swing."

"But you have your ministers."

"My ministers are my clerks, nothing more."

"Ah! I see you will be a rock, accepting counsel from none," cried the queen, almost impatiently.

"From you always, your Majesty, and if you permit I would at this moment beg your gracious counsel."

The queen's face beamed with pleasure. Frederick saw this, and an almost imperceptible smile flitted over his face.

"Speak, my son," she said, in breathless expectation.

"I wished to ask your advice with reference to the theatre and also as to the location which you find most appropriate for an opera-house."

The pleasure died out of the queen's face and her brow darkened. "I am no fitting counsellor for amusements," she said, pointing to her black robes. "My mourning garb is little suited for such service, and you well know that I can have no pleasure in the theatre after the many cold and wearisome evenings I have sighed through there."

"O madame, it is no question of a German theatre," said the king. "I understand and share fully your aversion to that. No, we will erect a French theatre and an Italian opera, for the French alone know how to play comedy and the Italians to sing. But to create music—that the Germans understand, and so I have assigned to Graun the task of composing an opera with which to inaugurate the new opera-house."

"And this inauguration will surely take place upon some very important occasion—perhaps at the marriage of some member of the family?"

"Ah! your Majesty is thinking of a marriage?" asked the king, lightly.

"Not I, but others seem to be thinking of it. Yesterday I received a letter from my royal brother in London, and Count Manteuffel has just been here and brought me a letter of condolence from the empress of Austria. But the count seemed to have been charged to question me as to the possible marriage of Prince Augustus."

"It were most presumptuous of the count to burden you with matters which happily lie beyond the domain of maternal duties," said the king. "For the marriage of royal princes and princesses is, unfortunately, merely a question of politics, and belongs, therefore, not before the forum of the mother's heart, but before the king."

The queen bit her lip until it bled. "Your Majesty has doubtless thought of this duty and selected a bride for the prince," she said, sharply.

"Pardon," he laughed; "in this question I have not pondered how marriages can be arranged, but how they may be undone."

Sophia Dorothea looked at the king in horror and astonishment.

"My son, are you thinking of a divorce?" she asked, trembling.

"Not of one, but of a great many, mother. I have, as your Majesty doubtless knows, within a few days abolished the torture."

"No," said the queen, impatiently; "I know nothing of it. Politics do not concern me."

"That is wholly appropriate to the noble and truly womanly character of my mother," said the king, smiling. "There is, indeed, nothing more tasteless and tedious than a woman who, instead of giving herself up to the Muses and Graces, insists upon making friends with the capricious old hag, Politics."

"And yet your Majesty, quite unprovoked, just now began to make me acquainted with that tedious personage."

"True, I mentioned to your Majesty that I had abolished the torture," said the king.

"And I ask, does that concern me?"

"Your Majesty wished to know how far I have busied myself in these days with marriage and divorce. I tell you that I have abolished torture, and in doing so naturally busied myself a little with marriage; for your Majesty will admit that there is no harder torture than an unhappy marriage."

"According to that you abolished marriage along with the torture?" asked the queen, horrified.

The king laughed. "Not quite. I am not the Pope, and have, therefore, not received direct from God the right to determine the consciences of men, though perhaps the majority of mankind might incline to bless me if I could really abolish the whole torture of marriage. At least, I have taken care that the claims of marriage, when they cease to be garlands of roses and turn into burdens of steel, can be relaxed. I have facilitated divorce and commanded that when a married couple absolutely cannot live together, divorce shall not be refused them. I hope my royal mother will agree with me."

"Ah! We shall see a great many divorces in the near future," said the queen, with a scornful smile. "Everyone will hasten to do the will of the king, and dissolve his marriage if it be not wholly happy. Who knows whether the king may not be first to set his people a good example!"

"God granting it, he will," said Frederick, earnestly. "His noble mother will certainly always incite him to give his people a good example. The happiness of his people he will always set above his own advantage, and will ever subordinate his own desires. For a prince, far from being the uncontrolled ruler of his people, is but their first servant."

"That is, indeed, a very humble and modest view of a king by the grace of God."

"I do not demand to be a king by the grace of God. I prefer to be king by my own right and my own power. But pardon, mother, you see the hag, Politics, is such an intrusive, talkative, conceited creature that she mixes herself up in everything, even in this long-wished-for *tête à tête* between my royal mother and her dutiful son. Let us leave politics. Your Majesty spoke, I think, of the possible marriage of princes and princesses."

"We spoke first of the marriage of Prince Augustus William," said the queen, who, with the obstinacy of a true woman, kept coming back to her point. "I told you that I received a letter yesterday from my royal brother in London, and that King George the Second greatly inclines to a union of our children."

"Another marriage with England!" said the king, with a melancholy smile. "But you well know, madame, that we have no good-fortune with English marriages. The couriers who bring the consent of England always come too late."

The queen turned pale and stood as though petrified with horror.

"That means that your Majesty has already determined

the bestowal of my son's hand, and that once more my heart's wish—the union of my children with the royal house of England—is not to be fulfilled. Your father's example must, indeed, have made a deep impression, that you so hasten to follow it."

"I find that the king was wholly right and wise in not regarding the wish of his heart and his family in the marriage of the crown prince, but solely the interests and considerations which the policy of the State imposed upon him. I shall, indeed, follow the example of my father, and in the marriage of the crown prince consult neither my own heart nor that of my royal mother, but solely the policy of the State."

"But Prince Augustus William is not crown prince," cried the queen, whose lips trembled, and on whose brow dark clouds rested. "The prince is but your brother, and you may have many sons to contest the succession to the throne."

The king shook his head and an expression of deep sorrow rested like a veil upon his clear and noble face.

"No, madame, I shall never have children," he said, almost solemnly; "and Prince Augustus William will be my heir."

The queen could not summon courage to answer him. She looked offensively at him. Their glance met, and the sad expression of the usually clear eyes awakened her mother-heart. With a quick motion she reached him both her hands, and pressing them passionately, exclaimed:

"Oh! my son, how poor is life! You are young, beautiful, and highly gifted; you are king, and still you are not happy."

The king's face had quickly cleared.

"I, too, do not hold this life a blessing, but a duty, and if we faithfully perform that duty we can at last be happy. But now we have reached your house again, and now, your Majesty, it is high time for me to return to my prison, and become king once more."

He kissed his mother's hand tenderly, and took leave of his sisters and the prince with a friendly jest. Then beckoning his cavaliers he left the *salon*. Queen Sophia Dorothea walked up and down the veranda, lost in thought. Princess Ulrica, her favorite daughter, ventured to interrupt and join her.

"How is this?" she asked. "Your Majesty looks so sad and grave, and has such reason for being happy. The king was amazingly kind and friendly. Think! you are to have six ladies in waiting and a beautiful new palace of your own!"

"Ah! yes," said the queen, reflectively; "one is surrounded with much outward splendor."

"And how considerate the crown prince is to make you forget the whole past," said Princess Amalie, who had now come out with Prince Augustus. "You are not the Queen Dowager, but the Queen Mother."

"Yes," answered Sophia Dorothea to herself, "I am the queen mother; but even as mother I shall never be queen. Oh! my children!" she exclaimed, passionately, "the king, your brother, is right. Princes are not born to be happy. He is not happy, and you will not be."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE QUEEN'S COURT TAILOR.

A DREARY silence had been prevailing for some time in the usually cheery family of the worthy tailor Pricker. No one ventured to speak a loud word or to laugh, for Pricker, the head and crown of the house, was low-spirited and ill-tempered, and the storm-clouds that rested upon his brow found near relatives of their own in possession of the faces of his wife and both his children, the pretty Anna and her usually jolly brother, William.

Even the help in the workshop were seized with the general discomfiture and looked crabbed enough. The shrill, merry song of the apprentices had subsided into silence, and both pretty maids went silent and cross about their daily work.

A tempest lowered over the house, and everything seemed anxiously to await its descent. When William, the son and heir of the house, returned from his promenades and amusements to the paternal mansion, he first hastened with an anxious expression to the living-room of his mother, and casting a questioning look at the old lady sitting with troubled mien upon the sofa, asked her mysteriously, "Not yet?" and Mother Pricker, sighing, shook her head and answered, "Not yet, not yet!"

When the pretty Anna, usually so happy to linger in her elegant room, painting or singing, heard the house door-bell ring and the tread of a stranger, she flew to her mother and asked, "Has it come?" And again Madame Pricker, sighing, shook her head, and answered, "Not yet!"

Father Pricker alone asked not and sought not. Silent

and proud he sat in the circle of his family; with stoic quiet he heard the ringing of the door-bell, saw strangers enter his office, his work-room. Too proud to betray excitement or anxiety he wrapped himself in Olympic silence, barricaded himself from the questions of his children behind the secure defence of paternal authority.

"But I cannot help seeing that he suffers," said Madame Pricker, with a sigh to her daughter Anna. "I see that he eats less daily and grows steadily paler. If this tension lasts much longer, my poor husband will finally get a dangerous illness and the king will be to blame for the death of the best and noblest of his subjects."

"But why does our father attach such importance to this trifle?" said Anna, with a superior shrug.

Her mother looked at her in amazement.

"You call that a trifle! It is a question of the honor, not of your father alone, but of your whole family. It is a question of the fame and reputation which the family Pricker has enjoyed for a century in Berlin. It is a question whether your father shall be deprived, without rhyme or reason, of his honors and titles, or whether justice shall be done him, and his services acknowledged."

Anna broke out into a loud laugh.

"Dearest mother, you take the matter far too tragically," she said, "and out of a gnat you make a camel. It is not a question of all the great and glorious things you have been counting up, but simply and only of a title. The great question is this, will our father receive the title, 'Court Tailor to the reigning Queen,' or must he content himself with being 'Court Tailor to the Queen Dowager?' It seems to me that that is a very trifling distinction, and I, for my part, do not comprehend why so much importance is attached to it."

"You do not comprehend that you have no family feeling, no sense of the honor of your house," sighed her mother.

"Ah, bah! It is a very poor and very doubtful honor to be the daughter of a tailor, even if the same be court tailor of one queen or a pair of them," said Anna, crossly. "Our father is rich enough to live comfortably without this miserable trade. He has given his children the education fitted to distinguished and aristocratic families; has kept a governess and music-teacher for me, a tutor for William, so that the lad need not be much in the streets, fearing his slender figure might tempt the recruiting officers. He has furnished our rooms with every luxury, and awakened the envy of all our friends. Why has he done this, if he nevertheless means to

condemn us to remain the children of a tailor? Why does he not take the sign from the door—this sign that forever remains a humiliation, even if it does stand printed thereon that father is the court tailor? That title does not make us presentable at court; and no aristocrat ever thinks of marrying a tailor's daughter, while enough of them might wish to do so if our father did but give up his trade, buy a country place, and live upon his own estate as a wealthy and distinguished man."

"Child, child! what are you saying?" cried Mother Pricker, aghast. "Your father give up his standing, his honorable standing, that has been hereditary in the family more than a hundred years? Your father so far dishonor himself as to buy with his hard-earned money some poor cavalier for a son-in-law, who might, perhaps, think wonders of the honor he was doing us in taking you as an appendage to the sixty thousand thalers? Your father buy a country place to eat up in idleness what he and his fathers have got together in centuries? Never will that happen, never will your father give his consent to the marriage of his daughter other than to an honorable citizen, and never will he permit your brother William to become anything else than that which his father, his grandfather, his great-grandfather, and all his ancestors have been—namely, court tailors."

The pretty Anna stamped her foot angrily, and her cheek flushed. "I will never marry a tradesman," she said, throwing her head back angrily, "and never will William submit to carry on the business of his father."

"Then your father will disinherit you both, and you can go away to beg your bread," said the old woman, wringing her hands.

"We do not need to beg, thank God! to get our bread," cried Anna, proudly; "we have both learned enough to come honorably through the world, and, if everything else should fail, I have a capital in my voice, which alone assures me a brilliant future. The young king is planning to arrange an opera, and female voices are such rarities that they will thank God if I accept a place."

"Oh! unhappy, unhappy child!" whined Madame Pricker. "She will disgrace her family, plunge us all into ruin, bring our honorable name into the theatre-bills to be placarded everywhere!"

"You will have the honor of seeing your daughter praised by all the world, laden with flowers wherever she appears, and lauded to the skies in the paper that is now published in Berlin!"

"Those are the new ideas," moaned Madame Pricker, "that are the fashion nowadays and that our king so greatly favors. Oh! misery and want will fall upon our whole city, honor and decency vanish away, and woe descend as upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and Berlin go to ruin. These are the dangerous temptations with which Baron Pöllnitz hath beguiled thine ears, and estranged thee from the honorable and respectable principles of thy family."

Suddenly she was silent, listening. She thought she heard a ring at the lower house-door. Yes. There were steps coming up the stairs and a voice asking for Father Pricker.

"Pöllnitz!" whispered Anna, and a glowing red decked her face, neck, and arms.

"Baron Pöllnitz, Master of Ceremonies to the King!" said Madame Pricker, with a mixture of pleasure and dread. "Perhaps he is bringing——"

The door flew open and with a fresh, cheery greeting the master of ceremonies tripped into the room. Anna had turned to the window and did not respond to the greeting. Madame Pricker advanced to meet him and receive her guest with reverential ceremony.

"Not at all," he laughed. "Why the great circumstance? His majesty, the young king, has no especial fondness for the renewal of titles and dignities which his father, the blessed king, bestowed upon us all. Entreaties are vain. He holds all titles superfluous and ridiculous."

Mother Pricker turned pale and murmured softly some indistinguishable words. But Anna, who still stood sideways at the window, had now turned suddenly to the speakers and fastened her great, gleaming eyes with a questioning glance upon the baron's smiling face.

"At last I have the honor of seeing your face, beautiful Anna," called Pöllnitz, laughing. "I knew very well that there was a charm by which to draw these fine eyes toward me. Let me kiss your hand, my most adorable one; and pardon me if I have perhaps disturbed you."

He flew to Anna with a dainty pirouette and took her hand, which she reluctantly gave him. Then he turned again to Madame Pricker, and bowing before her, said with solemn pathos, "I am here, to-day, not as the friend of your house, but as ambassador of the king, and I beg you, honored Madame Pricker, communicate to your spouse the fact that I wish to speak with him, to deliver a message from her majesty, the queen."

Madame Pricker uttered a cry of joy and, forgetting all

other considerations, hastened from the room. Baron Pöllnitz looked after her with a smile until the door closed after her; then he turned to Anna, who still leaned with a grave face upon the window-sash.

"Anna—my dearest Anna," he whispered, tenderly, "at last we are alone—at last I can tell you how I have longed for you, how happy I am to see you again."

He wished to press her tenderly to his heart, but the young girl turned proudly and coldly away. "Have you forgotten our agreement?" she asked, gravely.

"No. I have treasured your cruel harshness well in my memory. You will listen to me only when I have fulfilled all your wishes; when I have induced your father to engage a singing-teacher once more; when I have managed to let your truly divine voice resound before the assembled court."

"Yes," said Anna, with glowing eyes and cheeks; "this is my goal, my lofty aim. I will be a singer filling all Europe with her fame, at whose feet all men will lie, whose presence even kings and queens will seek."

"And I will be the happy one who paves the way for this pure nightingale. From my hand shall it flutter to the stage and to fame. But when I have kept my word, when you have sung in the royal castle in Berlin, then you must keep yours; and that evening Pöllnitz will be the happiest of mortals."

"I will keep my word," she said, proudly and loftily, as though she were already the famous and gracious prima donna. "On the day on which I have for the first time sung at court, on the day on which the tailor's daughter has purified herself of her lowly birth and become a free, independent, famous artiste, we shall no longer need to blush for our love. Baron Pöllnitz can, without disgrace, make her his wife who has been ennobled by her art, and Anna Pricker need cherish no humiliating consciousness that Baron Pöllnitz has conferred an honor upon her in marrying her."

Baron Pöllnitz had, courtier as he was, his features nevertheless insufficiently under control to conceal all the horror he felt at the words of his pretty sweetheart.

Speechless, he stared a moment into the face glowing with enthusiasm, ambition, and love; then a disdainful, demoniacal smile fled over his features, vanishing instantly, and leaving him the passionate and tender lover of pretty Anna Pricker.

"Yes, my dearest, best-beloved Anna," he whispered, drawing her into his arms, "on that happy, blessed day you will

become my wife, and the laurels twined in thy curls will turn for me into a myrtle wreath."

He covered her lips with his kisses. Anna did not resist. But suddenly the baron released her, stepping backward. Colder and more self-possessed than the young girl, he had clearly heard the light step that approached the door from without.

"Someone is coming," he whispered; "assume an expression of indifference, dear Anna. Your face reveals too much excitement."

He tripped to the open spinet and began to play a light melody, while Anna, to cool her flushed cheeks, buried her face in the branches of a high geranium that stood in the window.

Madame Pricker opened the door and begged the master of ceremonies to go into the adjoining room with her, where Father Pricker awaited him.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ILLUSTRIOUS ANCESTORS OF A TAILOR.

PÖLLNITZ offered his arm to Anna and followed Madame Pricker with her into the adjoining room. This was a long hall, that had something sombre and dusty in its whole arrangement and decoration. Two windows lighted dimly the long high walls that were covered with dark wall-papers. Several sofas of heavy silk of the same color stood about the room, and above them hung divers oil-paintings in black frames, representing manly figures in solemn pose and more or less artistic perfection. The conspicuous resemblance of the features made it evident that these must be consecutive portraits of the same family. It was always the same expression, the same small, compact figure, but the costume was different in each generation, and in the difference of fashion hinted at the different periods of time. And a figure precisely resembling those in the pictures stood in the middle of the room.

This figure, however, was alive, and with a solemn bow, but without leaving the great round table upon which it had been leaning, it greeted the baron, master of ceremonies.

"I bid you welcome to the house of my ancestors," said the little figure, with great dignity. "Blessed be your entrance and your departure."