

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."

Pöllnitz darted a mischievous look at Anna, who had released his arm on her entrance into the room and withdrawn to a niche.

"But why are you so grave and solemn to-day, dear Pricker?" he said, turning again to the old man.

"Are you not here as ambassador of the royal court?" asked Pricker, in turn. "Am I not, therefore, bound to receive you in festal array and in the festal apartment of my house? Therefore have I requested you to come into the hall of my ancestors, for only in their midst is it fitting for me to receive the royal message. Tell me quickly, how can I serve the royal house? What will it have of me?"

"It desires nothing more than that you change a little the sign before your door," he answered, smiling, and drawing a huge sealed paper from his bosom, "making it read, instead of 'Court Tailor to the Queen and Princesses,' 'Court Tailor to the Queen Mother and the reigning Queen.' Here is the certificate."

The old man accepted the offered script with calm dignity, not one feature betraying the slightest emotion. But Madame Pricker could not retain her joy. With a loud cry she flew to her husband to embrace him, wishing him joy in his nomination. Father Pricker waved her proudly back.

"The House of Hohenzollern hath done justice to my house, that is all. This title, 'Court Tailor to the reigning Queen,' has become, in a manner, a hereditary right in my family, and it were shameless ingratitude on the part of the House of Hohenzollern had it undertaken to withdraw the same from me. For more than a century the Hohenzollerns have been dressed by the Prickers for all balls and festivities, weddings, baptisms, and funerals; we have prepared the costumes of the queens and princesses; and if they were beautiful to look upon, they have our skill alone to thank for it. The proverb says: 'Clothes make the man!' And it is right. We made the coronation suits of both the queens, and it follows that without our help they never would have been crowned, and they owe us, therefore, the most heartfelt thanks. And now you rejoice and are thankful, wife, because they give us what is their duty and our rights."

"Meanwhile, I assure you, friend," said Pöllnitz, smiling, "that it cost hard work to get this nomination for you, and that you owe thanks to me, at least. It took all my eloquence, all my skill in flattery, to win the queen to my scheme."

Father Pricker turned pale and his face lost its quiet dignity.

"Then take the document back," he said, proudly, offering the baron the sealed paper. "If the queen does not grant me this title joyfully, then I will not not have it."

"Not at all; keep it," cried Pöllnitz, laughing. "It is due you, and you have a right to it. I only told you that I had difficulty in getting it, because I wished thereby to win your heart, and make you disposed to grant a request which I have to make of you."

"You doubtless mean with reference to the five hundred thalers that I lent you last month?" asked Father Pricker, smiling. "Let us speak no more of them. The debt is wiped out. You have just paid it, and I shall presently have the pleasure of handing you your note."

"I thank you," said Pöllnitz. "Meanwhile, I did not at the moment mean that trifle. It was another request that I wished to make."

"Let me hear it," said the court tailor, with a gracious nod.

"It is touching a young musician whom I would gladly recommend to your assistance," answered sly Pöllnitz, with a side glance at Anna—"a young and very talented musician, who must earn his bread by giving lessons. But he is, unfortunately, a stranger here, and has few patrons. I thought that if Father Pricker, being known as a connoisseur, would patronize him, this would be most useful to the young man, because then everyone would hasten to employ him. So let your daughter Anna take singing lessons of him and his fortune is made."

"I grant your request," said Pricker, solemnly, not doubting for a moment that Pöllnitz had spoken in full earnest. "I will assist the young musician, and he may give my daughter a lesson daily—that is, if Anna will do the young man that favor."

Anna could scarcely restrain a smile.

"You have commanded it," she said, "and, like an obedient daughter, I will obey your behest."

"Very well," said her father, majestically. "The matter is disposed of. Now, dear Baron, I would beg you to tell us about when the coronation will take place, so that we can make our preparations, and no postponement need be occasioned by us."

"The coronation day is still undetermined, but it will take place in August. You have time enough, therefore, to make all preparations. We will both confer with her majesty, later, touching cut, color, and material of the dresses. But

one piece of advice I can give you to-day, old friend—fit yourself into the new times. Remember that you have now a king who is exactly the opposite of his father. The dead king hated and despised all elegance and fashion; the new king loves them. The old king was a sworn enemy of everything French; the new king adores it, and if you wish to keep up good relations with him you must lay aside your old and respectable German traditions and prejudices, and like all the rest of us, fit yourself into the new system; for, I tell you, a new time is coming, a time of show and splendor. Everything will be different, the fashions first of all.”

Father Pricker had been looking at him in horror and astonishment. His cheeks were pale, his lips trembled, and with a voice shaking with rage, he shrieked:

“What! I take a part in all these God-forsaken changes? I cut off my honest German pigtail and put on a piebald monkey-jacket to make myself a laughing-stock for honest men? I so far forget God, my ancestors, and my German fatherland as to employ French hands? Never shall a French foot cross my threshold, never a French word be spoken in my house! A German I was born, a German will I die, and never shall a costume be cut after a French pattern in my workshop while I am alive!”

“If you mean that, your fortune is done for,” said Pollnitz, with a shrug.

Father Pricker paid no heed to him. He was looking with flashing eyes at the pictures that hung on the walls and bowing his head reverently before one of them.

“Look there!” he said, pointing with a wave of his hand. “That is my first ancestor, founder of the race of Pricker. He was a German, one of the best and most skilful. With him begins the line of Court-tailors Pricker. He wove the bonds which have, since that time, united the families, Hohenzollern and Pricker. Elector George William invented for him the title of court tailor. In his will he remembered my ancestor liberally, and from that time dates the fortune and the fame of the Prickers. Then look at that next portrait; that is his son, the court tailor of Frederick William, the great elector. From him dates the mantle that the elector wore in the battle of Fehrbellin; but his son, there, had the sad duty of making the great man’s funeral robes. With that next picture begins a new epoch for Prussia, for that is Frederick III.’s court tailor, and he made the robe and mantle for the coronation day which elevated Frederick III. to the throne of Prussia. His son followed him, and with the son came a

new epoch for the House of Pricker, as a new era for the Hohenzollerns with the father. The son did not follow his father’s example. He was of a gentler, more poetic nature, loved flowers, beauty, poetry, and became therefore a ladies’ tailor, and the crown princess, Sophia Dorothea, made him her court tailor. He made the coronation dress of the queen, the wedding dress of the Margravine of Baireuth and of Schmedt. I have made the wedding dress of the Duchess of Brunswick, and with me originated the mourning robes of the present queen mother. And now in the presence of my ancestors, of all these glorious recollections, you would move me to treason and innovation; you would make of the honorable German a French dandy, ashamed of the customs of his fathers! Nay, German I am and German I remain in my habits and fashions if I go to my ruin thereby!”

With a pathetic gesture he waved adieu to the astonished and amused Baron Pöllnitz, then strode proudly through the hall to enter his work-room. His wife followed him, with folded hands and anxious sighs, to quiet the excited man with loving words of comfort.

Pöllnitz and the pretty Anna were alone together again.

“In my whole life I never saw so strange a fool,” said Pöllnitz, laughing. “If Molière had known him it would have made a delightful comedy!”

“You forget that this fool may one day be your father-in-law,” said Anna, severely, pushing away the baron’s outstretched arms.

“Ah! true,” said Pöllnitz, smiling. “We must consider that. Come, one last kiss, my pretty Anna—a kiss as a reward for my happily won play, for to-morrow you will have the singing-teacher, and no poor beginner, but a famous and influential musician, who undertakes, as a personal favor to me, to give you instruction, although he is really no teacher, but a composer. Graun himself will give you lessons, and it will be nobody’s fault but your own if our love be not speedily crowned with the finest success.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOFFRI E TACL.

At last the young queen's deep longing for a solitary, unconstrained conversation with her husband was about to be fulfilled. The days of resignation and painful waiting were at an end. The beloved was about to return.

He had written her that he would visit her to-day, had requested her not to close the door of her sleeping-room, because, pressed by an accumulation of business, he would come late; and he wished to see her without the constraint of witnesses.

At last night came and Elizabeth could dismiss her retinue, and withdraw to her apartment to await him. For the first time and to the great astonishment of her ladies in waiting, the queen, therefore, requested them to bring out one of the charming *négligés* which the Empress of Austria had recently sent her. The ladies assure her that she never was more beautiful, but to-day the queen would see and measure everything herself. The great chandelier must be lighted, and she approaches the mirror to examine her costume with the cold criticism of the connoisseur. Then she bends nearer, examines her own face, and an expression of contentment flits over it. Perplexed and questioning glances pass between the ladies in waiting. The queen had never shown an interest in her own beauty, why should she be so happy over it now?

As they were retiring, the first lady in waiting was about to draw the key from her pocket, when Elizabeth, blushing, with a proud yet embarrassed smile, said:

"Do not close the doors to-night. I expect the king."

The ladies bowed reverently and withdrew; but out in the anteroom the reverence vanished and they looked at one another with a scornful smile.

"Poor queen! She would have us believe that the king visits her secretly because he neglects her so."

And they shrugged their shoulders with pitying smiles and slipped away to tell their friends the ridiculous story of the poor, despised, deserted queen's vanity.

But what is that—a wagon in the court-yard, the castle guard's trumpet-blast? Perhaps the queen was right after all; perhaps the king was really coming. And the amazed ladies hastened away to tell their friends that the king loved

his wife passionately, and that a more tenderly devoted pair could not be found.

A knock at the queen's door, and her throat seemed sealed. The little words, "Come in," seemed choking her. She could not move, and stood, as though turned to stone, in the middle of the room, only reaching her arms toward him, bidding him welcome with a tearful smile.

The door opened and he entered. The candle-light from the chandelier fell upon his face. It was beautiful as ever, but his eye was cold, and no smile of welcome played upon his lips. With a stiff, formal bow, he stepped forward, then remained standing.

"Madame," said the king, and his voice was more harsh and cold than she had ever heard it—"madame, I have, first of all, to beg your pardon for disturbing you at so unwonted an hour and robbing you of an hour's sleep. But you see that I am at least a repentant sinner, and you will pardon me when I promise you that to-day's offence against your quiet shall be my last, as it is my first."

The queen uttered a slight cry and pressed her hands to her heart. The king looked at her with an expression of surprise.

"You are pale," he said; "my presence is evidently annoying you. I will withdraw and send your ladies to you."

He approached the door, murmuring some angry words. But Elizabeth had regained her self-control.

"Stay, sire," she said; "I pray you, stay. It was but a passing palpitation, from which I often suffer and for which I ask your pardon."

The king approached her again. "If I may remain, then," he said, smiling, "permit me first to lead you to the sofa."

He offered her his arm, and she followed him to the divan upon which she had awaited his coming with such blissful dreams.

The king seated himself at her side. He rolled up an arm-chair and took his place opposite her at a slight distance.

"Madame," he said, "is it credible that we two have been married nearly seven years, yet never have been to one another as man and wife? They forced our lips to utter vows of which our hearts knew nothing. I know you hate me because you were forced to marry me. You have never been able to pardon me that I led you to the altar only under compulsion. We swore one another at the foot of the altar, not eternal love, but eternal coldness; and you at least, madame, have been true to your oath to the present hour."

The queen shuddered, murmured some unintelligible words, and her head dropped upon her bosom.

The king continued: "I have come to-day to beg your pardon for the wrong I did you then against my own will. I made you unhappy, for you were forced to give your hand to an unloved husband. Madame, it is, alas! true that between us two there yawns a chasm that is filled with the life-blood of my dearest friend. Forgive me the wrong I did you for the sake of the wrong I have suffered. I had a gentle and tender heart, but it has been trodden under foot and hardened by the blows of fate. I bore a great and joyful confidence toward the world, but I have been shamefully deceived, and have had more to suffer than the poorest beggar. I was forced to see in my own father my cruelest enemy, who watched me ceaselessly to find the moment when he might deal the death-blow. I was forever on my guard, for the most trifling error, the most pitiful nothing sufficed for my condemnation. If you did but know with what rage I was accused in public, and how, after all possible efforts had been made to get me hated by my people, the fear of non-success led them to try to kill me with ridicule. *Soffri e taci*, the Italian proverb, has been my motto, and believe me, it is difficult to follow this simple maxim with its vast meaning."

The king leaned back a moment in his chair, breathing heavily, oppressed by his recollections. The queen sat with bowed head opposite him, motionless, silent, transfixed by his words, that resounded in her heart like the death-knell of her youth.

"I tell you all this, not to play the rôle of a martyr in your eyes, but to make you comprehend how I could be so broken and so weak as to submit at last to the will of my father and be nothing more than his humble and obedient son. I bought my freedom, madame, by placing yourself in chains with me. But when I did so I registered a vow that those chains should bind only so long as I had no power to loosen them. The moment has come when I can redeem my vow, and for that purpose I am here. I know that you do not, *cannot* love me, madame. The only question is whether your aversion is so great that you insist upon a divorce."

The queen had raised her head, and looked with amazement into the sad, gentle face of her husband. Their looks met. The queen could not restrain the sigh that was almost a cry. She could not stem the tide of tears that welled up in her eyes and poured in streams over her cheeks.

"My God, my God!" she cried; "he asks me whether I hate him!"

The king seemed not to have heard her cry nor seen her tears.

"No, madame," he said, with a gentle smile, "I did not ask whether you hate me, for I know that your gentle, truly womanly heart is incapable of that wild passion. I only asked whether your aversion to me is so strong as to demand a divorce. I beg you to answer my question at once and definitively."

Elizabeth Christine had no power to utter a word. She shook her head, and the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"You agree, then, to be, in the eyes of the world, my wife and the Queen of Prussia? You do not demand that I begin my reign with the revelation of our domestic misfortune and give your chaste and noble name with mine to the disgusting chatter of the world?"

"No," said the queen in feverish haste, fearing that her strength might leave her again—"no I do not demand it. I do not wish a divorce."

"I thank you for this word. It is worthy of a queen. You feel with me that we princes have no right to cast from us the evil fate that rests upon us, but must bear it as we can. To be envied are they who can complain and reveal the wounds of their heart. But for us it is fitting to swathe ourselves in royal silence, to keep this pitiful world, that envies while it cheers us and curses while it flatters, from suspecting that a king, too, can suffer and know care, I thank you, madame, and from this hour you will have in me a true friend, a well-wishing brother, ever at your service. Give me your hand to this alliance, which shall be stronger, more lasting, and holier than that bond fastened by the priests, to which our hearts said not amen!"

He offered her his hand, and Elizabeth laid hers slowly and solemnly within it. But as he pressed her hand in his she started and a cry broke from her lips. She pushed his hand from her, and hastily leaning back in the cushions, broke out into a passion of weeping.

Frederick let her weep. He sat opposite her, watching her with a look of deepest sympathy. "You weep, madame?" he asked after a long, painful pause. "I respect your tears, and you have, indeed, a right to them. You are weeping for your lost youth, your heart grown cold under the pressure and force of circumstances. You weep that you are a queen and that reason is again fastening its fetters upon your heart

and hindering you from freeing yourself, as every other woman save a princess might do. Ah! madame, if we were mere human beings, not Prussia's rulers but Prussia's subjects, we might yet be happy, for feeling our own evil fate, and striving to keep my subjects from a like one, I have made divorce easy."

Elizabeth arose from her reclining attitude and looked at the king with a suffering smile. "I thank your Majesty," she said, softly. "It is very noble to lighten for others the sad fate which you have decided to endure yourself."

"Ah! madame," said the king, with a smile, "you forget that I have a noble friend and sister, that I have *you* at my side to help me bear that fate. And then, madame, remember, too, that we do not belong quite in the category of the unhappy married couples. We neither love nor hate each other; we are sister and brother, bound not by blood, it is true, but by the word of the priest. But have no fear, madame; I shall see in you only a sister, and I promise you that I will never, in any way, overstep the bounds prescribed by my reverence for your honor and virtue!"

"I believe you," murmured the queen, blushing deeply, and mortified at the coquettish *négligé* in which she had received the king.

"To the world, we are married," continued the king. "But I promise you that these fetters shall weigh upon you as lightly as possible, and that it shall be my constant endeavor to remind you, as rarely as may be in your private life, that you are, alas! not free, but my wife. When the act of coronation, which I must beg you to endure at my side, is past, you will be free and independent. I will give you a separate court; you shall have palaces of your own for winter and summer, in which you will reside, and where I shall never venture to molest you."

"Shall I never see you again?" asked the queen, with that stoical, resigned quiet which excess of pain sometimes brings with it.

"Oh, madame, I beg you to permit me to be with you occasionally, when etiquette demands it. But I shall always take care that this is exclusively upon neutral ground, and never in our private apartments. I will never come to your house without your permission, and then only on occasions such as your birthday. I hope you will not refuse me then."

"No, I will not refuse you," repeated the queen, looking at her husband with a melancholy, longing glance. But he did not, or would not, see it.

"I beg you," he said, smiling, "to let me make you a little present in memory of this hour, which has brought me a noble sister, you a faithful brother. Accept, I beg you, Castle Schönhausen as the token of our new friendship. I have had it decorated and finished for your summer residence, and you can, if you choose, establish yourself there immediately after the coronation."

"I thank you," said Elizabeth Christine, so softly that her husband scarcely understood her—"I thank you. On the day after the coronation I shall go thither."

She bowed her head once more, and sat still and motionless there. The king felt pity for her dumb pain. He wished to cast one ray of sunshine into her dark future, and warm her heart with a shimmer of happiness.

"Go to Schönhausen, while I make a short journey incognito. But when I come back from it I wish to pass several weeks in Rheinsberg in the midst of my family, and it is a matter of course that you, madame, are a member of my family. I beg you, therefore, to accompany me to Rheinsberg."

Elizabeth arose, and such a delightful, glowing smile illumined her countenance that the king saw it and admired her beauty. She reached him both her hands, and greeted him with such a look as replaced the words that refused to form themselves upon her lips.

The king arose. "I must not longer rob you of your sleep and your rest," he said; "and I too need sleep. We must keep ourselves well for the good of our people, for we have a noble task to perform. Farewell, Elizabeth; we shall rarely meet, but if I were so happy as to believe in a hereafter—and your nobility could almost tempt me to do so—I should say 'there we may perhaps see each other oftener, and understand one another better. Pray to God for me. I believe in God, and in the efficacy of the prayers of the good. Farewell.'"

"Poor woman, unhappy queen!" he murmured as he slowly returned to his apartments. "But why do I pity her? Is not her fate my own and that of every prince—a gilded misery, nothing more?"

A few moments later a wagon rolled through the court-yard once more. It was the king returning to Charlottenburg. The queen, weeping upon her knees, heard the wheels rolling.

"He is gone, he is gone!" she cried, with a moan of pain. "He has left me, and I am a poor, unfortunate, rejected wife! He despises me, and—I—I love him!"

And she wrung her hands and wept aloud and bitterly.