Count Néal is of quite as good ancestry as Countess Rhedern will be, and that, like her, he possesses several millions, which I have secured for our country by the recognition of his count's title. We agree, then, do we not? The Countess Rhedern shall be received at my court as well as Count Néal at yours?"

He offered the queen his hand; she reluctantly gave him hers. "My son, you have outwitted me cruelly," she whispered.

The king smiled. "Madame, we retain for our country three million thalers, and these weigh heavier in the end than a handful of mouldy ancestors. The Prussia of the future will win in battle by means of its nobility, but it will be mighty through its industries, richer and mightier than through its battles!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

UNDER THE LINDENS.

UNTER DEN LINDEN, in Berlin, now the most beautiful street of the great city, was a lonely and deserted region in the year 1740. Frederick the First was the king of display and splendor. Of him Sophia Charlotte said, upon her death-bed, when they told her that the king would mourn her demise, "He will divert his mind with providing me a gorgeous funeral, and if all goes well with the ceremony and nothing is wanting in the decorations he will be comforted."

Frederick the First had had the lindens planted to make the way which led to Lützelburg, his wife's pleasure palace, more shady and agreeable. This palace he had given her, and it was called, in honor of her, Charlottenburg. He had done what he could to redeem the region that intervened between the city and the palace, but the zeal of the Berliners had done little to help him. No one went willingly to this remote part of the city, and all the buildings erected there had been at royal expense. A few rich men of the nobility had, to please the king, built large houses here, which, however, they did not occupy. One of these stately edifices belonged, not to Count Dohna or Baron von Plessen, but to the famous and respectable Court Tailor Pricker. And for a few days past a new and brilliant sign blazed before his door, upon which in large letters stood the legend, "Court Tailor

to her Majesty the Queen Mother and her Majesty the reigning Queen." Immediately adjoining the great Pricker establishment stood the dwelling of poor Anna Schömmer—the quondam Doris Ritter—and her family.

Deep stillness reigned in this part of the city. Only the royal equipages passed frequently when the king invited his court and nobles to some festivity at Charlottenburg. To-day, however, the royal vehicle stopped and four gentlemen descended from it—the king with his architect, Knobelsdorf, Pöllnitz, and Jordan.

"You must cleanse me this Augean stable, Knobelsdorf," said the king; "you may prove yourself Hercules here. You have the strength for it, and I shall furnish the money. We shall erect ourselves a monument here, making of these sand-fields something brilliant. Here shall come palaces, and a temple of science, art, and religion. At present pretty much everything is wanting which could make of Berlin a suitable abode for the Muses. Knobelsdorf must take care that we can offer them comfortable quarters. What do you think, Jordan—were this site well chosen for the erection of all the fine buildings we dreamed of so often in Rheinsberg? Could we build our acropolis here—our temple of Jupiter and Minerva?"

"To prove to all the world what people already suspect—that your Majesty is no Christian, but a heathen more inclined to revere the religion of the ancient Greeks than that of the new-church fathers?"

"Do people say this? Then they are not wrong if they think I have no especial affection for the priesthood and the Christian Church. Not Christ built this church, but the priests, and a sly business they have carried on with their eternal blessedness. But now, Knobelsdorf, you shall build me here a temple such as I have long dreamed of—a temple of God, majestic without, divinely beautiful within."

"Then the palace of her majesty the queen mother is to be here?" asked Knobelsdorf.

"No, not here; let us go somewhat farther to seek a site for that."

"If your Majesty permits," said Pöllintz, as the king and his escort walked slowly down the middle allée of the lindens, "I should like to suggest what seems to me a most fitting place for the royal palace: it is at the end of the linden allée, the entrance to the park, and possesses both ample space and a charming situation."

"Show us the place," commanded the king, striding forward.

"Here it is, your Majesty," said Pöllnitz, as they reached the end of the lindens.

"What do you think, Knobelsdorf—shall we erect the palace here?" asked the king.

"We should have to begin by removing yonder hovels, your Majesty. But first your Majesty would have to buy them, and for this the consent of the owners is requisite, for they would be rendered homeless through immediate sale of the dwellings."

"Homeless! Since Jordan has been father of the poor there are no more homeless," said the king, with a familiar nod to his dearest friend. "This site seems to me suitable. Is it large enough, Knobelsdorf, for our project?"

"Quite so, your Majesty, and if your Majesty would graciously apportion the necessary moneys the work could begin at once."

"How much do you think we need?"

"At least a million, if all is to be executed as your Majesty has proposed."

"Very well. A million is not too much to give the queen mother pleasure."

"But," said Pöllnitz, "would it not be well to inform the poor dwellers in the hovels yonder of their fate and reconcile them to it with a gracious voice from the king? They are very poor people, your Majesty. The rain drove me to take refuge with them a few days ago, and I have been melancholy ever since, for I had never seen such want and misery. There were starving children, a woman almost perishing with grief, and a drunken husband. When I saw them I wished myself king for a quarter of an hour to brighten up the house with a ray of happiness."

"It must indeed have been a heart-rending scene to touch even Pöllnitz's heart and make him melancholy," cried the king. "Come, Jordan, let us enter, and you shall help me soften the misfortune. Knobelsdorf may sketch this spot meanwhile. Show us the way, Pöllnitz."

In a few moments they stood before the small, dusky house of the Schömmers.

"It is, indeed, a melancholy sight," said the king.

The door of the shop was ajar. The king pushed it open and entered with his companions. No one came to meet them and ask what they wished. Perfect stillness reigned.

"Permit me to go into yonder room and call the woman, your Majesty. No one seems to have heard the bell."

"No, we will go ourselves," said the king, gravely. "It is

well to seek out poverty in its hiding-place, and I think we may thus learn much that would never reach us in our palaces."

"Ah! my king," said Jordan, deeply touched. "From this day the people will call you not king, but father."

The king stepped into the room.

"Is it possible to dwell in such a den of misery?" he muttered.

"Yes, it is possible," answered a low, contemptuous voice. "People who are at home in want and wretchedness can live in such a den."

The king turned, almost in a fright, in the direction whence the voice came. Blinded by the dusk, he had not seen the woman who sat in the farthest corner of the long, narrow room lighted by but a single window. She had folded her hands in her lap and sat motionless. A poor, black dress covered her slender figure, giving her a still more sorrowful aspect. Her face was deathly pale, but of a rarely beautiful oval; her hair, wound about her head in braids, was of a clear blond color—having almost the effect of a halo—illuminated by two wonderful star-like eyes. It was like a picture of the Virgin in some poor village church.

The king stood looking with a reflective expression at this woman, whose eyes had been changelessly fastened upon him as though she would read his thoughts in his face. But that face was quiet, cold, unmoved.

Jordan broke the general silence.

"Arise, good woman," he said, mildly. "It is the king who stands before you."

She arose slowly from her seat, but betrayed not the slightest surprise or pleasure.

"The king!" she said. "What brings the king to a den of misery?"

"To soften the poverty and lessen the wretchedness if it is undeserved," said the king, gently.

She stepped rapidly toward him and made a motion as if to offer him her hand.

"It is undeserved," she said; "but the king himself cannot soften it."

"Let me try, at least. Tell me how I can help you."

She shook her head sadly.

"If King Frederick, son of Frederick William First, does not know, neither do I."

"You are poor; perhaps you suffer actual want?"

"I do not know. It is possible," she said, abstractedly.

"Among so many different pains and tortures, who can distinguish which is horror and despair, which want, starvation, privation?"

"Have you children?"

"Yes," she said, with a shudder, "I have children, and they, I know, suffer want, for they have often begged me for bread when I could give them none."

"Why does not their father care for them? Or is he not living?"

"He is alive, but not for us. He is wiser than I, and drowns his grief, while I gnaw at my own heart."

"You do not know, then, what you fain would ask for?" asked the king, almost angrily.

She looked at him long and questioningly with her large, penetrating eyes. "No," she said, harshly; "I have nothing to ask for."

At that moment the door opened with a slam and the children, Karl and Anna, entered, calling loudly. But they subsided into silence, slinking to their mother's side, as they saw the strangers. But Doris Ritter seemed transformed at sight of her children. Her hard features grew soft and gentle, the cold, marble face was illumined by a ray of divine love. With a passionate gesture she took the children by the hand and led them to the king. "Yes, your Majesty, there is something for which I have to ask, for my children's sake. They are as pure and innocent as the angels of God. May the shame and misfortune of their parents not descend upon their heads. King Frederick, have mercy upon my children!"

And the poor woman, drawing her children with her, sank at the king's feet.

"Jordan," said the king, gently—"Jordan, I charge you with the care of these children. From this day they are your wards."

The unfortunate mother arose in horror, clasping her children in her arms with an expression of such pain and terror as the Greek Niobe wears.

"Oh! you would not tear my children away from me?" she asked. "No, no, I have asked for nothing; we need no mercy, no help. We will starve together, suffer together; only do not separate us. They will cease to love me, will despise their mother, who lives only for them, who thanks God daily, in the midst of her suffering, for giving her these children, the sight of whom has saved her from despair and suicide."

"Those are wild, ungodly words," said the king, angrily. "You should ask God to soften your heart and make you humble. It is, of course, a misfortune to be poor and hungry and have a drunkard for one's husband, but it can be borne if one's conscience is clear. Your children shall not be separated from you. They shall have instruction and clothing at my cost, and I will see what I can do for you. Adieu."

And, slightly bowing, the king turned to the door, laying on the table near the window a handful of gold-pieces as he did so. Doris had followed his every movement. With a wild gesture she bounded forward, and, taking the gold-pieces from the table, handed them to the king.

"Your Majesty," she said, with flaming eyes, "I have asked for my children; but for myself I have not begged. With a few gold-pieces you cannot buy up my sufferings."

"I gave the money for your children, not for you," he said. "You should not rob them of this, their property. If you one day need and wish for help, come to me. I will remember your poverty, not your arrogance. Tell me your name, that I may remember you."

The pale woman looked at him, amazed and questioning. "My name?" she asked, reflecting and speaking as if to herself. "King Frederick asks my name! It is Anna Schömmer."

And as she spoke thus, with a peculiarly proud smile, she laid her hand upon the head of her little daughter Anna as if for support to keep from falling. So she stood, erect, though wellnigh fainting, as the king with his escort left the room. Her boy, who had directed his astonished gaze to the king, followed him on tiptoe and ventured to touch his robe. The mother saw this, and raising her right arm menacingly, while the left one rested upon the little girl, she called with a loud, threatening voice: "Do not touch him, my son! Kings are sacred!"

Frederick, standing upon the threshold, turned again; but he spoke no word, and in silent haste left the dismal little shop. Doris Ritter uttered a deep sigh when he was out of sight. Her hand slipped from the child's head and hung limp at her side. The child paid her no heed. Freed from the restraint of its mother's touch it slipped quickly out of the house to look after the king. The poor woman was alone. A long time she stood motionless, then a deep groan broke from her. "He did not even know me!" she cried, aloud. "For his sake I suffer poverty and shame, and he passes unheeding by and throws me a handful of crumbs

from his richly garnished table." Then she raised her clinched fist toward the heavens. "He did not even know me," she repeated, solemnly. "But one day he shall recognize me, and that will be the day on which I revenge myself upon him for my ruined, lashed, accursed life! Oh! he is a king and I am a poor woman, but the sting of a poisonous insect is enough to kill a king, for a king, too, is but a man! Yes, revenge will I have, revenge for my life of torture!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BERLIN POLITICIANS AND THE FRENCH TAILOR.

MEANTIME the scene without was greatly changed. The royal equipage slowly passing up the street had attracted the attention of the inhabitants, and everyone had descended to see and greet the king. Men and women, children and old people, were hurrying to and fro, and everyone asked his neighbor why the king had come hither and why the fat gentleman sitting on the fence was drawing pictures of the little houses on the sand-lots. Even the proud and exalted Father Pricker had not thought it beneath his dignity to descend to the street and take up his position before the door, surrounded by his apprentices and assistants.

"They say the king is in Schömmer's house," said one of the apprentices who had been doing an errand and gossiping by the way.

Father Pricker shook his head with solemn gravity. "There is some mistake, for the king was doubtless coming to pay me an honor, which is nothing new or surprising to my family. Not one ruler of the House of Hohenzollern has failed to make his visit to the House of Pricker. It is a pretty custom of the Hohenzollerns which the present king will doubtless not neglect."

A loud hurrah from the people in the street interrupted the worthy Pricker. The king was among them. Herr Pricker, who saw with quiet pleasure that Frederick was coming in his direction, stepped rapidly forward and took up his position directly in the king's way. But the king paid no attention to him. He replied to the people's greetings with less than his wonted friendliness, and a cloud rested upon his brow. He entered his carriage, the cavaliers followed, and the equipage rapidly departed.

"Why does this poor foolish folk rejoice?" grumbled Herr Pricker, with a shrug. "What do they mean by their shrieks and their waving of hats? The king looked at them as ill-humoredly as if they were annoying worms, and did not even smile at them. How much disturbed he was he showed by not even recognizing me, the court tailor of his own spouse, though his equipage stood directly before my door, in the full intention of visiting me."

Not far from Father Pricker and his apprentices stood several grave and worthy citizens, in long coats with large ivory buttons, their heads adorned with pigtails sedately braided under their three-cornered hats that covered their smooth, powdered hair.

Father Pricker, recognizing them, greeted them, beckoning them to him.

"God greet ye, worthy friends! Are ye, too, come to greet the king?" he asked them.

"We were going that way and did but pause."

"A handsome young man!" said the fat brewer.

"A very wise and learned king!" said the glovemaker.

"And yet—" said the shoemaker.

"Yes, and yet——"

"Yes, that is my opinion, friends," sighed Father Pricker. "The number of innovations and prescriptions. It frightens one to read them!"

"Every day there is something new and unexpected!"

"Yes, yes, it is not like the good old times," said Father Pricker; "not as it was under the dead king. That was a respectable, dignified life. Everyone knew what the next day would bring forth. He who was starving to-day knew he would be starving to-morrow. And he who was rich to-day knew he would be so to-morrow. It was a straight-laced, respectable, virtuous existence. Custom, morality, and discipline prevailed; the king was the best of husbands and fathers, and set us all a good example."

"It is true, there was danger of a beating now and then," said another, "and he who had the misfortune to be tall was in danger of getting seized for the guard; but that was all. In all things else people lived peaceably, one day like another; a man smoked his pipe, drank his glass of beer, and in both occupations could take the king for his pattern."

"But now!"

"Yes, now! Everything changes like the wind," said the glovemaker. "He who was poor yesterday is rich to-day, and the rich man of yesterday is cast out to-day, as Eckert was.

I worked for him and he was a good customer, for he used many gloves—nearly a dozen a month. This good customer I have lost in consequence of the innovations of the present government."

"But Eckert deserved it well, friend," said the fat brewer, thoughtfully. "He ground down the people, it is true, and was a puffed up, arrogant fellow, who greeted no one, not even me. I was glad when the new king took from him the fine house in the Jaeger Street; there was justice in that."

"But the dead king had given it to him; and the dead king's will should have been respected," said the glovemaker.

"Yes, that is true; the dead king's will should have been respected," they all agreed, with solemn gravity.

"Oh! We shall have much to endure," sighed Father Pricker. "Would you believe, my friends, that they are thinking of taking away our respectable pigtails?"

"Impossible!" "It cannot be!" "Never should we submit!" exclaimed the chorus, with pathos truly Grecian.

"They wish to force French fashions upon us," continued Pricker. "I see the day approaching when we shall have here French glovemakers, shoemakers, French barbers and brewers, and even French tailors; when French signs will be hung up before the doors, and no one will be beaten for soiling our pure German language with French phrases. The present king would never, like the dead king, have two girls arrested for saying 'charmant;' he will never, with his own exalted hands, chastise young lads for wearing French suits on the streets. All, all will be different, but not better; only more French."

"And no more beer is drunk at court. Aye, some day coffee will be the fashion, for not only has the café-owner in the Pleasure Garden, who has hitherto made coffee for the court and a few rich people, permission now to make coffee for all comers, but every other tavern-keeper can do the same," said the brewer.

"And have you heard," asked the glovemaker, darkly, "that the sole restaurateurs in Berlin—Nicolai, in the Herrenhouse, and St. Vincent—are no longer to be without rivals? Two French cooks have come already and opened what they call 'restaurations.'"

"Yes," sighed the shoemaker, "I went thither yesterday, and ate out of curiosity at the French cook's, in the Friedrich Street. Ah! friends, I could have wept with rage, for it was a better and finer meal than we have ever had at Nicolai's or St. Vincent's, and cheaper, too."

"Horrible! A Frenchman comes hither and makes better and cheaper dinners than a native Berliner!" sighed Father Pricker. "I tell you, we shall have much trouble yet; and not even my title of honor protects me from bitter humiliations, for it may yet happen that—" Father Pricker was silent, and stared into the middle of the street. The eyes of his friends followed in the same direction, and they, too, glowed with curiosity and astonishment. And indeed it was no common spectacle that met the worthy citizens' eyes. Drawn by two steaming, weary horses, a wagon was passing them, of new form and fashion, such as were now in favor at court, having been imported from France. The leather cover was down, and the occupants of the wagon were revealed to the public gaze. On the front seat were three persons. The first was a slender man of grave demeanor, imposing to look upon. He wore a black velvet coat with little silver buttons, its sleeves and breast trimmed with lace. His hair, already somewhat gray, was unpowdered, and in it he wore an enormous bow of ribbon. An extraordinarily dainty little three-cornered hat rested upon his wig and shaded his brow, grave and exalted as that of Jupiter himself.

At his side sat two women; the first an elder one, and the other a beautiful young girl with smiling lips, glowing black eyes, and rosy cheeks. The dainty and elegant toilets of the ladies differed extremely from the staid and respectable costume of the women of Berlin. The dresses were of bright-colored materials, with broad sleeves trimmed with white lace, and low necks, revealing, in the case of the younger, an exquisite throat and bust, and in the other the costliness of a cloth of guipure. Immense cushions of powdered hair decked their heads, upon the tops of which perched tiny velvet hats trimmed with long flowing ribbons.

On the back seat of the wagon were three other young girls in similar, though less costly, costume. Following this first wagon came a second, containing six young men, all in French costume, gazing with curious eyes about them, and laughing so loudly that the grave and respectable citizens standing near Father Pricker's house could readily hear every word which they said—hear, but, alas! not understand. "French," murmured Father Pricker, with a slight shudder; "French," murmured the friends after him, and stared at the strange apparition.

But what was that? Who stood by the wagon that now paused directly in front of Father Pricker's house? Who was it speaking with the pretty young girl that bent with a smile

to him, and jested and laughed quite unembarrassed? Could that be Father Pricker's son and heir speaking with these strangers, and speaking French at that? Yes, there was no doubt about it—it was his son William, the heir to his name. "How is this—does your son speak French?" asked the glovemaker in a reproachful tone.

"He wished it so greatly," sighed Father Pricker, with a shrug, "I was obliged to give my consent and engage a French teacher for him."

At that moment William, who had seen his father, hastened across the street. The young man's eyes glowed, pleasure beamed from his fine fresh face, he was all passion, movement, energy.

"Father," he cried, "come with me quickly. This stranger wishes to speak with you. Think what good-fortune! I was coming along from Charlottenburg when I met the strangers. They spoke to me in French, and inquired for the best hostelry in Berlin. A blessing that I understood and could at once recommend the City of Paris. Ah, father, what a beautiful girl this is; how friendly and unembarrassed! In all Berlin there is no girl so beautiful as this Blanche. I have been walking beside the wagon a good half-hour, and we have chatted and laughed like old friends, and when I learned who they are and why they have come to Berlin, I told them who my father is, and the old gentlemen was friendly and condescending at once, and his daughter quite frank and merry. But come, father, he longs to make your acquaintance."

"But I do not understand French," said Father Pricker, who, despite his repugnance to the French, was much flattered at this impatience to make his acquaintance.

"I'll be interpreter, father. Come, for you, too, will be astonished when you hear who this gentleman is," and William drew his father away to the wagon.

Father Pricker's friends stood stiff and motionless, awaiting with breathless impatience their friend's return. At last he came, but a strange change had taken place in him. His gait was unsteady and tottering, his face colorless, his lips trembled, and a deep fold furrowed his brow.

He approached his friends with wild looks. A pause followed. Their hearts beat wildly; the greatest tension was seen in every face. At last Father Pricker opened his trembling lips, but his voice was hollow and feeble.

"They are French, yes, French," he said. "It is the new French tailor whom the king has summoned. He brings six

apprentices and will work for the king, the princes, and the gentlemen of the court. But he is not tailor only, he is a dressmaker as well, and his wife and daughter are the most famous *modistes* of Paris; and they, too, have brought apprentices, and think that the queen and princesses will give them work."

"But it must not be!" shrieked the friends. "We have our guild-laws. No woman can work at dressmaking."

Father Pricker smiled uncomfortably. "The king has given them permission. Everything will be different, better. The king summons French tailors hither, and these monsters wish my counsel. Of me they would inquire as to their relations to the masters of guilds, etc. Me, the court tailor, the newly imported French tailor would have advise him. Ha, ha, ha! Is that not fine?"

And Father Pricker broke into a loud, wild laugh that made his friends shudder. Then he sank fainting into the arms of his friend the glovemaker. William, who had seen his father collapse, hastened to help carry him into the house. Pellissier with Jupiter brows gazed proudly from the heights of his chariot upon the fainting tailor.

"The good master has lost consciousness," he said, with an Olympian smile. "I cannot take it amiss, for he sees ruin staring him in the face. He is lost, for how could an unknown German tailor rival Pellissier, tailor to Louis XIV.? That were a degree of stupidity which I do not attribute even to the German mind."

Pellissier beckoned to the coachman to continue the journey, and the train moved with slow dignity up the Linden.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DOUBLE RENDEZVOUS.

The little maid of honor, Louise von Schwerin, paced up and down her room in intolerable impatience. She had bolted the door, for she wished to be entirely alone and unobserved, to read once more the mysterious billet which she had found in the bouquet that lay in her window. This note was from Fritz Wendel, the handsome gardener. So much she knew, for from him came the glorious bouquets which she always found upon her window-sill, here in Montbijou as at Rheins-

berg. It was brief and laconic, containing nothing but the earnest request to come to the greenhouse at eight in the evening and enter the dark grotto, where she would discover an important and dangerous secret.

"Does he think," she thought, with a roguish smile, "that his love is a secret? Dangerous it is for him and for me, but a secret it is not. Cruel it is to be two months so near one another and never find one moment for speaking together quietly; to be so laced up in this tedious court life, surrounded by spies! Never to have refused one's lover a kiss, because he never had a chance to ask for one! To be adored by a gardener, a youth handsome as a god, who has but the single fault of his lowly birth, that is new and piquant. Ah! Madame Brandt was jeering at me only yesterday for my innocent stupidity, my never having been kissed, never received a stolen embrace, the finest enjoyment in the life of a woman. And all the court ladies laughed at me as she spoke, and called me an unbaked bun that had never been in the fire. They shall laugh at me no more. I shall accept this mysterious invitation and go to the greenhouse at eight this evening."

Accident favored her ruin. Queen Sophia Dorothea desired to visit her royal daughter-in-law in Schönhausen, but without the pomp and splendor of a queen—informally, cosily, simply. Two ladies only should accompany her, and she had selected for that purpose the two oldest and most attached, with whom she could chat without restraint and jeer at the poverty-stricken home of the queen without fear of betrayal. Neither Laura von Pannewitz nor Louise von Schwerin were to accompany her, and Sophia Dorothea rejoiced that, for to-day at least, she was to be relieved for a few hours from the sight of the beautiful, sorrowful face, and melancholy eyes of Laura, whose soft, melodious voice, with its unconscious resignation, drove the irritable queen to the verge of distraction.

The king had gone to Potsdam, so there was no occasion for the queen to watch over Laura, and, besides, Sophia Dorothea had almost ceased to believe in that passion after watching in vain for any trace or symptom of it. The king seemed not to heed the beauty, had spoken to her but once since that day, and then only to jeer a little at her pale and sentimental appearance, and to ask her whether an unrequited passion was the cause of it. After that the queen had secretly reproached Madame Brandt for telling her a falsehood.

Madame Brandt had responded with a mysterious smile: "Your Majesty, I do not say that it is the king whom Laura

loves. Your Majesty thought you had divined it, and I did not contradict you."

"Why not, when you knew that it is not the king?" asked the queen, passionately.

"Because I had vowed with a sacred oath not to mention the name of her beloved. If it is not the king, then so much the better for my poor Laura. Yet I venture to entreat your Majesty once more to cure my poor friend of her unfortunate passion by marrying her with Count Voss."

The queen was determined to do so, and wished for that reason to discuss to-day with the young queen at Schönhausen the most efficient means of effecting this end.

At last Louise von Schwerin heard a wagon roll out of the palace-court, the watch's call, and the trumpet-blast. It was the queen departing for Schönhausen. So Louise was free and unobserved, and nothing prevented her going to the rendezvous. And she went. With unsteady steps and palpitating heart, she slipped through the dark *allées* of the garden, and entered the greenhouse on the stroke of eight. Silence reigned; the dusk and the odor of orange-blossoms intoxicated her. Noiselessly, breathlessly she made her way to the grotto and sank upon the turf within, blinded by the sudden darkness.

"Thank God," she whispered, "no one is here. I shall at least have time to recover and come to a decision. Oh! how afraid I am! I ought not to have come. Perhaps the note was a trick of the maids of honor to enable them to laugh at me later. What a poor fool I am to believe that he would dare invite me to a rendezvous. He is far too shy and humble to venture such a thing. But there is time to escape, no one saw me come hither."

But it was already too late. Two arms clasped her as she was about to arise, and drew her gently back to her seat. Her shy glance met a pair of glowing, flaming eyes resting upon her with fascinating power. With a groan she let her head sink backward. Two glowing lips burnt upon her own in a passionate kiss.

"Leave me," she said, breathless, with trembling lips in which she felt every heart-beat. "Leave me, do not detain me; I must go. I dare not stay here longer. How dared you misuse my terror in this way? How did you come here, and what do you want?" And Louise, who had wished to go, stayed, nevertheless, to hear the reply.

"How did I come here?" repeated the handsome gardener, in a humble tone. "I have worked every night for four weeks

upon the way which was to bring me hither unseen. Like a mole have I burrowed a path in the depths of the earth, and, while all the world was asleep and dreaming, I was awake and at work. But I dreamed a blessed dream with open eyes of the day when I should come here unseen, to find an angel whom I worship, to whom I have consecrated every day, every hour of my life. See, Fräulein, there, behind the orange-tree. That is the entrance to the road that leads to my paradise. Through that opening I can reach a little flight of stairs that leads to the cellar, and from there another flight leads to a trap-door opening into my room, which is on the ground floor of the gardener's house. So you see it took a good deal of time and effort to make this path."

Louise had gone inquisitively to the verge of the opening. The sight affected her more than the most glowing speeches. It required a mighty love to carry out this giant task unaided.

"Truly a mysterious path," she said; "but sure to be discovered by anyone who may visit the grotto with a light, and you know her majesty has the greenhouse lighted occasionally to take tea there with her court."

"No one will find this path," said the young gardener, pushing forward a tub containing an orange-tree. "See, Fräulein, this tree will keep my secret. It stands on a board which I have arranged to revolve. Now my way is cut off, and now, if anyone came——"

"Open it—please open it."

"I will do so when you promise not to leave me at once."

"I promise; but do push the tree back."

Fritz Wendel did so. Then he turned quickly to the young girl again, and, lifting her in his powerful arms, carried her back to the turf, laid her gently down, knelt beside her to bend his head and, like a slave, kiss her feet.

"You are my ruler," he said. "I lay myself at your feet and accept my fate at your hands. If you say, 'Arise, I love you!' I shall have strength to combat the whole world and ask for your hand some day before God and the world. But if you say, 'Stay where you are, you are in your place—a wretched gardener who presumes to love a high-born Fräulein,' then I shall die in order not to go mad; for I would rather bless you dying than perhaps live to curse you in my madness."

He was silent, and raised his handsome, excited face to hers.

"You do not answer," he said, with a sigh. "But before you condemn me, reflect a little at least. You do not know what you have made of me already—what you can make of

me if you will only love me. I was a poor, ignorant gardener's boy when I first saw you, loving only my flowers, knowing no language, and understanding no book. But when I saw you I blushed for my ignorance. Since that day my life has been one uninterrupted period of study. All that I earned I have spent for teachers. I wished not to be ignorant, that Louise might not be ashamed of me. And now I have come so far that I can say, 'Louise, command me! Tell me how I can earn the right to you, provided you have love, patience, and courage enough to wait for me.'"

"Ah!" she said, with a sigh, "what would it avail if I did not reject you, when I come of a proud family, and the king would never consent to my becoming your wife?"

"Oh! the king," said Fritz Wendel, carelessly. "There might be a way found of winning the king, a secret for which we could get this consent from him, for which honor and distinction can be purchased."

"Ah! the secret that you spoke of revealing to me here?" asked Louise, with the curiosity of a child. "Tell me, what is the secret?"

"You will know at once. Listen! But do not betray us by any exclamation."

"I hear steps," whispered Louise. "My God! if anyone should find us here!"

"Have no fear. Look yonder."

There, under the laurel, sat Laura von Pannewitz, and before her knelt Prince Augustus William, covering her hands with kisses. "Laura, my betrothed, my beloved," he said, softly, "when will the barriers fall, when will you be mine for all eternity?"

"The day will come when I am dead," she answered, with a melancholy smile. "Yes, my prince, then I shall be free to love you, pray for you, hover about you as your good genius to protect you from every harm."

Louise was so wholly absorbed in this new and unexpected scene that she did not notice that Fritz Wendel had slipped his arm about her and was pressing her closer to his heart.

"See there," he whispered; "he is a high-born prince and she but a poor maid of honor, and yet he loves her and she accepts his love without fear."

Louise laid her finger upon his lip with an impatient gesture. Fritz Wendel covered her hand with kisses and she did not withdraw it, listening with bated breath to the passionate, tender, chaste, and innocent dialogue of the lovers.

But there came a moment when Laura sank into the arms of the prince, permitted his kisses, and answered with stammering voice the vows of love and fidelity which he whispered amid ardent embraces. When Louise saw this she leaned her head upon her lover's shoulder, closed her eyes, and did not resist when he pressed her to his heart as firmly as the prince his Laura. But the chaste and upright lovers came to the rescue of Louise's inexperience, for in all the excitement of the moment the child heard Laura begging her lover, in all the pride and fear of a pure passion, to take pity upon his heart and hers, and not wish her ever to have cause to blush and lose the right proudly to confess her love and sorrow before her conscience and her God.

"Promise me never to approach me again in this way," she whispered. "Promise to consider my weakness, not to lead my too tender heart into temptation again. Save us the right to weep over our love before God's throne when men condemn us and cast us out."

"No one shall dare do that, Laura—no one shall slight my bride. I promise what you wish. But the day will come when you will remove this curse, redeem me from this sentence, when before God and the world you will be my wife."

"I thank you, my beloved," said Laura, giving him her hand. "Now let us part."

"Part? You know that we shall not meet again in weeks, that I am condemned to accompany the king upon a pleasure journey, while for me there is but one pleasure—to be at your side."

"Go, none the less," she said, with a smile. "We can never lose, never forget one another."

"Ah! I see you always, hear you, think of you, speak with you, when you are not with me!"

"Then accompany the king upon his pleasure journey and find pleasure in it yourself, for our souls are always united and our hearts understand one another."

And, with a smile, they walked hand in hand down the greenhouse. Louise had long since freed herself from her lover's embrace. Now she arose as if about to go. Fritz Wendel tried to detain her, but Louise had found strength in Laura's words to withstand her own heart. "If you dare embrace me again," she said, "we shall never meet again and I will never come here."

But the more clever and experienced youth observed what favor she unconsciously showed him, for he had not asked her to come again.

"I shall never venture to touch you again," he said, humbly. "Will you come?"

Louise smiled. "I must come, to follow the development of this touching romance of poor Fräulein von Pannewitz."

"This romance can one day be of use to us, for if one day Fräulein von Schwerin should accept my humble devotion the king cannot decline his consent in exchange for this secret of State."

"My God!" cried Louise, in terror. "You could not be so cruel as to betray the secret of these poor lovers to the king?"

"If I could thereby purchase the hand of my adored I should do so."

"Poor Laura," sighed Louise, "you were right in saying it were better for you to die and hover about your beloved. You will never know the joy of doing it in the flesh."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE INTRIGUING COURTIERS.

"You are right, dear Fredersdorf," said Baron Pöllnitz. "Our Hercules is not to be mastered in this way. He has no heart, is incapable of love, and, I believe, despises women."

"He may not despise them, perhaps," replied Fredersdorf, with a smile. "But he is satiated, and that is worse. Women have advanced to meet him too willingly for him to care for them; hence no woman will ever have power over him."

"But, dear friend," said Pöllnitz, horrified, "for every living creature there is some means of taming it. And what are we if the king remains master of the situation? Beasts of burden for his whims, and nothing more; condemned to execute the will of our master and have no will of our own. Dear friend, it were an everlasting shame for us both to have this state of things perpetuated. It is unheard of for a king to have no favorites. Frederick must have them as well as another, and it is but natural that, the places being vacant, we should occupy them."

"You called the king a young Hercules. How was Hercules tamed?"

"Through his love to Omphale, I think."

"Not at all. Through Omphale's drawing him into a luxurious way of life, and lulling his ambition with festivities