

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 COURTIER.

"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 tulling his ambition with festivities

and amusements. And you remember, too, how the Roman Emperor Heliogabalus disposed of the proud and imperious senators who endeavored to infringe upon his unlimited despotism?"

"I am not so learned as you, dear friend, and can confess without a blush that I know nothing about Heliogabalus."

"Then listen: Heliogabalus was tired of being the mere executive servant of the all-powerful senate. He wished to rule. But he concealed his intention and maintained a humble and contented demeanor toward the senators. He invited them to a banquet at his villa, delighted them with rare dishes and choicest wines, and when they were confused with the fumes of the wine he arose and said, with a subtle smile: 'I will go and prepare a little surprise for you, such as you have surely never experienced.' He left the hall, and the stupefied senators did not hear the bolts drawn behind him to cut off their retreat. Then suddenly the ceiling above them parted, and they heard Heliogabalus' voice crying: 'You could never attain honor and distinction enough. You sought ever-new laurels. Now you shall have enough of them,' and, as he spoke, a rain of laurel wreaths descended upon the heads of the senators. Then came masses of the most superb flowers, breathing an oppressive perfume. The senators protested that they had enough of honor and of the surprise; but the rain of flowers descended even more overwhelmingly upon them. Floor and table were buried under a carpet of blossoms. Then the terrified senators attempted to flee. They struggled to the door, but it was closed. They waded through the sea of bloom to the windows, but the hall was in the second story, and beneath the windows stood two Roman legions presenting arms. Escape was impossible. The senators prayed and besought that the rain of blossoms might cease. But it went on remorselessly, and soon all were buried below the exquisite petal masses, and all was silent. Heliogabalus had not murdered his senators—he had only buried them in flowers. What do you think of my tale?"

"It is pretty and piquant. But I do not see the connection between Emperor Heliogabalus, who was, by the way, of a most poetical nature, and ourselves."

"Aha! You do not grasp it," whispered Fredersdorf, mysteriously. "Let us intoxicate our giant with exquisite pleasures, bury his wilful spirit under masses of blossoms, render him effeminate with sensual enjoyment."

"But he has no senses," sighed Pöllnitz.

"None for the beauty of women, but other senses. He has

no heart, but a sensitive palate. That is one point. Another is his delight in extravagant splendor. He was so long compelled to live a frugal, unobtrusive life that he fairly longs to show himself a gold-scattering Jupiter now. His father hoarded millions; let us help the son scatter them. And while you are inventing new festivities with the king, I shall be reigning and bearing the burden of the affairs of State. You will help the king to scatter millions and I shall be collecting new ones to replace them."

"Let us hope a few drops of this rain may fall into my coffers," sighed Pöllnitz. "My finances are exhausted and my landlord threatens to seize my furniture and my few valuables because I have paid no rent for a year. So you see I really must get the house in the Jaeger Street, and I have calculated upon it with such certainty that I have already used it as security for some debts, and found some noble and credulous souls who were ready to accept it as such."

"You shall have the house," said Fredersdorf, confidently. "The king will give it you as a reward for the plans and sketches you have made for his new household."

"Have you communicated the plans to him?"

"The king has read and approves them. The papers lie in his cabinet only awaiting the royal signature."

"If they were but signed!" said Pöllnitz, with a smile.

"How Boden will rage when the millions hoarded under Frederick William are spent under Frederick for our festivities!"

"Boden," said Pöllnitz, reflectively, "is our most dangerous enemy. I have studied his face. He is a bold, determined man, capable of defying even the king when provoked. The rest of the ministers we may win for our plans, but Boden I can do nothing with. He will not understand my hints, flatteries, threats, and assurances of friendship."

"Oh! Boden need cause you no anxiety," cried Fredersdorf, with a laugh. "He is a lost man, about to fall of himself, with no help of ours. The king hates him and is only waiting for a chance to remove him. It may happen to-day."

"To-day?" queried Pöllnitz, amazed.

Fredersdorf nodded affirmatively.

"The king has to-day approved Knobelsdorf's plan for a new palace for the queen mother. It is to be a monster undertaking, a Capitol of the North, and its construction will require millions. The king has apportioned these millions between two finance reserves—that for general military purposes and the general reserve for public buildings—and

Boden will be constrained to respect these royal requisitions. If he does this he is an unscrupulous official and the king will not tolerate him in office. If he declines to do so, dares to oppose the royal command, he is guilty of high treason, and the king, who requires absolute obedience from all servants and officials, will have no more of him. Therefore, when the king gave me the signed requisitions for transmission to the minister of finance, he said, with a peculiar smile, 'This is a new pill for Minister Boden. Let us see whether he can swallow this, too.' So you see the worthy man is between two cliffs, whence he will scarcely emerge alive."

"If this be so," said Pöllnitz, rubbing his hands, "our success is assured. I can contract new debts *ad libitum*, and when my creditors grow intrusive I need no longer cheat them out of their money, but can simply smother them in flowers."

"And I, the low-born and despised body-servant," said Fredersdorf, with glowing eyes, "shall now be master."

At this moment Boden, the hated enemy, appeared. Without a greeting this man with iron features and stern expression approached the friends, who stared at him impudently.

"Be so good as to announce me to his majesty," he said to Fredersdorf, coldly.

"Has his majesty commanded an audience?" asked Fredersdorf, carelessly.

"No, but I have come to speak with his majesty upon matters of importance. Say this to his majesty."

Fredersdorf entered the adjoining cabinet. With a triumphant, malicious expression he returned to the finance minister.

"The king commands me to say to you, that if he desired to speak with you he would have you summoned. You may act accordingly."

The minister's face remained perfectly cold and calm. His lips trembled a little, however, as he said, quietly: "It may be that the king will not speak with me, but I have the most urgent reasons for wishing an audience. And I insist upon requesting him to receive me. I demand it as minister and official under oath. Go repeat this to his majesty."

"These are very proud and irreverent words," said Pöllnitz.

"Which I shall faithfully report to the king," said Fredersdorf, entering the king's cabinet.

"I fear your Excellency will pay dear for this bold speech," whispered Pöllnitz.

"Fear nothing," said Boden, with a scornful smile; "I am too good a financier not to save myself from heavy penalties."

Fredersdorf returned with a darkened brow. "The king awaits your Excellency," he said, standing in the door-way.

The minister strode through the hall, with head erect.

"The fox is caught," whispered Fredersdorf, as the door of the royal cabinet closed behind Boden.

"You think so?" sighed Pöllnitz. "It disturbs me a little that the king receives him."

"Fear nothing. It has doubtless been merely for the purpose of removing him at once from office. The king's eyes flashed lightning, and his clear brow was clouded. That means a thunder-storm. May it descend upon Boden's head."

They stole on tiptoe to the door of the cabinet and arranged the folds of the *portière* so as to see as well as hear.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE KING AND THE MINISTER OF FINANCE.

THE king received the entering minister of finance with a grave, silent nod. He was leaning on his writing-desk with folded arms and his eyes were fastened upon Boden's face with a sharp, penetrating expression. But Boden did not shrink before the royal eagle-glance.

"You have insisted upon an audience," said the king, sternly. "Let me hear what you have to say."

"Much, your Majesty, and I shall have to claim the patience and consideration of my king, for I fear that what I have to communicate will seem to your Majesty dry and tedious."

"Speak. I shall judge for myself how far I can grant you patience and consideration."

"Your Majesty is a noble, learned, ardent ruler. Your Majesty is, moreover, young, and youth cherishes ever the bold intention to rejuvenate the old and push the world one step forward. Your Majesty will, can, and must do this, for God has bestowed upon you not the power alone, but the mind and strength for such a task. Hence I expected my dismissal, but it did not come. And I rejoiced that your Majesty left me in possession of my office. I said to myself, 'The king will not revolutionize, he will improve, and if he thinks he can do this with us let us do his will with holy zeal. I know the secret machinery of the State's finances—the dead king had no

secrets from me—and I shall have the joy of communicating all these secrets and intricacies and serving my king and country somewhat longer.”

“These are very friendly and perhaps well-meant offers which you make,” said the king, with a slight smile. “But I do not need them. I know all that I need to know, and, having found among my father’s papers all the accounts of the sources of income and apportionment of expenditure, I know very exactly what I have to receive and expend. Besides, the whole matter is not so important that I need go into details concerning it. My time is limited. I have matters of greater weight to attend to than the discussion of the finances.”

“No, your Majesty,” cried the minister, ardently—“your Majesty has nothing weightier and nothing *better* to do. The finances are the arteries of the State, and the whole organism will fall ill and perish if the circulation be irregular.”

“Then there must be some blood-letting done,” cried the king, laughing. “I am the physician to this State body; you are merely the surgeon. When, therefore, I hold blood-letting needful, you shall cut a vein and let as much golden blood flow as I find good.”

“Nay, that I will not do, your Majesty,” said Boden, firmly. “Your Majesty can drive me away, but you cannot force me to do what is contrary to my conscience.”

“Boden!” cried the king, in so wrathful a tone that the two eavesdropping courtiers trembled and turned pale.

“This man is as good as dead already,” whispered Pöllnitz. “I scent already the refreshing odor of his corpse. We shall bury him and be his smiling heirs.”

“Do but see the king’s fearful looks,” whispered Fredersdorf.

“Boden,” said the king, after a long pause, “you forget that you are speaking with the son and not with the father. You were Frederick William’s favorite, but you are not mine, and I shall not tolerate so confident a tone. Do not forget this, and now go on.”

“So long as I am in office,” said the minister, with a slight bow, “so long it is my first and holiest duty to speak my mind, and, with your pardon, to give your Majesty my advice to the best of my ability. It is then in your Majesty’s discretion to discard it and act otherwise than has hitherto been the custom of the administration.”

“The first and nearest duty of a servant is to give counsel when his master demands it. But I have not required it, and you might have dispensed with this useless trouble.”

“Your Majesty has not requested my counsel, it is true,” said the minister of finance, with a bitter smile. “Your Majesty recalled my existence only to command me to empty the royal coffers.”

The king’s brow grew darker, and he drew himself up more stiffly. “I let no one prescribe limitations for my actions, nor shall I, like my father, live frugally for the sole purpose of storing up millions.”

“That the king never did,” cried the minister. “The king lived frugally, but he did not hoard. Where there was need he could give with truly royal hands. This the Lithuanian provinces prove, and the cities and villages which he rebuilt out of their ruins; the half-million human beings who now live in peace and plenty where formerly a famine-wasted desert stretched. More than three million thalers the king expended upon Lithuania, while he carefully watched over the bill of fare here in his own palace. No, the king hoarded no millions; he knew how to expend them wisely.”

“This man must be mad,” whispered Pöllnitz, almost pityingly. “He ventures to praise the dead king to the king’s face and at his expense. That is folly that must cost him his neck.”

“The king has turned from him,” said Fredersdorf; “see, he goes to the window, and is looking out, evidently to master his scorn and avoid knocking this impudent creature over with his fist.”

“Do you know,” said Pöllnitz, laughing, “I would give this Boden a hundred bottles of champagne from the cellar of my house in the Jaegar Street for the pleasure of seeing the king punish him with his own hand.”

The king now turned again to the minister, who was watching him calmly, like a man prepared for the worst.

“Well,” said Frederick, “since you praise my father for knowing how to expend millions, you will be content with me, for I shall vie with him in this. I shall begin by establishing my retinue upon a truly royal footing and by living as befits a King of Prussia. The necessary arrangements have been made and a detailed plan drawn up. It lies there on the table and I shall sign it to-day.”

“May I read it, your Majesty?” asked Boden, approaching the table.

The king nodded. Boden took the paper and read it hastily, while the king paced up and down, his hands folded behind his back.

“I find the king amazingly patient,” murmured Freders-

dorf. "It is not his custom to restrain himself so long toward a person whom he is about to crush."

"With what an impudent smile that man is reading my plan," said Pöllnitz, gnashing his teeth. "Verily, it looks as though he were venturing to scoff at it."

"Have you read it?" asked the king, watching him sharply.

"Yes, your Majesty, I have read it."

"What do you think of it?"

"That only Pöllnitz, who is famed for having nothing but debts, would have drawn up such a plan, for the realization of which not Prussian gold, but a flowing spring of precious metals out of the 'Arabian Nights' would be needed."

"I'll break his impudent neck, I swear I will," murmured Pöllnitz.

A scarcely perceptible smile flitted over the king's face. "Then you disapprove this plan?" he asked.

"Your Majesty, we have no reserves to which these expenditures could be apportioned, and if your Majesty should decide to sustain your retinue upon such a scale as this out of the State treasure it would be exhausted in one year."

"Let us leave this plan, and tell me first your opinion for the requisitions for the erection of the palace for the queen mother. Have you received my instructions?"

"I have received them."

"And appropriated the money?"

"No, your Majesty, I cannot do it."

"How so? You cannot when I, your king and master, command you?" cried Frederick, in a voice of thunder.

Boden bowed reverently.

"Your Majesty, there is a still higher master, and that is my conscience. But my conscience forbids me to take the money from the funds specified. Your Majesty requires four millions, and demands that they be drawn from the funds appropriated for the maintenance of the army and the assistance of localities needing help in consequence of disaster. I admit that the retinue of the dead king was somewhat needy, and that your Majesty may well find some changes necessary. But if for that purpose funds appropriated to other ends must be applied, your Majesty must either impose new taxes upon your subjects or diminish your army."

"Diminish my army!" cried the king. "Never will I do that!"

"Then deign to take the sum requisite for the erection of

the palace, if such be absolutely necessary, from the royal treasury. It contains, as your Majesty knows, seven million thalers, and, as there is no war in prospect, your Majesty may well venture to spend four millions of these seven upon a palace."

"No, that will not do. These millions are already appropriated to another purpose. The sum must be taken from the specified sources."

"I have had the honor of showing your Majesty the consequences of such a proceeding. Since, however, your Majesty insists upon not diminishing the army, nothing remains but to impose a new tax upon the people."

"Then do that," said the king, indifferently. "You give me the money from the sources specified, and then we can impose a new tax. To make it as effective as possible shall be your task."

The minister looked at the king in painful astonishment.

"If this be so, your Majesty," he said, bowing low, "the decisive moment has come for me. I am no longer young, your Majesty; I belong to the rigid old time and my ideas are old and rigid too. In all humility and devotion, I beg your Majesty to dismiss me from your service. Here are the papers which contain the requisitions for the palace. Your Majesty will readily find another who will execute these plans. I sue for my dismissal."

"At last!" cried the king, with gleaming eyes.

"At last!" repeated Pöllnitz. "Yes, indeed, it lasted long before the hardened creature could bring himself to this."

"Did I not tell you that the king was watching for a chance to dismiss Boden?" asked Fredersdorf, triumphantly. "But let us listen further."

"Not at all, my friend. Why hear more? Boden has demanded his dismissal and the king has accepted it. So much we know. My back aches with stooping. I need refreshment and shall go drink a bottle of champagne to the health of the new minister of finance."

"Not yet. The king asked for you when I announced Boden for the second time. He commanded us to wait until he should call us, as he had something of importance to communicate to us."

"He will doubtless give me the deed of my house to-day," said Pöllnitz. "Let us wait. See, there in the window-niche stand a pair of inviting chairs. Let us take possession of them."

"At last!" the king had said, when Boden demanded his

dismissal. Then, after a slight pause, he added: "It seems to me you delayed a little."

"It is true," said Boden, sorrowfully. "I had cause enough to take the step earlier, but I kept hoping to be of use to my king."

"And in this hope you were not deceived," said the king, striding to Boden and laying his hand upon the minister's shoulder. "I cannot grant the dismissal you demand."

The minister gazed at the king in amazement.

"Nay," continued the king "it were madness to rob myself of so noble and faithful a servant—madness to dismiss a minister because he has done what I commanded, placed the interests of my subjects above my own will, defied my anger to satisfy his conscience. Nay, Boden, I am not so great a spendthrift as to cast this treasure from me. But that you may know your king as he is, I will make a confession to you. You had been slandered to me. You as well as Eckert were made responsible for the people's starving, while the State treasury overflowed. They called you a flatterer, ready to execute the king's will unconditionally to retain your place, however unjust that will might be. I wished to test you. I therefore treated you disdainfully, imposed upon you tasks the fulfilment of which must have oppressed you; burdened your funds in an extravagant manner. Your patience has been extraordinary. To-day I took the last step, and had you executed my unrighteous instructions I should not alone have removed you from office, but have held you strictly responsible, for you would have been an unscrupulous official, injuring my people, whose prosperity is sacred in my eyes. God be praised, I can say that I have recognized my position. Would that all rulers did so. Did they but reflect upon the object of their appointment, they would see that the rank of which they are so jealous is but the gift of the people; that these thousands of human beings who are intrusted to them are by no means slaves of a single master to make him the mightier; that they have not subjected themselves to a single citizen to become the martyrs of his whim, the plaything of his notions. They would see that men choose him among them whom they hold most just to rule them, the best, to be a father to them, most humane, to feel with them in affliction, bravest, to defend them against their foes, wisest, to avoid complicating them in wars at unfortunate times—the man, in short, best fitted to represent the body politic, whom sovereign power serves as a support for the laws and for righteousness, but not as a means of committing crime unpunished or inflicting

tyranny.* This is my conception of the task of the prince. This I will fulfil, and in this you shall help me, Boden."

Tears of joy stood in the minister's eyes. He bowed low over the king's proffered hand, kissing it. "Ah!" he said, "how merciful has God been to my fatherland in giving it such a king!"

"Then you no longer desire your dismissal?" said the king, with a smile. "You are content to remain in my service provided I do not diminish my army or impose new taxes upon my subjects?"

"I shall be proud and happy to serve my king."

"But, I tell you, it will be no easy service, and less important, too, than gentlemen have perhaps supposed. I shall make heavy demands upon all my ministers, shall give them much work. But I, too, shall work hard, for an idle prince is a being of little use in the world, I think. I will serve my century—at least as much as I can. But I will do it alone, independently. My ministers will be the exclusive tools of my directing will. They will have much toil and little influence, for I shall never tolerate a favorite. Yet I shall ever require that they reply according to their conviction to all my questions and call my attention to any error into which haste or want of judgment may lead me."

"That I will do as surely as God helps me and gives me strength to serve my king and my country faithfully," cried Boden, deeply moved.

"Then continue to be my minister of finance. Come, let me embrace you. We kings are too poor to reward fidelity and love with aught but love."

The king opened his arms and Boden threw himself upon the king's breast, weeping loudly.

"Now," said the king, after a long pause, "we know one another. I will give you a proof at once that I am not deaf to the sensible suggestions of my minister of finance. The palace for the queen mother I shall not build. But in the royal household some changes are needed. Take these plans with you, strike out whatever is superfluous in them. See how much can remain, and tell me upon what scale my extra expenses must be adjusted."

* The king's own words.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DISAPPOINTED COURTIER.

WHEN the king gave to the finance minister Baron Pöllnitz's rich schemes the latter was sitting, in smiling security, with his friend Fredersdorf in the anteroom, discussing the rosy future and especially the festivities in his house in the Jaeger Street.

At last the door opened and the minister of finance came out of the royal cabinet into the anteroom. Pöllnitz and Fredersdorf arose, not to greet him, but to pass him by with contemptuous smiles and approach the king's cabinet.

Suddenly the smile died upon Pöllnitz's lips. He stood still in the middle of the room in front of the minister. "What papers have you there?" he asked, breathlessly, reaching out his hand as if to snatch them from the minister of finance.

Boden waved him back with a shrug. "They are papers which his majesty has intrusted to me to examine their contents and determine whether there is reason in them, or whether folly has written them."

"Sir!" cried Pöllnitz, beside himself; "these papers——" But he was silent, for the door of the cabinet opened again and the king entered the anteroom. His eye rested an instant upon the faces of the three gentlemen, and he seemed to have read the innermost thoughts of their souls, for he smiled, and darted a contemptuous glance at Pöllnitz, who had difficulty in swallowing his ire.

"One thing more," said the king. "I forgot a little surprise for you. You are, I know, not rich, in spite of your being minister of finance, and live in a way hardly suited to your rank. We must alter this, and I, fortunately, know of a house of which even Baron Pöllnitz has said that it is respectable and worthy of a nobleman. I give you this house with all that it contains. From this hour it is your property, and you, Baron Pöllnitz, may go with Boden at once to show him his house, conducting him through it and pointing out its advantages, as you have so often done to me."

Pöllnitz stood there, pale, trembling, confused. "I do not know of what house your Majesty speaks," he stammered—"of what house I can have said that it is worthy of Minister of Finance Boden."

"Not of the minister of finance, but of a nobleman, and

Boden is a nobleman, not in name only, but in thought and deed, and is therefore fully worthy to possess yonder house, which I herewith give him. You know it well, Pöllnitz. It is the house which my father had built for Eckert, the pretty house in the Jaeger Street."

"The pretty house in the Jaeger Street!" repeated Pöllnitz, beside himself, forgetting wholly the demeanor and self-restraint which the king's presence demanded of him. "No, no, your Majesty is pleased to jest. You surely do not mean the house in the Jaeger Street, that house which——"

"That house," interrupted the king, "which pleased you so much that, like a foolish child, taking your wish for the reality, you imagined it really yours. I could smile at this childish folly if it had remained a play of your idle fancy; but you have deceived others as well as yourself, and this is an offence for which you must atone to-day, unless you wish to be dismissed at once from my service."

"I do not know what your Majesty means. I do not understand of what offence I am accused, or whereby I have forfeited the favor of my king."

The king approached him one step and his flaming glance seemed to penetrate the abject courtier.

"You know very well, Baron Pöllnitz, of which offence, among the many that you daily and hourly commit, I spoke just now. You know very well that you have represented as your own the house in the Jaeger Street that I have just given to Boden, and have found credulous people to lend you money upon it, without your possessing the slightest possibility or intention of repaying it to them."

"Will your Majesty permit me to ask a favor?" said Boden, with a friendly, pitying glance at Pöllnitz, standing crushed and scarcely conscious beside them. When the king, with a silent nod, had assented, the minister continued: "Your Majesty has just made me so rich and happy that it is my right and duty to share my wealth and happiness with others. Baron Pöllnitz drew the plan of this house at command of the dead king and cared for all the brilliant and tasteful internal arrangements, and it is perhaps not unnatural that he believed this house, which so corresponds to his tastes and wishes, was meant for him. In any case, I am indebted to Baron Pöllnitz, for I am but a plain man and should not have known how to arrange the house so successfully. Permit me, therefore, your Majesty, to prove my thanks by taking up the trifling mortgage which Baron Pöllnitz has placed upon this house and having it transferred to me."

The king fixed his gaze upon the master of ceremonies, who was already recovering and raising his head with fresh courage.

"What have you to say to the finance minister's proposition?" asked the king.

"That I am ready to accept it with pleasure if your Majesty permit, and would only ask the finance minister whether he proposes to recognize only those creditors whom I have already secured with the hapless house, or those also whom I propose so to secure."

"Ah!" cried the king, laughing, "you are an incurable fool. If poor Boden should satisfy the new creditors whom you add to your old ones, the present I have just made him would probably bring him to beggary in a few months. Nay, nay, content yourselves with the holders of mortgages, which you, Boden, may redeem, since they are but a few thousand thalers—but out of my funds, not yours. And in order that there be no blemish in the gift which I bestow upon you, let Pöllnitz hold himself paid for the trouble which you say he took in the construction and arrangement of this house. But woe to you, Pöllnitz, if you let me hear of other such deceptions and follies—if you do not abandon a behavior which scoffs at all law and morals, and lead a life suitable to my servants and attendants. It is the last time that I shall pardon your pranks."

"Your Majesty plunges me into an abyss of despair," said Pöllnitz, wringing his hands. "Your Majesty demands that my future be pure and blameless, while the past rests like an Alp and casts dark shadows upon it; for how can I help making new debts without having money enough to pay the old ones? If, therefore, your Majesty most graciously desires to assist me to avoid future debts you must be so gracious as to pay my present debts, of which, unfortunately, a very small part was secured with the Jaeger Street house."

The king paced silently up and down once or twice; then he paused before Pöllnitz and said, with a smile: "You are so impudent a creature that one is obliged either to send you off or laugh at you. But I do not forget that both my grandfather and my father have laughed at you, as I laugh at the antics of Councillor, my ape. But even Councillor was beaten yesterday for being too arrogant with his ape tricks; so remember that, Baron Pöllnitz. Your debts I will pay this once, but if you venture to contract new ones I shall forget that you were jester to my grandfather and my father, and shall only remember that so frivolous a spendthrift cannot

remain in my service. And now go with the finance minister and show him his house. You are dismissed, gentlemen."

When the gentlemen had left the room the king remained some time lost in thought. He seemed not to know that he was not alone, Fredersdorf standing in the window-niche, whither he had retired, immediately upon the king's entrance, to be a despairing, trembling witness of the whole scene which destroyed his hopes and plans.

Suddenly the king crossed the hall and remained standing directly before Fredersdorf. "Fredersdorf," he said, with voice so soft that the man's heart bounded and his cheek turned pale, "is it really true that none of you ever see the man in me, but always the king only? that you have no heart for your prince, but only envy, hatred, malice, and deceit? And you, too, Fredersdorf, whom I have loved, not as a master loves his servant, but as a friend, believing that I had in you a man with a heart full of feeling for my sorrows and cares, with a little love, not for the prince only, but for the man in me! Why will you all make me cold-hearted and distrustful? A day will come when ye will all call me cold and loveless, and no one will know then that they whom I loved have made me so."

"Mercy—have mercy, my king!" prayed Fredersdorf, sinking at the king's feet. "Kill me, crush me with your wrath, only do not speak thus kindly, lovingly. Your Majesty does not know how I have loved you all my life, how my whole being is absorbed in yours. But I have a wild, ambitious heart. In the thirst of my ambition it was not enough to be the servant of my king. I wished to be a mighty and influential man, to mount high and see those far below me who now disdain me because I am but a body-servant and no distinguished gentleman. That, my King, is my whole offence, the whole remorseful confession of my fault."

"I know it," said the king. "You would not betray your master, you would only be your master's master. Poor Fredersdorf, did you believe it such happiness to be a king? But you are ambitious, and I will come to the assistance of this malady so far as I can. But give up trying to rule my will and influence my decisions."

Fredersdorf pressed his lips to Frederick's proffered hand and wept aloud.