

The king thought this a good opportunity for mollifying Quantz a little by manifesting some interest in his pupil.

"That is indeed a lamentable incident," said the king. "Make haste, Pöllnitz, to inquire, in my name, after the health of this talented young singer, and if she is still suffering, take a conveyance and accompany her to her home. Do not return until you can bring me satisfactory news of the health of Quantz's pupil." So saying, the king stole a side glance at the dreaded Quantz, whose brow had already begun to clear.

The king seated himself and gave the sign for the concert to proceed, having seen that the fainting singer had been carried out under the escort of Pöllnitz.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE DEATH OF THE OLD TIME.

THE music continued, while Pöllnitz, horrified and filled with secret fears, called a court equipage and drove away with the fainting Anna.

"The king little knows how fearful a task he has imposed upon me," thought Pöllnitz, watching her face in deadly anxiety. "If she revives, the whole storm of her rage will burst upon me, and I am a lost man. She is capable of scratching out my eyes or strangling me."

But this fear was groundless. Anna did not stir. She was still unconscious when they reached her father's house. But no one came to meet them, though Pöllnitz commanded the lackey to open the house door, and the bell thereupon jangled, its sound reverberating loud and long. No one appeared when Pöllnitz, with the help of the lackey, lifted the fainting girl out of the wagon, and bore her to her room. But as Pöllnitz carefully placed her upon the sofa she made a slight movement, and a deep sigh broke from her.

"Now the storm is coming," thought Pöllnitz, and he ordered the lackey to go down to the wagon and wait for him there. He wished to pass alone and unobserved through the scene which now awaited him.

Anna opened her eyes. Her first glance fell upon Pöllnitz, who was bending over her with a smile.

"What bliss, dear Anna," he whispered, "that you open your lovely eyes once more. I nearly died of fright."

Anna did not reply at once. Then a lightning flash seemed

to play over her face, a ray of consciousness gleamed in her eye. With a sudden, mighty movement her palm struck the face of her tender adorer, who tumbled backward in horror.

"Why did you shrug your shoulders?" she asked, rising and approaching Pöllnitz with a threatening mien.

"I did not know that I did it, my Anna," stammered Pöllnitz.

She stamped her foot impatiently. "Do not call me your Anna!" she cried, passionately, "You are a faithless, traitorous man, and I loath you from the depths of my soul, for you are a coward, and have not even the courage to defend those to whom you have sworn your love a thousand times. When I had finished singing and no one applauded, you ought to have had courage to applaud your beloved publicly."

"But, dearest Anna," said Baron Pöllnitz, "you do not know the law of etiquette, that at court the king alone may applaud!"

"And yet they broke into a storm of applause when the Farinella had sung!"

"Because the king had given the signal."

Anna shrugged her shoulders scornfully and walked hastily up and down the room. "All my hopes, my proud dreams for the future, are crushed," she murmured, with trembling lips, while the great tears rolled down her cheeks. "The king and the whole court laughed while I sang, and that presumptuous Italian, with her scornful smile, saw it all. Oh! I shall suffocate with rage."

She buried her face in her hands and sobbed and wept.

Pöllnitz had no sympathy with her tears, but remembered his creditors, and the thought of them fanned the dying embers of tenderness once more to a flame. He laid his arm around her neck. "Dearest Anna, why do you weep? How can this small mischance make you unhappy? Do we not love one another? Are you not still my beauty, my adored betrothed? Have you not sworn that you love me, and demand no higher fortune than to be indissolubly united with me?"

Anna dried her tears to look at this dear, smiling, tender Pöllnitz.

"True, you have not achieved the triumph you deserved this evening. The Farinella was in your way. The king has a prejudice against German singers—thinks the Germans cannot sing, can only write music. If you had an Italian name he would have been delighted with your marvellous voice, but since you have the misfortune to be of German birth he refuses his approval. But what you did not receive here you



can conquer elsewhere with ease. Let us leave this thankless Berlin together, beloved; let us go abroad and begin a new, delightful life. Assume an Italian name; I shall be your cavalier, and through my connections at all the courts it will be easy to secure you star engagements everywhere. You will earn fame and money and we shall live together the happiest of married people."

"Ah!" said Anna, shaking her head, "it is no question of money with me; I am richer than I supposed. My father told me himself to-day that he possesses nearly seven hundred thousand thalers and means to disinherit my brother William. I shall therefore be the sole heiress, for my father is mortally ill and the physician gives him but a few days more to live."

"Has your father made his will? Has he made you sole heiress?"

"He meant to do so to-day. He had engaged the attorneys, and I think they were with him when I started for this luckless concert. So it was not for money that I wished to become a singer—it was for fame. But now I renounce the project. This evening has demonstrated to me that there are thorns in the path of art, which I thought strewed with roses only. I renounce glory and honor and desire nothing but to be happy in our love. Yes, Pöllnitz, you are right, let us flee from this faithless, heartless Berlin to more beautiful regions. There we can buy villas, castles, palaces, estates, and the world shall know no happier pair than Baron and Baroness Pöllnitz." The baron felt no resentment now at the tailor's daughter's plan of becoming his wife. He forgave her ambition for the sake of her seven hundred thousand thalers. He assured her in passionate terms of his love, and Anna listened with gleaming eyes and a happy smile, when suddenly loud laments were heard in the next room.

"It is my father!" cried Anna, terrified, hastening into the adjoining room of the ancestors' portraits, whither Pöllnitz followed her. There, in the midst of his ancestors, the worthy and respectable court tailors, lay the court dressmaker of two queens, heir and descendant of a glorious race, upon his bed of pain. Pale and colorless as the pictures of his ancestors was Pricker's face. His eyes were not fixed, like theirs, but rolled in wild, feverish activity. When he saw Anna in her brilliant court costume a laugh so terrible broke from his lips that even Pöllnitz shuddered.

"Come here to me, worthy sister of your brother," said the old man, in his trembling voice, beckoning his daughter to his couch. "Come here and listen to what I have to say to you.

You and your brother have broken my heart. You have given me a drop of poison day by day, and day by day it has killed me. Your brother has left his father's house like the prodigal son, but he has not, like him, returned repentant. With all impertinence he boasts of his crime and casts his shame in my face. See, there is his letter, in which he writes me that he has eloped with the daughter of my murderer, the Frenchman Pellissier, to become a play-actor and drag the name of his fathers in the dust. For this noble work he demands his mother's portion. He shall have it—five thousand dollars—but from me he shall have nothing more—nothing but my curse; and I will pray God to let it sound in his ears unceasingly."

The old man, exhausted, let his head sink into the cushions and groaned aloud. Anna stood with tearless eyes by her father's bedside, and thought only of the brilliant and wonderful future which was drawing nearer every moment. Pöllnitz had withdrawn into a window-niche and was considering whether he should await the death of the old man or return at once to the king. Suddenly Pricker opened his eyes again and his glance rested with a tantalizing expression upon his daughter's face.

"What a beautiful, aristocratic lady you are, nowadays," he said, with an unpleasant grin—"rigged out in the latest fashion, and a great singer at that singing before the king and the court. Such a great lady must be ashamed of a father who is a court tailor. I understand that, and betake myself to my grave in order not further to embarrass my aristocratic daughter. Yes, I am going, and nothing shall remind her of me—neither my house nor my money. Oh! a great singer cannot be the heiress of a tailor; a lady who wears French dresses cannot take the money that her father earned by making old-fashioned suits."

And the old man broke into a crazy laugh, while Anna stared at him in horror, and Pöllnitz emerged from his retreat to see and hear the better.

"I do not understand you, father," she said, trembling.

"You will understand me," he mumbled, with a hoarse laugh. "When I am dead and the attorneys come to read aloud to you the will I made to-day, you will understand me; you will know that I have left all my possessions to the poor of the city, and not to the lady who does not need my money, because she has a million in her throat. Disinherited are ye both, the poor are my heirs, and ye shall have nothing but the inheritance from your mother, which I, alas! cannot keep from you."



"Father! father! It is not possible. You are not in earnest," whined Anna. "It is not possible that a father can act so unnaturally, so cruelly!"

"Have you not been unnatural and cruel to me?" asked the old man, grinning. "Have you not tortured and misused me, murdered me amid your smiles as you murdered your mother—that mother who died of grief for you? Nay, nay, no pity for unnatural children; you are disinherited, disinherited, disinherited!"

With a cough the old man sank back upon his bed, groaning and panting, while his features assumed that peculiar, fixed, brazen expression, the harbinger of death coming to meet his victims.

"He is dying, he is dying!" screamed Anna, throwing herself upon her father's bed; "he is dying, and he has disinherited me!"

"Yes, disinherited," mumbled the dying man's thick tongue.

Pöllnitz's heart failed him at this sight. He plunged out of the dreary chamber and down the stairs, opening the door so violently that the bell rang with a wild, loud, crashing jangle through the silent house. As he sat in his wagon, hastening to the palace, he found peace and composure once more, and, leaning comfortably upon the silk upholstery, he said: "I will petition the king for my dismissal, turn Protestant, and go to Nuremberg to marry the rich patrician."

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### THE DISCOVERY.

They were together once more in the quiet, perfumed greenhouse. Heart to heart, after long separation, they looked into one another's tearful eyes, and, smiling happily, asked whether it was not all a dream. It was the first time since his return from Silesia that Prince Augustus William had seen his Laura alone. And now there were two pairs of ears listening, two pairs of eyes peering; there were Louise Schwerin and her lover, handsome Fritz Wendel, sitting arm in arm in the grotto eavesdropping.

"How happy they are," sighed Louise.

"Are not we happy too?" asked Fritz Wendel, tenderly, pressing his arm more firmly about her waist. "Do we love

one another less warmly, passionately, purely than those two there?"

"Yet people would shed tears of pity for them and only laugh at us," sighed Louise.

"It is true, the poor gardener is a ridiculous lover for the beautiful Fräulein von Schwerin," murmured Fritz Wendel. "But that shall all be different, and I shall soon enter upon the new career which I have mapped out for myself. My Louise shall no longer have cause to blush for her lover. I have the means of purchasing rank and distinction, and I shall apply it."

"Tell me this means; let me share your plans," begged Louise.

He pointed with a cruel smile to the prince and his beloved. "There is my price," he whispered. "I will betray them to the king, who will grant me rank and riches for the information, for upon this secret depends the future of Prussia. Let us hear, therefore, what they are saying——"

"Nay, let us not hear," interrupted Louise, passionately. "It is cruel and ignoble to wish to buy our own good fortune at the cost of the misfortune of others. It is——"

"For heaven's sake, be still and listen," said Fritz Wendel, laying his hand upon her lips.

The conversation of the couple among the laurels had taken another turn.

"Is it really true?" whispered Laura, deeply sorrowful. "Are you betrothed to the Princess of Brunswick?"

"It is true," answered the prince. "There was no other way of keeping our secret than by acquiescing with apparent equanimity in the king's command. It will serve as a concealment for our love until we can reveal it to the whole world. And this, beloved, lies in your hands. Remember that you wear my ring upon your finger, are my bride."

"Yet you are betrothed to another, wear another betrothal ring upon your finger."

"But this princess to whom I am betrothed knows that I do not love her. I laid bare my heart before her. I told her that I shall never love another than yourself, shall never call another than Laura von Pannewitz my wife; and she was noble and generous enough to enter upon this masquerade and figure as my *fiancée* until our alliance no longer needs such protection. Therefore, Laura, I beg you, have the courage to defy the world and its prejudices. Come with me, my beloved, fly with me, decide to be my wife!"

He looked at her with such beseeching love that she had



not the courage to resist him decidedly. Her own heart appealed for him, and now, when she was in danger of losing him if she longer resisted, when he was the betrothed of another, the thought filled her with torturing jealousy; she was conscious now that it was easier to die than to renounce her love. Her noble, maidenly conscience gave her strength to master the tempting voices in her own heart. But when, driven to despair by her silence, her resistance, the prince finally burst into tears, accusing her of hardness, as she looked into his face full of pain and sorrow, she no longer found courage to withstand him, and, throwing herself into his arms, whispered:

"Take me, take me! From this moment I am wholly thine forever. I take thee to be my husband. Thy will shall be mine. What thou wilt shall be. To the ends of the earth will I follow thee, and naught save death shall part us!"

"God bless you, my beloved—God bless you for this decision!"

Fritz Wendel pressed Louise to his heart, whispering:

"Louise, you say Laura is an angel of virtue and purity, and still she has not the cruel courage longer to withstand her lover. Art thou less human than this tender, virtuous Laura? Oh, Louise, fly with me, marry me secretly, and then I will conceal thee in a place of safety and go make my own terms with those who would now reject my suit with scorn."

"I will do whatever she does," whispered Louise. "Now be still, and listen."

"Now, my Laura, listen well to every word," said Prince Augustus William, gravely. "I have made all the arrangements and preparations, and in a week you will be my wife. I have a good, trusty priest upon one of my estates who is wholly devoted to me. He has consented to perform our marriage ceremony. To him, therefore, we shall hasten when we leave Berlin, and when the union of our hearts has there received, by night, in the village church, the blessing of this father, when you have become my wife, a wagon will await us to bring us at courier speed to the Prussian border. I have a pass from the English ambassador, who is my devoted friend, and this will bring us, under an assumed name, safely to England. There my uncle, the King of England, will not refuse us his support and assistance, and with his mediation we shall bring about a reconciliation with my brother the king. When he sees that our union is indissoluble, he will give up the vain attempt to destroy it."

"But he can and will punish you for this action. He will

deprive you of your claim to the throne, and you will have to renounce your brilliant future for my sake."

"Let it be so," said the prince, with a smile. "I do not long for the crown, and would not sell my love for it. It is enough for me to reign in thy heart. If I can buy the undisputed possession of my beloved by renouncing the throne, I shall do it joyfully, and never experience one moment's regret."

"But how can I, a poor, insignificant girl, compensate for what you sacrifice for me?" asked Laura.

"You will love me, and that is more than compensation—that is reward. But you must hesitate no longer. You know our plan. All the preparations are made; do your part. Pastor Hartwig in Oranienburg will marry us. Send thither whatever you need, but without any comment. Your trunks will stand unopened. Next Tuesday, one week from to-day, the king gives a ball. You will keep your room two days in advance, complaining of serious illness. I shall accept the invitation, but not appear at the ball, for I shall be awaiting you at the palace gate at Montbijou. The ball begins at eight. At nine you leave your room and the palace, where I await you at the gate. A hundred steps thence there will be a wagon waiting to convey us to Oranienburg. In the village church, before the altar, the priest will await us, and the moment he has given us his blessing we shall depart for Hamburg, where a ship, provided by the English ambassador, lies ready to bring us to England. You see, dearest, every contingency is provided for. In a week, my Laura, in one short week!"

"In one week," she whispered. "I have no will of my own, I am wholly thine."

"Until then we shall not meet again, lest some trifling word arouse suspicion, and the spies by whom we are surrounded find some connection between my actions and thee. No word, no letter, no message, no sign shall pass between us; but next Tuesday, at nine o'clock sharp, I shall be at the palace door, and you will not let me wait in vain."

"No, I will not let you wait in vain," whispered Laura, with a rare blush, laying her cheek upon the heart of her beloved.

"And you, will you let me wait in vain?" asked Fritz Wendel, gazing into Louise's dreamy eyes.

"No, I will not let you wait in vain," replied Louise von Schwerin. "We, too, shall have our wagon, but we shall go a few hours earlier than the prince and his Laura. We, too, shall go to Oranienburg and await the princely pair before the



church door. We will tell him that we knew his secret, and did not betray it. Laura will plead for us, and the priest will marry two pairs instead of one. Then we will accompany the princely pair to London. As the prince sues for the king's pardon from the safe refuge of London, we will do the same with my family. It is a glorious plan. I shall have an elopement, a night wedding, a long journey. But what is that? Did you hear nothing? I thought I heard the outer door of the greenhouse open."

"Still, still," said Fritz Wendel. "Let us be on our guard."

The prince and Laura had heard the sound too, and were staring at the door, which opened, a tall female figure peering cautiously about.

"The queen!" whispered Laura, shuddering.

"My mother!" muttered the prince. His eye fell upon the grotto, and, pointing thither, he whispered: "Quick, quick, hide there. I will await my mother!"

The tall figure was approaching. The angry face and flashing eyes were already clearly discernible.

"Quick, quick, or we are lost!"

Laura darted through the shrubbery and reached the grotto, leaning, deathly pale and trembling, upon its inner wall. Blinded by the sudden darkness, her eye could distinguish nothing; her brain, still stunned with fright, was incapable of framing any thought.

Suddenly she heard a faint whisper. "Laura, dear Laura, fear nothing. We are true friends, who know your secret and would save you."

"Follow me, my Fräulein," whispered a second voice.

"Trust us as we trust you. We know your secret. You shall know ours. Give me your hand. I will lead you forth from here unseen, and you can return undiscovered to the palace."

Laura seemed stupefied, scarcely conscious. She felt herself drawn gently forward, saw a smiling, friendly, girlish face near her own, and recognized at last the little maid of honor, Louise von Schwerin.

"Louise," she asked, "what is the meaning of all this?"

"Hush," was the reply, "follow him. Go down the steps, so; I'll stay here and cover the retreat."

Fritz Wendel had vanished with Laura. Louise quickly covered the opening. Then she glided behind the Indian shrubbery at the opening of the grotto to watch what might happen further. It was, indeed, Queen Sophia Dorothea who had come to the greenhouse alone at this unwonted hour.

It was the time at which the ladies in waiting usually had entire freedom, the noon hour, when the queen habitually endeavored to make good the lost hours of the night's repose. But to-day she had not found the customary rest. Vexed at this, she had arisen and gone to the window, gazing dreamily into the empty garden that the winter was now wrapping in its shroud. After a moment she thought she saw a female figure walking rapidly down one of the *allées*. It was none of the palace servants, rather one of the ladies in waiting, and although Sophia Dorothea could not see her face, she was instantly convinced that it could be none other than Laura von Pannewitz on her way to a rendezvous with the unknown lover whom the queen, with endless endeavor, had nevertheless not succeeded in discovering. Her mind was quickly made up. She called her lady in waiting, put on furs and hood, declared herself overwhelmed by a sudden desire for a walk in the garden, declined all escort, and hastened to enter the path along which the figure had taken its way. She saw fresh footsteps in the snow, and, following them, reached the greenhouse. Without delay she entered it, to discover at last the secret of her maid of honor and stand before her as her condemning judge.

It was fortunate for the poor lovers that the daily increasing corpulence of the queen and her troublesome right foot made her gait a slow one. When, therefore, she reached the lower end of the greenhouse she found no one there but her son Augustus William, who, however, received her with such embarrassment that the queen clearly perceived that her arrival was not only unexpected, but most unwelcome.

She therefore sternly asked him the cause of his unusual visit to the greenhouse, and as he answered, with a smile, that he had been waiting for the queen to arise from her siesta before visiting her, she inquired, passionately: "And who, my son, gave you her society during your tedious waiting?"

"No one, dear mother," said the prince, but dared not meet his mother's piercing eyes.

"No one," she repeated. "But I heard voices when I entered the greenhouse."

"Your Majesty knows that I have inherited my father's habit of speaking to myself," replied the prince, with a forced smile.

"But the king, my husband, did not interrupt his soliloquy when anyone approached him," said the queen, angrily. "He had no secrets from me. When I came he continued, thus permitting me to share his innermost thoughts."



"The king, my exalted father, cherished great thoughts, worthy that Queen Sophia Dorothea should participate in them," said the prince, bowing reverently.

"God forbid that the thoughts of my son should be less worthy," cried the queen, with flaming eyes. "My son should at least be too proud to soil his lips with a lie, and when he has courage to do a wrong he should have courage to confess it, too."

"I do not understand you, dear mother," said the prince, meeting calmly the queen's penetrating stare. "I am conscious of no wrong and have no offence to confess."

"By heaven! this is an assurance that deserves to be unmasked!" cried the queen, who could no longer control the rising storm of indignation. "Know, my prince, that I am not deceived by your ease of manner. I know you were not alone; I myself saw a lady coming hither to give you her company until I should awake, and I followed her hither."

"Your Majesty seems to have followed a *Fata Morgana*," said the prince, with a constrained laugh, "for you see that I am alone." As he spoke his eye wandered involuntarily toward the grotto that concealed his secret.

Queen Sophia Dorothea caught the glance and grasped its meaning instantly. "There is no one in the greenhouse, but let us see whether there may not be someone in the grotto," she said, stepping rapidly in that direction. The prince seized her hand and held her back.

"I beseech you, mother, do not go too far. Remember that your suspicion is an insult for me, and your investigations place me in the position of a little boy."

The queen cast a wrathful look upon him. "I am upon my own property here," she said, repulsing his hand. "No one may limit my will here."

"Then, madame, I bow before your will," said the prince, decidedly; "I wished to spare you an irritation, but since your Majesty will have it so, come, and if trouble and sorrow follow, your Majesty, being inexorable, will find me determined. Let us go to the grotto."

He gave the queen his arm and led her to the grotto. She was disarmed by her son's decision, convinced in advance that she had really wronged him, and should find no one in the grotto. She turned to him with a kind smile to say some mollifying words, when she suddenly heard the light rustle of a dress behind the Indian shrubs and saw a white shimmer through the leaves.

"And you said I was deceived by a *Fata Morgana*, my son,"

said the queen, striding suddenly forward and raising her hand imperiously. "Come out, my *Fräulein*," she said, "and spare yourself and us the shame of being obliged to drag you out by force."

The queen had not been mistaken. There really was some movement behind the Indian shrubbery, and a female figure in white drapery now emerged and threw herself at the queen's feet.

"Mercy, your Majesty, mercy," she cried; "I am not to blame for intruding upon your Majesty. I fell asleep in the grotto and only awoke when your Majesty entered, and I could not escape. So I have been an involuntary witness of your interview. This is my whole offence."

The queen listened in amazement, while the prince gazed in utter horror at the kneeling figure thus presenting itself in the place of his beloved.

"This is not the voice of *Fräulein von Pannewitz*," said the queen, and, stepping back past the kneeling maid of honor into the brighter greenhouse, she added: "Stand up and come hither. I wish to see your face."

The lady arose and came forward. "*Louise von Schwerin*!" cried the queen and the prince in one breath, while the little maid folded her hands and said, with an appearance of childish innocence: "Oh! your Majesty, have mercy upon me! I was so very tired after the ball, I came out here to sleep a little, though I had not forgotten that your Majesty prefers not to have us come alone to the greenhouse."

Sophia Dorothea did not deign to look at her; her eyes rested with a forbidding, contemptuous expression upon her son.

"I really thought better of you," she said. "To lead a child astray is a very easy, but a very contemptible, action for a royal prince."

"Mother," he cried, horrified, "do not believe——"

"I believe what I see," interrupted the queen. "Make an end of your protestations of innocence and bow before the truth, which condemns you in spite of your denials. As to you, my *Fräulein*, I command you to follow me and obey my commands implicitly. Assume your wonted cheerful expression. My court shall not learn of this scandal and read your guilt in your terrified looks. I shall see to it that you do not betray yourself in words. Come!"

The prince stared after them in blank amazement. "Well, however this riddle may solve itself," he murmured, "*Laura* is safe, and in a week we shall be gone."