

he hears of his cruel sufferings he will certainly strive to deliver him. General Riedt is exactly the man to effect this great object; he is thoroughly acquainted with all the by-ways and intrigues of the court of Vienna. Maria Theresa classes him among her most trusted confidants and friends. Whoever desires to free Trenck must consult with General Riedt and win him."

Amelia raised her head and looked up quickly at the stranger; his eyes were fixed upon her with a searching and significant expression; their glances met and were steadily fixed for one moment, then a scarcely perceptible smile flitted over the face of the jeweller, and the princess nodded her head. Each felt that they were understood.

"Have you nothing more to say?" said Amelia.

"No, your highness, I have only to beg you will pardon me for not selling you this cup. I must take it to General Riedt."

"Leave it with me," said Amelia, after a few moments' reflection. "I myself will show it to him and seek to interest him in the fate of his unhappy relative. If I succeed, the cup is mine, and you will not wish to sell it to General Riedt. Do you agree to this? Go, then, and return to me at this hour to-morrow, when I will either pay you the price of the cup, or return it to you, if I am so unhappy as to fail."

The jeweller bowed profoundly. "I will punctually obey your highness's commands. To-morrow at this hour I will be here."

The stranger took his casket and left the room. The princess gazed after him till the door closed.

"That man is silent and discreet, I believe he can be trusted," she murmured. "I will write at once, and desire an interview with General Riedt."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRINCESS AND THE DIPLOMAT.

AN hour later the page of the princess announced General von Riedt, Austrian ambassador at the court of Berlin. Amelia advanced to meet him, and gazed with a sharp, piercing glance at the general, who bowed respectfully before her.

"I have sent for you, general," said the princess, "to repair an injury. You have been announced twice, and both times I declined receiving you."

"That was no injury, your royal highness," said the general,

smiling. "I ventured to call on you because etiquette demands that a new ambassador should introduce himself to every member of the royal house. Your royal highness declined to receive me, it was not agreeable, and you were perfectly justifiable in closing your doors against me."

"And now you must wonder why I have sent for you?"

"I never allow myself to wonder. Your order for me to come has made me happy—that is sufficient."

"You have no suspicion why I sent for you?"

"Your royal highness has just informed me you kindly wished to indemnify me for my two former visits."

"You are a good diplomatist; you turn quickly about, are as smooth as an eel, cannot be taken hold of, but slip through one's fingers. I am accustomed to go at once to the point—I cannot diplomatize. See here, why I wished to see you—I wished to show you this cup."

She took the cup hastily from the table, and gave it to the ambassador. He gazed at it long and earnestly; he turned it around, looking at every picture, reading every verse. Amelia watched him keenly, but his countenance betrayed nothing. He was as smiling, as unembarrassed as before. When he had looked at it attentively, he placed it on the table.

"Well, what do you think of the workmanship?" said Amelia.

"It is wonderful, worthy of an artist, your royal highness."

"And do you know by what artist it was made?"

"I suspect it, your royal highness."

"Give me his name?"

"I think he is called Frederick von Trenck."

"It is so, and if I do not err, he is your relative?"

"My distant relative—yes, your royal highness."

"And can you bear to have your relative in chains? Does not your heart bleed for his sufferings?"

"He suffers justly, I presume, or he would not have been condemned."

"Were he the greatest criminal that lived, it would still be a crime to make him suffer perpetually. A man's sleep is sacred, be he a criminal or a murderer. Let them kill the criminal, but they should not murder sleep. Look at this picture, general; look at this prisoner lying upon the hard floor; he has been torn from his dreams of freedom and happiness by the rough voice of the soldier standing at his door. Read the verse beneath it—is not every word of it bathed in tears? Breathes there not a cry of terror throughout so fearful, so unheard-of, that it must resound in every breast? And you, his relative, you will not hear him? You will do nothing

to free this unfortunate man from his prison? You, the Austrian ambassador, suffer an officer of your empress to remain a prisoner in a strange land, without a trial, without a hearing."

"When my empress sent me here, she gave me her instructions, and she informed me of the extent and character of my duties. She did not request me to exert myself for the release of this unfortunate prisoner, that is entirely beyond my sphere of action, and I must be discreet."

"You must be careful and discreet when the life of a man, a relative, is concerned? You have, then, no pity for him?"

"I pity him deeply, your royal highness, but can do nothing more."

"Perhaps not you! Perhaps another! Perhaps I?"

"I do not know if your royal highness interests herself sufficiently in the prisoner to work for him."

"You know not whether I interest myself sufficiently in Trenck to serve him," cried Amelia, with a harsh laugh. "You well know it; the whole world knows it; no one dares speak of it aloud, for fear of the king's anger; but it is whispered throughout the whole land why Trenck languishes in prison. You, you alone, should be ignorant of it! Know, then, that Trenck is imprisoned because I love him! Yes, general, I love him! Why do you not laugh, sir? Is it not laughable to hear an old, wrinkled, broken-down creature speak of love—to see a wan, trembling form, tottering to her grave on a prop of love? Look at this horribly disfigured countenance. Listen to the rough, discordant voice that dares to speak of love, and then laugh, general, for I tell you I love Trenck. I love him with all the strength and passion of a young girl. Grief and age have laid a fearful mask upon my countenance, but my heart is still young, there burns within it an undying, a sacred flame. My thoughts, my desires are passionate and youthful, and my every thought, my every desire is for Trenck. I could tell you of all the agony, all the despair I have endured for his sake, but it would be useless. There is no question of my sufferings, but of his who through me has lost his youth and his freedom—his all! Nine years he has lain in prison; for nine years my one aim has been to release him. My existence, my soul, my heart, are bound up in his prison walls. I only live to release him. Though I have ceased to look for human assistance, my heart still prays earnestly to God for some way of escape. If you know any such, general, show it to me, and were it strewed with thorns and burning irons, I would wander upon it in my bare feet."

She raised her hands and fixed an imploring glance upon the general, who had listened to her in silence. When she had ceased

speaking, he raised his head and looked at her. Amelia could have cried aloud for joy, for two bright, precious tears gleamed in his eye.

"You weep," cried she; "you have some pity."

The general took her hand, and kneeling reverentially before her he said: "Yes, I weep, but not over you. I weep over your great, self-sacrificing soul. I do not pity you—your grief is too great, too sacred—it is above pity. But I bow profoundly before you, for your suffering is worthy of all reverence. To me you appear much more beautiful than all the women of this court who dance giddily through life. It is not the diplomatist but the man who kneels before you and offers you his homage."

Gently Amelia bade him rise. With a sweet, happy smile upon her lip she thanked him for his sympathy, and hoped they would be good friends and counsel with each other.

The general was silent for a few moments. "The feelings of the empress must be worked upon—she must intercede with King Frederick for Trenck. He cannot refuse her first request."

"Will you undertake to effect this?" said Amelia, hastily. "Will you intercede for your unfortunate relative?"

"I had done so long ago had it been possible. Alas, I dared not. Trenck is my relative—my request would, therefore, have been considered as that of a prejudiced person. My exalted empress possesses so strong a sense of right that it has become a rule of hers never to fulfil a request made by any of her own intimate and confidential friends for their families or relatives. She would have paid no attention to my request for Trenck's release. Moreover, I would have made enemies of a powerful and influential party at court—with a party whose wish it is that Trenck may never be released, because he would then come and demand an account of the gold, jewels, and property left him by his cousin, the colonel of the pandours, thus causing a great disturbance amongst several noble families at court. These families are continually filling the ear of the empress with accusations against the unfortunate prisoner, well knowing that he cannot defend himself. You must appear to have forgotten that poor Trenck is languishing in prison while his property is being guarded by stewards who pay themselves for their heavy labor with the old colonel's money. It is dangerous, therefore, to meddle with this wasp's nest. To serve Trenck, the interceder must be so harmless and insignificant that no one will consider it worth while to watch him, so that Trenck's enemies, not suspecting him, can place no obstacles in his path."

"Lives there such a one?" said the princess.

"Yes, your royal highness."

"Where is he? What is his name? What is he?"

"The fireman in the apartments of the empress. He is a poor Savoyard, without name, without rank, without position, but with credit and influence."

"A fireman?" cried the princess, with amazement.

"An old, ugly, deformed fellow, called by the other servants Gnome because of his stubborn silence, his want of sociability, his rough manner and voice, his caring for nothing but his service, which he performs with great method. Every morning at six he enters her majesty's apartment, makes the fire, throws back the curtain to admit the light, arranges the chairs, and then withdraws without the least noise. All this he does without committing the slightest indiscretion; always the same; never lingering beyond his time—never leaving before. He is like a clock that maintains always the same movement and sound. The empress, accustomed for thirty years to see him enter daily her apartments, has become used to his homeliness, and often in the kindness of her heart enters into conversation with him. His answers are always laconic, in a tone of perfect indifference—at times *brusque*, even harsh—but they have a sensible and often a deep meaning. When the empress speaks with him, he does not cease his work for a moment, and when he has finished he does not remain a minute longer, but goes without asking if she desires to continue the conversation. For thirty years he has had the same duties and has fulfilled them in the same manner. He has never been accused of a mistake—he has never been guilty of inquisitiveness or intrigue. Thus the empress has great and firm confidence in him. She is so convinced of his truth, disinterestedness, and probity, that he has gained a sort of influence over her, and as she knows that he is to be won neither by gold, flattery, promises of position and rank, she constantly asks his opinion on matters of importance, and not seldom is biassed by its strong, sensible tone."

"But if this man is so honest and disinterested, how are we to influence him?"

"We must seek to win his heart and his head. He must become interested in the fate of the unfortunate prisoner—he must become anxious for his release. When we have done this much, we can question his self-interest and offer him gold."

"Gold? This wonder of probity and truth is susceptible to bribes?"

"He never has, perhaps never may be. He himself has no desires, no necessities; but he has one weakness—his daughter. She is a young and lovely girl, whom he, in his dark distrust of all at court in the form of men, has had educated in a convent far from

Vienna. She is now living with some respectable family in Vienna, but she never visits him, never enters the castle to inquire for him for fear she should be seen by some of the court gentlemen. This girl has now formed an attachment to a young doctor. They would like to marry, but he has no practice, she no money. Her father has saved nothing, but spent all his wages on her education, and has no dowry for his daughter."

"And he intends to plead with the empress for this dower?"

"If such a thought came to him he would put it away with contempt, for his only ambition consists in making no requests, receiving no gifts from the empress. Nor would he now act for this gold alone contrary to his idea of right, were his daughter to die of sorrow. As I said before, his heart and head must first be won, then only must we speak of reward."

"If this man has a heart, we cannot fail to win it when we tell him all that Trenck has suffered and still endures," cried the princess. "The agony and despair that have been heaped upon the head of one poor mortal will surely touch both head and heart. When we have succeeded, we will give his daughter a handsome dower. God has so willed it that I am right rich now, and can fulfil my promises. My pension as abbess and my salary as princess were both paid in yesterday. There is a little fortune in my desk, and I shall add more to it. Do you think four thousand louis d'or will be sufficient to win the Savoyard's heart?"

"For any other it would be more than sufficient; but to win this honest heart, your offer is not too great."

"But is it enough?"

"It is."

"Now, all that we need is some sure, cunning messenger to send to him; a man whose heart and head, soul and body are bound up in the cause he advocates. General, where shall we find such a man?"

General Riedt laughed. "I thought your royal highness had already found him."

The princess looked at him in amazement.

"Ah," cried she, "the jeweller; the man who brought me the cup; who referred me to you in so wise and discreet a manner."

"I think you desired him to return early to-morrow morning?"

"How do you know that? Are you acquainted with him?"

General Riedt bowed smilingly. "I ventured to send him to your royal highness."

"Ah! I now understand it all, and must acknowledge that the jeweller is as great a negotiator as you are a diplomatist. The cup I showed you, you sent to me?"

"I received it from the Governor of Magdeburg, the Landgrave of Hesse; as I could do nothing with it, I ventured to send it to your royal highness."

"And I thank you, general, for sending it in so discreet, so wise a manner. We may, perhaps, succeed in keeping all this secret from my brother, so that he cannot act against us. Hasten away, general, and give the jeweller, or whatever else he may be, his instructions. Send him to me early in the morning for his reward."*

CHAPTER VII.

THE ROYAL HOUSE-SPY.

THE next morning, a carriage drew up before the garden of Sans-Souci, and a gentleman, in a glittering, embroidered court uniform, crept out slowly and with much difficulty. Coughing and murmuring peevish words to himself, he slipped into the *allée* leading to the terraces. His back was bent, and from under the three-cornered hat, ornamented with rich gold lace, came sparsely, here and there, a few silver hairs. Who could have recognized, in this doubled-up, decrepit form, now with tottering knees creeping up the terrace, the once gay, careless, unconcerned grand-master of ceremonies, Baron von Pöllnitz? Who could have supposed that this old weather-beaten visage, deformed with a thousand wrinkles, once belonged to the dashing cavalier? And yet, it was even so. Pöllnitz had grown old, and his back was bowed down under the yoke which the monster Time lays at last upon humanity; but his spirit remained unchanged. He had preserved his vivacity, his malice, his egotism. He had the same passion for gold—much gold; not, however, to hoard, but to lavish. His life was ever divided between base covetousness and thoughtless prodigality. When he had revelled and gormandized through the first days of every month, he was forced, during the last weeks, to suffer privation and hunger, or to borrow from those who were good-natured and credulous enough to lend him. There was also one other source of revenue which the adroit courtier knew how to use to his advantage. He was a splendid *écarte* player; and, as it was his duty, as grand-master of ceremonies, to provide amusements for the court, to choose places and partners for the card-tables, he always arranged it so as to bring himself in contact with wealthy and eager card-players, from some of whom

* The princess succeeded in winning the influence of the fireman. How he succeeded with the empress, can be seen in "Thiébauld's Souvenirs de Vingt Ans," vol. iv.

he could win, and from others borrow a few louis d'or. Besides this, since the return of the king, Pöllnitz had voluntarily taken up his old trade of spy, and informed Frederick of all he saw and heard at court; for this, from time to time, he demanded a small reward.

"Curious idea," he said, as, puffing and blowing, he clambered up the terrace. "Curious idea to live in this wearisome desert, when he has respectable and comfortable castles in the midst of the city, and on a level plain. One might truly think that the king, even in life, wishes to draw nearer to heaven, and withdraws from the children of man, to pray and prepare himself for paradise."

The baron laughed aloud; it seemed to him a droll idea to look at the king as a prayerful hermit. This conception amused him, and gave him strength to go onward more rapidly, and he soon reached the upper platform of the terrace, upon which the castle stood. Without difficulty, he advanced to the antechamber, but there stood Deesen, and forbade him entrance to the king.

"His majesty holds a cabinet council," said he, "and it is expressly commanded to allow no one to enter."

"Then I will force an entrance," said Pöllnitz, stepping boldly to the door. "I must speak to his majesty; I have something most important to communicate."

"I think it cannot be more important than that which now occupies the king's attention," said the intrepid Deesen. "I am commanded to allow no one to enter; I shall obey the order of the king."

"I am resolved to enter," said Pöllnitz, in a loud voice; but Deesen spread his broad figure threateningly before the door. An angry dispute arose, and Pöllnitz made his screeching voice resound so powerfully, he might well hope the king would hear him, and in this he was not deceived; the king heard and appeared at once upon the threshold.

"Pöllnitz," said he, "you are and will always be an incorrigible fool; you are crowing as loud as a Gallic cock, who is declaring war against my people. I have made peace with the Gauls, mark that, and do not dare again to crow so loud. What do you want? Do your creditors wish to cast you in prison, or do you wish to inform me that you have become a Jew, and wish to accept some lucrative place as Rabbi?"

"No, sire, I remain a reformed Christian, and my creditors will never take the trouble to arrest me; they know that would avail nothing. I come on most grave and important matters of business, and I pray your majesty to grant me a private audience."

Frederick looked sternly at him. "Listen, Pöllnitz, you are still a long-winded and doubtful companion, notwithstanding your seventy-six years. Deliberate a moment; if that which you tell me is