

Gentz laughed. "Indeed, he is right," he exclaimed; "that is the end of wedded life. But, thank God, mine is over, and, I swear by all my hopes, never will I be such a fool as to marry again! I shall remain a bachelor as long as I live; for he who belongs to no woman owns all women. It is time, however, to think of to-night's banquet. But in order to give a banquet, I must first procure new furniture for my rooms, and this time I won't have any but beautiful and costly furniture. And how shall I get it? Ah, *parbleu*, I forgot the six hundred dollars I received from the minister. I shall buy furniture for that sum. No, that would be very foolish, inasmuch as I greatly need it for other purposes. The furniture dealers, I have no doubt, will willingly trust me, for I never yet purchased any thing of them. Unfortunately, I cannot say so much in regard to him who is to furnish me the wines and delicacies for the supper, and I have only one hundred dollars in my pocket. The other five hundred dollars I must send to that bloodsucker, that heartless creditor Werner. But must I do so? Ah! really, I believe it would be rank folly. The fellow would think he had frightened me, and as soon as I should owe him another bill, he would again besiege my door, and raise a fresh disturbance here. No; I will show him that I am not afraid of him, and that his impudent conduct deserves punishment. Oh, John! John!"

The door was opened immediately, and the footman entered.

"John," said Gentz, gravely, "go at once to Mr. Werner. Tell him some friends are coming to see me to-night. I therefore want him to send me this evening twenty-four bottles of champagne, three large *pâtés de foie gras*, two hundred oysters, and whatever is necessary for a supper. If he should fill my order promptly and carefully, he can send me to-morrow a receipt for two hundred dollars, and I will pay him the money. But if a single oyster should be bad, if a single bottle of champagne should prove of poor quality, or if he should dare to decline furnishing me with the supper, he will not get a single *groschen*. Go and tell him that, and be back as soon as possible."

"Meantime, I will write a few invitations," said Gentz, as soon as he was alone. "But I shall invite none but unmarried men. In the first place, the Austrian minister, Prince von Reuss. This gentleman contents himself with one mistress, and as he fortunately does not suspect that the beautiful Marianne Meier is at the same time *my* mistress, he is a great friend of mine. Yes, if he knew that—ah!" he interrupted himself, laughing, "that would be another illustration of La Fontaine's fable of the two cocks and the hen. Well, I will now write the invitations."

He had just finished the last note when the door opened, and John entered, perfectly out of breath.

"Well, did you see Mr. Werner?" asked Gentz, folding the last note.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Werner sends word that he will furnish the supper promptly and satisfactorily, and will deliver here to-night twenty-four bottles of his best champagne, three large *pâtés de foie gras*, two hundred oysters, etc., but only on one condition."

"What! the fellow actually dares to impose conditions?" exclaimed Gentz, indignantly. "What is it he asks?"

"He asks you, sir, when he has delivered every thing you have ordered, and before going to supper, to be kind enough to step out for a moment into the anteroom, where Mr. Werner will wait for you in order to receive there his two hundred dollars. I am to notify him if you accept this condition, and if so, he will furnish the supper."

"Ah, that is driving me to the wall," exclaimed Gentz, laughing. "Well, go back, to the shrewd fellow and tell him that I accept his conditions. He is to await me in the anteroom, and as he would, of course, make a tremendous noise in case I should disappoint him, he may be sure that I shall come. So go to him, John."

"As for myself," said Gentz, putting on his cloak, "I shall go and purchase several thousand dollars' worth of furniture; my rooms shall hereafter be as gorgeous as those of a prince. By the by, I believe I have been too generous. If I had offered Werner one hundred dollars, he would have contented himself with that sum."

CHAPTER XV.

THE WEDDING.

At the house of the wealthy banker Itzig a rare festival took place to-day, a festival which all Berlin had been talking of for the last few days, and which had formed the topic of conversation, no less among the people on the streets, than among the aristocratic classes in their palatial mansions. To-day the wedding of three of his beautiful young daughters was to take place, and the rich, ostentatious, and generous gentleman had left nothing undone in order to celebrate this gala-day in as brilliant and imposing a manner as possible. All the manufacturers of Berlin had been employed for months to get up the *trousseaux* of his daughters, for he had declared that they should wear exclusively the productions of German

industry, and that not a single piece of their new household goods should be of French manufacture. Hence, all the gorgeous brocades, velvets, and laces for their dresses and furniture had been woven in Berlin manufactories; the most magnificent linen had been ordered from Silesia, and a host of milliners and seamstresses had got up every thing required for the wardrobe of the young ladies, in the most skilful and artistic manner. Even the plate and costly jewelry had been manufactured by Berlin jewellers, and the rich and exquisitely painted china had been purchased at the royal *Porzellan-fabrik*. These three *trousseaux*, so beautiful and expensive, had been, as it were, a triumph of home art and home industry, and for this reason they excited general attention. Herr Itzig had finally, though very reluctantly, yielded to the urgent entreaties of his friends and admitted the public to the rooms and halls of his house in which the *trousseaux* of his daughters were displayed. However, in order not to lay himself open to the charge of boastful ostentation, he had tried to impart a useful and charitable character to this exhibition. He had fixed a tablet over the entrance to those rooms, bearing the inscription of "Exhibition of Productions of Home Industry;" in addition, every visitor had to buy a ticket of admission for a few *groschen*, the proceeds to be distributed among the poor.

Every one hastened to the banker's house in order to admire the "productions of home industry." Even the queen had come with one of her ladies of honor to inspect the gorgeous display, and while admiring the magnificence of the silks and velvets and the artistic setting of the diamonds, she had exclaimed joyfully: "How glad I am to see that Germany is really able to do entirely without France, and to satisfy all her wants from her own resources!"

The queen had uttered these words perhaps on the spur of the moment, but the public imparted to them a peculiar meaning and tendency; and the newspapers, the organs of public opinion, never tired of praising the royal words, and of admonishing the inhabitants of Berlin to visit the patriotic exhibition at the banker's house. Curiosity, moreover, stimulated the zeal of the ladies, while political feeling caused the male part of the population to appear at the exhibition. But when it became known that the French embassy had taken umbrage at the zeal manifested by the people of Berlin, and that the French minister had even dared at the royal table to complain loudly and bitterly of the words uttered by the queen in Herr Itzig's house, the indignation became general, and the visits to the exhibition assumed the character of a national demonstration against the overbearing French. Hosts of spectators now hastened to Herr Itzig's house, and gay, mischievous young men took

pleasure in stationing themselves in groups in the street on which the French minister was living, right in front of the house, in order to converse loudly in the French language about the rare attractions of the banker's exhibition, and to praise the noble patriot who disdained to buy abroad what he could get at home just as well, if not better.

The success of his exhibition, however, far exceeded the wishes of the banker, and he was glad when the days during which the exhibition was to continue were at an end, so that he could exclude the inquisitive visitors from his house.

But to-day the house was to be opened to the invited guests, for to-day, as we stated before, Herr Itzig was going to celebrate simultaneously the wedding of three of his beautiful daughters, and the whole place was astir with preparations for a becoming observance of the gala-day.

While the footmen and other servants, under the direction of skilful artists, were engaged in gorgeously decorating the parlors and halls; while a hundred busy hands in the kitchen and cellar were preparing a sumptuous repast; while Herr Itzig and wife were giving the last directions for the details of the festival, the three brides were chatting confidentially in their own room. All of them were quite young yet, the eldest sister having scarcely completed her twenty-first year. They were very beautiful, and theirs was the striking and energetic beauty peculiar to the women of the Orient—that beauty of flaming black eyes, glossy black hair, a glowing olive complexion, and slender but well-developed forms. They wore a full bridal costume; their bare, beautifully rounded arms and necks were gorgeously adorned with diamonds and other precious stones; their tall and vigorous figures were clad in white silk dresses, trimmed with superb laces. He who would have seen them thus in the full charm of beauty, grace, and youth, in their magnificent costumes, and with delicate myrtle-crowns on their heads, would have believed he beheld three favorite daughters of Fate, who had never known care and grief, and upon whose heads happiness had poured down an uninterrupted sunshine.

Perhaps it was so; perhaps it was only the beautiful myrtle-crowns that cast a shadow over the faces of the three brides, and not their secret thoughts—their silent wishes.

They had eagerly conversed for a while, but now, however, they paused and seemed deeply absorbed. Finally, one of them slowly raised her glowing black eyes and cast a piercing glance upon her sisters. They felt the magic influence of this glance, and raised their eyes at the same time.

"Why do you look at us so intently, Fanny?" they asked.

"I want to see if I can read truth on your brow," said Fanny; "or if the diamonds and the myrtle-crowns conceal every thing. Girls, suppose we take off for a moment the shining but lying masks with which we adorn ourselves in the eyes of the world, and show to each other our true and natural character? We have always lied to each other. We said mutually to each other: 'I am happy. I am not jealous of you, for I am just as happy as you.' Suppose we now open our lips really and tell the truth about our hearts? Would not it be novel and original? Would it not be an excellent way of whiling away these few minutes until our betrothed come and lead us to the altar? See, this is the last time that we shall be thus together—the last time that we bear the name of our father; let us, therefore, for once tell each other our true sentiments. Shall we do so?"

"Yes," exclaimed the two sisters. "But about what do you want us to tell you the truth?"

"About our hearts," replied Fanny, gravely. "Esther, you are the eldest of us three. You must commence. Tell us, therefore, if you love your betrothed, Herr Ephraim?"

Esther looked at her in amazement. "If I love him?" she asked. "Good Heaven! how should I happen to love him? I scarcely know him. Father selected him for me; it is a brilliant match; I shall remain in Berlin; I shall give splendid parties and by my magnificent style of living greatly annoy those ladies of the so-called *haute volée*, who have sometimes dared to turn up their noses at the 'Jewesses.' Whether I shall be able to love Ephraim, I do not know; but we shall live in brilliant style, and as we shall give magnificent dinner-parties, we shall never lack guests from the most refined classes of society. Such are the prospects of my future, and although I cannot say that I am content with them, yet I know that others will deem my position a most enviable one, and that is at least something."

"The first confession!" said Fanny, smiling. "Now it is your turn, Lydia. Tell us, therefore, do you love Baron von Eskeles, your future husband?"

Lydia looked at her silently and sadly. "Do not ask me," she said, "for you and Esther know very well that I do not love him. I once had a splendid dream. I beheld myself an adored wife by the side of a young man whom I loved and who loved me passionately. He was an artist, and when he was sitting at his easel, he felt that he was rich and happy, even without money, for he had his genius and his art. When I was looking at his paintings, and at the handsome and inspired artist himself, it seemed to me there was but one road to happiness on earth: to belong to that man, to love him, to

serve him, and, if it must be, to suffer and starve with him. It was a dream, and father aroused me from it by telling me that I was to marry Baron von Eskeles, that he had already made an agreement with the baron's father, and that the wedding would take place in two weeks."

"Poor Lydia!" murmured the sisters.

A pause ensued. "Well," asked Esther, "and you, Fanny? You examine us and say nothing about yourself. What about your heart, my child? Do you love your betrothed, Baron von Arnstein, the partner of Eskeles, your future brother-in-law? You are silent? Have you nothing to say to us?"

"I have to say to you that we are all to be pitied and very unhappy," said Fanny, passionately. "Yes, to be pitied and very unhappy, notwithstanding our wealth, our diamonds, and our brilliant future! We have been sold like goods; no one has cared about the hearts which these goods happen to have, but every one merely took into consideration how much profit he would derive from them. Oh, my sisters, we rich Jewesses are treated just in the same manner as the poor princesses; we are sold to the highest bidder. And we have not got the necessary firmness, energy, and independence to emancipate ourselves from this degrading traffic in flesh and blood. We bow our heads and obey, and, in the place of love and happiness, we fill our hearts with pride and ostentation, and yet we are starving and pining away in the midst of our riches."

"Yes," sighed Lydia, "and we dare not even complain! Doomed to eternal falsehood, we must feign a happiness we do not experience, and a love we do not feel."

"I shall not do so!" exclaimed Fanny, proudly. "It is enough for me to submit to compulsion, and to bow my head; but never shall I stoop so low as to lie."

"What! you are going to tell your husband that you do not love him?" asked the sisters.

"I shall not say that to my *husband*, but to my *betrothed* as soon as he makes his appearance."

"But suppose he does not want to marry a girl who does not love him?"

"Then he is the one who breaks off the match, not I, and father cannot blame me for it. But do you not hear footsteps in the hall? It is my betrothed. I begged him to be here a quarter of an hour previous to the commencement of the ceremony, because I desired to speak to him about a very serious matter. He is coming. Now pray go to the parlor, and wait for me there. I shall rejoin you, perhaps alone, and in that case I shall be free; perhaps, however, Arnstein will accompany me, and in that eventuality he will have

accepted the future as I am going to offer it to him. Farewell, sisters; may God protect us all."

"May God protect *you!*" said Lydia, tenderly embracing her sister. "You have a courageous and strong soul, and I wish mine were like yours."

"Would that save you, Lydia?" asked Fanny, sharply. "Courage and energy are of no avail in our case; in spite of our resistance, we should have to submit and to suffer. He is coming."

She pushed her sisters gently toward the parlor door, and then went to meet her betrothed, who had just entered.

"Mr. Arnstein," said Fanny, giving him her hand, "I thank you for complying so promptly with my request."

"A business man is always prompt," said the young baron, with a polite bow.

"Ah, and you treat this interview with me likewise as a business affair?"

"Yes, but as a business affair of the rarest and most exquisite character. A conference with a charming young lady is worth more than a conference with the wealthiest business friend, even if the interview with the latter should yield a profit of one hundred per cent."

"Ah, I believe you want to flatter me," said Fanny, closely scanning the small and slender figure and the pale face of the baron.

He bowed with a gentle smile, but did not raise his eyes toward her. Fanny could not help perceiving that his brow was slightly clouded.

"Baron," she said, "I have begged you to come and see me, because I do not want to go to the altar with a lie on my soul. I will not deceive God and yourself, and therefore I now tell you, frankly and sincerely, I do not love you, baron; only my father's will gives my hand to you!"

There was no perceptible change in the young baron's face. He seemed neither surprised nor offended.

"Do you love another man?" he asked quietly.

"No, I love no one!" exclaimed Fanny.

"Ah, then, you are fortunate indeed," he said, gloomily. "It is by far easier to marry with a cold heart, than to do so with a broken one; for the cold heart may grow warm, but the broken one never."

Fanny's eyes were fixed steadfastly on his features.

"Mr. Arnstein," she exclaimed, impetuously, "you do not love me either!"

He forced himself to smile. "Who could see you—you, the proud, glorious beauty—without falling in love with you?" he exclaimed, emphatically.

"Pray, no empty flatteries," said Fanny, impatiently. "Oh, tell me the truth! I am sure you do not love me!"

"I saw you too late," he said, mournfully; "if I had known you sooner, I should have loved you passionately."

"But now I am too late—and have you already loved another?" she asked, hastily.

"Yes, I love another," he said, gravely and solemnly. "As you ask me, I ought to tell you the truth. I love another."

"Nevertheless, you want to marry me?" she exclaimed, angrily.

"And you?" he asked, gently. "Do you love me?"

"But I told you already my heart is free. I love no one, while you—why don't you marry her whom you love?"

"Because I cannot marry her."

"Why cannot you marry her?"

"Because my father is opposed to it. He is the chief of our house and family. He commands, and we obey. He is opposed to it because the young lady whom I love is poor. She would not increase the capital of our firm."

"Oh, eternally, eternally that cold mammon, that idol to whom our hearts are sacrificed so ruthlessly!" exclaimed Fanny, indignantly. "For money we sell our youth, our happiness, and our love."

"I have not sold my love. I have sacrificed it," said Baron Arnstein, gravely; "I have sacrificed it to the interests of our firm. But in seeing you so charming and sublime in your loveliness and glowing indignation, I am fully satisfied already that I am no longer to be pitied, for I shall have the most beautiful and generous wife in all Vienna."

"Then you really want to marry me? You will not break off the match, although your heart belongs to another woman, and although you know that I do not love you?"

"My beautiful betrothed, let us not deceive each other," he said, smiling; "it is not a marriage, but a partnership we are going to conclude in obedience to the wishes of our fathers. In agreeing upon this partnership only our fortunes, but not our hearts, were thought of. The houses of Itzig, Arnstein, and Eskeles will flourish more than ever; whether the individuals belonging to these houses will wither is of no importance. Let us therefore submit to our fate, my dear, for we cannot escape from it. Would it be conducive to your happiness if I should break off the match? Your father would probably select another husband for you, perhaps in Poland or in Russia, and you would be buried with all the treasures of your beauty and accomplishments in some obscure corner of the world, while I shall take you to Vienna, to the great theatre of the world

—upon a stage where you will at least not lack triumphs and homage. And I? Why should I be such a stupid fool as to give you up—you who bring to me much more than I deserve—your beauty, your accomplishments, and your generous heart? Ah, I shall be the target of general envy, for there is no lady in Vienna worthy of being compared with you. As I cannot possess her whom I love, I may thank God that my father has selected you for me. You alone are to be pitied, Fanny, for I cannot offer you any compensation for the sacrifices you are about to make in my favor. I am unworthy of you; you are my superior in beauty, intellect, and education. I am a business man, that is all. But in return I have at least something to give—wealth, splendor, and a name that has a good sound, even at the imperial court. Let me, then, advise you as a friend to accept my hand—it is the hand of a friend who, during his whole life, will honestly strive to compensate you for not being able to give his love to you and to secure your happiness.”

He feelingly extended his hand to her, and the young lady slowly laid hers upon it.

“Be it so!” she said, solemnly; “I accept your hand and am ready to follow you. We shall not be a pair of happy lovers, but two good and sincere friends.”

“That is all I ask,” said Arnstien, gently. “Never shall I molest you with pretensions and demands that might offend your delicacy and be repugnant to your heart; never shall I ask more of you than what I hope I shall be able to deserve—your esteem and your confidence. Never shall I entertain the infatuated pretensions of a husband demanding from his wife an affection and fidelity he is himself unable to offer her. In the eyes of the world we shall be man and wife; but in the interior of your house you will find liberty and independence. There you will be able to gratify all your whims and wishes; there every one will bow to you and obey you. First of all, I shall do so myself. You shall be the pride, the glory and joy of my house, and secure to it a brilliant position in society. We shall live in princely style, and you shall rule as a queen in my house. Will that satisfy you? Do you accept my proposition?”

“Yes, I accept it,” exclaimed Fanny, with radiant eyes, “and I assure you no other house in Vienna shall equal ours. We will make it a centre of the best society, and in the midst of this circle which is to embrace the most eminent representatives of beauty, intellect, and distinction, we will forget that we are united without happiness and without love.”

“But there will be a day when your heart will love,” said Arnstien. “Swear to me that you will not curse me on that day because I shall then stand between you and your love. Swear to me that

you will always regard me as your friend, that you will have confidence in me, and tell me when that unhappy and yet so happy hour will strike, when your heart begins to speak.”

“I swear it to you!” said Fanny, gravely. “We will always be sincere toward each other. Thus we shall always be able to avert wretchedness, although it may not be in our power to secure happiness. And now, my friend, come, give me your arm and accompany me to the parlor where they are already waiting for us. Now, I shall no longer weep and mourn over this day, for it has given to me a friend, a brother!”

She took his arm and went with him to the parlor. A gentle smile was playing on her lips when the door was opened and they entered. With an air of quiet content she looked at her sisters, who were standing by the side of their betrothed, and had been waiting for her with trembling impatience.

“There is no hope left,” murmured Lydia; “she accepts her fate, too, and submits.”

“She follows my example,” thought Esther; “she consoles herself with her wealth and brilliant position in society. Indeed, there is no better consolation than that.”

At that moment the door opened, and the rabbi in his black robe, a skull-cap on his head, appeared on the threshold, followed by the precentor and sexton. Solemn silence ensued, and all heads were lowered in prayer while the rabbi was crossing the room in order to salute the parents of the brides.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARIANNE MEIER.

At that moment of silent devotion, no one took any notice of a lady who crossed the threshold a few seconds after the rabbi had entered. She was a tall, superb creature of wonderful beauty. Her black hair, her glowing eyes, her finely-curved nose, the whole shape of her face imparted to her some resemblance to Fanny Itzig, the banker's beautiful daughter, and indicated that she belonged likewise to the people who, scattered over the whole world, have with unshaken fidelity and constancy preserved everywhere their type and habits. And yet, upon examining the charming stranger somewhat more closely, it became evident that she bore no resemblance either to Fanny or to her sisters. Hers was a strange and peculiar style of beauty, irresistibly attractive and chilling at the same time—a tall, queenly figure, wrapped in a purple velvet dress,