

he said, "on taking leave of you, and being, perhaps, for the last time, so fortunate as to see your majesty, it is a comfort to me to remember the day when I beheld you first in the spring of the present year. It was at Kydullen, where your majesty showed to the King of Prussia your lifeguards that accompanied you from St. Petersburg to participate in the war against France. When the soldiers marched past you embraced King Frederick William, and exclaimed with tearful eyes: 'Neither of us shall fall alone; either both, or neither!' These words are still resounding in my ears, and in these disastrous days, when Prussia's honor and existence are at stake, they are my only consolation. Your majesty has not fallen, and hence, you will not allow Prussia to fall. You will remember your oath, the fidelity which Prussia has manifested toward you, and never so stain your glory as to desert her now and suffer her to fall alone! This is my hope, and, comforted by it, I leave you."

"Ah," said Alexander, sighing, "how unfortunate I am! You spoke at my right ear, and you know that there I am deaf. Hence, I did not hear much of what you said. But I believe you wished to take leave of me; I, therefore, bid you a heart-felt farewell, and wish you a happy journey." He offered his hand to Hardenberg, but the deep bow the minister made just then, prevented him, perhaps, from seeing the extended hand of the emperor; he did not grasp it, but withdrew in silence, walking backward to the door.

When he was about to go out, the queen rose from the sofa. "Hardenberg," she exclaimed, vehemently, "and you forget to bid *me* farewell?"

"Your majesty," said the minister, respectfully, "I await your permission to do so."

The queen hastened to him. Tears glistened in her eyes, and she said in a voice tremulous with emotion: "You know what I suffer in these times of humiliation, for you know my sentiments, which can never change—never prove faithless to the objects which we pursued together. A time of adversity compels us to bow our heads; but let us lift our hearts to God, and pray for better times. He will instil courage and patience into the souls of noble and true patriots, and teach them not to despair. Hardenberg, I believe in you, and so does Prussia. Work for the cause in private life, as you are unable to do so in public—prepare for the new era. This is my farewell—this the expression of my gratitude for your

fidelity. May God protect you, that you may be able again to be useful to our country! Whenever I pray for Prussia, I shall remember you! Farewell!" She offered him her hand, and as he bent to kiss it, he could not refrain from tears. He averted his head as if to conceal his emotion, and left the room.

Louisa looked at the king, who stood musing with folded arms. "Oh, my husband!" she exclaimed mournfully, "Napoleon robs you not only of your states, but of your most faithful friends and advisers. God save Prussia!"

CHAPTER XXX.

QUEEN LOUISA AND NAPOLEON.

THE queen had finished her toilet. For the first time during many months, she had adorned herself, and appeared again in regal pomp. A white satin dress, embroidered with gold, surrounded her tall and beautiful form, and fell behind her in a flowing train. A broad necklace of pearls and diamonds set off her superb neck; bracelets of the same kind encircled her arms, that might have served as a model for Phidias. A diadem of costly gems was glittering on her expansive forehead. It was a truly royal toilet, and in former days the queen herself would have rejoiced in it; but to-day no gladness was in her face—her cheeks were pallid, her lips quivering, and her eyes gloomy.

She contemplated her figure in the mirror with a mournful, listless air, and, turning to Madame von Berg, who had accompanied her to Puktupöhnen, and who was to be her companion on her trip to Tilsit, she said: "Caroline, when I look at myself, I cannot help shuddering, and my heart feels cold. I am adorned as the ancient Germans used to dress their victims, when they were about to throw them into the flames to pacify the wrath of their gods. I shall suffer the same fate. I shall die of the fire burning in my heart, yet I shall not be able to propitiate the idol that the world is worshipping. It will be all in vain! With a soul so crushed as mine, I am incapable of accomplishing any thing. But complaints are useless, I must finish what I have begun; I must—but hush! is not that the sound of wheels approaching this house?"

"Yes," said Madame von Berg, hastening to the window;

"it is a carriage—a brilliant court-carriage, drawn by eight horses, and escorted by French dragoons."

Louisa pressed her hands against her heart, and a low cry burst from her lips. "Oh," she whispered, "the dagger is again piercing my heart. Oh, how it aches!"

Owing to the noise with which the imperial coach had driven up Madame von Berg did not hear the last words of the queen. "Oh," she exclaimed joyfully, "the Emperor Napoleon really seems to be favorably disposed toward us. He takes pains at least to receive your majesty with the respect due to a queen. The carriage is magnificent, and the eight horses wear a harness of gold and purple. The French dragoons have on their gala-uniforms and are marching into line to present arms when your majesty appears. I begin to hope that I was mistaken in Napoleon; he will not humble her whom he receives with the splendor lavished on the most powerful crowned heads."

Louisa shook her head. "He has learned a lesson from the ancient Cæsars," she said. "When Zenobia adorned the triumphal procession of Aurelian, she was clad in robes of purple and gold; she stood on a gilded car, surrounded by servants, as it was due to a queen. But manacles were about her arms; she was, after all, but a prisoner, and the contrast of the chain with the royal pomp rendered only more striking the imperial triumph and her own humiliation. But, no matter! We must go through with it. Come, Caroline, give me my cloak." She wrapped herself in a small cloak of violet velvet, and casting a last imploring glance toward heaven, she left the room to drive to Tilsit.

At the hotel, where the king was staying, he received his consort and conducted her up-stairs to the room prepared for her. They said little; the immense importance of this hour made them taciturn; they spoke to each other only by glances, by pressing each other's hands, and by a few whispered words indicative of their profound anxiety and suspense. Scarcely fifteen minutes had elapsed when one of Napoleon's aides appeared, to inform her that the emperor was already on his way to see her. The king kissed his wife's hand. "Farewell, Louisa," he said, "and may God give you strength to meet your adversary!"

Louisa retained him. "You will not stay with me?" she asked, breathlessly. "You will leave me at this painful moment?"

"Etiquette requires me to do so," said the king. "You know very well that I care nothing for these empty forms; but it seems that Napoleon, to whom they are still new, deems them necessary for upholding the majesty of the new-fangled empire. The emperor pays a visit to the queen alone; hence, you must receive him alone. Only your lady of honor is allowed to remain in the adjoining room, the door of which will be left open. Napoleon's companion—Talleyrand, I believe—will also remain there. Farewell, Louisa; I shall come only when the emperor expressly asks for me. Do you hear the horses in front of the house? Napoleon is coming! I go." He nodded pleasantly, and left the room.

"Oh, my children!" muttered the queen; "I am doing this for you—for your sake I will speak and humble my heart!"

She heard the sound of footsteps on the staircase, and Madame von Berg appeared in the adjoining room to announce that his majesty the Emperor Napoleon was approaching. Louisa nodded, and, quickly crossing the anteroom, she went out into the corridor. Napoleon was just ascending the stairs. His face was illuminated with a triumphant expression, and a sinister fire was burning in his eyes, which he fixed on the queen with a strange mixture of curiosity and sympathy. Louisa looked at him calmly; a touching smile played on her lips; her beautiful face beamed with energy and courage, and an air of pious solemnity was visible in her whole appearance. Napoleon felt involuntarily moved in the presence of a lady so queen-like and yet so gentle, and bowed more respectfully to her than he had ever done to any other woman.

"Sire," said Louisa, conducting him into the room, "I am sorry that your majesty had to ascend so miserable a staircase."

"Oh," exclaimed Napoleon, "if the way leading to you was inconvenient, madame, the reward is so desirable that one would shrink from no trouble to obtain it."

"It seems there is nothing too inconvenient for your majesty," said the queen, gently. "Neither the sands of Egypt nor the snows of our north impede the career of the hero. And yet I should think our cold climate an obstacle difficult to overcome. Did your majesty not have this opinion sometimes last winter?"

"It is true," said Napoleon. "Your Prussia is somewhat cold. She is too close to Russia, and allows herself to be fanned too much by its icy breezes!"

Louisa feigned not to understand this allusion to the policy of Prussia, and, turning to the emperor, she requested him to take a seat on the sofa. Napoleon offered her his hand and conducted her to it. "Let us sit down," he said, with a tinge of irony. Turning to her, he added: "You have hated me so long that you ought to give me now a slight token of the change in your sentiments, and permit me to sit at your side." Bending over, he looked her full in the face and seemed to wait for her to renew the conversation.

The queen felt her heart tremble—that the critical moment had come, and she concentrated her courage and determination that that moment might not pass unimproved. She raised her eyes slowly, and, with an affecting expression, she said in a low, tremulous voice, "Will your majesty permit me to tell you why I have come hither?"

Napoleon nodded, and continued looking steadily at her.

"I have come," added the queen, "to beg your majesty to grant Prussia a more favorable peace. Sire, I use the word 'beg!' I will not speak of our rights, of our claims, but only of our misfortunes; I will only appeal to the generosity of your majesty, imploring you to lessen our calamities, and have mercy on our people!"

"The misfortunes we suffer are generally the consequences of our own faults," exclaimed Napoleon, harshly; "hence, we must endure what we bring upon ourselves. How could you dare to wage war against me?"

The queen raised her head, and her eyes flashed. "Sire," she said, quickly and proudly, "the glory of the great Frederick induced us to mistake our strength, if we were mistaken."

"You were mistaken, at least in your hopes that you could vanquish me," exclaimed Napoleon, sternly. But, as if struck by a sudden recollection, and meaning to apologize for his rudeness, he bowed, and added in a pleasant tone: "I refer to Prussia and not to you, queen. Your majesty is sure to vanquish every one. I was told that you were beautiful, and I find that you are the most charming lady in the world!"

"I am neither so vain as to believe that, nor so ambitious as to wish it," said the queen. "I have come hither as consort of the king, as mother of my children, and as representative of my people!"

"Ah," exclaimed Napoleon, politely, "Prussia may well be proud of so noble a representative."

"Sire, Prussia cannot be proud," replied the queen, sighing. "She weeps over her sons fallen on the fields of battle that brought laurels to you; to us nothing but defeat. She has lost her prosperity; her fields are devastated; her supplies consumed. She is looking despondingly toward the future, and all that remains to her is hope. Sire, let not this hope be in vain! Pardon us for not having feared your all-powerful genius and your victorious heroism! It was a terrible misfortune for us to have mistaken our strength; but we have been humbled for it. Let it be enough! You have made us feel the conqueror's hand; let us now feel and acknowledge your magnanimity! Your majesty cannot intend to trample in the dust those whom fortune has already so humbled. You will not take revenge for our errors—you will not deride and revile our majesty—for majesty, sire, is still enthroned on our heads. It is the sacred inheritance which we must bequeath to our children."

"Ah, your majesty will comprehend that I cannot feel much respect for such sacred inheritance," said Napoleon, sneeringly.

"But your majesty will respect our misfortunes," exclaimed Louisa. "Sire, adversity is a majesty, too, and consecrates its innocent children."

"Prussia has to blame none but herself for her calamities!" said Napoleon, vehemently.

"Does your majesty say so because we defended our country when we were attacked?" asked the queen, proudly. "Do you say so because, faithful to the treaties which we had sworn to observe, we refused to desert our ally for the sake of our own profit, but courageously drew the sword to protect his and our frontiers? Heaven decreed that we should not be victorious in this struggle, and our defeats became a new laurel-wreath for your brow. But now you will deem your triumphs sufficient, and will not think of taking advantage of our distress. I am told that your majesty has asked of the king, as the price of peace, the largest and best part of his states—that you intend taking from him his fortresses, cities, and provinces, leaving to him a crown without territory, a title without meaning—that you wish to distribute his subjects and provinces, and form of them new nations. But your majesty knows well that we cannot with impunity rob a people of their inalienable and noblest rights—of their nationality—give them arbitrary frontiers, and transform them into new

states. Nationality is a sentiment inherent in the human heart, and our Prussians have proud hearts. They love their king, their country—”

“And above all their august queen,” interrupted Napoleon, who wished to put an end to this appeal, and direct the conversation into less impetuous channels. “Oh, I know that all Prussia idolizes her beautiful queen, and henceforth I shall not wonder at it. Happy those who are permitted to bear your chains!”

She cast on him a glance so contemptuous that Napoleon shrank, and lowered his eyes. “Sire,” she said, “no one who bears chains is happy, and your majesty—who once said to the Italians, ‘You need not fear me, for I have come to break your chains and to deliver you from degrading servitude!’—will not now reduce a state to servitude. For to wrest it from its legitimate sovereign, and to compel it to submit to another prince is chaining it—to distribute a people like merchandise, is reducing them to slavery. Sire, I dare beg your majesty to leave us our nationality and our honor! I dare beg you in the name of my children to leave them their inheritance and their rights.”

“Their rights?” asked Napoleon. “Only he has them who knows how to maintain them. What do you call the rights of your children?”

“Sire, I refer to their birth, their name, and history. By their birth, God conferred on them the right to rule over Prussia. And the Prussian monarchy is rooted in the hearts of the people. Oh, your majesty, do not overthrow it! Honor in us the crown adorning your own victorious head! Sovereigns ought to respect each other, that their people may never lose the respect due to them; sovereigns ought to support and strengthen each other, to enable them to meet their enemies now carried away by the insane ideas of a so-called new era—ideas that brought the heads of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette to the scaffold. Sire, princes are not always safe, and harmony among them is indispensable; but it is not strengthening one’s own power to weaken that of others—it is not adding lustre to one’s own crown to tarnish another’s. O sire, in the name of all monarchies—nay, in the name of your own, now shedding so radiant a light over the whole world, I pray for our crown, our people, and our frontiers!”

“The Prussians,” said Napoleon, rising, “could not have found a more beautiful and eloquent advocate than your maj-

esty!” He paced the room several times, his hands folded behind him. The queen had also risen, but she stood still, and looked in breathless suspense at Napoleon, whose cold face seemed to warm a little with humane emotion. He approached, and fixed his eyes in admiration on her sad but noble countenance. “Your majesty,” he said, “I believe you have told me many things which no one hitherto has ventured to tell me—many things which might have provoked my anger—some bitter words, and prophetic threats have fallen from your lips. This proves that you at least respect my character, and that you believe I will not abuse the position to which the fortune of war has elevated me. I will not disappoint you, madame. I will do all I can to mitigate your misfortunes, and to let Prussia remain as powerful as is compatible with my policy and with my obligations to my old and new friends. I regret that she refused to enter into an alliance with me, and that I vainly offered my friendship to her more than once. It is no fault of mine that your majesty has to bear the consequences of this refusal, but I will try to ameliorate them as much as I can. I cannot restore your old frontiers; I cannot deliver your country entirely from the burdens and calamities of war, and preserve it from the tribute which the conqueror must impose upon the vanquished, in order to receive some compensation for the blood that was shed. I will always remember that the Queen of Prussia is not only the most fascinating, but also the most high-minded, courageous, and generous lady in the world, and that one cannot do homage enough to her magnanimity and intelligence. I promise your majesty that I am quite willing to comply with all your wishes as far as I can. Inform me, therefore, of them; it will be best for you to be quite frank with me. We shall try to become good friends, and, as a token of this friendship, I take the liberty to offer you this flower, which bears so striking a resemblance to you.” He took a full-blown moss-rose from the porcelain vase standing on the table, and presented it to her. “Will you accept this pledge of friendship at my hands?”

The queen hesitated. It was repugnant to her noble and proud heart to receive so sentimental a gift from him to whom her heart never could grant true friendship. She slowly raised her eyes and looked almost timidly into his smiling face. “Sire,” she said in a low voice, “add to this pledge of your friendship still another, that I may accept the rose.”