

Julia stood at a distance, contemplating them with thoughtful glances.

"They should be happy," she murmured low, and then asked aloud: "Count Lynar, did you receive my letter?"

"I did receive it," said the count, "and may God reward you for the sacrifice you are so generously disposed to make for us! Anna, your friend Julia is our good angel. To her we shall owe it if our happiness is henceforth indestructible and indissoluble. Do you know the immense sacrifice this young maiden proposes to make for us?"

"No, Princess Anna knows nothing, and shall know nothing of it," said Julia, with a grand air. "Princess Anna shall only know that I love her, and am ready to give my life for her. And now," she continued, with her natural gayety, "forget me, ye happy lovers! Lull yourselves in the sweet enjoyment of nameless ecstasies! I go to watch the spies, and especially your husband, lest he break in upon you without notice!"

And Julia suddenly left the room, shutting the door upon Anna Leopoldowna and her lover, the Polish Count Lynar.

CHAPTER VIII.

NO LOVE.

PRINCE ULRICH of Brunswick, the husband of the regent, had assembled the officers of his general staff for a secret conference. Their dark, threatening glances were prophetic of mischief, and angrily flashed the eyes of the

prince, who, standing in their midst, had spoken to them in glowing words of his domestic unhappiness, and of the idle, dreamy, and amatory indolence into which the regent had fallen.

"She writes amorous complainings," he now said, with a voice of rage, in closing his long speech—"she writes sonnets to her lover, instead of governing and reading the petitions, reports, and other documents that come to her from the different ministries and bureaus, which she constantly returns unread. You are men, and are you willing to bear the humiliation of being governed by a woman who dishonors you by disregarding her first and holiest duties, and setting before your wives and daughters the shameful example of a criminal love, thus disgracing her own son, your emperor and master?"

"No, no, we will not bear it!" cried the wildly excited men, grasping the hilts of their swords. "Give us proof of her unfaithfulness, and we shall know how to act as becomes men over whom an adulterous woman would reign!"

"It is an unnatural and unendurable law that commands man to obey a woman. It is contrary to nature that the mother should rule in the name of her son, when the father is living—the father, whom nature and universal custom acknowledge as the lord and head of his wife and children!" cried the prince.

"Give us proof of her guilt," cried the soldiers, "and we will this very hour proclaim you regent in her stead!"

A confidential servant of the prince, who entered at this moment, now whispered a few words in his ear.

The prince's face flamed up. "Well, then, gentlemen,"

said he, straightening himself up, "you demand proof. In this very hour will I furnish it to you. But I do it upon one condition. No personal violence! In the person of your present regent you must respect the mother of your emperor, the wife of your future regent! Anna will yield to our just representations, and voluntarily sign the act of abdication in my favor. That is all we ought to demand of her. She will retain her sacred and inviolable rights as the wife of your regent, as the mother of your emperor. Forget not that!"

"First of all, give us the proof of her guilt!" impatiently cried the men.

"I shall, alas, be able to give it you!" said the prince, with dignity. "Far be it from me to desire the conviction of an innocent person! Believe me, nothing but her guilt could induce me to take action against her; were she innocent, I would be the first to kneel and renew to her my oath of fidelity and obedience. But you cannot desire that I, your generalissimo, should be the subject of a wife who shamefully treads under foot her first and holiest duty! The honor of you all is wounded in mine. Come, follow me now. I will show you Count Lynar in the arms of his mistress, the Regent Anna Leopoldowna!"

The prince strode forth, cautiously followed by his generals. They thus passed noiselessly through the long corridor leading from the wing of the palace inhabited by the prince to that occupied by the regent.

In the boudoir of the Regent Anna a somewhat singular scene was now presented.

The tender caresses of the lovers were suddenly inter-

rupted by Julia von Mengden, who slipped in through the secret door in a white satin robe, and with a myrtle crown upon her head.

"Princess Anna, it is time for you to know all!" she hurriedly said. "Your husband is now coming here through the corridor with his generals; they hope to surprise you in your lover's arms, that they may have an excuse for deposing you from the regency and substituting your husband. Struggle against struggle! We will outwit them, and cure your husband of his jealousy! From this hour he shall be compelled to acknowledge that he was mistaken, and that it is for him to implore your pardon. Anna Leopoldowna, I love no one in the world but you, and therefore I am ready to do all that love can do for you. I will marry Count Lynar for the purpose of preserving you from suspicion and slander. I will bear the name of his wife, as a screen for the concealment of your loves." *

Anna's eyes overflowed with tears of emotion and transport.

"Weep not, my love," whispered the count, "be strong and great in this eventful hour! Now will you be forever mine, for this magnanimous friend veils and protects our union."

Julia opened the door and waved her hand.

A Russian pope in sacred vestments, followed by two other servants of the church, entered the room. With them came the most trusted maid-servants of Julia.

Clasping the count's hand and advancing to Anna, Julia

* Levecque, "Histoire de la Russie," vol. v., p. 222.

said: "Grant, illustrious princess, that we may celebrate our solemn espousal in thy high presence, which is the best blessing of our union!"

Anna opened wide her arms to her favorite, and, pressing her to her bosom, whispered: "I will never forget thee, my Julia. My blessing upon thee, my angel!"

"I will be a true sister to him," whispered Julia in return; "always believe in me and trust me. And now, my Anna, calmness and self-possession! I already hear your husband's approach. Be strong and great. Let no feature of your dear face betray your inward commotion!"

And, stepping back to the count, Julia made a sign to the priest to commence the marriage ceremony.

Hand in hand the bridal pair knelt before the priest, the servants folded their hands in prayer, and, proudly erect, with a heavenly transfiguration of her noble face, stood Anna Leopoldowna—the priest commenced the ceremony.

A slight noise was heard at the closed, concealed door. The priest calmly continued to speak, the bridal pair remained in their kneeling position, and, calmly smiling, stood the regent by their side.

The door opened, and, followed by his generals, the enraged prince appeared upon the threshold.

No one suffered himself to be disturbed; the priest continued the service, the parties remained upon their knees, Anna Leopoldowna stood looking on with a proud and tranquil smile.

Motionless, benumbed, as if struck by lightning, remained the prince upon the threshold; behind him were

seen the astonished faces of his generals, who, on tiptoe, stretched their necks to gaze, over each other's shoulders, upon this singular and unexpected spectacle!

At length a murmur arose, they pressed farther forward toward the door, and, overcoming his momentary stupefaction, the prince ventured into the room.

An angry glance of the priest commanded silence; with a louder voice he continued his prayer. Anna Leopoldowna smilingly beckoned her husband to her side, and slightly nodded to the generals.

They bowed to the ground before their august mistress, the regent.

Now came the closing prayer and the dispensation of the blessing. The priest pronounced it kneeling,—the regent also bent the knee, and drew the prince down beside her. Following the example of the generalissimo, the other generals also sank upon their knees,—it was a general prayer, which no one dared disturb.

The ceremony was ended. The priest kissed and blessed the bridal pair, and then departed with his assistants; he was followed by the servants of the favorite.

Anna now turned with a proud smile to the prince.

"Accident, my husband, has made you a witness of this marriage," said she. "May I ask your highness what procures me this unexpected and somewhat intrusive visit, and why my generals, unannounced, accompany you to their regent and mistress?"

The embarrassed prince stammered some unintelligible words, to which Anna paid no attention.

Stepping forward, she motioned the generals to enter,

and with her most fascinating smile said: "Ah, I think I now know the reason of your coming, gentlemen! Your loyal and faithful hearts yearn for a sight of your young emperor. It is true, his faithful subjects have not seen him for a long time! Even a sovereign is not guaranteed against the evil influences of the weather, which has lately been very rough, and for that reason the young czar has been unable to show himself to his people. Ah, it pleases me that you have come, and I am obliged to my husband for bringing you to me so unexpectedly. You may now satisfy yourselves that the emperor lives and is growing fast. Julia, bring us the young emperor!"

Julia von Mengden silently departed, while Count Lynar, respectfully approaching the regent, said a few words to her in a low tone.

"You are quite right, sir count," said the regent aloud, and, turning to her husband and the generals, continued: "Count Lynar is in some trouble about the unexpected publicity given to his marriage. There are, however, important reasons for keeping it still a secret. The family of my maid of honor are opposed to this alliance with a foreigner, and insist that Julia shall marry another whom they have destined for her. On the other hand, certain family considerations render secrecy the duty of the count. Julia, oppressed by her inexorable relations, disclosed the state of affairs to me, and as I love Julia, and as I saw that she was wasting away with grief without the possession of her lover, I favored her connection with Count Lynar. They daily saw each other in my apartments, and, finally yielding to their united prayers, I consented that they should this day

be legally united by the priest, and thus defeat the opposition of their respective families.

"This, gentlemen," continued Anna, raising her voice, "is the simple explanation of this mystery. I owe this explanation to myself, well knowing that secret slander and malicious insinuations might seek to implicate me in this affair, and that a certain inimical and evil-disposed party, displeased that you should have a woman for regent, would be glad to prove to you that all women are weak, faulty, and sinful creatures! Be careful how you credit such miserable tales!"

Silent, with downcast eyes, stood the generals under the flashing glance of the regent, who now turned to her husband with a mocking smile. "You, my prince and husband," said she, "you I have to thank!—your tenderness of heart induced you generously to furnish me with this opportunity to justify my conduct to my most distinguished and best-beloved subjects and servants, and thus to break the point of the weapon with which calumny threatened my breast! I therefore thank you, my husband. But see! there comes the emperor."

In fact, the folding-doors were at this moment thrown open, and a long train of palace officials and servants approached. At the head of the train was Julia von Mengden, bearing a velvet cushion bespangled with brilliants, upon which reposed the child in a dress of gold brocade. On both sides were seen the richly adorned nurses and attendants, and near them the major-domo, bearing upon a golden cushion the imperial crown and other insignia of empire.

Anna Leopoldowna took young Ivan in her arms; the child smiled in her face, and stretched forth his hand toward the sparkling crown.

With her son upon her arm, Anna majestically advanced to the centre of the hall, and, lifting up the child, said: "Behold your emperor! Respect and reverence for your illustrious master! Upon your knees in the presence of your emperor!"

It was as if all, servants, attendants, and generals, had been struck with a magic wand. They all fell upon their knees, and bowed their heads to the earth—venal slaves, one word from the ruler sufficed to set them all grovelling in the dust!

With a proud smile Anna enjoyed this triumph. Near her stood the prince, the father of the emperor, with rage and shame in his heart.

"Long live the emperor!" resounded from all lips, and the child Ivan, Emperor of all the Russias, screeched for joy at the noise and at the splendor of the assemblage.

"Long live our noble regent, Anna Leopoldowna!" now loudly cried Julia von Mengden.

Like a thundering cry of jubilation it was instantly echoed through the hall.

The generals were the first to join in this enthusiastic *viva!*

A quarter of an hour later the generals were permitted to retire, and the emperor was reconveyed to his apartments.

Anna Leopoldowna remained alone with her husband and the newly-married pair, who had retreated to the recess of a window and were whispering together.

Anna now turned to her husband, and, with cutting coldness in her tone, said:

"You must understand, my husband, that I am very generous. It was in my power to arrest you as a traitor, but I preferred only to shame you, because you, unhappily, are the father of my child."

"You think, then," asked the prince, with a scornful smile, "that I shall take the buffoonery you have just had played before us for truth?"

"That, my prince, must wholly depend upon your own good pleasure. But for the present I must request you to retire to your own apartments! I feel myself much moved and exhausted, and have also to prepare some secret dispatches for Count Lynar to take with him in his journey."

"Count Lynar is, then, to leave us?" quickly asked the prince, in an evidently more friendly tone.

"Yes," said Anna, "he leaves us for some weeks to visit the estate in Liefland which I have given to Julia as a bridal present, and to make there the necessary preparations for the proper reception of his wife."

Julia clasped the hands of her mistress, and bathed them with tears of joy and gratitude.

"Anna," whispered Prince Ulrich, "I did you wrong. Pardon me."

Anna coldly responded: "I will pardon you if you will be generous enough to allow me a little repose."

The prince silently and respectfully withdrew.

Anna finally, left alone with her lover and her favorite, sank exhausted upon a divan.

"Close the doors, Julia, that no one may surprise us,"

she faintly murmured. "I will take leave. Oh, I would be left for at least a quarter of an hour undisturbed in my unhappiness."

"Then it is true that you intend to drive me away?" asked Count Lynar, kneeling and clasping her hands. "You are determined to send me into banishment?"

Anna gave him a glance of tenderness.

"No," said she, "I will send myself into banishment, for I shall not see you, dearest. But I felt that this sacrifice was necessary. Julia has sacrificed herself for us. With another love in her heart, she has magnanimously thrown away her freedom and given up her maiden love for the promotion of our happiness. We owe it to her to preserve her honor untarnished, that the calumnious crowd may not pry into the motives of her generous act. For Julia's sake, the world must and shall believe that she is in fact your wife, and that it was love that united you. We must, therefore, preserve appearances, and you must conduct your wife to your estate in triumph. Decency requires it, and we cannot disregard its requirements."

"Princess Anna is in the right," said Julia; "you must absent yourself for a few weeks—not for my sake, who little desire any such triumph, but that the world may believe the tale, and no longer suspect my princess."

It was a sweetly painful hour—a farewell so tearful, and yet so full of deeply-felt happiness. On that very night was the count to commence his journey to Liefland and Warsaw. As they wished to make no secret of the marriage, the count needed the consent of his court and his family.

Anna provided him with letters and passports. The best and fairest of the estates of the crown in Liefland was assigned to Julia as a bridal present, and the count was furnished with the proper documents to enable him to take possession of it.*

And finally came the parting moment! For the last time they lay in each other's arms; they mutually swore eternal love, unconquerable fidelity—all that a loving couple could swear!

Tearing himself from her embrace, he rushed to the door.

Anna stretches out her arms toward him, her brow is pallid, her eyes fixed. The door opens, he turns for one last look, and nods a farewell. Ah, with her last glance she would forever enchain that noble and beautiful face—with her extended arms she would forever retain that majestic form.

"Farewell, Anna, farewell!"

The door closes behind him—he is gone!

A cold shudder convulsed Anna's form, a bodeful fear took possession of her mind. It lay upon her heart like a dark mourning-veil.

"I shall never, never see him again!" she shrieked, sinking unconscious into Julia's arms.

* Levecque, vol. v., p. 222.