

sephine worshipped, because its existence seemed to assure her own happiness, the child that had awakened the first feeling of motherly bliss in Hortense's bosom, the child that had often even consoled Louis Bonaparte for the unenjoyable present with bright hopes for the future—the little Napoleon Charles died in the year 1807, of the measles.

This was a terrific blow that struck the parents, and the imperial pair of France with equal force. Napoleon's eyes filled with tears when this intelligence was brought him, and a cry of horror escaped Josephine's lips.

"Now I am lost!" she murmured in a low voice; "now my fate is decided. He will put me away."

But after this first egotistical outburst of her own pain, she hastened to the Hague to weep with her daughter, and bring her away from the place associated with her loss and her anguish. Hortense returned with the empress to St. Cloud; while her husband, who had almost succumbed to his grief, was compelled to seek renewed health in the baths of the Pyrenees. The royal palace at the Hague now stood desolate again; death had banished life and joy from its halls; and, though the royal pair were subsequently compelled to return to it, joy and happiness came back with them no more.

King Louis had returned from the Pyrenees in a more gloomy and ill-natured frame of mind than ever; a sickly distrust, a repulsive irritability, had taken possession of his whole being, and his young wife no longer

had the good-will to bear with his caprices, and excuse his irritable disposition. They were totally different in their views, desires, inclinations, and aspirations; and their children, instead of being a means of reuniting, seemed to estrange them the more, for each insisted on considering them his or her exclusive property, and in having them educated according to his or her views and wishes.

But Hortense was soon to forget her own household troubles and cares, in the greater misery of her mother. A letter from Josephine, an agonized appeal to her daughter for consolation, recalled Hortense to her mother's side, and she left the Hague and hastened to Paris.

CHAPTER VII.

PREMONITIONS.

JOSEPHINE's fears, and the prophecies of the French clairvoyante, were now about to be fulfilled. The crown which Josephine had reluctantly and sorrowfully accepted, and which she had afterward worn with so much grace and amiability, with such natural majesty and dignity, was about to fall from her head. Napoleon had the cruel courage, now that the dreamed-of future had been realized, to put away from him the woman who had loved him and chosen him when he had nothing to offer her but his hopes for the future. Josephine, who,

with smiling courage and brave fidelity, had stood at his side in the times of want and humiliation, was now to be banished from his side into the isolation of a glittering widowhood. Napoleon had the courage to determine that this should be done, but he lacked the courage to break it to Josephine, and to pronounce the word of separation himself. He was determined to sacrifice to his ambition the woman he had so long called his "good angel;" and he, who had never trembled in battle, trembled at the thought of her tears, and avoided meeting her sad, entreating gaze.

But Josephine divined the whole terrible misfortune that hung threateningly over her head. She read it in the gloomy, averted countenance of the emperor, who, since his recent return from Vienna, had caused the door that connected his room with that of his wife to be locked; she read it in the faces of the courtiers, who dared to address her with less reverence, but with a touch of compassionate sympathy; she heard it in the low whispering that ceased when she approached a group of persons in her parlors; it was betrayed to her in the covert, mysterious insinuations of the public press, which attached a deep and comprehensive significance to the emperor's journey to Vienna.

She knew that her destiny must now be fulfilled, and that she was too weak to offer any resistance. But she was determined to act her part as wife and empress worthily to the end. Her tears should not flow outwardly, but inwardly to her grief-stricken heart; she

suppressed her sighs with a smile, and concealed the pallor of her cheeks with rouge. But she longed for a heart to whom she could confide her anguish, and show her tears, and therefore called her daughter to her side.

How painful was this reunion of mother and daughter, how many tears were shed, how bitter were the lamentations Josephine whispered in her daughter's ear!

"If you knew," said she, "in what torments I have passed the last few weeks, in which I was no longer his wife, although compelled to appear before the world as such! What glances, Hortense, what glances courtiers fasten upon a discarded woman! In what uncertainty, what expectancy more cruel than death, have I lived and am I still living, awaiting the lightning stroke that has long glowed in Napoleon's eyes!"*

Hortense listened to her mother's lamentations with a heart full of bitterness. She thought of how she had been compelled to sacrifice her own happiness to that of her mother, of how she had been condemned to a union without love, in order that the happiness of her mother's union might be established on a firm basis. And now all had been in vain; the sacrifice had not sufficed to arrest the tide of misfortune now about to bear down her unhappy mother. Hortense could do nothing to avert it. She was a queen, and yet only a weak, pitiable woman, who envied the beggar on the street her freedom and her humble lot. Both mother and daughter stood on the summit of earthly magnificence, and yet this empress and

* Josephine's own words.—Bourrienne, vol. viii., p. 243.

this queen felt themselves so poor and miserable, that they looked back with envy at the days of the revolution—the days in which they had led in retirement a life of poverty and want. Then, though struggling with want and care, they had been rich in hopes, in wishes, in illusions; now, they possessed all that could adorn life; now millions of men bowed down to them, and saluted them with the proud word “majesty,” and yet empress and queen were now poor in hopes and wishes, poor in the illusions that lay shattered at their feet, and rejoicing only in the one happiness, that of being able to confide their misery to each other.

A few days after her arrival, the emperor caused Hortense to be called to his cabinet. He advanced toward her with vivacity, but before the gaze of her large eyes the glance of the man before whom the whole world now bowed, almost quailed.

“Hortense,” said he, “we are now called on to decide an important matter, and it is our duty not to recoil. The nation has done so much for me and my family, that I owe them the sacrifice which they demand of me. The tranquillity and welfare of France require that I shall choose a wife who can give the country an heir to the throne. Josephine has been living in suspense and anguish for six months, and this must end. You, Hortense, are her dearest friend and her confidante; she loves you more than all else in the world. Will you undertake to prepare your mother for this step? You would thereby relieve my heart of a heavy burden.”

Hortense had the strength to suppress her tears, and fasten her eyes on the emperor's countenance in a firm, determined gaze. His glance again quailed, as the lion recoils from the angry glance of a pure, innocent woman. Hortense had the courage to positively refuse the emperor's request.

“How, Hortense!” exclaimed Napoleon with emotion. “You then refuse my request?”

“Sire,” said she, hardly able longer to restrain her tears, “sire, I have not the strength to stab my mother to the heart.”*

And regardless of etiquette, Hortense turned away and left the emperor's cabinet, the tears pouring in streams from her eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DIVORCE.

NAPOLEON made one other attempt to impart to Josephine, through a third person, the distressing tidings of his determination with regard to herself. He begged Eugene, the Viceroy of Italy, to come to Paris, and on his arrival informed him of his intentions and of his wish. Eugene, like his sister, received this intelligence in silent submissiveness, but like his sister, he refused to impart to his mother, tidings that must destroy her happiness forever.

* Schelten, vol. ii., p. 45.