

help remembering her. For my own part, I can never forget her."

"Ah, what a *fripon* you are, to give me such a reply! Well, I will prove to you, M. Fripon, that I have not forgotten Josephine, either. This is New-Year's-day. Would you not like to offer your congratulations to the Empress Josephine at Malmaison?"

"Sire, if so humble and low a servant as I am may dare, I should certainly be very happy to lay my congratulations at her feet."

"Go, I permit you to do so, and the empress will surely receive you very kindly."

"Particularly, sire, if I had a message from his majesty the emperor to deliver."

"Fripon, I believe you take the liberty of guessing my thoughts! Yes, I will give you a message. Hasten to the Empress Josephine, take her my greetings, but see that the empress receives you without witnesses.—Do you hear, Constant—without witnesses? Then tell her to have her carriage immediately brought to the door, and, on the pretext of being alone with her mournful New-Year's meditations, to take a ride without attendants. But when she is at a considerable distance from Malmaison, she is to order the coachman to drive to the little castle of La Bagatelle. She must be there precisely at four o'clock. I shall be there, and tell her majesty I shall not come alone. Now make haste, Constant! Recommend entire reticence to the empress. As to yourself, pray do not forget that, if any one shall hear of this affair, you must be held responsible. Go!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

JOSEPHINE.

JUST as the clock struck four, the carriage of the Empress Josephine wheeled into the courtyard of the little castle of La Bagatelle. She inquired of the castellan, in a tremulous voice, whether any one had arrived there, and she breathed more freely when he replied in the negative. She left the carriage with youthful alacrity and entered the castle, followed by the castellan, who gazed in amazement at this empress without court or suite, who arrived stealthily and tremblingly, like a

maiden to meet her lover for the first time. She hurried through the well-known apartments of the castle, and entered the hall in which, during the days of her happiness, she had so often received the foreign princes and ambassadors, or the dignitaries of France. The hall was now empty; no one was there to receive the deserted empress; but bright, merry fires were burning in the fireplaces, and every thing was in readiness for the reception of distinguished guests.

"You knew, then, that I was to come?" inquired the empress of the castellan.

"Your majesty," he replied, in a low and reverential voice, "M. Constant was here, and gave orders to have the rooms in readiness. If your majesty wishes refreshments, you will find every thing served up in the dining-room."

"No, no, I thank you," cried the empress, hastily. "But tell me is my dressing-room—my former dressing-room," she corrected herself falteringly—"is that heated, too?"

"Your majesty will find all your rooms comfortable, just as though you still condescended to reside here."

"Well, then, I will go to that room. If any one comes, I shall notice it through the opened doors; it is unnecessary for you to inform me; I will go then at once to the reception-room."

The castellan withdrew, and Josephine hastened through the adjoining apartment into the dressing-room. With a long, painful sigh she glanced around the room which had so often witnessed her happiness and her triumphs. Here, surrounded by her ladies in front of this mirror, she had had her hair dressed, and the emperor had almost always made his appearance at that hour to chat with her, look at her toilet, and delight her heart by a smile, a glance, that was more transporting to her than all the homage and flattery paid her by all her other admirers. Now she was here again, but alone, and with a mournful sigh she stepped to the mirror which had so often reflected her charming portrait, radiant with happiness, and sparkling with diamonds.

And what did she see now in this mirror? A woman with a pale, grief-stricken face, features growing old, and a desponding exhaustion which only a good and pleasant life can disguise when the vigor of youth has faded.

"Oh, I have become old!" sighed Josephine; "the years of tears and solitude count double, for one consumes then in days the strength of many years. I have grown old because I have

wept for *him*, and because I have felt his misfortunes. Oh, how will he look? Will his cheeks be even paler and his eyes gloomier than formerly? I have not seen him since his return from his disastrous campaign; if I read the history of his sufferings on his face, my grief will kill me. But no," she encouraged herself, "I will not weep, nor trouble him with my tears. I will be serene, and suppress my emotions. He will not come alone; but whom will he bring with him? I hope not the woman who is my rival—to whom I had to yield my throne!—No, I know Bonaparte's heart, I know that he would be incapable of such cruelty. She, young, beautiful, the reigning empress—I, old, sorrowful, faded, the deserted empress! I—ah, there is a carriage rolling into the courtyard! He comes!" Her whole form trembled, and, breathless, her face suffused with deep blushes, she sank into an easy-chair. "I love him still," she murmured; "my heart does not forget!" A low knocking at the small side-door leading to the inner corridor, was heard, and Constant entered. Josephine rose hastily, and with quivering lips asked, "Constant, is he there?"

"Yes, your majesty. The emperor requests you to repair to the reception-room. He will be there in a moment."

"And who is accompanying him?"

"His majesty has commissioned me to tell you that it would afford him great satisfaction to prepare a little surprise for your majesty, and that he has, therefore, fulfilled a wish which you have felt for a long time."

"Constant!" exclaimed Josephine, joyfully, "the emperor brings the King of Rome to me?"

"Yes, your majesty."

"Ah, *her* child!" cried the empress, with an emotion of jealousy, burying her face in her hands.

"The emperor requests your majesty to be so gracious as not to let the little king suspect whom he has the honor to approach," whispered Constant.

"Ah, *she* is not to suspect that her child has come to me!" murmured Josephine, while fresh tears trickled down her cheeks.

"The emperor, besides, implores your majesty not to frighten the prince by a sadness which your majesty, in the generosity and kindness of your heart, has so often overcome."

"Yes," said the empress, removing her hands from her

face, and hastily drying her tears with her handkerchief, "I will not weep. It is true, I have often begged that I might see the King of Rome—the child for whom I have suffered so much, and to read in his face whether he is worthy of my sacrifice. The emperor is so kind as to fulfil my wish; tell him that I am profoundly grateful to him, that I will restrain my emotion and not make the prince suspect who I am. Tell him that I shall not weep when I see the child of the present empress. No, do not tell him that, Constant; it would grieve him—tell him only that I thank him, and that he shall not be displeased with me. Go! I am ready, and shall be happy to see the boy. It is not *her* child, but *his* that I am to embrace." And greeting Constant with that inimitable smile of grace and kindness peculiar to her, she walked toward the reception-room. "How my heart throbs!" she murmured; "it is as if my limbs were falling me—as if I should die." Nearly fainting, she slowly glided through the adjoining apartment, and entered the reception-room. "Courage, my heart! for it is *his* child that I am to greet." Sitting down on an easy-chair near the window, she looked in anxiety and suspense toward the large folding-doors.

At length the emperor appeared. Josephine had not seen him for nearly a year, and at first her eyes beheld only him. She read in his pallid and furrowed face the secret history of his sorrows, which he had not, perhaps, communicated to any one, but which he could not conceal from the eye of love. Unutterable sympathy and tender compassion for him filled her soul. And now she almost timidly looked upon the child that Napoleon led by the hand.

How charming was this child! How proud of him was his father! Josephine felt this, and she said almost exultingly to herself: "I have not been sacrificed in vain! This child is an ample indemnity for my tears. I am the boy's real mother, for I have suffered, sorrowed, and prayed for him!" Rejoicing in this sentiment, which seemed to restore the beauty of former days, Josephine stretched out her arms toward the child.

"Go, my son, and embrace the lady," said Napoleon, dropping the hand of the prince. He advanced, while his father stood at the table in the middle of the room, supporting his right hand on the marble slab. He looked gravely but kindly upon the empress, from whom he felt separated, by the presence of his child, as by an impassable gulf.

The little prince offered his hand to the empress with a smile, and Josephine drew him into her arms, pressing his head to her bosom. A sigh, in spite of herself, came from the depths of her heart. She slowly bent back the boy's head and gazed at him with a mournful but loving expression. Then her glance fell upon the emperor, and, with an indescribable look of love and tenderness, she said: "Sire, he is like you; God bless him for it!"

There was something so touching and heartfelt in these words—in the tone of her voice, and the glance of her eyes, that the emperor was profoundly moved, and responded only by a silent nod, not venturing to speak lest the tremor of his words should betray his emotion. Even the little king seemed to understand the excellent heart of this lady. He clung to her and said in a sweet voice, "I love you, madame, and want you to love me, too!"

"I love you, sire," cried Josephine, "and shall pray God every day to preserve you to your father—to your parents," she corrected herself with the self-abnegation of a true woman. "You will one day confer happiness on France and your people, for you undoubtedly wish to become as good, great, and wise, as your father."

"Oh, yes, my papa emperor is very good, and I love him dearly!" exclaimed the boy, looking toward his father. "But, papa, why do you not come to us? Why do you not shake hands with this dear lady, who is so good and loves me so well?"

"The emperor is generous," said Josephine, gently; "he wished me to have you a moment by yourself, sire; he has you every day, but I have never had you before."

"Why did you not come and see me?" asked the child. "You live near Paris; and, if you loved me, you would often come and see how the little King of Rome is getting on. The emperor told me you were a dear and kind-hearted lady, and that every one loved you."

"Did he tell you so, sire?" exclaimed the empress, drawing the boy into her arms. "Oh, tell the emperor that I shall always be grateful to him for it, and that these words will forever silence my grief." Her eyes glanced in gratitude to the emperor, who softly laid his finger on his mouth, to admonish her to be silent and calm.

The little prince had now, with the facility with which children pass from one subject to another, turned his attention

to a large diamond brooch fastened to Josephine's golden sash. "How beautiful it is!" he exclaimed—"how it is flashing as though it were a star fallen from heaven, and fastened to your breast, because it loves you, madame, and because you are so good! And what fine ornaments you have on your watch! Ah, look here, papa emperor; see those pretty things! Come, papa, and look at them!"

"No, sire," said the emperor, with a strange and mournful smile, "let me remain here. I can see all those pretty things quite distinctly."

"They are very beautiful, are they not?" cried the child. "And if—"

"Well, sire," asked Josephine, "why do you pause? Pray speak!"

The boy had suddenly assumed a grave air, and gazed upon the ornaments of the empress. "I was just thinking—but you will be angry if I tell you what, madame."

"Certainly not, sire; tell me what you thought."

"It occurred to my mind that we met in the forest on our way a poor man who looked haggard and wretched, and begged us to give him something. But papa and I could not, for we had already distributed all our money among the unfortunate persons whom we had previously met. Why are there so many poor people, madame?—why does my papa emperor not order all men to be happy and rich?"

"Because it is impossible for him to do so, sire," said Josephine.

"And because, in order to be able to make others happy, we must ourselves be rich!" exclaimed the emperor, smiling. "Now you said yourself, sire, we could not give the poor man in the forest any thing, for we had nothing to give him."

"Yes, and I was very sorry," said the boy. "And now I was thinking if we sent for the poor man, and you, madame, gave him your watch and your diamonds, and he sold them, he would have a great deal of money, and be very rich and happy."

Josephine pressed the boy tenderly to her heart. "Sire," she said, "I promise you that I will send for your poor man and give him so much money that he will never again be wretched."

"Oh!" exclaimed the prince, encircling the lady's neck with his arms, "how good you are, madame, and how I love you!"

Josephine pressed his head to her bosom. "Oh, you may certainly love me a little," she replied, with a touching smile; "I have really deserved it of you."

"Sire," said the emperor, advancing a few steps, "now bid the lady farewell. We must go."

"Papa!" cried the boy, joyously—"papa, we must take the dear lady with us; she is so good, and I love her. Let her live with us in the Tuileries, and always stay with us. I want her to do so, and you, too, papa, do you not?"

Josephine's eyes filled with tears, and she looked at the emperor with an expression of unutterable woe. He immediately averted his face, perhaps to prevent Josephine from noticing his emotion. "Come, sire," he said imperiously, "it is high time; it is growing dark. Take leave of madame!"

"Oh, no; I will not take leave of her!" cried the boy, vehemently. "I say to her rather—Come with us to the Tuileries!"

"It cannot be, sire," said Josephine, smiling amidst her tears.

"Why?" cried the boy, impatiently, and throwing back his head. "Come; you may accompany the emperor, and I want you to do so!"

Napoleon, painfully moved by this scene, quickly advanced to the prince, and took his hand. "Come, sire," he said in a tone so grave that the boy dared no longer resist. Submitting to his father's will, he stepped back, and, pleasantly bowing, took leave of the empress.

"We shall meet again," said Josephine, and, turning her tearful eyes to Napoleon, she asked, "We shall meet again, sire, shall we not?"

"Yes," said Napoleon, gravely, "we shall meet again." He then took leave of her with an affectionate look, which fell as a sunbeam upon her desolate heart, and, leading the boy by the hand, turned quickly toward the door. She looked after them in silence and with clasped hands. As the door opened, the emperor turned again with a parting but melancholy glance.

Josephine was again alone. With a groan she fell on her knees, and lifting her face toward heaven, she cried, "My God, protect—preserve him! Whatever I may suffer, oh, let him be happy!"

CHAPTER XLV.

TALLEYRAND.

FOR a week the emperor had scarcely left his cabinet; bending over his maps, he anxiously examined the position of his army, and that of the constantly advancing allies. Every day couriers with news of fresh disasters arrived at Paris; rumors of invading armies terrified the citizens, and disturbed the emperor's temper. It was impossible for the government to conceal the misfortunes which had befallen France from the beginning of the new year. The people knew that Blucher had crossed the Rhine, and, victoriously penetrating France, on the 16th of January had taken up his quarters at Nancy. It was publicly known that a still larger army of the allies, commanded by Prince Schwartzberg, had advanced through Switzerland, Lorraine, and Alsace, taken the fortresses, overcome all resistance, and that both generals had sworn to appear in front of Paris by February, and conquer the capital. All Paris knew this, and longed for peace as the only way to put an end to the sufferings of the nation. The strength and the superiority of the allied army could not be concealed, and it was felt to be impossible to expel the powerful invaders.

Napoleon himself at length saw the necessity of peace, and, conquering his proud heart, he sent the Duke de Vicenza, his faithful friend Caulaincourt, to the headquarters of the allies, to request them to send plenipotentiaries to a peace congress. The allies accepted this proposition, but they declared that, despite the peace congress, the course of the war could not in the least be interrupted; that the operations in the field must be vigorously continued. Napoleon responded to this by decreeing a new conscription, ordering all able-bodied men in France to be enrolled in the national armies. The terrors of war were, therefore, approaching, and yet Paris was in hope that peace would be concluded; Caulaincourt was still at the headquarters of the allies, treating with them about the congress.

Early on the morning of the 23d of January, another dispatch from Caulaincourt to Maret was received at Paris, and the minister immediately repaired to the Tuileries, to communicate it to the emperor. This dispatch confirmed all the