

"You love me, Sophia!—say that you will be mine—mine forever!"

"Am I not thine already. What more do you require?"

"This lovely hand, in confirmation of your vows," exclaimed the king, respectfully pressing it to his lips; "I will not leave your feet Sophia, till you promise to become my bride."

"Madman!" cried the princess, starting from her seat; "your king could not demand more. Think you, Adolphus, that Sophia of Mecklenburg will stoop to a coronet, when she might wear a crown?"

Surprise, vexation, and disappointment, were strongly depicted in the countenance of the king. The mask slowly dropped, and his once adored Sophia appeared in the hateful light of an artful and intriguing woman. He stood on the edge of an abyss covered with flowers, the chasm yawned at his feet, and he shuddered at the gulf beneath.

Sophia beheld her power nearly at an end. If ever she had loved, it was the high spirited youth before her, and re-seating herself, she tried to assume a composure ill suited to the generally vivid display of her feelings—but it was her last resource.

"You look surprised, Count Dahl—reflect a moment calmly, and you will cease to condemn me."

She paused and covered her face with her hands, as if anticipating his answer, but he was silent and she continued:

"My country demands my hand as a political sacrifice, and my unresisting person becomes the property of the highest bidder. I shall receive for my husband a man whom I never saw, and one whom in all probability, when seen, I shall despise. But the unbought affections of the heart, no state interest can chain; they are at least my own, and can you, noble Dahl, blame me for bestowing them where inclination prompts me?"

She ceased speaking, and held out her hand to the king, accompanying the action with one of her most bewitching smiles. He took it passively, but the pressure was unreciprocal. The expression of his countenance was changed towards her—a stern serenity had superseded the animated glow of passion—he looked the king, and spoke like the judge of a hardened and offending criminal.

"Is it possible, Sophia, that *you*, who possess talents and beauty of no common order, would sacrifice your honour to the man you love; and for the sake of *power*, (which you could never enjoy,) sell your person to another. Ah, believe one who speaks from experience, that the love of a true and honourable heart would have rendered you happier than the possession of a diadem!"

"Count Dahl!" returned the princess, with a scornful laugh; "you have suffered passion to deceive you—ambition may conquer love; but when," she continued with bitterness, "did love ever conquer ambition?"

"Tonight, madam," replied the Swede, in a tone equally haughty, "when the representative of one of the most ancient kingdoms in Europe offered you his hand in honourable wedlock. I have visited every court in Germany, in the vain hope of meeting with a noble female, who was capable of feeling a disinterested passion. Such a heart I thought I had found in the person of the beautiful and accomplished Sophia of Mecklenburg. But what can I say of the woman who would accept the man and refuse the husband. Madam, had I unseen offered you my crown, I should have succeeded better."

He turned, and was gone.

"It is the King of Sweden! the hero of the north, the brave high-minded Gustavus!" exclaimed Sophia, flinging herself back on the couch and bursting into tears; "and I have lost him for ever!"

CHAPTER II.

Deserted, trampled, and alone

My spirit caught a sterner tone;

My brain was fire!—on man I turn'd,

And stung the tyrant who had spurn'd,

And with vindictive fury hued

My stormy passions on the world!

Agnes Strickland's Worcester Field.

DISGUSTED with the unfortunate termination of his first love adventure, the king quitted Mecklenburg early the next morning, and proceeded towards Brandenburg, which was the last court he meant to honour with his presence. His passion for the lovely and ambitious Sophia ended in strong contempt; and his journey was spent in melancholy reveries on his late disappointment; and he often vented his indignation by railing aloud at the inconstancy and deceit of woman, to the no small amusement of his page, a laughter loving stripling, whose merry blue eyes and rosy cheeks, proclaimed a light heart, and an inexhaustible fund of mirth and good humour.

"Why, your majesty bears your disappointment with as little fortitude as a love lorn damsel of sixteen. By this light, you could endure a defeat in the field much better than being crossed in love; my leige lord, if you go on at this rate I shall expect to see you shame your doublet and hose by shedding tears like a woman."

"In truth my pretty boy, I deserve your censure," replied the king, putting his horse on to a brisker pace; "to let such a trifle disturb my peace,—but were you old enough to understand the nature of these things, you would find it no laughing matter to be out witted by an artful woman."

"Heaven comfort your majesty under all afflictions," said the provoking boy, laughing at the tragic air with which the young hero of the north concluded his speech; "and send you a bosom comforter."