

coldly. "I sent for you for a different purpose. I have chosen a husband for you."

"Mercy, sire!" exclaimed Natalie, clasping her hands imploringly. "Do not force me to marry."

"Force, mademoiselle! that is an ugly word. I, your Emperor, recommend your acceptance of the suit of a young nobleman of high rank. There are reasons of state which make me expressly desire this marriage. And, Natalie," he added, his harsh tone and manner softening visibly, "grief should not be eternal. Life is not given us to waste in idle sorrow for what is irremediable; and new ties will bring you solace, and, in time, happiness."

As she pressed her hands to her bosom, in a momentary spasm of pain, he observed the glittering emerald that encircled her finger.

"So splendid a jewel is hardly befitting a mourning garb, Mademoiselle. May I see the ring?"

Poor Natalie murmured faintly, "Your Majesty will not take it from me?"

"I will return it," replied the Emperor, as he examined the inscription. "Death, the consoler!" he murmured to himself. "Yes, death is the great healer and comforter."

His rigid features relaxed into an expression of deep pity as he remarked her wasted appearance and pallid features; but nothing of this was perceptible in his tone as he said, "It is my will, Mademoiselle, that you should be married a month from this day. The time will come when you will thank me for this decision. You can now retire."

As soon as Natalie had left, the Emperor rang his bell for Dr. Seckendorf, his favourite physician.

"Seckendorf," said the Czar, "go and see Mademoiselle Radetski. Find out if she has any organic disease. Return here and report, but say nothing of what you observe to any one else."

In a few hours Dr. Seckendorf was again admitted to the presence of the Czar.

"How is your patient?" inquired Nicholas.

"I fear very ill, your Majesty. She has aneurism of the heart."

"Is there any immediate danger?"

"There may not be, if she is not excited. But violent agitation or grief may prove fatal."

"What has caused the disease?"

"Her constitution has always been frail; but I think——," here he hesitated.

"Say what you think," said the Czar, impatiently.

"Then with your Majesty's permission, I think that the sentence of Count Potemkin was her death-blow."

The Czar paced his cabinet impatiently. "She will get over it, Seckendorf. A happy marriage will make her forget all that. There is nothing like happiness for a woman's health."

"I do not presume to contradict your Majesty, but I doubt whether Mademoiselle Radetski is able to bear either happiness or sorrow very long."

The Emperor dismissed his physician, after enjoining him to visit his patient daily. In the meantime the preparations for the marriage went on. A costly *trousseau* was provided for the bride, and all the beauty and rank of the capital invited. The Emperor himself was to grace the ceremony with his presence.

But still Dr. Seckendorf visited his patient, and his face grew grave as he looked at her.

One morning he reached her mansion at a later hour than usual. Her attendants informed him that their mistress had not yet rang her bell, and they hesitated to disturb her. He went at once to her apartment. The attendants drew aside the curtains of the bed. With one hand supporting her head, which rested upon the pillow, lay the pale sleeper, less brilliantly beautiful than when, with proud step and careless grace, she trod the gorgeous *salons* of the capital, but far more lovely.

Death, the consoler, had stooped to kiss his victim, and had not disturbed the peaceful smile that rested on her lips. In her hand she held the ring, which she had taken from her finger, and she had passed away while reading its inscription.

Gently Seckendorf replaced it upon the marble finger, from which it was never more to be taken.

"Truly," he murmured, "for her, Death is the consoler."

#### FROM OUT THE SHADOWS.

Is thy pathway dark and dreary?  
Do earth's tapers dimly shine?  
Thou canst better see the brightness,  
Of the lamp of love divine.

Art thou weary of the journey,  
Ever longing for thy rest?  
Learn to leave thy cares with Jesus,  
Fainting, lean upon His breast.

He will guide thee safely onward,  
And be with thee all the way;  
Though thy footsteps often falter,  
Thou shalt never backward stray.

Does the battle rage too fiercely  
For thy shrinking, daunted heart?  
And thy wounded spirit quiver  
With each unexpected smart?

He will give the longed for victory  
O'er the foes of truth and right;  
Thou shalt be a trusty warrior,  
Yes, a hero in the fight.

Art thou chilled by earth's dark shadows?  
Saddened by a cold world's frown?  
Lift thine eyes to where the storm clouds,  
Rifting, let the sunbeams down.

*Toronto.*

—Emily A. Sykes.