

"And did it relate to the princess?" eagerly asked, in the same breath, the king and queen.

"It did, madame, and sire—if my mother erred, if she acted with precipitation, if she allowed her fears for the life of a beloved friend to get the better of her prudence, now that she is no more, your majesties will pity and excuse a woman's pity for a woman. I know not how to judge an unprecedented action. Unwonted dangers call for extraordinary remedies. This paper, sire, gives a full account of the manner in which the Comtesse de Konigsmark, in conjunction with the attendants of the Czarowitch's consort, spread the report of her decease after her brutal husband had left her apparently dead. It was well known to the princess's friends that Alexis had resolved on her destruction, and that assassins were at hand to do his work in case she recovered. They placed a wooden figure in the coffin ostensibly prepared for the princess, and tended her in a secluded chamber until she had strength enough to make her escape from Russia, and the doom which awaited the Czarowitch's wife. In a separate letter my mother lays her commands upon me not to divulge these facts unless a time should come when the princess might desire to establish her identity. I have brought the documents with me, sire, and I place in your majesty hands the evidence of my mother's daring act, and of the existence of the Princess Charlotte of Brunswick."

"This is indeed a wonderful history," said the king as he began to peruse the papers.

The queen in the meantime asked, "And where did the princess fly when she left Russia?"

"To New France, madame, accompanied by one only servant and humble friend—the librarian of her father's court, who had followed her to St. Petersburg."

"And how comes she here? and good heavens! did not you say she was in prison?"

"Madame, she was arrested this morning, at the instance of the Russian embassy. It seems that when she escaped from St. Petersburg, she carried away with her jewels which were her own private property, and sold a part of them on her arrival at New Orleans. These trinkets, of course, were missed, and orders given at the Russian embassies and consulates to institute inquiries as to the persons who were supposed to have taken them. Suspicion rested principally on one individual, who had disappeared at the time of the princess's supposed death, the old German librarian who had accompanied her in her flight. It does not seem however that the inquiry was actively followed up in the colony; but a bracelet, which the princess sold since her arrival in Paris, has been recognized by a jeweller who many years ago had himself executed the order for it. In conjunction with a German who had seen the Royal exile in America, and was aware of the suspicion afloat on the subject, he gave information to Prince Kourakin of the discovery he had made. Hence, the princess's arrest on a charge which places her amongst felons and thieves, unless his majesty interposes at once to rescue her from such a position."

The king looked up from the papers he had been perusing, and made the count repeat again the foregoing details. Then he said, "Of

course, the princess must be at once released. These documents, M. de Saxe, leave no doubt on my mind that the lady you recognized in the Tuileries Gardens is the same person the Comtesse de Konigsmark speaks of, the widow of the late Czarowitch. But what sort of existence has she led during all these late years? Where did she live, and with whom?"

"Sire," said the count, in the tone of a man who makes a reluctant confession, "the romance would not be complete without a love story."

"Ah," said the king laughing, "is it one that you can relate before the queen?"

"Sire," said the Comte de Saxe, with some emotion, "I know but little of the Princess Charlotte's history during those years of obscure seclusion. But I would willingly lay down my life that her heart is as pure and her life as unstained as that of her majesty herself," he added, bowing profoundly to Marie Leckzinska. "Since the Czarowitch's decease, sire, his widow has married a French gentleman, and a brave man, who at the time of the Natches insurrection, by prodigies of valor saved her and many other French women from the horrors of a lingering death."

Without uttering an untruth, the count had managed to make it appear that the marriage had followed instead of preceded this heroic exploit. Gratitude, he thought, might be considered as a *circonstance atténuante*.

"I do not see," said the king, "how that difficulty can be got over. Such a marriage can never be acknowledged by her relations. Are there children?"

"One girl, sire."

The king reflected a little, and then said, "I will write with my own hand a letter to the Queen of Hungary, and inform her of her aunt's existence, and of the proofs which establish it. If I judge by my own feelings she will gladly offer to receive her at her own court, and to provide for her in her dominions a home suitable to her rank. She must, of course, give up this second husband. I forgot if you mentioned his name?"

"Colonel d'Auban, sire."

"This d'Auban she must, of course, separate from; but as you say he is a brave officer, I will take care of his fortune and place him in a good position. The daughter can be educated at St. Cyr."

The queen looked anxiously at first at M. de Saxe and then at the king. Her woman's heart evidently shrunk from this summary disposal of the nearest and dearest ties of a woman's heart. She ventured to say, "But if this princess is attached to her husband and her child, would it not be possible—"

"Possible, Madame, for the Queen of Hungary to call M. d'Auban uncle, and his daughter's cousin! Heaven forbid that any royal family should permit of such a degradation—"

"No; what I meant was perhaps she would not give them up."

"Then, of course, her family could not acknowledge her."

M. de Saxe was growing very impatient at this lengthened discussion, and ventured to say:

"Sire, every moment must appear an age to