

but which he nevertheless declares to be perfectly true."

"Your majesty is always glad to see the Comte de Saxe, and will doubtless accede to his request, and direct that he be admitted."

"Ah! madame. Is there not some feminine curiosity lurking in your implied desire to receive the noble count?"

"I confess, sire, that a romance in real life is well fitted to excite the interest of one whose own destiny might be described under that name."

As she said this, Marie Leckzinska looked with tenderness at the king, whom she passionately loved.

The young monarch, for although the father of four children, Lewis the XV. was scarcely three and twenty years old, commanded the Comte de Saxe to be introduced. Like most sovereigns, the king of France liked to be treated with cautious familiarity which some persons know how to use without trespassing the limits of respect. The Comte de Saxe perfectly understood his royal master's disposition and tastes, and stood high in his good graces.

"Ah! M. de Saxe," the king exclaimed, as the count made his obeisance to him and to the queen, "welcome to Versailles. Would that you took us oftener by surprise. It is one of the ennuis of our position to have no unexpected pleasures. Our life is so mapped out beforehand that I sometimes fancy to-morrow is yesterday, I know so well all about it."

A shade of anxiety passed over the queen's face. The king's liability to ennui was her greatest trouble. She had none of the lively wit or piquancy of manner which aids a woman to retain her hold of the affection of a man of indolent temperament and idle habits.

"I hope," she said to the count, "that you are not about to harass our feelings too deeply by the history you are going to tell us."

"Ah! madame—the cause I have to plead"

"O come!" exclaimed the king, "this is not fair, you spoke of a romantic story and now hint at a petition."

"I have indeed a petition to make, sire, and no trifling one either—no less a one than for the immediate release of two prisoners."

The king looked annoyed.

"And it must be the act of your majesty; an order emanating from yourself alone."

"You should have spoken to M. de Frejus."

"No, sire, to your majesties alone could I communicate the story of a princess of royal birth, whose unexampled destiny places her at your mercy."

"A princess!" repeated the king, "of what nation?"

"A German, sire."

"Ah! they are innumerable, your German princesses," Madame des Ursins said to the minister of a small Teutonic Prince, who had rejected the hand of a Spanish lady of high rank. "Monsieur, une grande dame d'Espagne vaut bien une petite dame d'Allemagne." Is your princess, M. de Saxe, une petite dame d'Allemagne?"

"So far from it, sire," rejoined the count, "that, had she been fifteen years younger, she might have aspired to your majesty's hand, for

her sister was the wife of the Emperor of Austria, and the house of Hapsburg deemed it no mesalliance."

"Who can you be speaking of, M. de Saxe? What emperor do you mean? The present emperor was married to the eldest daughter of the Duke of Brunswick, Wolfenbittel, and her sister married the Czarowitch of Russia."

"Sire, the sister of the late Empress of Austria, the daughter of the Duke of Brunswick, the widow of the Czarowitch, is at this moment in the prison of the Conciergerie, and it is on her behalf I have come to implore your majesty!"

"My dear M. de Saxe, you are under a strange delusion, for I suppose you are not joking!"

"Sire, I was never further from it in my life."

"But the princess you speak of has been dead these fifteen years."

"Sire, she is not dead. How she happens to be alive I did not know till two months ago, when I met her in the Tuilleries Gardens. The sound of her voice first attracted my attention; then I caught sight of her face, and though more than sixteen years had elapsed since I had seen her, I recognized at once the Princess Charlotte of Brunswick. Sire, I had been her playmate in childhood—later, she honoured me with her friendship. I loved her as those love who can never hope to be loved in return; with an intense, hopeless, reverend affection; she was a woman who, when once known, could never be forgotten."

"I have heard my beloved father speak of her," said the queen. "He used to say that her eyes had a melancholy beauty, a dreamy softness peculiarly their own, and that to look upon her and to love her was the same thing."

"Madame, I verily believe that in body and in mind so rare a creature has seldom graced a palace or a cottage. From the very moment I saw her I had not a doubt as to her identity. She turned away, she tried to put me off, to avoid answering my abrupt and eager questions; but her tears, her changing color, her passionate emotion, betrayed her. She refused, however, to give me any clue as to the name she bore or the place of her residence. I wished to inform your majesty at once of the existence of the princess, but she extorted from me a promise to delay this disclosure three months. When I lost sight of her that day doubts as to my own sanity occurred to me, for the death of the Czarowitch's consort was a well known public event. All the Courts in Europe had gone into mourning for her; and the thought of the interview I had just had with the living-dead was a fact enough to drive reason from its throne. A sudden recollection flashed then on my brain. I remembered having seen amongst my mother's papers, when I was sorting them after her death, a packet, on which was written, 'particulars relating to the supposed death of—. To be read by my son after my decease.' Pressed as I was at that moment by a multiplicity of affairs, I put off opening this packet to a period of greater leisure. The events of the campaign and my return to Paris put it out of my mind, until suddenly the words 'supposed death' flashed across me like a ray of light. I wrote for the box in which I had left this packet, and only a few days ago made myself acquainted with its contents."