

Michel and Angele (A Ladder of Swords), Volume 2.

Gilbert Parker

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MICHEL AND ANGELE

[A Ladder of Swords]

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 2.

CHAPTER VIII

Five minutes later, Lempriere of Rozel, as butler to the Queen, saw a sight of which he told to his dying day. When, after varied troubles hereafter set down, he went back to Jersey, he made a speech before the Royal Court, in which he told what chanced while Elizabeth was at chapel.

"There stood I, butler to the Queen," he said, with a large gesture, "but what knew I of butler's duties at Greenwich Palace! Her Majesty had given me an office where all the work was done for me. Odds life, but when I saw the Gentleman of the Rod and his fellow get down on their knees to lay the cloth upon the table, as though it was an altar at Jerusalem, I thought it time to say my prayers. There was naught but kneeling and retiring. Now it was the salt-cellar, the plate, and the bread; then it was a Duke's Daughter--a noble soul as ever lived--with a tasting-knife, as beautiful as a rose; then another lady enters who glares at me, and gets to her knees as does the other. Three times up and down, and then one rubs the plate with bread and salt, as solemn as St. Ouen's when he says prayers in the Royal Court. Gentles, that was a day for Jersey. For there stood I as master of all, the Queen's butler, and the greatest ladies of the land doing my will--though it was all Persian mystery to me, save when the kettle-drums began to beat and the trumpet to blow, and in walk bareheaded the Yeomen of the Guard, all scarlet, with a golden rose on their backs, bringing in a course of twenty-four gold dishes; and I, as Queen's butler, receiving them.

"Then it was I opened my mouth amazed at the endless dishes filled with niceties of earth, and the Duke's Daughter pops onto my tongue a mouthful of the first dish brought, and then does the same to every Yeoman of the Guard that carried a dish--that her notorious Majesty be safe against the hand of poisoners. There was I, fed by a Duke's Daughter; and thus was Jersey honoured; and the Duke's Daughter whispers to me, as a dozen other unmarried ladies enter, 'The Queen liked not the cut of your frieze jerkin better than do I, Seigneur.' With that she joins the others, and they all kneel down and rise up again, and lifting the meat from the table, bear it into the Queen's private chamber.

"When they return, and the Yeomen of the Guard go forth, I am left alone with these ladies, and there stand with twelve pair of eyes upon me, little knowing what to do. There was laughter in the faces of some, and looks less taking in the eyes of others; for my Lord Leicester was to have done the duty I was set to do that day, and he the greatest gallant of the kingdom, as all the world knows. What they said among themselves I know not, but I heard Leicester's name, and I guessed that they were mostly in the pay of his soft words. But the Duke's Daughter was on my

side, as was proved betimes when Leicester made trouble for us who went from Jersey to plead the cause of injured folk. Of the Earl's enmity to me--a foolish spite of a great nobleman against a Norman-Jersey gentleman--and of how it injured others for the moment, you all know; but we had him by the heels before the end of it, great earl and favourite as he was."

In the same speech Lempriere told of his audience with the Queen, even as she sat at dinner, and of what she said to him; but since his words give but a partial picture of events, the relation must not be his.

When the Queen returned from chapel to her apartments, Lempriere was called by an attendant, and he stood behind the Queen's chair until she summoned him to face her. Then, having finished her meal, and dipped her fingers in a bowl of rose-water, she took up the papers Leicester had given her--the Duke's Daughter had read them aloud as she ate--and said:

"Now, my good Seigneur of Rozel, answer me these few questions: First, what concern is it of yours whether this Michel de la Foret be sent back to France, or die here in England?"

"I helped to save his life at sea--one good turn deserves another, your high-born Majesty."

The Queen looked sharply at him, then burst out laughing.

"God's life, but here's a bull making epigrams!" she said. Then her humour changed. "See you, my butler of Rozel, you shall speak the truth, or I'll have you where that jerkin will fit you not so well a month hence. Plain answers I will have to plain questions, or De Carteret of St. Ouen's shall have his will of you and your precious pirate. So bear yourself as you would save your head and your honours."

Lempriere of Rozel never had a better moment than when he met the Queen of England's threats with faultless intrepidity. "I am concerned about my head, but more about my honours, and most about my honour," he replied. "My head is my own, my honours are my family's, for which I would give my head when needed; and my honour defends both until both are naught--and all are in the service of my Queen."

Smiling, Elizabeth suddenly leaned forward, and, with a glance of satisfaction towards the Duke's Daughter, who was present, said:

"I had not thought to find so much logic behind your rampant skull," she said. "You've spoken well, Rozel, and you shall speak by the book to the end, if you will save your friends. What concern is it of yours whether Michel de la Foret live or die?"

"It is a concern of one whom I've sworn to befriend, and that is my concern, your ineffable Majesty." "Who is the friend?"

"Mademoiselle Aubert."

"The betrothed of this Michel de la Foret?"

"Even so, your exalted Majesty. But I made sure De la Foret was dead when I asked her to be my wife."

"Lord, Lord, Lord, hear this vast infant, this hulking baby of a

Seigneur, this primeval innocence! Listen to him, cousin," said the Queen, turning again to the Duke's Daughter. "Was ever the like of it in any kingdom of this earth? He chooses a penniless exile--he, a butler to the Queen, with three dove-cotes and the perquage--and a Huguenot withal. He is refused; then comes the absent lover over sea, to shipwreck; and our Seigneur rescues him, 'fends him; and when yon master exile is in peril, defies his Queen's commands"--she tapped the papers lying beside her on the table--"then comes to England with the lady to plead the case before his outraged sovereign, with an outlawed buccaneer for comrade and lieutenant. There is the case, is't not?"

"I swore to be her friend," answered Lempriere stubbornly, "and I have done according to my word."

"There's not another nobleman in my kingdom who would not have thought twice about the matter, with the lady aboard his ship on the high seas--'tis a miraculous chivalry, cousin," she added to the Duke's Daughter, who bowed, settled herself again on her velvet cushion, and looked out of the corner of her eyes at Lempriere.

"You opposed Sir Hugh Pawlett's officers who went to arrest this De la Foret," continued Elizabeth. "Call you that serving your Queen? Pawlett had our commands."

"I opposed them but in form, that the matter might the more surely be brought to your Majesty's knowledge."

"It might easily have brought you to the Tower, man."

"I had faith that your Majesty would do right in this, as in all else. So I came hither to tell the whole story to your judicial Majesty."

"Our thanks for your certificate of character," said the Queen, with amused irony. "What is your wish? Make your words few and plain."

"I desire before all that Michel de la Foret shall not be returned to the Medici, most radiant Majesty."

"That's plain. But there are weighty matters 'twixt France and England, and De la Foret may turn the scale one way or another. What follows, beggar of Rozel?"

"That Mademoiselle Aubert and her father may live without let or hindrance in Jersey."

"That you may eat sour grapes ad eternam? Next?"

"That Buonespoir be pardoned all offences and let live in Jersey on pledge that he sin no more, not even to raid St. Ouen's cellars of the muscadella reserved for your generous Majesty."

There was such humour in Lempriere's look as he spoke of the muscadella that the Queen questioned him closely upon Buonespoir's raid; and so infectious was his mirth, as he told the tale, that Elizabeth, though she stamped her foot in assumed impatience, smiled also.

"You shall have your Buonespoir, Seigneur," she said; "but for his future you shall answer as well as he."

"For what he does in Jersey Isle, your commiserate Majesty?"

"For crime elsewhere, if he be caught, he shall march to Tyburn, friend," she answered. Then she hurriedly added: "Straightway go and bring Mademoiselle and her father hither. Orders are given for their disposal. And to-morrow at this hour you shall wait upon me in their company. I thank you for your services as butler this day, Monsieur of Rozel. You do your office rarely."

As the Seigneur left Elizabeth's apartments, he met the Earl of Leicester hurrying thither, preceded by the Queen's messenger. Leicester stopped and said, with a slow malicious smile: "Farming is good, then--you have fine crops this year on your holding?"

The point escaped Lempriere at first, for the favourite's look was all innocence, and he replied: "You are mistook, my lord. You will remember I was in the presence-chamber an hour ago, my lord. I am Lempriere, Seigneur of Rozel, butler to her Majesty."

"But are you, then? I thought you were a farmer and raised cabbages." Smiling, Leicester passed on.

For a moment the Seigneur stood pondering the Earl's words and angrily wondering at his obtuseness. Then suddenly he knew he had been mocked, and he turned and ran after his enemy; but Leicester had vanished into the Queen's apartments.

The Queen's fool was standing near, seemingly engaged in the light occupation of catching imaginary flies, buzzing with his motions. As Leicester disappeared he looked from under his arm at Lempriere. "If a bird will not stop for the salt to its tail, then the salt is damned, Nuncio; and you must cry David! and get thee to the quarry."

Lempriere stared at him swelling with rage; but the quaint smiling of the fool conquered him, and instead of turning on his heel, he spread himself like a Colossus and looked down in grandeur. "And wherefore cry David! and get quarrying?" he asked. "Come, what sense is there in thy words, when I am wroth with yonder nobleman?"

"Oh, Nuncio, Nuncio, thou art a child of innocence and without history. The salt held not the bird for the net of thy anger, Nuncio; so it is meet that other ways be found. David the ancient put a stone in a sling and Goliath laid him down like an egg in a nest--therefore, Nuncio, get thee to the quarry. Obligato, which is to say Leicester yonder, hath no tail--the devil cut it off and wears it himself. So let salt be damned, and go sling thy stone!"

Lempriere was good-humoured again. He fumbled in his purse and brought forth a gold-piece. "Fool, thou hast spoken like a man born sensible and infinite. I understand thee like a book. Thou hast not folly and thou shalt not be answered as if thou wast a fool. But in terms of gold shalt thou have reply." He put the gold-piece in the fool's hand and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Why now, Nuncio," answered the other, "it is clear that there is a fool at Court, for is it not written that a fool and his money are soon parted? And this gold-piece is still hot with running 'tween thee and me."

Lempriere roared. "Why, then, for thy hit thou shalt have another gold-piece, gossip. But see"--his voice lowered--"know you where is my friend, Buonespoir, the pirate? Know you where he is in durance?"

"As I know marrow in a bone I know where he hides, Nuncio, so come with me," answered the fool.

"If De Carteret had but thy sense, we could live at peace in Jersey," rejoined Lempriere, and strode ponderously after the light-footed fool who capered forth singing:

"Come hither, O come hither,
There's a bride upon her bed;
They have strewn her o'er with roses,
There are roses 'neath her head:
Life is love and tears and laughter,
But the laughter it is dead
Sing the way to the Valley, to the Valley!
Hey, but the roses they are red!"

CHAPTER IX

The next day at noon, as her Majesty had advised the Seigneur, De la Foret was ushered into the presence. The Queen's eye quickened as she saw him, and she remarked with secret pleasure the figure and bearing of this young captain of the Huguenots. She loved physical grace and prowess with a full heart. The day had almost passed when she would measure all men against Leicester in his favour; and he, knowing this clearly now, saw with haughty anxiety the gradual passing of his power, and clutched futilely at the vanishing substance. Thus it was that he now spent his strength in getting his way with the Queen in little things. She had been so long used to take his counsel--in some part wise and skilful--that when she at length did without it, or followed her own mind, it became a fever with him to let no chance pass for serving his own will by persuading her out of hers. This was why he had spent an hour the day before in sadly yet vaguely reproaching her for the slight she put upon him in the presence-chamber by her frown; and another in urging her to come to terms with Catherine de Medici in this small affair--since the Frenchwoman had set her revengeful heart upon it--that larger matters might be settled to the gain of England. It was not so much that he had reason to destroy De la Foret, as that he saw that the Queen was disposed to deal friendly by him and protect him. He did not see the danger of rousing in the Queen the same unreasoning tenaciousness of will upon just such lesser things as might well be left to her advisers. In spite of which he almost succeeded, this very day, in regaining, for a time at least, the ground he had lost with her. He had never been so adroit, so brilliant, so witty, so insinuating; and he left her with the feeling that if he had his way concerning De la Foret--a mere stubborn whim, with no fair reason behind it--his influence would be again securely set. The sense of crisis was on him.

On Michel de la Foret entering the presence the Queen's attention had become riveted. She felt in him a spirit of mastery, yet of unselfish purpose. Here was one, she thought, who might well be in her household, or leading a regiment of her troops. The clear fresh face, curling hair, direct look, quiet energy, and air of nobility--this sort of man could

only be begotten of a great cause; he were not possible in idle or prosperous times.

Elizabeth looked him up and down, then affected surprise. "Monsieur de la Foret," she said, "I do not recognise you in this attire"--glancing towards his dress.

De la Foret bowed, and Elizabeth continued, looking at a paper in her hand: "You landed on our shores of Jersey in the robes of a priest of France. The passport for a priest of France was found upon your person when our officers in Jersey made search of you. Which is yourself--Michel de la Foret, soldier, or a priest of France?"

De la Foret replied gravely that he was a soldier, and that the priestly dress had been but a disguise.

"In which papist attire, methinks, Michel de la Foret, soldier and Huguenot, must have been ill at ease--the eagle with the vulture's wing. What say you, Monsieur?"

"That vulture's wing hath carried me to a safe dove-cote, your gracious Majesty," he answered, with a low obeisance.

"I'm none so sure of that, Monsieur," was Elizabeth's answer, and she glanced quizzically at Leicester, who made a gesture of annoyance. "Our cousin France makes you to us a dark intriguer and conspirator, a dangerous weed in our good garden of England, a 'troublous, treacherous violence'--such are you called, Monsieur."

"I am in your high Majesty's power," he answered, "to do with me as it seemeth best. If your Majesty wills it that I be returned to France, I pray you set me upon its coast as I came from it, a fugitive. Thence will I try to find my way to the army and the poor stricken people of whom I was. I pray for that only, and not to be given to the red hand of the Medici."

"Red hand--by my faith, but you are bold, Monsieur!"

Leicester tapped his foot upon the floor impatiently, then caught the Queen's eye, and gave her a meaning look.

De la Foret saw the look and knew his enemy, but he did not quail. "Bold only by your high Majesty's faith, indeed," he answered the Queen, with harmless guile.

Elizabeth smiled. She loved such flattering speech from a strong man. It touched a chord in her deeper than that under Leicester's finger. Leicester's impatience only made her more self-willed on the instant.

"You speak with the trumpet note, Monsieur," she said to De la Foret. "We will prove you. You shall have a company in my Lord Leicester's army here, and we will send you upon some service worthy of your fame."

"I crave your Majesty's pardon, but I cannot do it," was De la Foret's instant reply. "I have sworn that I will lift my sword in one cause only, and to that I must stand. And more--the widow of my dead chief, Gabriel de Montgomery, is set down in this land unsheltered and alone. I have sworn to one who loves her, and for my dead chief's sake, that I will serve her and be near her until better days be come and she may

return in quietness to France. In exile we few stricken folk must stand together, your august Majesty."

Elizabeth's eye flashed up. She was impatient of refusal of her favour. She was also a woman, and that De la Foret should flaunt his devotion to another woman was little to her liking. The woman in her, which had never been blessed with a noble love, was roused. The sourness of a childless, uncompanionable life was stronger for the moment than her strong mind and sense.

"Monsieur has sworn this, and Monsieur has sworn that," she said petulantly--" and to one who loveth a lady, and for a cause--tut, tut, tut!--"

Suddenly a kind of intriguing laugh leaped into her eye, and she turned to Leicester and whispered in his ear. Leicester frowned, then smiled, and glanced up and down De la Foret's figure impertinently.

"See, Monsieur de la Foret," she added; "since you will not fight, you shall preach. A priest you came into my kingdom, and a priest you shall remain; but you shall preach good English doctrine and no Popish folly."

De la Foret started, then composed himself, and before he had time to reply, Elizabeth continued: "Partly for your own sake am I thus gracious; for as a preacher of the Word I have not need to give you up, according to agreement with our brother of France. As a rebel and conspirator I were bound to do so, unless you were an officer of my army. The Seigneur of Rozel has spoken for you, and the Comtesse de Montgomery has written a pleading letter. Also I have from another source a tearful prayer--the ink is scarce dry upon it--which has been of service to you. But I myself have chosen this way of escape for you. Prove yourself worthy, and all may be well--but prove yourself you shall. You have prepared your own brine, Monsieur; in it you shall pickle."

She smiled a sour smile, for she was piqued, and added: "Do you think I will have you here squiring of distressed dames, save as a priest? You shall hence to Madame of Montgomery as her faithful chaplain, once I have heard you preach and know your doctrine."

Leicester almost laughed outright in the young man's face now, for he had no thought that De la Foret would accept, and refusal meant the exile's doom.

It seemed fantastic that this noble gentleman, this very type of the perfect soldier, with the brown face of a picaroon and an athletic valour of body, should become a preacher even in necessity.

Elizabeth, seeing De la Foret's dumb amazement and anxiety, spoke up sharply: "Do this, or get you hence to the Medici, and Madame of Montgomery shall mourn her protector, and Mademoiselle your mistress of the vermilion cheek, shall have one lover the less; which, methinks, our Seigneur of Rozel would thank me for."

De la Foret started, his lips pressed firmly together in effort of restraint. There seemed little the Queen did not know concerning him; and reference to Angele roused him to sharp solicitude.

"Well, well?" asked Elizabeth impatiently, then made a motion to Leicester, and he, going to the door, bade some one to enter.

There stepped inside the Seigneur of Rozel, who made a lumbering obeisance, then got to his knees before the Queen.

"You have brought the lady safely--with her father?" she asked.

Lempriere, puzzled, looked inquiringly at the Queen, then replied: "Both are safe without, your infinite Majesty."

De la Foret's face grew pale. He knew now for the first time that Angele and her father were in England, and he looked Lempriere suspiciously in the eyes; but the swaggering Seigneur met his look frankly, and bowed with ponderous and genial gravity.

Now De la Foret spoke. "Your high Majesty," said he, "if I may ask Mademoiselle Aubert one question in your presence--"

"Your answer now; the lady in due season," interposed the Queen.

"She was betrothed to a soldier, she may resent a priest," said De la Foret, with a touch of humour, for he saw the better way was to take the matter with some outward ease.

Elizabeth smiled. "It is the custom of her sex to have a fondness for both," she answered, with an acid smile. "But your answer?"

De la Foret's face became exceeding grave. Bowing his head, he said: "My sword has spoken freely for the Cause; God forbid that my tongue should not speak also. I will do your Majesty's behest."

The jesting word that was upon the royal lips came not forth, for De la Foret's face was that of a man who had determined a great thing, and Elizabeth was one who had a heart for high deeds. "The man is brave indeed," she said under her breath, and, turning to the dumfounded Seigneur, bade him bring in Mademoiselle Aubert.

A moment later Angele entered, came a few steps forward, made obeisance, and stood still. She showed no trepidation, but looked before her steadily. She knew not what was to be required of her, she was a stranger in a strange land; but persecution and exile had gone far to strengthen her spirit and greatness her composure.

Elizabeth gazed at the girl coldly and critically. To women she was not over-amiable; but as she looked at the young Huguenot maid, of this calm bearing, warm of colour, clear of eye, and purposeful of face, some thing kindled in her. Most like it was that love for a cause, which was more to be encouraged by her than any woman's love for a man, which as she grew older inspired her with aversion, as talk of marriage brought cynical allusions to her lips.

"I have your letter and its protests and its pleadings. There were fine words and adjurations--are you so religious, then?" she asked brusquely.

"I am a Huguenot, your noble Majesty," answered the girl, as though that answered all.

"How is it, then, you are betrothed to a roistering soldier?" asked the Queen.

"Some must pray for Christ's sake, and some must fight, your most christian Majesty," answered the girl. "Some must do both," rejoined the Queen, in a kinder voice, for the pure spirit of the girl worked upon her. "I am told that Monsieur de la Foret fights fairly. If he can pray as well, methinks he shall have safety in our kingdom, and ye shall all have peace. On Trinity Sunday you shall preach in my chapel, Monsieur de la Foret, and thereafter you shall know your fate."

She rose. "My Lord," she said to Leicester, on whose face gloom had settled, "you will tell the Lord Chamberlain that Monsieur de la Foret's durance must be made comfortable in the west tower of my palace till chapel-going of Trinity Day. I will send him for his comfort and instruction some sermons of Latimer."

She stepped down from the dais. "You will come with me, mistress," she said to Angele, and reached out her hand.

Angele fell on her knees and kissed it, tears falling down her cheek, then rose and followed the Queen from the chamber. She greatly desired to look backward towards De la Foret, but some good angel bade her not. She realised that to offend the Queen at this moment might ruin all; and Elizabeth herself was little like to offer chance for farewell and love-tokens.

So it was that, with bowed head, Angele left the room with the Queen of England, leaving Lempriere and De la Foret gazing at each other, the one bewildered, the other lost in painful reverie, and Leicester smiling maliciously at them both.

CHAPTER X

Every man, if you bring him to the right point, if you touch him in the corner where he is most sensitive, where he most lives, as it were; if you prick his nerves with a needle of suggestion where all his passions, ambitions and sentiments are at white heat, will readily throw away the whole game of life in some mad act out of harmony with all he ever did. It matters little whether the needle prick him by accident or blunder or design, he will burst all bounds, and establish again the old truth that each of us will prove himself a fool given perfect opportunity. Nor need the occasion of this revolution be a great one; the most trivial event may produce the great fire which burns up wisdom, prudence and habit.

The Earl of Leicester, so long counted astute, clearheaded, and well-governed, had been suddenly foisted out of balance, shaken from his imperious composure, tortured out of an assumed and persistent urbanity, by the presence in Greenwich Palace of a Huguenot exile of no seeming importance, save what the Medici grimly gave him by desiring his head. It appeared absurd that the great Leicester, whose nearness to the throne had made him the most feared, most notable, and, by virtue of his opportunities, the most dramatic figure in England, should have sleepless nights by reason of a fugitive like Michel de la Foret. On the surface it was preposterous that he should see in the Queen's offer of service to the refugee evidence that she was set to grant him special favours; it was equally absurd that her offer of safety to him on pledge of his turning preacher should seem proof that she meant to have him near her. Elizabeth had left the presence-chamber without so much as a glance at

him, though she had turned and looked graciously at the stranger. He had hastily followed her, and thereafter impatiently awaited a summons which never came, though he had sent a message that his hours were at her Majesty's disposal. Waiting, he saw Angele's father escorted from the palace by a Gentleman Pensioner to a lodge in the park; he saw Michel de la Foret taken to his apartments; he saw the Seigneur of Rozel walking in the palace grounds with such possession as though they were his own, self-content in every motion of his body.

Upon the instant the great Earl was incensed out of all proportion to the affront of the Seigneur's existence. He suddenly hated Lempriere only less than he hated Michel de la Foret. As he still waited irritably for a summons from Elizabeth, he brooded on every word and every look she had given him of late; he recalled her manner to him in the ante-chapel the day before, and the admiring look she cast on De la Foret but now. He had seen more in it than mere approval of courage and the self-reliant bearing of a refugee of her own religion.

These were days when the soldier of fortune mounted to high places. He needed but to carry the banner of bravery, and a busy sword, and his way to power was not hindered by poor estate. To be gently born was the one thing needful, and Michel de la Foret was gently born; and he had still his sword, though he chose not to use it in Elizabeth's service. My Lord knew it might be easier for a stranger like De la Foret, who came with no encumbrance, to mount to place in the struggles of the Court, than for an Englishman, whose increasing and ever-bolder enemies were undermining on every hand, to hold his own.

He began to think upon ways and means to meet this sudden preference of the Queen, made sharply manifest as he waited in the ante-chamber, by a summons to the refugee to enter the Queen's apartments. When the refugee came forth again he wore a sword the Queen had sent him, and a packet of Latimer's sermons were under his arm. Leicester was unaware that Elizabeth herself did not see De la Foret when he was thus hastily called; but that her lady-in-waiting, the Duke's Daughter, who figured so largely in the pictures Lempriere drew of his experiences at Greenwich Palace, brought forth the sermons and the sword, with this message from the Queen:

"The Queen says that it is but fair to the sword to be by Michel de la Foret's side when the sermons are in his hand, that his choice have every seeming of fairness. For her Majesty says it is still his choice between the Sword and the Book till Trinity Day."

Leicester, however, only saw the sword at the side of the refugee and the gold-bound book under his arm as he came forth, and in a rage he left the palace and gloomily walked under the trees, denying himself to every one.

To seize De la Foret, and send him to the Medici, and then rely on Elizabeth's favour for his pardon, as he had done in the past? That might do, but the risk to England was too great. It would be like the Queen, if her temper was up, to demand from the Medici the return of De la Foret, and war might ensue. Two women, with two nations behind them, were not to be played lightly against each other, trusting to their common sense and humour.

As he walked among the trees, brooding with averted eyes, he was suddenly faced by the Seigneur of Rozel, who also was shaken from his discretion and the best interests of the two fugitives he was bound to protect, by a

late offence against his own dignity. A seed of rancour had been sown in his mind which had grown to a great size and must presently burst into a dark flower of vengeance. He, Lempriere of Rozel, with three dovecotes, the perquage, and the office of butler to the Queen, to be called a "farmer," to be sneered at--it was not in the blood of man, not in the towering vanity of a Lempriere, to endure it at any price computable to mortal mind.

Thus there were in England on that day two fools (there are as many now), and one said:

"My Lord Leicester, I crave a word with you."

"Crave on, good fellow," responded Leicester with a look of boredom, making to pass by.

"I am Lempriere, lord of Rozel, my lord--"

"Ah yes, I took you for a farmer," answered Leicester. "Instead of that, I believe you keep doves, and wear a jerkin that fits like a king's. Dear Lord, so does greatness come with girth!"

"The King that gave me dove-cotes gave me honour, and 'tis not for the Earl of Leicester to belittle it."

"What is your coat of arms?" said Leicester with a faint smile, but in an assumed tone of natural interest.

"A swan upon a sea of azure, two stars above, and over all a sword with a wreath around its point," answered Lempriere simply, unsuspecting irony, and touched by Leicester's flint where he was most like to flare up with vanity.

"Ah!" said Leicester. "And the motto?"

"Mea spes supra stella--my hope is beyond the stars."

"And the wreath--of parsley, I suppose?"

Now Lempriere understood, and he shook with fury as he roared:

"Yes, by God, and to be got at the point of the sword, to put on the heads of insolents like Lord Leicester!" His face was flaming, he was like a cock strutting upon a stable mound.

There fell a slight pause, and then Leicester said: "To-morrow at daylight, eh?"

"Now, my lord, now!"

"We have no seconds."

"'Sblood! 'Tis not your way, my lord, to be stickling in detail of courtesy."

"'Tis not the custom to draw swords in secret, Lempriere of Rozel. Also my teeth are not on edge to fight you."

Lempriere had already drawn his sword, and the look of his eyes was as

that of a mad bull in a ring. "You won't fight with me--you don't think Rozel your equal?" His voice was high.

Leicester's face took on a hard, cruel look. "We cannot fight among the ladies," he said quietly. Lempriere followed his glance, and saw the Duke's Daughter and another in the trees near by.

He hastily put up his sword. "When, my lord?" he asked.

"You will hear from me to-night," was the answer, and Leicester went forward hastily to meet the ladies--they had news no doubt.

Lempriere turned on his heel and walked quickly away among the trees towards the quarters where Buonespoir was in durance, which was little more severe than to keep him within the palace yard. There he found the fool and the pirate in whimsical converse.

The fool had brought a letter of inquiry and warm greeting from Angele to Buonespoir, who was laboriously inditing one in return. When Lempriere entered the pirate greeted him jovially.

"In the very pinch of time you come," he said. "You have grammar and syntax and etiquette."

"'Tis even so, Nuncio," said the fool. "Here is needed prosody potential. Exhale!"

The three put their heads together above the paper.

CHAPTER XI

"I would know your story. How came you and yours to this pass? Where were you born? Of what degree are you? And this Michel de la Foret, when came he to your feet--or you to his arms? I would know all. Begin where life began; end where you sit here at the feet of Elizabeth. This other cushion to your knees. There--now speak. We are alone."

Elizabeth pushed a velvet cushion towards Angele, where she half-knelt, half-sat on the rush-strewn floor of the great chamber. The warm light of the afternoon sun glowed through the thick-tinted glass high up, and, in the gleam, the heavy tapestries sent by an archduke, once suitor for Elizabeth's hand, emerged with dramatic distinctness, and peopled the room with silent watchers of the great Queen and the nobly-born but poor and fugitive Huguenot. A splendid piece of sculpture--Eleanor, wife of Edward--given Elizabeth by another royal suitor, who had sought to be her consort through many years, caught the warm bath of gold and crimson from the clerestory and seemed alive and breathing. Against the pedestal the Queen had placed her visitor, the red cushions making vivid contrast to her white gown and black hair. In the half-kneeling, half-sitting posture, with her hands clasped before her, so to steady herself to composure, Angele looked a suppliant--and a saint. Her pure, straightforward gaze, her smooth, urbane forehead, the guilelessness that spoke in every feature, were not made worldly by the intelligence and humour reposing in the brown depths of her eyes. Not a line vexed her face or forehead. Her countenance was of a singular and almost polished smoothness, and though her gown was severely simple by

comparison with silks and velvets, furs and ruffles of a gorgeous Court at its most gorgeous period, yet in it here and there were touches of exquisite fineness. The black velvet ribbon slashing her sleeves, the slight cloud-like gathering of lace at the back of her head, gave a distinguished softness to her appearance.

She was in curious contrast to the Queen, who sat upon heaped-up cushions, her rich buff and black gown a blaze of jewels, her yellow hair, now streaked with grey, roped with pearls, her hands heavy with rings, her face past its youth, past its hopefulness, however noble and impressive, past its vivid beauty. Her eyes wore ever a determined look, were persistent and vigilant, with a lurking trouble, yet flooded, too, by a quiet melancholy, like a low, insistent note that floats through an opera of passion, romance, and tragedy; like a tone of pathos giving deep character to some splendid pageant, which praises whilst it commemorates, proclaiming conquest while the grass has not yet grown on quiet houses of the children of the sword who no more wield the sword. Evasive, cautious, secretive, creator of her own policy, she had sacrificed her womanhood to the power she held and the State she served. Vain, passionate, and faithful, her heart all England and Elizabeth, the hunger for glimpses of what she had never known, and was never to know, thrust itself into her famished life; and she was wont to indulge, as now, in fancies and follow some emotional whim with a determination very like to eccentricity.

That, at this time, when great national events were forward, when conspiracies abounded, when Parliament was grimly gathering strength to compel her to marry; and her Council were as sternly pursuing their policy for the destruction of Leicester; while that very day had come news of a rising in the North and of fresh Popish plots hatched in France—that in such case, this day she should set aside all business, refuse ambassadors and envoys admission, and occupy herself with two Huguenot refugees seemed incredible to the younger courtiers. To such as Cecil, however, there was clear understanding. He knew that when she seemed most inert, most impassive to turbulent occurrences, most careless of consequences, she was but waiting till, in her own mind, her plans were grown; so that she should see her end clearly ere she spoke or moved. Now, as the great minister showed himself at the door of the chamber and saw Elizabeth seated with Angele, he drew back instinctively, expectant of the upraised hand which told him he must wait. And, in truth, he was nothing loth to do so, for his news he cared little to deliver, important though it was that she should have it promptly and act upon it soon. He turned away with a feeling of relief, however, for this gossip with the Huguenot maid would no doubt interest her, give new direction to her warm sympathies, which if roused in one thing were ever more easily roused in others. He knew that a crisis was nearing in the royal relations with Leicester. In a life of devotion to her service he had seen her before in this strange mood, and he could feel that she was ready for an outburst. As he thought of De la Foret and the favour with which she had looked at him he smiled grimly, for if it meant aught it meant that it would drive Leicester to some act which would hasten his own doom; though, indeed, it might also make another path more difficult for himself, for the Parliament, for the people.

Little as Elizabeth could endure tales of love and news of marriage; little as she believed in any vows, save those made to herself; little as she was inclined to adjust the rough courses of true love, she was the surgeon to this particular business, and she had the surgeon's love of laying bare even to her own cynicism the hurt of the poor patient under

her knife. Indeed, so had Angele impressed her that for once she thought she might hear the truth. Because she saw the awe in the other's face and a worshipping admiration of the great protectress of Protestantism, who had by large gifts of men and money in times past helped the Cause, she looked upon her here with kindness.

"Speak now, mistress fugitive, and I will listen," she added, as Cecil withdrew; and she made a motion to musicians in a distant gallery.

Angele's heart fluttered to her mouth, but the soft, simple music helped her, and she began with eyes bent upon the ground, her linked fingers clasping and unclasping slowly.

"I was born at Rouen, your high Majesty," she said. "My mother was a cousin of the Prince of Passy, the great Protestant--"

"Of Passy--ah!" said Elizabeth amazed. "Then you are Protestants indeed; and your face is no invention, but cometh honestly. No, no, 'tis no accident--God rest his soul, great Passy!"

"She died--my mother--when I was a little child. I can but just remember her--so brightly quiet, so quick, so beautiful. In Rouen life had little motion; but now and then came stir and turmoil, for war sent its message into the old streets, and our captains and our peasants poured forth to fight for the King. Once came the King and Queen--Francis and Mary--"

Elizabeth drew herself upright with an exclamation. "Ah, you have seen her--Mary of Scots," she said sharply. "You have seen her?"

"As near as I might touch her with my hand, as near as is your high Majesty. She spoke to me--my mother's father was in her train;--as yet we had not become Huguenots, nor did we know her Majesty as now the world knows. They came, the King and Queen--and that was the beginning."

She paused, and looked shyly at Elizabeth, as though she found it hard to tell her story.

"And the beginning, it was--?" said Elizabeth, impatient and intent.

"We went to Court. The Queen called my mother into her train. But it was in no wise for our good. At Court my mother pined away--and so she died in durance."

"Wherefore in durance?"

"To what she saw she would not shut her eyes; to what she heard she would not close her soul; what was required of her she would not do."

"She would not obey the Queen?"

"She could not obey those whom the Queen favoured. Then the tyranny that broke her heart--"

The Queen interrupted her.

"In very truth, but 'tis not in France alone that Queen's favourites grasp the sceptre and speak the word. Hath a Queen a thousand eyes--can she know truth where most dissemble?"

"There was a man--he could not know there was one true woman there, who for her daughter's sake, for her desired advancement, and because she was cousin of Passy, who urged it, lived that starved life; this man, this prince, drew round her feet snares, set pit-falls for her while my father was sent upon a mission. Steadfast she kept her soul unspotted; but it wore away her life. The Queen would not permit return to Rouen--who can tell what tale was told her by one whom she foiled? And so she stayed. In this slow, savage persecution, when she was like a bird that, thinking it is free, flieth against the window-pane and falleth back beaten, so did she stay, and none could save her. To cry out, to throw herself upon the spears, would have been ruin of herself, her husband and her child; and for these she lived."

Elizabeth's eyes had kindled. Perhaps never in her life had the life at Court been so exposed to her. The simple words, meant but to convey the story, and with no thought behind, had thrown a light on her own Court, on her own position. Adept in weaving a sinuous course in her policy, in making mazes for others to tread, the mazes which they in turn prepared had never before been traced beneath her eyes to the same vivid and ultimate effect.

"Help me, ye saints, but things are not at such a pass in this place!" she said abruptly, but with weariness in her voice. "Yet sometimes I know not. The Court is a city by itself, walled and moated, and hath a life all its own. 'If there be found ten honest men within the city yet will I save it,' saith the Lord. By my father's head, I would not risk a finger on the hazard if this city, this Court of Elizabeth were set 'twixt the fire from Heaven and eternal peace. In truth, child, I would lay me down and die in black disgust were it not that one might come hereafter would make a very Sodom or Gomorrah of this land: and out yonder--out in all my counties, where the truth of England is among my poor burgesses, who die for the great causes which my nobles profess but risk not their lives--out yonder all that they have won, and for which I have striven, would be lost. . . . Speak on. I have not heard so plain a tongue and so little guile these twenty years."

Angele continued, more courage in her voice. "In the midst of it all came the wave of the new faith upon my mother. And before ill could fall upon her from her foes, she died and was at rest. Then we returned to Rouen, my father and I, and there we lived in peril, but in great happiness of soul until the day of massacre. That night in Paris we were given greatly of the mercy of God."

"You were there--you were in the massacre at Paris?"

In the house of the Duke of Langon, with whom was resting after a hazardous enterprise, Michel de la Foret."

"And here beginneth the second lesson," said the Queen with a smile on her lips; but there was a look of scrutiny in her eyes, and something like irony in her tone. "And I will swear by all the stars of Heaven that this Michel saved ye both. Is it not so?"

"It is even so. By his skill and bravery we found our way to safety, and in a hiding-place near to our loved Rouen watched him return from the gates of death."

"He was wounded then?"

"Seven times wounded, and with as little blood left in him as would fill a cup. But it was summer, and we were in the hills, and they brought us, our friends of Rouen, all that we had need of; and so God was with us.

"But did he save thy life, except by skill, by indirect and fortunate wisdom? Was there deadly danger upon thee? Did he beat down the sword of death?"

"He saved my life thrice directly. The wounds he carried were got by interposing his own sword 'twixt death and me."

"And that hath need of recompense?"

"My life was little worth the wounds he suffered; but I waited not until he saved it to owe it unto him. All that it is was his before he drew the sword."

"And 'tis this ye would call love betwixt ye--sweet givings and takings of looks, and soft sayings, and unchangeable and devouring faith. Is't this--and is this all?"

The girl had spoken out of an innocent heart, but the challenge in the Queen's voice worked upon her, and though she shrank a little, the fulness of her soul welled up and strengthened her. She spoke again, and now in her need and in her will to save the man she loved, by making this majesty of England his protector, her words had eloquence.

"It is not all, noble Queen. Love is more than that. It is the waking in the poorest minds, in the most barren souls, of something greater than themselves--as a chemist should find a substance that would give all other things by touching of them a new and higher value; as light and sun draw from the earth the tendrils of the seed that else had lain unproducing. 'Tis not alone soft words and touch of hand or lip. This caring wholly for one outside one's self kills that self which else would make the world blind and deaf and dumb. None hath loved greatly but hath helped to love in others. Ah, most sweet Majesty, for great souls like thine, souls born great, this medicine is not needful, for already hath the love of a nation inspired and enlarged it; but for souls like mine and of so many, none better and none worse than me, to love one other soul deeply and abidingly lifts us higher than ourselves. Your Majesty hath been loved by a whole people, by princes and great men in a different sort--is it not the world's talk that none that ever reigned hath drawn such slavery of princes, and of great nobles who have courted death for hopeless love of one beyond their star? And is it not written in the world's book also that the Queen of England hath loved no man, but hath poured out her heart to a people; and hath served great causes in all the earth because of that love which hath still enlarged her soul, dowered at birth beyond reckoning?" Tears filled her eyes. "Ah, your supreme Majesty, to you whose heart is universal, the love of one poor mortal seemeth a small thing, but to those of little consequence it is the cable by which they unsteadily hold over the chasm 'twixt life and immortality. To thee, oh greatest monarch of the world, it is a staff on which thou need'st not lean, which thou hast never grasped; to me it is my all; without it I fail and fall and die."

She had spoken as she felt, yet, because she was a woman and guessed the mind of another woman, she had touched Elizabeth where her armour was weakest. She had suggested that the Queen had been the object of adoration, but had never given her heart to any man; that hers was the

virgin heart and life; and that she had never stooped to conquer. Without realising it, and only dimly moving with that end in view, she had whetted Elizabeth's vanity. She had indeed soothed a pride wounded of late beyond endurance, suspecting, as she did, that Leicester had played his long part for his own sordid purposes, that his devotion was more alloy than precious metal. No note of praise could be pitched too high for Elizabeth, and if only policy did not intervene, if but no political advantage was lost by saving De la Foret, that safety seemed now secure.

"You tell a tale and adorn it with good grace," she said, and held out her hand. Angele kissed it. "And you have said to Elizabeth what none else dared to say since I was Queen here. He who hath never seen the lightning hath no dread of it. I had not thought there was in the world so much artlessness, with all the power of perfect art. But we live to be wiser. Thou shalt continue in thy tale. Thou hast seen Mary, once Queen of France, now Queen of Scots--answer me fairly; without if, or though, or any sort of doubt, the questions I shall put. Which of us twain, this ruin-starred queen or I, is of higher stature?"

"She hath advantage in little of your Majesty," bravely answered Angele.

"Then," answered Elizabeth sourly, "she is too high, for I myself am neither too high nor too low. . . . And of complexion, which is the fairer?"

"Her complexion is the fairer, but your Majesty's countenance hath truer beauty, and sweeter majesty." Elizabeth frowned slightly, then said:

"What exercises did she take when you were at the Court?"

"Sometimes she hunted, your Majesty, and sometimes she played upon the virginals."

"Did she play to effect?"

"Reasonably, your noble Majesty."

"You shall hear me play, and then speak truth upon us, for I have known none with so true a tongue since my father died."

Thereon she called to a lady who waited near in a little room to bring an instrument; but at that moment Cecil appeared again at the door, and his face seeming to show anxiety, Elizabeth, with a sigh, beckoned him to enter.

"Your face, Cecil, is as long as a Lenten collect. What raven croaks in England on May Day eve?" Cecil knelt before her, and gave into her hand a paper.

"What record runs here?" she asked querulously. "A prayer of your faithful Lords and Commons that your Majesty will grant speech with their chosen deputies to lay before your Majesty a cause they have at heart."

"Touching of--?" darkly asked the Queen.

"The deputies wait even now--will not your Majesty receive them? They have come humbly, and will go hence as humbly on the instant, if the hour is ill chosen."

Immediately Elizabeth's humour changed. A look of passion swept across her face, but her eyes lighted, and her lips smiled proudly. She avoided troubles by every means, fought off by subtleties the issues which she must meet; but when the inevitable hour came none knew so well to meet it as though it were a dearest friend, no matter what the danger, how great the stake.

"They are here at my door, these good servants of the State--shall they be kept dangling?" she said loudly. "Though it were time for prayers and God's mercy yet should they speak with me, have my counsel, or my hand upon the sacred parchment of the State. Bring them hither, Cecil. Now we shall see--Now you shall see, Angele of Rouen, now you shall see how queens shall have no hearts to call their own, but be head and heart and soul and body at the will of every churl who thinks he serves the State and knows the will of Heaven. Stand here at my left hand. Mark the players and the play."

Kneeling, the deputies presented a resolution from the Lords and Commons that the Queen should, without more delay, in keeping with her oft-expressed resolve and the promise of her Council, appoint one who should succeed to the throne in case of her death "without posterity." Her faithful people pleaded with her gracious Majesty to forego unwillingness to marry and seek a consort worthy of her supreme consideration, to be raised to a place beside her near that throne which she had made the greatest in the world.

Gravely, solemnly, the chief members of the Lords and Commons spoke, and with as weighty pauses and devoted protestations as though this were the first time their plea had been urged, this obvious duty had been set out before her. Long ago in the flush and pride of her extreme youth and the full assurance of the fruits of marriage, they had spoken with the same sober responsibility; and though her youth had gone and the old certainty had for ever disappeared, they spoke of her marriage and its consequences as though it were still that far-off yesterday. Well for them that they did so, for though time had flown and royal suitors without number had become figures dim in the people's mind, Elizabeth, fed upon adulation, invoked, admired, besieged by young courtiers, flattered by maids who praised her beauty, had never seen the hands of the clock pass high noon, and still remained under the dearest and saddest illusion which can rest in a woman's mind. Long after the hands of life's clock had moved into afternoon, the ancient prayer was still gravely presented that she should marry and give an heir to England's crown; and she as solemnly listened and dropped her eyes, and strove to hide her virgin modesty behind a high demeanour which must needs sink self in royal duty.

"These be the dear desires of your supreme Majesty's faithful Lords and Commons and the people of the shires whose wills they represent. Your Majesty's life, God grant it last beyond that of the youngest of your people so greatly blessed in your rule! But accidents of time be many; and while the world is full of guile, none can tell what peril may beset the crown, if your Majesty's wisdom sets not apart, gives not to her country, one whom the nation can surround with its care, encompass lovingly by its duty."

The talk with Angele had had a curious influence upon the Queen. It was plain that now she was moved by real feeling, and that, though she deceived herself, or pretended so to do, shutting her eyes to sober facts, and dreaming old dreams--as it were, in a world where never was a

mirror nor a timepiece--yet there was working in her a fresher spirit, urging her to a fairer course than she had shaped for many a day.

"My lords and gentlemen and my beloved subjects," she answered presently, and for an instant set her eyes upon Angele, then turned to them again, "I pray you stand and hear me. . . . Ye have spoken fair words to my face, and of my face, and of the person of this daughter of great Henry, from whom I got whatever grace or manner or favour is to me; and by all your reasoning you do flatter the heart of the Queen of England, whose mind indeed sleeps not in deed or desire for this realm. Ye have drawn a fair picture of this mortal me, and though from the grace of the picture the colours may fade by time, may give by weather, may be spoiled by chance, yet my loyal mind, nor time with her swift wings shall overtake, nor the misty clouds may darken, nor chance with her slippery foot may overthrow. It sets its course by the heart of England, and when it passeth there shall be found that one shall be left behind who shall be surety of all that hath been lying in the dim warehouse of fate for England's high future. Be sure that in this thing I have entered into the weigh-house, and I hold the balance, and ye shall be well satisfied. Ye have been fruitful in counsel, ye have been long knitting a knot never tied, ye shall have comfort soon. But know ye beyond peradventure that I have bided my time with good reason. If our loom be framed with rotten hurdles, when our web is well-nigh done, our work is yet to begin. Against mischance and dark discoveries my mind, with knowledge hidden from you, hath been firmly arrayed. If it be in your thought that I am set against a marriage which shall serve the nation, purge yourselves, friends, of that sort of heresy, for the belief is awry. Though I think that to be one and always one, neither mated nor mothering, be good for a private woman, for a prince it is not meet. Therefore, say to my Lords and Commons that I am more concerned for what shall chance to England when I am gone than to linger out my living thread. I hope, my lords and gentlemen, to die with a good Nunc Dimittis, which could not be if I did not give surety for the nation after my graven bones. Ye shall hear soon--ye shall hear and be satisfied, and so I give you to the care of Almighty God."

Once more they knelt, and then slowly withdrew, with faces downcast and troubled. They had secret knowledge which she did not yet possess, but which at any moment she must know, and her ambiguous speech carried no conviction to their minds. Yet their conference with her was most opportune, for the news she must presently receive, brought by a messenger from Scotland who had outstripped all others, would no doubt move her to action which should set the minds of the people at rest, and go far to stem the tide of conspiracy flowing through the kingdom.

Elizabeth stood watching them, and remained gazing after they had disappeared; then rousing herself, she turned to leave the room, and beckoned to Angele to follow.

CHAPTER XII

As twilight was giving place to night Angele was roused from the reverie into which she had fallen, by the Duke's Daughter, who whispered to her that if she would have a pleasure given to but few, she would come quickly. Taking her hand the Duke's Daughter--as true and whimsical a spirit as ever lived in troubled days and under the aegis of the sword-

led her swiftly to the Queen's chamber. They did not enter, but waited in a quiet gallery.

"The Queen is playing upon the virginals, and she playeth best when alone; so stand you here by this tapestry, and you shall have pleasure beyond payment," said the Duke's Daughter.

Angele had no thought that the Queen of her vanity had commanded that she be placed there as though secretly, and she listened dutifully at first; but presently her ears were ravished; and even the Duke's Daughter showed some surprise, for never had she heard the Queen play with such grace and feeling. The countenance of the musician was towards them, and at last, as though by accident, Elizabeth looked up and saw the face of her lady.

"Spy, spy," she cried. "Come hither--come hither, all of you!"

When they had descended and knelt to her, she made as if she would punish the Duke's Daughter by striking her with a scarf that lay at her hand, but to Angele she said:

"How think you then, hath that other greater skill--Darnley's wife I mean?"

"Not she or any other hath so delighted me," said Angele, with worship in her eyes--so doth talent given to majesty become lifted beyond its measure.

The Queen's eyes lighted. "We shall have dancing, then," she said. "The dance hath charms for me. We shall not deny our youth. The heart shall keep as young as the body."

An instant later the room was full of dancers, and Elizabeth gave her hand to Leicester, who bent every faculty to pleasing her. His face had darkened as he had seen Angele beside her, but the Queen's graciousness, whether assumed or real, had returned, and her face carried a look of triumph and spirit and delight. Again and again she glanced towards Angele, and what she saw evidently gave her pleasure, for she laughed and disported herself with grace and an agreeable temper, and Leicester lent himself to her spirit with adroit wit and humility. He had seen his mistake of the morning, and was now intent to restore himself to favour.

He succeeded well, for the emotions roused in Elizabeth during the day, now heightened by vanity and emulation, found in him a centre upon which they could converge; and, in her mind, Angele, for the nonce, was disassociated from any thought of De la Foret. Leicester's undoubted gifts were well and cautiously directed, and his talent of assumed passion--his heart was facile, and his gallantry knew no bounds--was put to dexterous use, convincing for the moment. The Queen seemed all complaisance again. Presently she had Angele brought to her.

"How doth her dance compare--she who hath wedded Darnley?"

"She danceth not so high nor disposedly, with no such joyous lightness as your high Majesty, but yet she moveth with circumspection."

"Circumspection--circumspection, that is no gift in dancing, which should be wilful yet airily composed, thoughtless yet inducing. Circumspection!--in nothing else hath Mary shown it where she should. 'Tis like this Queen perversely to make a psalm of dancing, and then pirouette with

sacred duty. But you have spoken the truth, and I am well content. So get you to your rest."

She tapped Ange'le's cheek. "You shall remain here to-night. 'Tis too late for you to be sent abroad." She was about to dismiss her, when there was a sudden stir. Cecil had entered and was making his way to the Queen, followed by two strangers. Elizabeth waited their approach.

"Your gracious Majesty," said Cecil, in a voice none heard save Elizabeth, for all had fallen back at a wave of her hand, "the Queen of Scots is the mother of a fair son."

Elizabeth's face flushed, then became pale, and she struck her knee with her clinched hand. "Who bringeth the news?" she inquired in a sharp voice.

"Sir Andrew Melvill here."

"Who is with him yonder?"

"One who hath been attached to the Queen of Scots."

"He hath the ill look of such an one," she answered, and then said below her breath bitterly: "She hath a son--and I am but a barren stock."

Rising, she added hurriedly: "We will speak to the people at the May Day sports to-morrow. Let there be great feasting."

She motioned to Sir Andrew Melvill to come forward, and with a gesture of welcome and a promise of speech with him on the morrow she dismissed them.

Since the two strangers had entered, Angele's eyes had been fastened on the gentleman who accompanied Sir Andrew Melvill. Her first glance at him had sent a chill through her, and she remained confused and disturbed. In vain her memory strove to find where the man was set in her past. The time, the place, the event eluded her, but a sense of foreboding possessed her; and her eyes followed him with strained anxiety as he retired from the presence.

CHAPTER XIII

As had been arranged when Lempriere challenged Leicester, they met soon after dawn among the trees beside the Thames. A gentleman of the court, to whom the Duke's Daughter had previously presented Lempriere, gaily agreed to act as second, and gallantly attended the lord of Rozel in his adventurous enterprise. There were few at Court who had not some grudge against Leicester, few who would not willingly have done duty at such a time; for Leicester's friends were of fair-weather sort, ready to defend him, to support him, not for friendship but for the crumbs that dropped from the table of his power. The favourite himself was attended by the Earl of Ealing, a youngster who had his spurs to win, who thought it policy to serve the great time-server. Two others also came.

It was a morning little made for deeds of rancour or of blood. As they passed, the early morning mists above the green fields of Kent and Essex

were being melted by the summer sun. The smell of ripening fruit came on them with pungent sweetness, their feet crashed odorously through clumps of tiger-lilies, and the dew on the ribbon-grass shook glistening drops upon their velvets. Overhead the carolling of the thrush came swimming recklessly through the trees, and far over in the fields the ploughmen started upon the heavy courses of their labour; while here and there poachers with bows and arrows slid through the green undergrowth, like spies hovering on an army's flank.

To Lempriere the morning carried no impression save that life was well worth living. No agitation passed across his nerves, no apprehension reached his mind. He had no imagination; he loved the things that his eyes saw because they filled him with enjoyment; but why they were, or whence they came, or what they meant or boded, never gave him meditation. A vast epicurean, a consummate egotist, ripe with feeling and rich with energy, he could not believe that when he spoke the heavens would not fall. The stinging sweetness of the morning was a tonic to all his energies, an elation to his mind; he swaggered through the lush grasses and boskage as though marching to a marriage.

Leicester, on his part, no more caught at the meaning of the morning, at the long whisper of enlivened nature, than did his foe. The day gave to him no more than was his right. If the day was not fine, then Leicester was injured; but if the day was fine, then Leicester had his due. Moral blindness made him blind for the million deep teachings trembling round him. He felt only the garish and the splendid. So it was that at Kenilworth, where his Queen had visited him, the fetes that he had held would far outshine the fete which would take place in Greenwich Park on this May Day. The fete of this May Day would take place, but would he see it? The thought flashed through his mind that he might not; but he trod it under foot; not through an inborn, primitive egotism like that of Lempriere, but through an innate arrogance, an unalterable belief that Fate was ever on his side. He had played so many tricks with Fate, had mocked while taking its gifts so often, that, like the son who has flouted his indulgent father through innumerable times, he conceived that he should never be disinherited. It irked him that he should be fighting with a farmer, as he termed the Seigneur of the Jersey Isle; but there was in the event, too, a sense of relief, for he had a will for murder. Yesterday's events were still fresh in his mind; and he had a feeling that the letting of Lempriere's blood would cool his own and be some cure for the choler which the presence of these strangers at the Court had wrought in him.

There were better swordsmen in England than he, but his skill was various, and he knew tricks of the trade which this primitive Norman could never have learnt. He had some touch of wit, some biting observation, and, as he neared the place of the encounter, he played upon the coming event with a mordant frivolity. Not by nature a brave man, he was so much a fatalist, such a worshipper of his star, that he had acquired an artificial courage which had served him well. The unschooled gentlemen with him roared with laughter at his sallies, and they came to the place of meeting as though to a summer feast.

"Good-morrow, nobility," said Leicester with courtesy overdone, and bowing much too low. "Good-morrow, valentine," answered Lempriere, flushing slightly at the disguised insult, and rising to the moment.

"I hear the crop of fools is short this year in Jersey, and through no fault of yours--you've done your best most loyally," jeered Leicester, as

he doffed his doublet, his gentlemen laughing in derision.

"'Tis true enough, my lord, and I have come to find new seed in England, where are fools to spare; as I trust in Heaven one shall be spared on this very day for planting yonder."

He was eaten with rage, but he was cool and steady.

He was now in his linen and small clothes and looked like some untrained Hercules.

"Well said, nobility," laughed Leicester with an ugly look. "'Tis seed time--let us measure out the seed. On guard!"

Never were two men such opposites, never two so seemingly ill-matched. Leicester's dark face and its sardonic look, his lithe figure, the nervous strength of his bearing, were in strong contrast to the bulking breadth, the perspiring robustness of Lempriere of Rozel. It was not easy of belief that Lempriere should be set to fight this toreador of a fighting Court. But there they stood, Lempriere's face with a great-eyed gravity looming above his rotund figure like a moon above a purple cloud. But huge and loose though the Seigneur's motions seemed, he was as intent as though there were but two beings in the universe, Leicester and himself. A strange alertness seemed to be upon him, and, as Leicester found when the swords crossed, he was quicker than his bulk gave warrant. His perfect health made his vision sure; and, though not a fine swordsman, he had done much fighting in his time, had been ever ready for the touch of steel; and had served some warlike days in fighting France, where fate had well befriended him. That which Leicester meant should be by-play of a moment became a full half-hour's desperate game. Leicester found that the thrust--the fatal thrust learned from an Italian master--he meant to give, was met by a swift precision, responding to quick vision. Again and again he would have brought the end, but Lempriere heavily foiled him. The wound which the Seigneur got at last, meant to be mortal, was saved from that by the facility of a quick apprehension. Indeed, for a time the issue had seemed doubtful, for the endurance and persistence of the Seigneur made for exasperation and recklessness in his antagonist, and once blood was drawn from the wrist of the great man; but at length Lempriere went upon the aggressive. Here he erred, for Leicester found the chance for which he had manoeuvred--to use the feint and thrust got out of Italy. He brought his enemy low, but only after a duel the like of which had never been seen at the Court of England. The toreador had slain his bull at last, but had done no justice to his reputation. Never did man more gallantly sustain his honour with heaviest odds against him than did the Seigneur of Rozel that day.

As he was carried away by the merry gentlemen of the Court, he called back to the favourite:

"Leicester is not so great a swordsman after all. Hang fast to your honours by the skin of your teeth, my lord."

CHAPTER XIV

It was Monday, and the eyes of London and the Court were turned towards Greenwich Park, where the Queen was to give entertainment to the French

Envoy who had come once more to urge upon the Queen marriage with a son of the Medici, and to obtain an assurance that she would return to France the widow of the great Montgomery and his valiant lieutenant, Michel de la Foret. The river was covered with boats and barges, festooned, canopied, and hung with banners and devices; and from sunrise music and singing conducted down the stream the gaily dressed populace--for those were the days when a man spent on his ruff and his hose and his russet coat as much as would feed and house a family for a year; when the fine-figured ruflier with sables about his neck, corked slipper, trimmed buskin, and cloak of silk or damask furred, carried his all upon his back.

Loud-voiced gallants came floating by; men of a hundred guilds bearing devices pompously held on their way to the great pageant; country bumpkins up from Surrey roystered and swore that there was but one land that God had blessed, and challenged the grinning watermen from Gravesend and Hampton Court to deny it; and the sun with ardour drove from the sky every invading cloud, leaving Essex and Kent as far as eye could see perfect green gardens of opulence.

Before Elizabeth had left her bed, London had emptied itself into Greenwich Park. Thither the London Companies had come in their varied dazzling accoutrements--hundreds armed in fine corselets bearing the long Moorish pike; tall halberdiers in the unique armour called Almainrivets, and gunners or muleteers equipped in shirts of mail with morions or steel caps. Here too were to come the Gentlemen Pensioners, resplendent in scarlet, to "run with the spear;" and hundreds of men-at-arms were set at every point to give garish bravery to all. Thousands of citizens, openmouthed, gazed down the long arenas of green festooned with every sort of decoration and picturesque invention. Cages of large birds from the Indies, fruits, corn, fishes, grapes, hung in the trees, players perched in the branches discoursed sweet music, and poets recited their verses from rustic bridges or on platforms with weapons and armour hung trophy-wise on ragged staves. Upon a small lake a dolphin four-and-twenty feet in length came swimming, within its belly a lively orchestra; Italian tumblers swung from rope to bar; and crowds gathered at the places where bear and bull-baiting were to excite the none too fastidious tastes of the time.

All morning the gay delights went on, and at high noon the cry was carried from mouth to mouth: "The Queen! The Queen!"

She appeared on a balcony surrounded by her lords and ladies, and there received the diplomatists, speaking at length to the French Envoy in a tone of lightness and elusive cheerfulness which he was at a loss to understand and tried in vain to pierce by cogent remarks bearing on matters of moment involved in his embassy. Not far away stood Leicester, but the Queen had done no more than note his presence by a glance, and now and again with ostentatious emphasis she spoke to Angele, whom she had had brought to her in the morning before chapel-going. Thus early, after a few questions and some scrutiny, she had sent her in charge of a gentleman-at-arms and a maid of the Duke's Daughter to her father's lodging, with orders to change her robe, to return to the palace in good time before noon, and to bring her father to a safe place where he could watch the pleasures of the people. When Angele came to the presence again she saw that the Queen was wearing a gown of pure white with the sleeves shot with black, such as she herself had worn when admitted to audience yesterday. Vexed, agitated, embittered as Elizabeth had been by the news brought to her the night before, she had kept her

wardrobers and seamstresses at work the whole night to alter a white satin habit to the simplicity and style of that which Angele had worn.

"What think you of my gown, my lady refugee?" she said to Angele at last, as the Gentlemen Pensioners paraded in the space below, followed by the Knights Tilters--at their head the Queen's Champion, Sir Henry Lee: twenty-five of the most gallant and favoured of the courtiers of Elizabeth, including the gravest of her counsellors and the youngest gallant who had won her smile, Master Christopher Hatton. Some of these brave suitors, taken from the noblest families, had appeared in the tilt-yard every anniversary of the year of her accession, and had lifted their romantic office, which seemed but the service of enamoured knights, into an almost solemn dignity.

The vast crowd disposed itself around the great improvised yard where the Knights Tilters were to engage, and the Queen, followed by her retinue, descended to the dais which had been set up near the palace. Her white satin gown, roped with pearls only at the neck and breast, glistened in the bright sun, and her fair hair took on a burnished radiance. As Angele passed with her in the gorgeous procession, she could not but view the scene with admiring eye, albeit her own sweet sober attire, a pearly grey, seemed little in keeping; for the ladies and lords were most richly attired, and the damask and satin cloaks, crimson velvet gowns, silk hoods, and jewelled swords and daggers made a brave show. She was like some moth in a whorl of butterflies.

Her face was pale, and her eye had a curious disturbed look, as though they had seen frightening things. The events of last evening had tried her simple spirit, and she shrank from this glittering show; but the knowledge that her lover's life was in danger, and that her happiness was here and now at stake, held her bravely to her place, beset as it was with peril; for the Queen, with that eccentricity which had lifted her up yesterday, might cast her down to-day, and she had good reason to fear the power and influence of Leicester, whom she knew with a sure instinct was intent on Michel's ruin. Behind all her nervous shrinking and her heart's doubt, the memory of the face of the stranger she had seen last night with Sir Andrew Melvill tortured her. She could not find the time and place where she had seen the eyes that, in the palace, had filled her with mislike and abhorrence as they looked upon the Queen. Again and again in her fitful sleep had she dreamt of him, and a sense of foreboding was heavy upon her--she seemed to hear the footfall of coming disaster. The anxiety of her soul lent an unnatural brightness to her eyes; so that more than one enamoured courtier made essay to engage her in conversation, and paid her deferential compliment when the Queen's eyes were not turned her way. Come to the dais, she was placed not far from her Majesty, beside the Duke's Daughter, whose whimsical nature found frequent expression in what the Queen was wont to call "a merry volt." She seemed a privileged person, with whom none ventured to take liberties, and against whom none was entitled to bear offence, for her quips were free from malice, and her ingenuity in humour of mark. She it was who had put into the Queen's head that morning an idea which was presently to startle Angele and all others.

Leicester was riding with the Knights Tilters, and as they cantered lightly past the dais, trailing their spears in obeisance, Elizabeth engaged herself in talk with Cecil, who was standing near, and appeared not to see the favourite. This was the first time since he had mounted to good fortune that she had not thrown him a favour to pick up with his spear and wear in her honour, and he could scarce believe that she had

meant to neglect him. He half halted, but she only deigned an inclination of the head, and he spurred his horse angrily on with a muttered imprecation, yet, to all seeming, gallantly paying homage.

"There shall be doings ere this day is done. 'Beware the Gipsy!'" said the Duke's Daughter in a low tone to Angele, and she laughed. lightly.

"Who is the Gipsy?" asked Angele, with good suspicion, however.

"Who but Leicester," answered the other. "Is he not black enough?"

"Why was he so called? Who put the name upon Who but the Earl of Sussex as he died--as noble a chief, as true a counsellor as ever spoke truth to a Queen. But truth is not all at Court, and Sussex was no flatterer. Leicester bowed under the storm for a moment when Sussex showed him in his true colours; but Sussex had no gift of intrigue, the tide turned, and so he broke his heart, and died. But he left a message which I sometimes remember with my collects. 'I am now passing to another world,' said he, 'and must leave you to your fortunes and to the Queen's grace and goodness; but beware the Gipsy, for he will be too hard for all of you; you know not the beast so well as I do.' But my Lord Sussex was wrong. One there is who knows him through and through, and hath little joy in the knowing."

The look in the eyes of the Duke's Daughter became like steel and her voice hardened, and Angele realised that Leicester had in this beautiful and delicate maid-of-honour as bitter an enemy as ever brought down the mighty from their seats; that a pride had been sometime wounded, suffered an unwarrantable affront, which only innocence could feel so acutely. Her heart went out to the Duke's Daughter as it had never gone out to any of her sex since her mother's death, and she showed her admiration in her glance. The other saw it and smiled, slipping a hand in hers for a moment; and then a look, half-debating, half-triumphant, came into her face as her eyes followed Leicester down the green stretches of the tilting-yard.

The trumpet sounded, the people broke out in shouts of delight, the tilting began. For an hour the handsome joust went on, the Earl of Oxford, Charles Howard, Sir Henry Lee, Sir Christopher Hatton, and Leicester challenging, and so even was the combat that victory seemed to settle in the plumes of neither, though Leicester of them all showed not the greatest skill, while in some regards greatest grace and deportment. Suddenly there rode into the lists, whence, no one seemed to know, so intent had the public gaze been fixed, so quickly had he come, a mounted figure all in white, and at the moment when Sir Henry Lee had cried aloud his challenge for the last time. Silence fell as the bright figure cantered down the list, lifted the gauge, and sat still upon his black steed. Consternation fell. None among the people or the Knights Tilters knew who the invader was, and Leicester called upon the Masters of the Ceremonies to demand his name and quality. The white horseman made no reply, but sat unmoved, while noise and turmoil suddenly sprang up around him.

Presently the voice of the Queen was heard clearly ringing through the lists. "His quality hath evidence. Set on."

The Duke's Daughter laughed, and whispered mischievously in Angele's ear.

The gentlemen of England fared ill that day in the sight of all the

people, for the challenger of the Knights Tilters was more than a match for each that came upon him. He rode like a wild horseman of Yucatan. Wary, resourceful, sudden in device and powerful in onset, he bore all down, until the Queen cried: "There hath not been such skill in England since my father rode these lists. Three of my best gentlemen down, and it hath been but breathing to him. Now, Sir Harry Lee, it is thy turn," she laughed as she saw the champion ride forward; "and next 'tis thine, Leicester. Ah, Leicester would have at him now!" she added sharply, as she saw the favourite spur forward before the gallant Lee. "He is full of choler--it becomes him, but it shall not be; bravery is not all. And if he failed "she smiled acidly--"he would get him home to Kenilworth and show himself no more--if he failed, and the White Knight failed not! What think you, dove?" she cried to the Duke's Daughter. "Would he not fall in the megrims for that England's honour had been over thrown? Leicester could not live if England's honour should be toppled down like our dear Chris Hatton and his gallants yonder."

The Duke's Daughter curtsied. "Methinks England's honour is in little peril--your Majesty knows well how to 'fend it. No subject keeps it."

"If I must 'fend it, dove, then Leicester there must not fight to-day. It shall surely be Sir Harry Lee. My Lord Leicester must have the place of honour at the last," she called aloud. Leicester swung his horse round and galloped to the Queen.

"Your Majesty," he cried in suppressed anger, "must I give place?"

"When all have failed and Leicester has won, then all yield place to Leicester," said the Queen drily. The look on his face was not good to see, but he saluted gravely and rode away to watch the encounter between the most gallant Knight Tilter in England and the stranger. Rage was in his heart, and it blinded him to the certainty of his defeat, for he was not expert in the lists. But by a sure instinct he had guessed the identity of the White Horseman, and every nerve quivered with desire to meet him in combat. Last night's good work seemed to have gone for naught. Elizabeth's humour had changed; and to-day she seemed set on humiliating him before the nobles who hated him, before the people who had found in him the cause why the Queen had not married, so giving no heir to the throne. Perturbed and charged with anger as he was, however, the combat now forward soon chained his attention. Not in many a year had there been seen in England such a display of skill and determination. The veteran Knight Tilter, who knew that the result of this business meant more than life to him, and that more than the honour of his comrades was at stake--even the valour of England which had been challenged--fought as he had never fought before, as no man had fought in England for many a year. At first the people cried aloud their encouragement; but as onset and attack after onset and attack showed that two masters of their craft, two desperate men, had met, and that the great sport had become a vital combat between their own champion and the champion of another land--Spain, France, Denmark, Russia, Italy?--a hush spread over the great space, and every eye was strained; men gazed with bated breath.

The green turf was torn and mangled, the horses reeked with sweat and foam, but overhead the soaring skylark sang, as it were, to express the joyance of the day. During many minutes the only sound that broke the stillness was the clash of armed men, the thud of hoofs, and the snorting and the wild breathing of the chargers. The lark's notes, however, ringing out over the lists freed the tongue of the Queen's fool, who

suddenly ran out into the lists, in his motley and cap and bells, and in his high trilling voice sang a fool's song to the fighting twain:

"Who would lie down and close his eyes
While yet the lark sings o'er the dale?
Who would to Love make no replies,
Nor drink the nut-brown ale,
While throbs the pulse, and full 's the purse
And all the world 's for sale?"

Suddenly a cry of relief, of roaring excitement, burst from the people. Both horsemen and their chargers were on the ground. The fight was over, the fierce game at an end. That which all had feared, even the Queen herself, as the fight fared on, had not come to pass--England's champion had not been beaten by the armed mystery, though the odds had seemed against him.

"Though wintry blasts may prove unkind,
When winter's past we do forget;
Love's breast in summer time is kind,
And all 's well while life 's with us yet
Hey, ho, now the lark is mating,
Life's sweet wages are in waiting!"

Thus sang the fool as the two warriors were helped to their feet. Cumbered with their armour, and all dust-covered and blood-stained, though not seriously hurt, they were helped to their horses, and rode to the dais where the Queen sat.

"Ye have fought like men of old," she said, "and neither had advantage at the last. England's champion still may cry his challenge and not be forsworn, and he who challenged goeth in honour again from the lists. You, sir, who have challenged, shall we not see your face or hear your voice? For what country, for what prince lifted you the gauge and challenged England's honour?"

"I crave your high Majesty's pardon"--Angele's heart stood still. Her love had not pierced his disguise, though Leicester's hate had done so on the instant--"I crave your noble Majesty's grace," answered the stranger, "that I may still keep my face covered in humility. My voice speaks for no country and for no prince. I have fought for mine own honour, and to prove to England's Queen that she hath a champion who smiteth with strong arm, as on me and my steed this hath been seen to-day."

"Gallantly thought and well said," answered Elizabeth; "but England's champion and his strong arm have no victory. If gifts were given they must needs be cut in twain. But answer me, what is your country? I will not have it that any man pick up the gauge of England for his own honour. What is your country?"

"I am an exile, your high Majesty; and the only land for which I raise my sword this day is that land where I have found safety from my enemies."

The Queen turned and smiled at the Duke's Daughter. "I knew not where my own question might lead, but he hath turned it to full account," she said, under her breath. "His tongue is as ready as his spear. Then ye have both laboured in England's honour, and I drink to you both," she added, and raised to her lips a glass of wine which a page presented. "I love ye both--in your high qualities," she hastened to add with dry

irony, and her eye rested mockingly on Leicester.

"My lords and gentlemen and all of my kingdom," she added in a clear voice, insistent in its force, "ye have come upon May Day to take delight of England in my gardens, and ye are welcome. Ye have seen such a sight as doeth good to the eyes of brave men. It hath pleased me well, and I am constrained to say to you what, for divers great reasons, I have kept to my own counsels, labouring for your good. The day hath come, however, the day and the hour when ye shall know that wherein I propose to serve you as ye well deserve. It is my will--and now I see my way to its good fulfilment--that I remain no longer in that virgin state wherein I have ever lived."

Great cheering here broke in, and for a time she could get no further. Ever alive to the bent of the popular mind, she had chosen a perfect occasion to take them into her confidence--however little or much she would abide by her words, or intended the union of which she spoke. In the past she had counselled with her great advisers, with Cecil and the rest, and through them messages were borne to the people; but now she spoke direct to them all, and it had its immediate reward--the acclamations were as those with which she was greeted when she first passed through the streets of London on inheriting the crown.

Well pleased, she continued: "This I will do with expedition and weightiest judgment, for of little account though I am, he that sits with the Queen of England in this realm must needs be a prince indeed.... So be ye sure of this that ye shall have your heart-most wishes, and there shall be one to come after me who will wear this crown even as I have worn, in direct descent, my father's crown. Our dearest sister, the Queen of the Scots, hath been delivered of a fair son; and in high affection the news thereof she hath sent me, with a palfrey which I shall ride among you in token of the love I bear her Majesty. She hath in her time got an heir to the throne with which we are ever in kinship and alliance, and I in my time shall give ye your heart's desire."

Angele, who had, with palpitating heart and swimming head, seen Michel de la Foret leave the lists and disappear among the trees, as mysteriously as he came, was scarce conscious of the cheers and riotous delight that followed Elizabeth's tactful if delusive speech to the people. A few whispered words from the Duke's Daughter had told her that Michel had obeyed the Queen's command in entering the lists and taking up the challenge; and that she herself, carrying the royal message to him and making arrangements for his accoutrement and mounting, had urged him to obedience. She observed drily that he had needed little pressure, and that his eyes had lighted at the prospect of the combat. Apart from his innate love of fighting, he had realised that in the moment of declining to enter the Queen's service he had been at a disadvantage, and that his courage was open to attack by the incredulous or malicious. This would have mattered little were it not that he had been given unusual importance as a prisoner by the Queen's personal notice of himself. He had, therefore, sprung to the acceptance, and sent his humble duty to the Queen by her winsome messenger, who, with conspicuous dramatic skill, had arranged secretly, with the help of a Gentleman Pensioner and the Master of the Horse, his appearance and his exit. That all succeeded as she had planned quickened her pulses, and made her heart still warmer to Angele, who, now that all was over, and her Huguenot lover had gone his mysterious ways, seemed lost in a troubled reverie.

It was a troubled reverie indeed, for Angele's eyes were on the stranger

who was present with Sir Andrew Melvill the night before. Her gaze upon him now became fixed and insistent, for the sense of foreboding so heavy on her deepened to a torturing suspense. Where had she seen this man before? To what day or hour in her past did he belong? What was there in his smooth, smiling, malicious face that made her blood run cold? As she watched him, he turned his head. She followed his eyes. The horse which Mary Queen of Scots had sent with the message of the birth of her son was being led to the Queen by the dark browed, pale-faced churl who had brought it from Scotland. She saw a sharp dark look pass between the two.

Suddenly her sight swam, she swayed and would have fainted, but resolution steadied her, and a low exclamation broke from her lips. Now she knew!

The face that had eluded her was at last in the grasp of horrified memory. It was the face of one who many years ago was known to have poisoned the Due de Chambly by anointing the pommel of his saddle with a delicate poison which the rider would touch, and touching would, perhaps, carry to his nostrils or mouth as he rode, and die upon the instant. She herself had seen the Due de Chambly fall; had seen this man fly from Paris for his life; and had thereafter known of his return to favour at the court of Mary and Francis, for nothing could be proved against him. The memory flashed like lightning through her brain. She moved swiftly forward despite the detaining hand of the Duke's Daughter. The Queen was already mounted, her hand already upon the pommel of the saddle.

Elizabeth noted the look of anguished anxiety in Angele's eyes, her face like that of one who had seen souls in purgatory; and some swift instinct, born of years upon years of peril in old days when her life was no boon to her enemies, made her lean towards the girl, whose quick whispered words were to her as loud as thunder. She was, however, composed and still. Not a tremor passed through her.

"Your wish is granted, mistress," she said aloud, then addressed a word to Cecil at her side, who passed on her command. Presently she turned slowly to the spot where Sir Andrew Melvill and the other sat upon their horses. She scanned complacently the faces of both, then her eyes settled steadily on the face of the murderer. Still gazing intently she drew the back of her gloved fingers along the pommel. The man saw the motion, unnoted and insignificant to any other save Angele, meaningless even to Melvill, the innocent and honest gentleman at his side; and he realised that the Queen had had a warning. Noting the slight stir among the gentlemen round him, he knew that his game was foiled, that there was no escape. He was not prepared for what followed.

In a voice to be heard only at small distance, the Queen said calmly:

"This palfrey sent me by my dear sister of Scotland shall bear me among you, friends; and in days to come I will remember how she hath given new life to me by her loving message. Sir Andrew Melvill, I shall have further speech with you; and you, sir,"--speaking to the sinister figure by his side--"come hither."

The man dismounted, and with unsteady step came forward. Elizabeth held out her gloved hand for him to kiss. His face turned white. It was come soon, his punishment. None knew save Angele and the Queen the doom that was upon him, if Angele's warning was well-founded. He knelt, and bent his head over her hand.

"Salute, sir," she said in a low voice.

He touched his lips to her fingers. She pressed them swiftly against his mouth. An instant, then he rose and stepped backwards to his horse. Tremblingly, blindly, he mounted.

A moment passed, then Elizabeth rode on with her ladies behind her, her gentlemen beside her. As she passed slowly, the would-be regicide swayed and fell from his horse, and stirred no more.

Elizabeth rode on, her hand upon the pommel of the saddle. So she rode for a full half-hour, and came back to her palace. But she raised not her gloved right hand above the pommel, and she dismounted with exceeding care.

That night the man who cared for the horse died secretly as had done his master, with the Queen's glove pressed to his nostrils by one whom Cecil could trust. And the matter was hidden from the Court and the people; for it was given out that Melvill's friend had died of some heart trouble.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Each of us will prove himself a fool given perfect opportunity
No note of praise could be pitched too high for Elizabeth
She had never stooped to conquer

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