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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GOD'S PLAYTHINGS ***

GOD'S PLAYTHINGS

BY
MARJORIE BOWEN

AUTHOR OF "THE VIPER OF MILAN," "THE GLEN O' WEEPING,"
"I WILL MAINTAIN," ETC.

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GOD’S PLAYTHINGS

THE KING’S SON

“This letter has given rise to various conjectures.”–*Dalrymple’s Memoirs.*

From Ringwood, the 9th of July, 1685.

My Lord,

Having had some proof of your kindness when I was last at Whitehall, makes me hope now that you will not refuse interceding for me with the King, being I know, though too late, how I have been misled; were I not clearly convinced of that, I would rather die a thousand deaths than say what I do. I writ yesterday to the King, and the chief business of my letter was to desire to speak to him, *for I have that to say to him that I am sure will set him at quiet for ever*. I am sure the whole study of my life shall hereafter be how to serve him; and *I am sure that which I can do is worth more than taking my life away*; and I am confident, if I may be so happy to speak to him, he will himself be convinced of it, *being I can give him such infallible proof of my truth to him that, though I would alter, it would not be in my power to do it*. This which I have now said, I hope will be enough to encourage your lordship to show me your favour, which I do earnestly desire of you and hope that you have so much generosity as not to refuse it. I hope, my lord, and I make no doubt of it, that you will not have cause to repent having saved my life, which I am sure you can do a great deal in if you please; being it obliges me to be entirely yours, which I shall ever be, as long as I have life.

Monmouth.

For the Earl of Rochester, Lord High Treasurer of England.

Knowing that I had been involved in the miserable final adventure of that unhappy Prince, James Scot, Duke of Monmouth, and even been with him in that last Council in Bridgewater, my lord Rochester showed me this letter with a kind of languid malice, and even had the indecency to smile at it and address to me a remark slighting to the unfortunate writer of that desperate appeal.

“For,” said he, “had Monmouth a secret to reveal, though ever so base a one, he had disclosed it to save his life–and since he disclosed nothing ’tis proof plain this was but a fool’s trick to catch mercy.”

He said no more, but I was minded to tell what I knew that I might do justice to the memory of one wronged and wretched; yet the impulse was but passing, for I knew that the secret his dead Grace had never discovered was one which for pity’s sake I must be silent on; and well I was aware also that what I could say would awaken no understanding in the cold heart of Lawrence Hyde. My Lord’s Grace of Monmouth has been dead ten years, and in the potent and huge events that have changed Europe since, he has been forgotten by all but some of those poor souls in the West who called him King. But I, who joined fortunes with him in his reckless enterprise, hold often in my thoughts him whose fate is now reckoned but a trifle in the history of nations. Both in the exile that followed Sedgemoor and the years in England under His present Protestant Majesty have I considered silently the tragic mystery of this young man whose life was useless pleasure and whose death was bitter anguish.

It hath a curious sound that I, once penman to his Grace, should now be secretary to the Earl of Rochester; I gave my master this reflection, and he laughed in his indolent fashion and answered that ten years had accomplished the work of a hundred, and that the rebellion in the West was ancient history. Yet when he had left me to my work I copied this same letter (written in a quick hand with the agony of the author showing in that forceful entreaty to one who had never been his friend), and I brought the copy home with me and now must write under it the explanation like the key to a cipher. Not to show any, but rather to bury or destroy; not to betray the secret of the dead, but to ease mine own heart of one scene which has haunted me these long ten years.

It hath a turn of folly to write what will never be read, but the impulse driving me is stronger than reason, and so I make confession of what I know while holding my faith inviolate.

At the time of the capture of my lord in ’85, the indecent cruelty of the then King in seeing one whom he had resolved to be bitterly avenged on, and in commanding to be published an account of those agonies he should have been most sedulous to veil, was much commented upon, and first gave his people the impression of that ill-judging severity of character and stern harshness of temper they soon found unendurably galling.

It was well known too at that time, that my lord had obtained that interview with the King by reason of the desperate letter he wrote, of the same trend as the epistle he sent to my lord Rochester, declaring he had somewhat of such importance to reveal that it should put the King’s mind at rest for ever concerning him. Various were the rumours abroad concerning this secret and what it might be, and as it was known from the King’s lips that his Grace had revealed

nothing, many supposed, as my lord Rochester, that it was but a feint to obtain an audience of his Majesty; yet how any could read those letters and not see they were inspired by the bitter truth, I know not. Some believed that it was that his Grace had been urged to his fatal undertaking by His present Majesty, then Stadtholder of the United Provinces, and that he had about him letters from that Prince's favourite, Monsieur Bentinck.

Yet all evidence was against this, and the Duke himself appealed to the Stadtholder to bear witness that he had no designs against England when he left The Hague, but intended for Hungary (for which purpose, indeed, the Prince equipped him) and had since been misled by the restless spirit of the Earl of Argyll and other malcontents whom he met, to his undoing, in Brussels. [5]

More believed that the disclosure related to that subtle designing minister, the Earl of Sunderland, who was deep in the councils of the King's enemies, yet held his Majesty in such a fascination that no breath against him was credited, even at the last, when he ruined the King easily with a graceful dexterity that deceived even Monsieur Barillon, who is esteemed for his astuteness.

Yet what reason had my lord Sunderland, intent on far larger schemes, to lure my lord Monmouth into a disastrous expedition, and what object had his Grace in keeping a final silence about such treachery?

Nor would the revelation of the falsehood of his Majesty's minister or the discovery of the dissimulation of his Majesty's nephew be such a secret as his Grace indicated in his letter–"for I have that to say to him which I am sure will set him at quiet for ever"–whereas either of these communications would rather have set King and Kingdom at great trouble and dis-ease.

No one came near the truth in their guesses, and after a while no one troubled, and truly it is an empty matter now; still, one that containeth a centre of such tragic interest that for me the wonder and pity of it never dieth.

To bring myself back to the events of that fatal year (the recollection groweth as I write), it shall here be noted that I was witness of the great and bitter reluctance of my lord to lead this rebellion. [6]

He was brave in his spirit, but of an exceeding modesty and softness in his temper, of a sweet disposition, averse to offend, fearful of hardship, a passionate lover of life, generously weak to the importunities of others.

Yet for a great while he withstood them, avoided Argyll, shut his doors to Lord Grey and Ferguson and was all for retirement with the lady whom he truly loved, Harriet Wentworth.

But from Love for whom he would put by these temptations came the goad to urge him into the arms of Ambition, and she, who in her pride would see him set on a throne, joined her entreaties to the arguments of the men who needed a King's son for their leader, and pawned the very jewels in her ears to buy him arms. And he was prevailed upon to undertake this sad and bitter voyage with but a few adventurers whose much enthusiasm must take the place of money and wits, for of these last they had neither. At first his Grace's heart utterly misgave him and he was more despondent than any man had ever known him, being indeed in a black and bitter mood, reluctant to speak on anything but Brussels and my lady waiting there.

This brought him into some discredit with his followers, but Ferguson had spirit enough to inspire the ignorant, and Lord Grey, who, though a man dishonoured in private and public life, was of a quick moving wit and an affable carriage, animated the little company of us, not above a hundred, who had joined together on this doleful enterprise. [7]

But when we had landed on the rocky shores of Lyme Regis, it was his Grace whose mood became cheerful, for his ready sensibility was moved by the extraordinary and deep welcome these people of the West gave us, for, whereas we who were at first, as I have said, but a hundred, in a few days were six thousand, all hot on an encounter and confident; truly it was marvellous to see how these people loved his Grace and how he was at the very height of joyous exaltation in this fair successful opening.

Taunton saw a day of triumph when his Grace was proclaimed King in the market-place by a mad speech of Ferguson in which wild and horrible crimes were laid to the charge of James Stewart, and I think Monmouth saw himself King indeed, at Whitehall, so gracious and gay was his bearing.

But my lord Grey looked cynically, for not a single person of any consideration had joined us, and, while the gentry held back, ill-aimed and untrained peasants were of no use to us. Yet had his Grace done better to trust their fanatical valour and march on for Bristol and so take that wealthy town, instead of spending his time endeavouring to train his men–God knows he was no general, though a brave soldier in his services in the Low Countries!

While he dallied, my lord Beaufort was raising the trained bands, and my lord Feversham came down from London with some of the King's troops. Then came that attempt of my lord Grey on Bridport when he forsook his men and fled; though this was proved cowardice, his Grace was too soft to even reprimand him. [8]

In miserable searching for food, in vain straggling marches, in hesitations, in fatal delays the time passed; his Grace might have had Bristol, a place abounding in his own friends; yet, hearing that the Duke of Beaufort had threatened to fire it rather than open the gates, he turned towards Bath, saying he could not endure to bring disaster on so fair a city.

This faint-hearted gentleness was not fitted for the position he had assumed; at Bath they killed his herald and returned a fierce defiance. So we fell back on Frome in disorder; and my lord saw his visions melting, his dream of Kingship vanish, for in the same day he received three pieces of news: that the three Dutch regiments had landed at Gravesend, that my lord Argyll was a prisoner, and that my lord Feversham was marching upon him with three thousand men and thirty pieces of cannon.

And now the full utter madness of what he had undertaken was apparent; we had neither cannon nor arms, scarcely powder; and he who had seen the fine armies of Holland and France could not but see the hopeless position he held with a force of these poor peasants, the cavalry mounted on cart and plough horses, the foot but armed with scythes and pruning-knives. Despair [9] and dismay gained an audience of his mind; he fell suddenly into agonies of fear and remorse for what he must bring on these followers of his; from every one who came near him he asked advice, and the anguish of his spirit was visible in his altered countenance. He called councils in which nothing was resolved but the desperate state they were in, and nothing talked of but the folly that had put them there; his Grace passionately blaming Ferguson and Argyll for their evil urgings. Then it was resolved to retreat on Bridgewater to be nearer the sea; on this march some few left his Grace, but most stayed in a dogged love, and this faith touched his tender heart as much as his own danger, and wrought such a passion of weak agony in him it was piteous to see the expression of it in his face.

At Bridgewater he viewed the enemy through his glasses from the top of the church tower; there and then, I think, he knew that he gazed on a country he must soon for ever leave.

Alas! alas! In my nostrils is still the scent of that July afternoon, the perfume from the slumbrous grasses, the scent of the peaceful flowers....

That day we had a very splendid sunset; all the west was gold and violet and the whole sky clear of clouds, yet over the morass below the castle the marsh fog lay cold and thick, for lately it had rained heavily and the Parret had overflowed its banks, so the whole earth was wet–very [10] clearly I recall all details of that day.

Here I come to that picture that is for ever with me–the last Council of my lord. Had I the skill of some of those Hollanders whom I have seen abroad, who can limn a scene just to the life, I could give this scene on canvas with every colour exact.

It was a room in the Castle, not large, looking on to the garden; through the open window showed that emblazoned sunset, and a rose and vine leaf entwined against the mullions.

The panelling of the chamber was darkened and polished, above the mantelpiece was a painting of a stone vase of striped and gaudy tulips, very like, and there were logs ready on the hearth, for the evenings were chilly. On the floor was a little carpet of Persia, and in the centre a table with stools set about it, all of a heavy, rather ancient design. A little brass clock with a mighty pendulum stood against the wall on a bracket; on the table were two branched candlesticks, clumsy and shining.

There were gathered the rebel officers, talking themselves into a boastful confidence; the only man of quality among them, my lord Grey, stood a little apart beside the open window–and smiled; he was a curious man, not well-favoured, but one whom it was pleasant to look upon, tall and dark, with that little fault in the eyes that casteth them crooked. My office was an idle one, for there was nothing to write, so I watched the others and felt chilled at the heart for the hopelessness of it all. [11]

When the dusk gathered, my lord Grey drew the curtains across the rising mists and lit the candles slowly.

When the last flame rose up, Monmouth entered quietly: he ever had a light step.

Marred as he then was by his inward misery, he was still the loveliest gentleman in England and of a winning beauty impossible to be realised by those who have not seen him; he wore a riding coat of brown cloth and a black hat with a penache of white plumes, being more plainly dressed than ever he had been before, I think, in all his easy life.

They all rose when he entered, but he motioned them to their seats again, and I saw that he had not the firmness to command his voice to speak. He took the place they had left for him, and Lord Grey, shading the candle flame from his eyes, stared at him with that crossed glance of his and that immovable expression of amusement on his lips. For a while they spoke together, to cover, as I took it, this dismal discomposure on the part of their leader.

But presently he took off his hat impatiently, showing his long soft hair of that English-coloured brown and his eyes, of the tint of a chestnut, that usually shone with so bright a light, and leaning a little forward in his chair he broke into astonishing speech.

“I cannot go on,” he said. “I will not go on–there is nothing ahead but ruin.”

[12] At these words that so stript the poor pretence of hope from their councils, these officers sat revealed as fearful and stricken men. They looked at Monmouth as one who would be the mouthpiece of their own terrors; my lord Grey withdrew himself a little from them and went to stand by the mantelshelf, from there observing all.

The red came into the Duke’s face and he eyed them wildly.

“What are we going on?” he said. “We are not such fools as to think we can prevail now.... I saw Dumbarton’s Scots yonder on Sedgemoor.... I know how they can fight ... they were under

me at Bothwell Brig.…" He pressed his handkerchief to his lips and he was trembling like a sick maid.

They saw in his eyes that he considered them, as the play saith, on "the edge of doom," and as he had given them leave for ignoble thoughts, so each took advantage of it and bethought him of his own sad condition.

"We have but a rabble," said one. "And there is yet a chance to get over seas—"

"I cannot fall into the hands of James Stewart," muttered Monmouth; "for I have done that which cannot be forgiven." And there was such pusillanimous fear in his wretched look of shivered dread that it passed like a panic through all that they too had done what could not be forgiven; nor was James Stewart a merciful man. One voiced the general terror:

"We could get to the coast before any guessed we had left Bridgewater–in flight lies our only chance." [13]

Then my lord Grey made this speech.

"There are six thousand people have left their homes to follow you–would you, my lord, abandon them to that fate ye cannot face yourself?"

Monmouth looked at him; maybe he thought it strange that the man that had been a proved coward under fire should speak so intrepidly in the council, yet he was too unnerved for a retort or an answer.

"Oh, you," added Lord Grey, with a flick of a scorn in his tone, "who took the title of a King, and are a King's son, cannot you make a more seemly show of it than this?"

"It is my life," said the Duke in a piteous agitation. "Five thousand pounds on my head … to die as Russell did.…"

"You are a King's son," repeated Lord Grey.

In a desperate passion his Grace answered him.

"Why did you induce me to this folly? It was you, that villain Ferguson and Argyll—"

"He has paid," said the other quickly.

"As I must pay.… My God, was I not happy in Brabant? You but wanted my name to gild your desperation—"

"We would have made you King," said Lord Grey, and he smiled a little.

There fell a silence, and it seemed that the Duke would speak, but he said no words.

"Come, gentlemen," spoke out my lord Grey. "The Council is over–you will have your orders before morning–all expedients are ineffectual; now each, in his own way, must go forward to the end." He took up the candle to light them from the room, and they, being men of a little station, were overawed by his quality and went; two of them deserted that night, and one betrayed us by firing a pistol to warn Lord Feversham of our approach and so got the King's pardon. God be merciful to the others; I think they died unknown and brave. [14]

I, being trusted because there was a price on my head and I had borne the torture in Scotland, was asked by Lord Grey to stay and help hearten his Grace.

We endeavoured to reason him into going into Castle Field, where Ferguson preached to the miners and ploughmen; he would not, but in a weak agony abused Wildman and Argyll as the engines of his torture, and he had the look on him we call "fey"; I believed he was near his death.…

So the night fell very misty and warm, and my lord would not lie down, but sat in that little room struggling with anguish.

He had his George of diamonds on and often looked at it and spoke incoherently of how King Charles had given it him … surely my pity was more provoked than my scorn, for he was soft and gentle in his ways and so had gained much love.

That morning one had complained to him Lord Grey should be dishonoured for his behaviour without Bridport–and he had answered: "I will not affront my lord by any mention of his misfortune–" yet here was he sunk in utter misery while Lord Grey strove to rouse in him a manly and decent courage with which to be worthy of these poor brave souls who loved and followed him; presently he came round to his old and first appeal. [15]

"Remember you are a King's son."

It was near one in the morning by the little brass clock, and I sat wearily by the door that led to the bedchamber; the Duke was at the table, and as my lord Grey spoke he looked up and began laughing. He laughed so long and recklessly that we were both dumb in a kind of horror, and when at last he came to a pause in his laughter there was silence.

Now the Duke discovered some fortitude: he rose and helped himself to wine, which brought the fugitive blood back into his cheeks and he held himself with more dignity, though there was that wild look of unsettled wits in his wide-opened eyes.

"My lord," he said, "and you, sir–bring the candles nearer and I will show you something—" He put back the admired locks that screened his brow and took from the pocket of his inner coat a leather book that he laid on the table before us.

"What is this?" asked my lord Grey.

[16] The Duke untied the covers in quiet and let fall on the polished wood all manner of odd and foolish papers, letters, complexion wash recipes, charms and notes of his journeyings in Holland.

These he put aside and drew from a secret lining a silver case such as is used for a painting in little.

It was my thought that it contained the picture of Lady Harriet, which we were to return to her if either lived to do it, and I was sorry for this lady who had been so faithful in her love.

From one to the other of us the Duke looked strangely; his face was flushed now and beautiful as in former days when he was the loved one of that great brilliance at Whitehall, yet still he had the seal of death on him, and, worse than that, the horrible fear of it writ in every line of his comely countenance.

"Please you, look here," he said; he opened the locket and held it out in his palm.

"What is this?" he asked in a husk and torn voice.

It was the likeness of a man, very fairly done, who wore a uniform and cravat of the time of the death of King Charles I.

Lord Grey looked at it quickly.

"It is your Grace," he said; then, seeing the dress–"No," he added, and glanced swiftly at Monmouth–"who is it?"

"It is Colonel Sidney taken in his youth," I said, for I had known the man well in Rotterdam when he was attached to the court of the late King Charles, then in exile there. And I gazed at the painting … it was a marvellous fair face.

[17] While I looked my lord Duke had three letters out from the same secret corner of his book, and I saw that two were in the writing of Colonel Sidney and the third in a hand I did not know, the hand of an ill-educated woman.

"Who is this?" asked Lord Grey with an amazed look. "Surely Colonel Sidney was never any concern of your Grace?"

He stood with the picture in his hand and Monmouth looked up at him from the old worn and folded letters he was smoothing out.

"It is Colonel Sidney," he said.

"Well?" asked Lord Grey intently.

"He was my father," said Monmouth; then he began laughing again, and it had the most doleful sound of anything I have ever heard. I could not grasp what had been said, but my lord Grey with his quick comprehension seemed in a moment to understand and value this truth.

"Your father!" he said softly, and added: "To think we never saw it!" which was an extraordinary thing to say; yet, on looking at the likeness in little and on the fair agonised face staring across the candlelight one might notice that they were in almost every detail the same, and methought I was a very fool never to have observed before how these two men were alike, even to little manners and fashions of speech.

And being that I saw the tragic pitifulness of it all, I could do no more than laugh dismally also.

[18] "See you these letters if you want proof," said Monmouth.

"There is no need," answered my lord Grey. "The likeness is enough." Then he repeated: "And we never saw it!"

"No," said his Grace half-fiercely; "you never saw it–I was always the King's son to you–instead of that I am scarce a gentleman…. Now you know why I cannot go on…. I am no Stewart, I have no royal blood…."

Grey looked at him, turning over in his mind, I think, the aspects of this bewildering turn; he gazed at Colonel Sidney's son with a curiosity almost cruel.

I was thinking of the obscurity from which he had sprung, the mystery round his early years in Rotterdam, his sudden appearance in a blaze of glory at Whitehall when the King had made him Duke….

"Who did this?" I asked. "And who kept silence?"

"King Charles loved me as his son," he answered vaguely, "and I loved him…. I could not have told him–and I was ambitious. What would you have done?" he cried. "I did not know until I was fourteen." He pressed his hand to his breast.

"But I will not die for it," he muttered. "Why should I die for it?"

"Your death must become your life, not your birth," said Lord Grey.

"My death!" shivered Monmouth.

[19] Lord Grey turned to face him; thin and harsh-featured as he was, he made the other's beauty a thing of nothing.

"Why?" he said commandingly. "You know that you must die–you know what will happen to-morrow and what you have to expect from James Stewart, and those honours that you have won in life will you not keep to grace your death?"

"I cannot die," answered Monmouth; he rose and began walking about in a quick passion of protesting anguish: "I will not die."

"That you cannot decide; the manner only is in your power," said Lord Grey calmly, and I marvelled to think that he had been a coward in open field.

"I am not the King's son—" his Grace cried out at him, and fell across a chair sick with unavailing love of life.

Lord Grey took up a candle and turned to the door, looking at him the while.

"Will you give James Stewart this triumph?" he asked.

This seemed the one thing to brace Monmouth, for those two had always hated each other strongly; James in the old days had feared my lord's power, been jealous that he was the elder son of the elder son, and Monmouth seemed to remember that; yet a mean thought hurried on the heels of the manly reflection.

"He would give me my life for this," he said weakly. "My life for this secret—"

"Good night," said Lord Grey–a strange man–and left us.

The Duke seemed not to know that he had gone or that I remained; after a little he went into the bedchamber, but not to sleep, and all night I heard him weeping … such sick and bitter womanish sobs all through that long watch I kept…. [20]

Colonel Sidney's son!

Who were they who did this–and they who kept silence?

A curious commingling of motives, sordid and lovable, ambition, some little love, some touch of self-sacrifice…. I felt compassion for King Charles, who had had no deeper feeling in all his spoilt life than this affection for what was not his….

I put the wasting candles out and sat in the dark; I lifted the curtain and saw the sun rise over Sedgemoor.

Six thousand men to fight against hopeless odds to-morrow for him they deemed a King, the blood of Bourbon and Stewart, the heir of Tudor and Plantagenet….

And in my ears was the thick sobbing of a mere Englishman of a stock that scarce boasted gentility, who could not face the end of his masquerade nor fit the robe of greatness he had assumed.

So here is the secret revealed at length to the dumb and innocent paper; God knoweth it is, as Lawrence Hyde saith, a great while ago; for the rest, the world knows how the Duke rode out to Sedgemoor with such a look in his face the very children knew he was marked for doom, and how he fled, leaving his men to gain great honour after he had forsaken them. Also how he was found in peasant's dress, so changed they did not know him till the George of diamonds flashed out on his tattered garments as he fainted in his captor's clutch. Lord Grey was taken with him; they stayed at Ringwood two days and from there his Grace wrote frantically to the King and to Lord Rochester. [21]

It is very clear he meant to buy his life with his wretched secret, though I think my lord Grey must have been ever urging him to die with a decent carriage.

So they brought him to London and he was taken before his Majesty, swordless and with his hands tied behind him.

What passed no man knoweth but James Stewart; he has spoken often of it, and I know those to whom he has told of Monmouth's ignoble desperate pleadings for life at any cost, of his casting himself down and imploring mercy.

Yet he must have been spurred by something in the demeanour of his ancient enemy, for he never told his secret, and he left the presence with anger and dignity, resolving, it must be, to cheat the King of that last satisfaction. Yet afterwards he fell again into unmanly misery that was the wonder of all, and then into a strange mood that was neither the apathy of despair, or, as some said, an exalted enthusiasm. I wondered then and now where his proofs were: not found on him with the other poor trifles I had seen at Bridgewater Castle–destroyed, perhaps. And so he died, hurried reluctant from life, without either religion or repentance, sorry for the blood shed in the West, firm in his love for Lady Harriet, indifferent to the clergyman who cried out on the scaffold: [22]

"God accept your imperfect repentance!"

He would not join in the prayer for the King; when they goaded him he said "Amen" with a careless air.

Knowing as I do what bitter terror he felt, what ghastly anticipations he had, what agony he had endured at the thought of the sheer moment of death, with what shivering sickness he felt the axe, with what horror he eyed the headsman, I cannot bear to write or think how they mangled him….

And so he died; he brought much misery on the innocent and he was maybe a worthless man, yet I could weep for him even now. I am glad he did not speak; Lord Grey has been ever silent

and no one else knows.

Among all those who watched that fair-haired head held up it is strange there is not one to think it showed little likeness to the dark-browed Stewart Kings....

Here the paper is endorsed in another hand:

"If this be truth then this was a thing ironical. The writer of this rambling manuscript and the Earl of Tankerville, once Lord Grey, are dead, and there be none that know save God who knows and judges."

A BIOGRAPHY

[23]

The Earl of Strafford

> "Certainly never any man acted such a part, in such a theatre, with more wisdom, constancy and eloquence, with greater reason, judgment and temper, and with a better grace in all his words and gestures, than this great and excellent person did."–*Whitelock on the trial of Strafford.*

This was a man who in his own time was great and fell to dishonoured death, leaving a brilliant memory, but one neither respected nor praised; a King raised him, used him and forsook him, a people judged him, condemned him, and put him to death. Great events followed; the nation shook and changed. The King himself was swept away by that same power to which he had in vain sacrificed his minister, a greater than the King ruled England and men forgot the Earl of Strafford save to execrate his policies.

But they who come home crowned with laurel from the wars the popular heroes of an hour are not always the only saviours of their country, and they who flatter the people do not always serve them best. History is a hard, often an unreflective, judge; her verdict, dictated by the passion of a moment, lasts too often for centuries.

Judging a man by his inner spirit, his desires, the use he makes of great abilities, pitying a man for his misfortunes, his bitter death, those English born may well give a little gratitude to this Englishman who had ever England in his heart.

[24] Thomas Wentworth was of an ancient and noble family of Yorkshire, powerful by intellect, Puritan by tradition, strong by courage and self-belief, above all things deeply desirous of rendering that service to his country which is the way that most readily appeals to a man of an active complexion of satisfying that almost unconscious yearning for glory that is the sign of a great spirit. Mere personal ambition is a proof of either meanness or madness, and the self-seeking of either insanity or vanity has never attained any but a brittle fame and a hollow achievement; if a man is to even contemplate the performance of mighty deeds, he must have some mightiness within him.

Strong enthusiasm, unless it be of the headlong useless kind, is ever joined to that tincture of melancholy which comes from viewing the contrasting apathy of the rest of mankind, and for the first years of his opening understanding Thomas Wentworth was silent, reserved in matters political, given to reflect and observe more than to speak or act.

He had the usual education of a gentleman, studied at Cambridge, travelled in Europe, became Sir Thomas and member for Yorkshire before he was twenty-one.

It was the beginning of the power of parliaments, the beginning of that temper in the people which was to later furnish the extraordinary spectacle of a nation ruling its own kings and retaining a monarchy as a mere ornament to that independence which displayed undisguised is likely to be too stern an object to please a people full of levity and love of show. [25] This party was represented by the Opposition that had galled and restricted the first Charles since his accession; he, however, rather disliked than feared them, and did not doubt that his authority would quell their republican principles.

With these men, among whom was John Pym and afterwards a nobler patriot, John Hampden, Sir Thomas took his seat; he went not into extremes against the court, but conducted himself moderately; he became *Custos Rotulorum* for the West Riding; presently the king was advised to make him Sheriff of York that he might be disqualified as a Parliamentary candidate; next he was imprisoned for refusing to pay a forced loan imposed by Charles; it seemed that he was committed beyond withdrawal to the Opposition, daily more daring; and that he was to be one of that band of men, firm willed and single minded, who discovered in an absolute monarchy a menace to the general good; but Wentworth did not see with them; tradition was strong in him, his imagination glorified loyalty; he saw in the king an instrument for procuring the greatness of the people; he saw a crisis approaching, a struggle drawing nearer, he chose his side, knowing perhaps that it was bound to lose, but seeing at least a chance for his own dormant abilities to strengthen and exalt a weakening institution. In 1628 the Duke of Buckingham was stabbed to the heart by one of those Puritans who were resolved that all pertaining to Kingship was fatal to

their country's peace, and in that year Thomas Wentworth took the place of the murdered [26] favourite and became, with Laud of Canterbury, chief adviser to the King.

It was supposed by his former friends that he had covered himself with immortal infamy by his desertion of the popular party for that of the court, and their censure has been often echoed, it being assumed that because the cause he espoused was unsuccessful he wasted his genius in serving it; but in 1628 Sir Thomas may have hoped to make England as great as did Cromwell afterwards, and there was no prophet to tell him his judgment was deceived.

A personal friendship rose between him and the stately, formal King with whose traits he had much in common. Charles, grateful to the genius that took the place of Buckingham's careless talents, created him in one year baron, viscount, and Lord President of the Council of the North.

The Puritan party viewed his rise with peculiar hatred; so hard is it for even just men to stifle the claims of party and see any good in that cause which is not their own.

"You have left us," said John Pym, "but we will not leave you while your head is on your shoulders."

In 1633 Wentworth was made Lord Deputy of Ireland, and endeavoured to reduce order into [27] that vexed and discontented country by measures which were abused as despotic, but which were necessary to a man occupied with great schemes. England could never be a great empire while Ireland was an independent kingdom; his claim of Connaught only anticipated the inevitable, and if the army he was so abused for raising could have been kept together under his direction, the crown of England might have been saved. As far as time permitted, he introduced social benefits into the wretched land and encouraged the linen industry by planting flax.

But he was too late, perhaps too impetuous, blinded by his own genius for command into overlooking the steady rise of the democracy; he himself described his policy as "thorough." Had he been allowed the time, he would have made a notable thing of this policy; but the tide was against him, and bore him sharply out to ruin.

Private malice, not his own faults, brought about his downfall, and he was thrown by a misuse of the law as wanton as any tyranny that could be brought against him. In 1639 John Pym carried out his threat and impeached him of high treason; Wentworth, newly created Lord Strafford, was committed to the Tower, and the outward disgrace and real glory of the man began.

It was one of the most memorable of all state trials, and lacked no element of the tragic, the strange, the terrible, or the dramatic.

The prisoner was he who for over ten years had been the greatest man in the three kingdoms; the principal accuser was one who had been the closest friend of the man he accused; the judges [28] were eighty peers of the realm, the witnesses the two Houses. A King who loved and a Queen who hated the accused were present. The prisoner conducted his own defence, and outside beyond the doors of Westminster Hall the first murmurs of the growing civil war were beginning to rise and swell.

Sir Anthony Van Dyck painted Lord Strafford as a dark, handsome man of a robust type dictating to his secretary; the picture shows a personality such as is in accordance with what we know of the man, and when looking at the proud, half-frowning face it is easy to imagine how he stood during his trial, pale, composed, erect, scornful of them, seeing very surely the axe ahead, having no trust save in the sad-eyed King at whose ear the Bourbon Queen whispered hatred of him, yet using all his magnificence of eloquence to save himself as one who is conscious that his life is worth defending.

Thirteen accusers, who relieved each other, plied him with questions for seventeen days, and he answered them all with unshaken judgment, calm and grace, unaided, unpitied. John Pym's hatred spurred his enemies on, and Lord Strafford must have tasted the bitterest of all humiliation when he looked to where sat his friend Charles Stewart, not daring to lift a hand to save him–and he had hoped to make his King great indeed.

The man on trial for his life and honours and the King in his regal seat exchanged many a deep look across the commoners who were the masters of both–"he trusts me, and I am helpless" was [29] like a dagger in the heart of Charles.

By his side always sat the Queen, Mary of France, black-eyed, small, in satin and pearls, ready with her hand on his wrist, her voice in his ear: "Do not rouse the people–let Strafford go—"

She had always hated him; she hated any who endeavoured to share her dominion over her husband; she began, too, to be afraid of the people, and as she was of the blood royal of France, a breed that could not understand concession, she and her priests urged the King into further tyrannical measures; first, let Strafford go: he had devised the unpopular laws; if his death would appease the people, let them glut in his blood and keep their complaints from the ear of his Majesty.

So the Queen; but the King loved Strafford, who had served him to this end of ruin, and when he looked across at the dauntless figure pleading his cause to ears deaf with prejudice, he vowed in his heart that his minister should not die, and cursed the barking commoners who forced him there to witness the humiliation of this his faithful servant.

The genius of one man was triumphant over the malice of many. Strafford argued away every charge raised against him. A bill of attainder was then brought forward, hurried on, and passed on April 26th, a week after he had closed his splendid defence.

The King, desperate and seeing his own throne shaking, yet had the resolution to refuse his assent; he had promised his protection to Strafford and would not give way. [30]

The whole nation rose to demand the blood of Thomas Wentworth; Laud was already in the Tower, the Puritan party dominant; the fallen minister had no friend save the King.

His ambitious, lofty, and reserved spirit tasted great agony while he waited through the long days of early spring, tramping his chamber in the Tower–he who had hoped to make England great–and here was England howling for his life and honours ... here was John Pym and his fanatic followers triumphant.

"What is left? Can the great spirit rise to the great crisis? Having proudly lived, can I proudly die? Can I still serve England–now?"

The King was firm, and public feeling rose to a panic of excitement. Revolution was on the point of shaking the very palace. The Queen, with a baseness doubly vile in a woman, used her arts to wrest death from Strafford for her husband, vowed with tears to flee to France. The Bishop of Lincoln urged that the needs and desires of the nation were more than a mere private promise.

But the King was firm; he would not sign the death warrant of Strafford.

Then the Queen, potent for mischief, wrought on the King, since he was obstinate on that point, to save his servant by violent means. The distracted Charles took her fatal advice and endeavoured to seize the Tower of London by force by means of the troops lately raised by the Queen.

This attempt on the keys of the kingdom threw the nation, already in a ferment, into a tumult of wrath and fear, and Lord Strafford was lost. [31]

The wildfire of party zeal inflamed men into believing anything desperate of the King; thrice the members of the House of Commons fled on a cracking of the floor, thinking they had trod again over gunpowder as in the former reign. There was nothing too monstrous to be stated, nor too extravagant to be believed.

But the King would not sign the death warrant of his friend and servant; he was supported by the Bishop of London, who bade him listen to his conscience rather than to the fierce demands of party. Amid all the press of turning strife one man was calm–the prisoner in the Tower who saw every day how he had failed in his scheme of government and how he had been the means of embroiling the King with the people instead of establishing a great man over a great nation and making a light in Europe of Charles Stewart.

Of all bitter failures, what can be more bitter than that of a great statesman who hugely stakes and hugely loses beyond redemption, beyond hope? The proud dark-faced man who had stood so high and dreamt so daringly had his vigils of anguish during those long May days and nights in the old Tower already darkened with noble blood and the memory of splendid sufferers. He had lost everything but his life, and that hung on the promise of the King. My lord did not doubt that his master would keep that promise; but what was mere life to a man who only valued existence as it meant use, power, achievement? [32]

He who had given the King and England his best now gave all left to him. On one of those awakening days of spring, when even in the Tower there were trees bursting into leaf, glimpses of cloud-flecked blue, bars of sunshine across the cold walls and sounds from the wide river of music and merry-making, Lord Strafford wrote to the King, asking, for the sake of the peace of England, to be left to his fate.

In these words he concluded his noble letter: "My consent will more acquit you to God than all the world can do besides. To you I can resign the life of this world with all imaginable cheerfulness." The King gave way, but with no abatement of his anguish, since he justly felt that such a request was but another reason for him to keep his word.

He could not, when he had consented, sign the warrant himself, so this was done by four lords, and he sent a message entreating mercy of the peers, or at least a delay; but there was no pity in England for Lord Strafford, nor for the King.

The worst half of the tragedy was his; he never forgot nor shook his conscience free of what he had done. When he came to his own agony and bent his sad head to the block he looked at Juxon, that same bishop who had been advocate for Strafford, and said, "Remember," and it was believed that the terrible whisper referred to the forsaken friend who had died the same death eight years before.

At the moment he fell into a kind of apathy in the midst of the rejoicing faction who had their way at last. [33]

Lord Strafford prepared for death; he was in the full vigour of life, of a worldly temper, proud and ambitious; the warm days were full of the keen joy of life. He tasted to the utmost the sharpness of the struggle between flesh and spirit. When he heard from the written paper the actual words of the King formally condemning him he was for a moment broken with emotion and overcome at thought of the friendship that had failed so miserably; he, beloved of the King, was to die an attainted man, a death humiliating and shameful, branded as a traitor.

He struggled to control his haughty spirit, to subdue the flesh that clung to lovely life, but always before his eyes were the ripening green, the sweet early weather, the sounds from the river, and it was not easy.

The execution was hurried on; on the 12th of May he went to his death in black satins like the

great gentleman he was; as he left the gate Archbishop Laud, his one-time coadjutor, now his fellow-prisoner, met him, and he went on his knee to receive the blessing of one who was to so quickly follow him to the scaffold, then on between his guards silent and scornful like the leader of them all, while on his face were the low-breathed air and the early sunshine, and in his ears the calls of the birds and the swish of the river rippling hurriedly under the fortress walls.

Many men have died for England in many ways, none under circumstances more difficult and bitter than this proud man who sank to rest upon the block that May day while his sick, haunted King waited in the great palace for the awful news of the irrecoverable. [34]

A POOR SPANISH LODGING [35]

PHILIP WHARTON, DUKE OF WHARTON

"The scorn and wonder of his age."–*Alexander Pope.*

A young man sat at a wooden table in a small, mean room.

His hands were in his pockets and his head sunk on his breast, his legs outstretched before him.

A miserable bed, covered with a dirty blanket, occupied one corner of the room, above it being a gaunt and poorly carved crucifix.

The floor, walls and ceiling were lath, plaster and worn wood, all soiled, smoked and crumbling.

The one small window was covered with a thick pane of discoloured glass that could not open; some portmanteaux stood beneath and a broken chair.

On the table was a coarse glass stained with lees of wine, a loaf of bread, an hour-glass and a knife.

The flies turned in and out of the glass, clustered round the loaf and hung in clouds about the window.

Outside the sun, at its full height and strength, blazed at white heat, and a bar of vivid light streamed through the smeared glass and fell in a pool of gold on the dirty floor near to the young man, who appeared to be dozing, so still did he sit and so level was his breathing.

He was humbly dressed in a travelling coat that was much worn, though of a good cloth and fashionable cut, a frayed blue silk waistcoat, black breeches, boots to his knees, and a coat of grey tabinet, all much used and soiled. [36]

At his side was a light sword, and round his throat a neckcloth of fine Venetian lace, carelessly folded.

His hair hung untidily down his back and forward over his face; it was a charming chestnut-brown colour and very thick. Presently he stretched himself and raised his head without removing his hands from his breeches pockets.

He glanced round the room, and it would have been impossible to discover from his expression whether the squalor of his surroundings moved him to disgust or no.

His face was unusually handsome, of a high-born and rakish type, but ravaged in a ghastly fashion by want and illness. The contour and pose of youth remained, but all bloom, freshness and colour had gone; his person seemed to have seen as much hard service as his clothes and to have suffered more.

From the lines on his brow and at the corners of his remarkably beautiful mouth it might have been supposed that he was in pain, but his expression was calm and his large hazel eyes serene. The flies circled the room and beat at the window with a monotonous persistency; the sun burnt up the already foul air and heated the room almost unbearably. The young man rose, displaying a figure no more than the middle height, but of a graceful, well-trained manliness, and walked unsteadily to the window. [37]

As he moved he felt his own weakness and caught his breath with a quick exclamation.

For years he had been warned that he was killing himself as he had been warned that he was ruining himself. The last had occurred; he had been ruined in fame and fortune, and it seemed as if the first prophecy would be justified also. Two nights ago he had ridden from one town to another; six hours in the rain and the chill that had followed had greatly increased the vague illness that had been for the last two years threatening his life.

He had always been as reckless of his health as of all the other great gifts he had once been blessed with, and he was paying toll now, a penniless exile, bankrupt in everything.

He could see nothing from the window, the blaze of the sun was too strong on the white Spanish street.

The flies droned in his ears, and they were the only sound.

He closed his eyes, for the dazzle of sunshine made him feel giddy.

"Gad," he murmured, "one could do with a few drops of rain–a cloud at least."

He began to be conscious of a great thirst; there was no water in the brown earthenware jug standing in the corner, he knew. Languidly, but with the well-schooled and now unconscious grace of the man of fashion who is used to move with a thousand eyes watching every detail of his dress and deportment, the young Englishman crossed the room, unlatched the door and went slowly down the dark, steep and dirty stairs. [38]

He came directly into a large picturesque room that gave by a tall open door on to the street.

It was a kind of general hall or kitchen, the smooth black beams of the ceiling hung with rows of onions and herbs, all manner of pots and pans about the huge open hearth, a window at the back looking on to the garden, and in a dusky corner an empty cradle and a spinning wheel.

The young man went to the shelf where the thick green glasses stood, took one down and dipped it into the red-glazed pitcher that stood beneath. The bubble of the water sounded pleasantly; he raised the dripping glass and drank with a grateful air.

He was glad of the cool shadows and of the intense quiet; every one seemed abroad; it was autumn and he supposed they were at work in the vineyards.

There was an old rush-bottomed chair near the black-carved supports of the door; he seated himself with his back to the sunlight in the deserted street, and his eyes on the window the other side of the room that gave an exquisite glimpse of a fig-tree drooping in the shadowed garden, and beyond a glossy myrtle, glittering in distant sunbeams. The young man knew that he had not long to live, both from ordinary signs and fore-warnings and the sure inner instinct his keen intelligence was quick to notice and regard.

He was absolutely without fear; he had never had any credence in any religion or any belief, even vague, in a future state of existence, nor had, like many, tried to invent these feelings for himself or supply their place with superstitions and conventions. [39]

He had never needed these lures to gild his life with promise, always he had found the moment sufficient, and whatever the moment demanded, in wealth, honour, talent, charm or health, he had given lavishly, not unthinkingly, for he had always known that a price would be demanded, as he had seen it demanded from others of his kind.

And he was prepared to pay.

A long life did not attract him; all the pleasures he valued were pleasures that could not with dignity be enjoyed when youth was past; his own sparkling wit had often made a butt of an old rake, or an elderly prodigal; he had never intended to join the ranks of those people who had outworn their enjoyments.

A poet whom he had patronised had called him "The scorn and wonder of the age;" but from his own point of view his life had been the very steady following of a very simple philosophy.

Caring for nothing but the world, that he regarded as the golden apple hung above the head of every youth to ignore or gain, he had bought the world, with money, with charm, with honour, with talent, with beauty and strength and exulted in it and sated himself–and he did not complain of the bargain. He never complained of anything; his sweet, good humour was held by many to condone his villainies as the grace with which he took his final fall almost justified the acts which had led to that fall. When his political levity, his social extravagances, his dissipations had finally left him without health or money, he had taken the verdict of the doctors, the curses of his creditors and the flight of his friends with the same gentle smile, and, urged by his ardent love of the world to make life an adventure to the last, had disappeared from London, where he was so dazzling and infamous a figure, to die abroad, in the sun and among scenes that by their freshness and simplicity disguised, at least to a stranger's eyes, the sharpness of their poverty. So he, by birth an English Marquis, by patent of the Pretender a Duke, son of a famous man and himself the most renowned rake in London, even among a set that included Viscount Bolingbroke, stayed his obscure wanderings at a poor inn in an unknown Spanish village and prepared himself for death among the peasants of a strange land. [40]

He regretted nothing, not the splendid chances he had thrown away, not the fine name he had tarnished, not the great talents he had wasted, not the life he had sapped and used up before its time. He admitted no sins, he claimed no virtues and he believed in no judgment.

God he considered a polite myth, invented to frighten human weaknesses, the devil a fable to excuse man's breakage of his own laws; he had never paid the least regard to either; never, in any moment of disappointment or sickness, had he felt any touch of remorse, of regret or fear. [41]

If he had been given his life over again he would have again used it for the same extravagances, the same follies, the same short brilliant flare.

As he sat now, looking at the distant fig-tree and myrtle, he was thinking of his past life without compunction, though every incident that rose to his memory was connected with some broken promise, some shameless deception, some ruined heart, some wanton, dishonourable action.

The one thing he had been faithful to (beyond his own Epicurean creed) was the code of a gentleman, as interpreted by the society in which he moved. It was a curious code, inherited, not learnt, an instinct more than a quality only remotely connected with the chivalry from which it had sprung.

The Duke would have found this code difficult to define; he called it honour, but it was only a kind of flourishing likeness of honour.

Its laws were simple, mainly these: never be afraid; never chaffer with money nor earn it in any way, nor mingle in trade; never play false in your games or your bets; always be courteous to your inferiors and to women; never take insolence from any one, even the King; seek out danger and the company of your equals; never take up money once you have put it down; smile when you win and laugh when you lose; never speak of your loves nor toast an actress at your club. [42]

My lord had never broken these laws: he did not put this to his credit; he took them as naturally as clean linen and neat table manners, but perhaps in the casting up of his worthless life they might be set against the black length of his wicked record, as some poor palliative. There was something else my lord could claim, a personal quality this and peculiar to himself: he was tender to animals and anything weak that came his way.

He could not have turned a step aside to seek out the poor or miserable, but when they crossed his path he was lavish.

And no bird or beast had ever suffered through him; he had never lent the brilliance of his presence to any baiting or cock-fighting or bull-fight.

This, too, might be set to my lord's account, but there was little else.

Yet he was lovable; he had always been lovable.

People who knew him and scorned him still cared for him; he had been caressed by Charles Edward in genuine affection and liked by King George. Perhaps because he was so utterly soulless and made no pretence of being other than he was, because he was so entirely frank in his passionate capacity for happiness, in his beautiful gaiety he attracted those who were themselves divided in their aims and too timid to crown their own vices as he crowned his, for his fascination was more than merely physical and the attraction of exquisite manners. [43]

He was lovable now; even after his long exile from the splendours of St. James, even in his worn clothes, even marred by illness and weariness, he carried with him something that was wholly pleasing, not in the least suggestive of the shameful, unlovely things with which his name was branded.

He was reviewing the final adventure of his life with no changed sense of values, no blurred outlook.

The near presence of death did not alter his opinion in one jot on any particular nor confuse his estimate nor awaken new feeling; he must have satisfied, in some way, the purposes for which he had been born, to be so serene, so content on the eve of the complete end.

All his senses were absolutely clear, even more exquisite than usual; even more perhaps than ever did he appreciate the beauties of light and colour and scent, the delicacies of sound, of touch, yet his mean and unbeautiful surroundings did not trouble him; compared to what they might have been they were well enough. It was better to die in a poor Spanish lodging than in the Fleet, or a garret in Whitefriars, or some kinsman's back room; nay, better this than the Tower and the panoply of death some chill morning on the scaffold.

He would perhaps have preferred an active death in some duel, but he made no complaint that this had not been the end ordained for him. [44]

He was grateful that he was going to die in the sun.

Leaning back easily in the old willow-wand chair, he began to compose some verses–some of those witty cynical lines for which he had been famous in London and which amused him to fashion.

Presently his sensitive ears detected a light sound, a sweet and familiar sound, the play of a woman's skirt against her ankles and the floor.

He broke off his mental composition and turned his head towards the shadowy depths of the room that lay between him and the window at which he had been gazing.

From out these darknesses a figure emerged from a mysterious door that opened and shut on farther recesses of blackness, moved into the clearer shadows and finally into the full light.

It was a woman, young and notable, who appeared not to notice that there was any one in the room, for she stood in a watchful, motionless pose, gazing up the dark staircase from which the Duke had descended.

Her dress was fantastic and charming, a tight blue satin bodice gleamed round her slender waist, and beneath it panniers of pink gauze billowed over her hips and were looped away from a white petticoat trimmed with blue jet that glimmered even when she stood still.

Round the bottom of this petticoat was a garland of pink roses, her stockings, that showed well above her ankles, were blue, her shoes white, heelless and fastened in with embroidered pink ribbons. [45]

On one arm she carried a pale yellow cloak and a black velvet mask; over her wide shoulders was flung, carelessly, but gracefully, a white silk scarf with a deep fringe border.

Her dusky brown hair was slightly powdered and gathered on the top of her small head by a huge tortoiseshell comb set with red coral, long blue jet earrings quivered in her ears, and she wore a necklace of fine pearls.

The Duke noticed these things and the delicacy and grace of the woman herself, the poise of her head, the straight lines of her profile, the fineness of her hands and ankles, the richness of

her locks, the dark sweep of her eyebrows and the dusky bloom on her round cheek.

He also knew her dress to be that of a dancer or ballerina, despite the blue brocade train that dragged a couple of yards behind her.

What or who she was he did not care, nor how she came to be in this poor inn dressed in this festal fashion.

He was pleased to see again one of the pretty creatures who had always been to him the most entrancing and beautiful objects in an entrancing and beautiful world.

He watched the gentle vision with interest and tenderness, making no movement or sound.

Suddenly she turned full on him her dark face that, although it was too broad for perfect beauty, was piquant and glowing with fine colour. [46]

The Duke rose and bowed.

"I am Philip Wharton, Señora," he said in Spanish.

She advanced towards him.

"I thought you were upstairs," she said gravely.

Her voice was delicate, but her speech had the peasant accent of Andalusia.

"Were you watching for me?" he asked curiously.

"Yes," she said. "For who else? Why should I come back after this long time save to see you? Yesterday I was here," she added, "but you would not see me."

"Pardon me, I was ill yesterday and did not come downstairs."

She gazed at him with soft, luminous and unfathomable eyes.

"Have I seen you before?" asked the Duke, endeavouring to place her among the many women who had flitted across his life.

"I used to dance," she answered, "at the opera in Venice."

He did not remember her. How could he recall one face from out the whirl of joy and gaiety he had known in Venice?

"You are Spanish?" he asked.

"From Andalusia. And you are English?" [47]

"Yes."

"And dying?"

"Ah, you know as much as that, do you?" he smiled.

"I know many things now."

"Ah, wisdom!" he mocked. "I could wager your knowledge begins and ends with the list of your victims and triumphs. How did you come here?" he asked abruptly.

"I ran away."

"To this place?"

"It was but a stage on the road."

"You know me?" he asked.

"Yes; I have met you at Paris, at Vienna, at Rome and Naples."

"By gad," he said, "you flatter me by your memory."

He began to notice that she never smiled, and it displeased him; he disliked a grave woman.

"What is your name?" he asked in the tone of a master, and sank back into the chair, for indeed he felt very weak.

She shook her head.

"I have so many."

"Give me one."

She bent her eyes on him earnestly.

"What was the name of your first love?" she asked.

He started.

"I have forgotten."

"What was the name of the woman you loved the most?" [48]

Fair faces rose before him, tearful faces, pleading faces, angry faces–he could not choose between them.

"I do not know," he said faintly.

She glanced round the room as if she, too, saw the faces that had risen so clearly before his mental eyes.

"You were not kind or loyal to one of them," she said.

Philip Wharton laughed.

“Tell me your name,” he insisted.

“You have forgotten it, and you do not know it,” she returned quickly. “Once I was called Helen, but that was a long time ago.”

He looked at her curiously.

“Tell me about yourself,” he said, “and how you come to be here alone.”

She put her hands behind her back; the mantle trailed over her train and her fragile dress glimmered in the shade.

“It was after the opera at Versailles,” she began. “I was dressed for the ballet and was leaving my dressing-room, when they put a cloak over my head and carried me out to a coach–we drove all night to the house of an English lord in the Rue de Vaugirard—”

She stepped suddenly and noiselessly behind the Duke.

“—as I was descending from the coach they put a handkerchief over my eyes, so—”

Philip Wharton felt a scrap of muslin flung over his head and drawn tight over his eyes, leaving him in pleasant darkness. [49]

“—and one led me by the hand, thus—”

Her fingers touched his; he smiled passively beneath the bandage.

“—and took me into the presence of my lord, who had betted a thousand guineas that I should ride in his cabriolet through Paris. But it was not very long before he was tired of me.”

She loosened the handkerchief and withdrew it gently.

Philip Wharton opened his eyes on cool shade, a room hung with raised crimson and white velvet and furnished in a very stately style.

An arched marble window looked on to a blue canal on which the rays of the setting sun sparkled, and in the seat of this window, that was piled with cushions, a lady sat; she wore a great hooped skirt, fluttering with sarcenet ribbons, and in her red-gold locks drooped a red rose.

“As I was saying,” she said in a matter-of-fact tone, “you very soon got tired of me.”

“*Carina*, no,” answered the Duke. “I have always been in love with you and Venice.”

“You went away. It was the day of the Carnival. I was then wearing an orange cloak with a fringe. It was exactly five days since I had met you. But you cared for me more than for any woman you met in Venice.” [50]

“I love you now,” said Philip Wharton, “for I have come back to you when I am dying.”

She looked at him gravely and stepped out of the window on to the balcony.

“Will you come once more in my gondola?” she asked.

He followed her.

Light steps led from the balcony to the Canal, where a gay gondola cushioned in sapphire blue floated.

The lady stepped in and the Duke after her; the gondolier sped the light boat forward between the palaces.

“This has always been a pleasant memory to me,” he said.

She sat erect with a fan of curled white ostrich to lips and looked at him over the feather tips.

“The night you went away,” she said, “my husband hired three bravos. I was crossing the bridge when I met them–this bridge—”

Suddenly the Rialto was over them; the gondola had shot from blue and gold into darkness.

“They thought I was coming to meet you. My husband—”

The boat stopped in the blackness; he felt, though he could not see, the lady rise and step out.

Her hand touched his, and blindly following the guidance of it, he stepped ashore, and felt a step beneath his feet; the firm clasp on his wrist drew him through a doorway.

“My husband is coming back to-morrow,” the voice continued. “Oh, Philip, I am afraid!”

He put his free hand to his sword.

“That is foolish of you,” he said. “I am here.”

“But you have begun to cease to care,” her voice wailed, “and you will go away.” [51]

As she spoke a door opened to her right, and she released his wrist; he followed her into a little boudoir charmingly hung with straw-coloured silk.

The Duke remembered it very well; he turned to the woman.

She was now a pale blonde wrapped in an embroidered mob and wearing dazzling little silver slippers.

Her face was tear-stained and her eyes pleading.

“Paris was terrible after you left,” she said. “Why did you go? You tired so soon.”

“You have remarked that,” he returned, “twice, I think, before.”

She began to cry.

“Do not you love me any more, Philip?”

“I have come back to you,” he answered; “but my head is rather confused. And, Madame, you are spoiling your complexion with these tears.”

“Hush!” she cried.

She ran to the dainty hangings that concealed the door, raised them, and listened.

“Some one is coming!”

She hastened back to him and half dragged, half pushed him to a secret door; as she touched a spring it flew open, and he stepped with a laugh into the concealment of a dark secret room that was filled with a bitter, pungent perfume. He closed his eyes; there was a heaviness in his head; he could not tell how long he had been closed in when the sliding panel was drawn.

“It was a false alarm after all,” said the woman. [52]

Her black hair hung dishevelled on her brocade gown, her hollow face was pale and her eyes stormy.

“Did you say that you must leave Bois-le-Duc to-morrow?” she demanded hoarsely.

She held a candle in a pewter stick in her right hand and her left clasped her dress together over her palpitating bosom.

“The Prince gave me leave to return to England,” he answered.

He stepped from his concealment into a room with polished walls, furnished heavily and well.

“You would not betray him after he has given you a Dukedom–you would not forsake me?” she asked anxiously.

“Do you not trust me?” he asked lightly.

“Oh yes, I trusted you. But you went away.”

“Always the same!” he exclaimed impatiently. “Have I not been faithful to return to you now?”

She began to laugh.

“Faithful!” she cried. “Faithful!”

He laughed too, and the echo was long and loud.

He went to the door and opened it on dark stairs; without looking back he descended.

The first landing blazed with the light of a thousand candles; a magnificent doorway with portals flung wide invited him into a gorgeous ballroom, where splendidly dressed people moved to and fro to the melody of violin and harp.

Philip Wharton entered; in a little alcove to his right he found the woman waiting for him. [53]

The diamonds sparkled red and blue as if her flesh was on fire; her powdered locks were piled high, and the billows of her violet dress spread wide on the settee where she sat.

She laughed.

“Faithful!” she cried. “Faithful! And you are leaving Vienna to-morrow!”

He seated himself on the small portion of the brocade her spreading skirts had left uncovered.

His nostrils distended to drink in the perfumed air, and his eyes sparkled; his whole spirit became animated in the congenial atmosphere of a court–a luxurious court.

“And I must really die and leave all this,” he complained.

He looked at the lady and smiled; but her face was very grave.

“Let us walk once more in the garden,” she said, and rose and opened a glass door in the alcove that led into a garden that was very prettily lit by coloured lanterns. She took the Duke’s arm, and they passed along the prim paths between avenues of clipped limes and box bushes.

For some while she did not speak; then she whispered–

“It is strange to see you at Kensington again, my lord.” Her voice sounded as if it was full of tears. “Strange to think that you must leave again so soon.”

She pressed close to his side now, for she no longer wore a hoop; a quilted hood and cloak concealed her head and figure, and he thought that she must wear jasmine somewhere on her person, so strong was the scent of that blossom on the air. [54]

“I wonder,” she continued, “if, when you come to die, you will ever think of these moments–the broken promises, the broken hearts?”

“When I come to die,” repeated the Duke musingly, “I shall no doubt think of you and your sweetness.”

“Not of me and my sadness?”

Philip Wharton did not answer; he smiled into the darkness, which he perceived was beginning to be lightened by the first delicate sparkle of dawn.

“Have you ever done one good action?” continued the voice at his side.

“Oh, Madame!”

“Or shed one tear–one tear for another? One tear to heal all the wickedness you have committed–all the grief you have caused?”

“Never!” he answered. “Never!”

“Is there no memory you can recall that would soften you to tears now?”

He answered “None.”

Her hand slackened on his arm and was withdrawn; in the confusion of the lifting shadows and the spreading milky whiteness of the new day he lost her.

He was alone in the garden. No, not a garden; it was soon light enough to see, and he then noticed that he was walking in an English field in early spring-time.

Before him a meadow sloped to a fence that enclosed a little wood; bluebells, daffodils, and primroses grew under the branches of the trees; the meadow was starred all over with buttercups and daisies. [55]

To one side of the fence was a small thatched cottage behind which the sun was rising, and where the distance merged into the early blue vapour the sharp spire of a church rose.

A slight, very slight, feeling of apprehension came over Philip Wharton.

“I do not wish to come back here,” he said. “This has all been a dream, and I will wake up now.”

Yet he walked on.

It was absolutely still; though the sun had now risen clear of the mists and was glittering in a clear heaven, there was no one abroad.

The Duke approached the cottage, saying to himself–

“I know this place, and I do not wish to see it again.”

Before the wooden gate of the tiny garden he paused.

A few modest flowers were growing in neat beds–pinks, wallflowers, and sweet williams; beside the closed door was a lavender bush.

The Duke’s sensation of dread deepened. He noticed that a white blind hung behind each of the four windows. He felt that he was there against his will. Peaceful and lovely as the scene was, it was one from which he would willingly have fled.

He left the garden and wandered away into the little wood and seated himself under a pine tree and took his head in his hands. [56]

And as he sat there he heard the church bell tolling.

“I am not going,” he said to himself, and for a while he was resolute and would not move; yet presently he rose and went back to the cottage.

The door was half open now.

He pushed wide the garden gate and entered; he was acutely conscious of the scent of the simple flowers and the tolling of the bell.

Without knocking he entered.

Two men were in the narrow passage carrying before them a coffin.

Philip Wharton found himself face to face with it; it was held upright, and the name-plate was near his eyes. He read, “*Aged nineteen*.”

He heard a woman sobbing in the room into which the coffin was being taken, and he peered through the crack of the door.

On a humble bed lay the wasted form of a young girl from which the soul had recently departed.

Philip Wharton passed out of the house, out of the garden, and down the meadow.

“I am sorry,” he said; he had never sincerely spoken those words before.

He walked till he came to the church, and then he entered the graveyard, and seated himself on an old sunken tomb and watched the poor funeral procession that presently wound through the lych-gate.

When they had all left and he was again alone, he walked down the sloping churchyard path and looked at the new-made grave. [57]

A simple headstone was already in place; it bore no name, but only the date and the words–

“A broken and a contrite heart, O Lord, Thou wilt not despise.”

Philip Wharton put his hand before his eyes; he felt sorry and afraid.

All the women who had ever loved him seemed to lie buried in that humble grave. Love itself, compact of a thousand graces, a thousand transports, which had been made manifest to him under so many different shapes, in so many climes, seemed to have fallen and died at last and to

lie buried here with Lucy....

He took his hand from his eyes and saw about him the poor Spanish lodging, the distant window with the fig and myrtle from which the sun had now departed. He sat up shivering.

"What dreams!" he muttered. "What dreams!"

He found his eyes wet with tears; he rose and held on to the back of the chair. For one awful moment he believed in God. Then he shook off the oppression.

"She died as I must die," he said. "Why not?"

A chill had fallen with the setting of the sun. He shivered again, and found that his limbs were stiff beneath him; he pushed the dark hair back from his face and gazed before him, trying to conjure the figure of the dancer in the pink gauze and blue jet out of the encroaching shadows.

But he knew that it was useless, that she was dead and buried with all those other women. [58]

And death had him by the throat, was struggling with him even now, and he must prepare himself to go down into the darkness that enveloped them.

He went upstairs to the room he called his own; as he opened the door of it he heard steps below, and leaning over the rails saw the old woman who owned the inn enter with a basket of grapes on her grey head.

The young Duke blew her a kiss; she was the last woman whom he would ever see. He entered his room; the flies still buzzed round the stale bread and dirty glass, but the golden pool of sunlight had gone from the floor.

"Not one of those women," reflected Philip Wharton, "ever thought that I should die–like this!"

So saying the young rake seated himself heavily and wearily in his former seat by the table and stretched out his hand for his pipe which lay next the glass.

But before he touched it, he felt a slight cold touch on his shoulder, and thought he heard some one behind him.

As he turned to look he drew a long breath.

"Why, Lucy—" he said, and on that word–died.

DEFEAT

[59]

Edward Plantagenet

Edward Plantagenet, Prince of Wales, Duke of Cornwall, Earl of Chester, Lord of Biscay and Uridales, rested at Bordeaux with his brother Johan of Gaunt, Duke of Acquitaine and Lancaster, Earl of Derby, Lincoln and Leicester, Seneschal of England and the English army.

Edward of Wales had saved his word; he could not save Acquitaine.

He had redeemed the oath sworn before the high God that the treacherous Limoges should pay for its disloyalty. The town lay now a burning ruin; in one day three thousand men, women, and children had atoned with their blood for the falsity of Jean le Cros, Bishop of Limoges.

For Edward had sworn by his father's soul to wipe out every life in Limoges. Chained and bare-headed the Bishop had been brought before the Prince, and had only been spared by the intercession of Johan of Gaunt, for Edward had vowed by God and St. George that the arch traitor should perish.

Yet at this he stayed his hand and came to Bordeaux, carried in a litter, his vengeance satisfied but his chivalry stained by the innocent blood of churls, an unhappy knight, ill at ease in mind and body, without money for his men-at-arms, with Acquitaine slipping from him. East and south and north the French were advancing, and he had no means to stay them.

This was great bitterness for one who had been the pattern of knighthood in Europe, who was a King's son and the hero of the English. So he came to Bordeaux, where his family waited him in a castle above which the Leopards floated, and saw the ships in the harbour waiting to carry him back to England. At Cognac he had delegated his powers and his offices to his brother, and Johan of Gaunt had taken up the almost hopeless task; but he was ambitious, a famous knight, eager to play a great part among the Princes of Europe, also in his full health and lusty; but Edward wasted from day to day. After the feverish fury of the attack on Limoges and the ferocity of his vengeance, he fell deeper into his sickness and brooded bitterly in his mind. [60]

When he had halted at Lormont a messenger had ridden up to meet him with word from the Princess, Jehanne of Kent. She had her two children with her, and one, the elder, was sick.

Edward said no word to this message, and so they carried him, a silent knight, into the castle.

All gaiety, all joy, all splendour of chivalry and deeds of arms, all the brightness of glory and bliss of youth seemed overclouded now.

Edward the King was old, Edward the Prince was sick and defeated, Philippa the Queen was dead, and English chivalry was smirched by the massacre of Limoges.

And the ships waited to take ingloriously home the proudest knight in Europe to rest his limbs

in the Savoy and presently his bones in St. Peter's Church at the Abbey near Westminster. When he came to the castle he asked after his little son Edward. [61]

They carried him to a room overlooking the Bay of Biscay that lay placid beneath a pale October sky, and laid him on a couch by the window; and he asked again for his son.

Immediately the Princess Jehanne, his wife, entered the room and came to his side, and in silence went on her knees beside him.

"Ah, *joli coeur*!" he said, and raised his weary eyes and took her long face between his hands and gazed down into it.

"What happened at Limoges?" she asked, without a word of greeting or duty.

His hands fell to his sides and his worn countenance overclouded.

"I kept my word," he muttered.

Tears came into the eyes of Jehanne of Kent.

"I would you had been foresworn, seigneur," she answered, "for the hand of God is against us."

"In what way?" asked Edward.

"In your sickness," she said, "for, certes, I perceive you very weak–and in the illness of the child."

"Help me up," answered the Prince, "that I may go to him."

He raised himself to a sitting posture and put his feet to the ground; his simple dull red robe flowed round him unbroken by a jewel, his dark thin face had the look of a man weary of himself. [62]

With her arm round his shoulder Jehanne supported him; she was very grave, like one who had no comfort to give.

"That I should lean on you, *joli coeur*!" he said, and rose unsteadily, holding to her arm. "Look well to this child, Jehanne," he added in a sterner tone, "for meseems he will wear the crown sooner than I—"

"*Hèlas!*" she answered tenderly." This is not Edward who speaks so sadly—"

"Jehanne," he said, "I shall never wear mail again."

She shook her head, looking up at him, and tried to smile.

"I shall no more set lance in rest nor draw sword," he continued. "I have been useless sick so long, and now I feel death in my bones."

"Never," said the gentle Jehanne, "have you come back to me in this ill humour–the air of England will restore you, seigneur."

"The air of England will be no balm to my hurts," he answered. "Take me to the child."

She led him gently to the next chamber, her own, where Prince Edward had lain two days in an increasing fever.

It was a tall and glooming room, hung with cloths covered with stitching in bright wools.

The two arched windows opened on to the courtyard and the distant prospect of the sea, and were crossed by the boughs of a poplar tree that shook golden and amber leaves against the mullions.

An Eastern rug spread the floor, and there was an open hearth on which some logs smouldered. [63]

The bed stood out from the wall opposite the windows, and was hung with curtains of clean blue and white check linen; at the foot of it were two chairs, on one of which a white dog slept.

Beside the bed was a *prie dieu*, with an illuminated book on the rest, beneath which hung a long strip of embroidered silk, beyond that several coffers and chests, still unpacked, and a couch piled with skins and garments.

Two women and a man were talking together over the fire; they rose hastily at the entrance of the Prince, but he took no heed of them.

Aided by his wife, he came to the end of the bed and stood holding by the light rail.

Under the blue and white frill of the canopy a child lay asleep, his brown hair a tangle on the stiff white bolster, his flushed cheek pressed against his hand.

The coverlet that was worked with the arms of England on a blue ground was drawn up to his chin, his little body only slightly disturbed the smoothness of the heavy fall of the silk.

"In what manner did he become sick?" demanded the Prince hoarsely. "God wot, you might have looked to him better."

The Princess quivered beneath his hand on her shoulder.

"Neither he nor Richard," she answered, "has been from my sight since you left me; but there has been much sickness in Bordeaux." The tears overbrimmed her eyes and ran down her pale cheeks. "I have been watching him these two days without sleep," she added. [64]

Edward of Wales did not answer her; his hollow eyes were fixed upon his heir–that third Edward who was to carry on the splendour of England and the glory of Plantagenet.

The boy had always been next his heart; Richard, his second son, was not of so kindly a nature.

His father did not see in him promise of his own qualities, but his eldest born was his own copy, beautiful, brave, at six a perfect little knight.

Jehanne glanced timidly up at his bitter, stern face.

"You must not grieve," she whispered; "he will be well in a little while. Is he not strong, and will he not be running beside you in a few short days?"

Still Edward the Black Prince did not answer; he disengaged himself from her fond support and walked heavily to his son's pillow, then sank on his knees on the bedstep and clasped his thin hands against the coverlet.

The little face so near to his was calm and proud, the flower of English beauty, gold and rose in tint, blunt featured, strongly made, yet delicate.

Save that he was deeply flushed and his hair damp beneath the tumble of silken curls, he might have been in perfect health. The weary, sick, disappointed, and defeated knight, with that dark day of Limoges on his soul, stared with a piteous eagerness at the child's gracious innocency.

The child who would be King of England soon, surely; it was mere chance who would live the longer, the old King languishing at Westminster in tarnished glory at Alice Perrer's side, or his famous son who had just resigned his commands and was coming home to die. Edward himself never thought that he would be King; he felt the sands of life running out too swiftly. [65]

That day when he had been carried through the slaughter round the church of St. Etienne at Limoges he had known that it was the last time he would look on war.

And Edward the King could not live long now.

So soon the fair child would be Lord of England and possessor of all the perilous honours and glories of his father. The Prince's proud head sank low; the hot tears welled up and blinded him, then dripped down his cheeks as he considered his smirched chivalry.

And the Princess Jehanne saw this, but did not dare to stir from her place, for she knew that, as a shield once dented by a heavy sword can never be made smooth again, so a knight's honour once stained can never more be cleaned, even by the bitterest repentance. For her husband to have fallen from this lofty code, which was the only code that held among those of gentle blood, was a more awful thing than the lapse of a poor obscure knight, for he had blazed so brightly in his chivalry and brought such renown to England that the whole world had echoed with his fame.

The Prince rested his cheek against the arms of England on the coverlet; he felt the lassitude of a man who sees that life is done, and that never more in this world will he perform feats of arms or guide great policies or strive with men or shine before them. [66]

The loss of his strength had had the effect of drawing a veil between him and the world; seeing as a spectator those events in which he had once played a leading part, he had come to estimate things differently.

And now that feeling culminated; he felt like one very old, looking back on a long life, or as if he beheld the incidents of his career painted in little bright pictures on a long roll of vellum.

It was an unfinished life, a broken, defeated life, perhaps men might hereafter call it a tarnished life.

The Prince knew this, and the sense of failure was like a black cloud on his heart.

But his little son, sleeping beneath the leopard-strewn coverlet, would redeem his own unfulfilled promise.

"Ah, dear Lord Christ, and St. George," he prayed, "let this be so–let him be a very perfect knight and a great King."

Hearing a little movement, he lifted his head.

The child was awake; the sparkling blue of his eyes was brilliant in his flushed face.

"Seigneur!" he whispered, seeing his father; he smiled. "Shall we be going to England soon?"

"Even now they load the boats," answered the Prince. "You wish to return to England?" [67]

"*Certès*," said the child wistfully. "Is the war over?" he added.

"What should you know of that?" asked the Prince, startled.

"I did hear the knights all talking of the war."

"It is not over," answered Edward sombrely. "Your Uncle Lancaster will finish that business."

"*Hèlas!* I would I were a big knight, Seigneur," murmured the child.

"There is time for that," said the Prince.

His son stared at him for a moment's silence, then said–

"When the knights showed us feats with the lance in the courtyard, Richard was afraid."

"Nay," replied Edward angrily, "not *afraid*!"

The child nodded.

"Richard has a new silk cote hardie which pleases him mightily; but when I am well I shall have a shirt of mail, shall I not?"

"Ay!" answered the Prince, "if the armourer can make one so small."

The child closed his eyes.

"Why am I sick, Seigneur?" he muttered. "Did I do wrong?"

Edward shivered.

"You are not sorely sick?" he demanded hoarsely.

His son put out a hot hand, which the Prince clasped tightly.

"I feel so tired," he whispered, still with his eyes closed; "but when I sleep the dragons come and crawl over the bed—" [68]

Jehanne had crept round to the other side of the pillow.

"Let him sleep, Edward," she whispered anxiously.

"He can sleep while I hold his hand," answered the Prince, never lifting his eyes from his son's face.

"Nay, but you should rest," she insisted. "Have you not come a long journey, and are you not sick?"

"I rested at Lormont," answered Edward.

The Princess lifted her red kirtle from her feet and crossed to the doctor, who stood between the two women on the hearth, and whispered to him, her pretty face quivering with agitation.

A wind was rising from the sea, ruffling the waves, shaking the cordage of the anchored ships and lifting the little pennons of England that struggled at the main masts. This wind beat at the diamond-shaped leaded casements and scattered the leaves from the poplar tree without in a yellow shower like golden ducats dropped by a reluctant hand across the prospect of sea and town.

The Princess Jehanne came back to the bed with the doctor; he was a Spaniard, who had been in the service of Don Pedro and was renowned for his knowledge of Eastern medicine.

He spoke in French to the Prince, with a courteous humility.

"Fair Seigneur, permit me to look to the little Prince. And for yourself, it would be wiser that you should rest." [69]

Edward glanced up into his cool, composed face; then rose heavily and seated himself in the stiff chair against the wall.

The doctor bent over the child, delicately touched his brow, then called, in soft Spanish, one of the women, who came with a small horn beaker in her hand.

The little Prince was moaning. When he saw the draught he tried to push it away, and shut his lips obstinately.

"Ah, *par dè*!" cried the father, "what manner of knight will you become?"

The child sat up, shuddering, but meek, and swallowed the noisome liquid without a protest.

"Is he better?" whispered the Princess Jehanne, drawing the coverlet anxiously up over him as he lay down.

The doctor shook his head.

"Not–worse?" she faltered.

"That I cannot say," he replied. "The fever is very high."

She glanced at her husband sitting gloomy and silent, and beckoned one of the women and whispered to her to fetch Prince Richard, who might charm the Prince out of his melancholy.

But when his second son was brought and led up to him, Edward showed no manner of interest.

Yet the child was of a neat and exact beauty and very richly dressed in brown silk and very humble in his duty.

"Were you afraid of the lance play?" asked his father. [70]

Richard looked up in a mischievous and charming manner.

"I do prefer, Seigneur, to go in a litter to horseback," he lisped.

"Do you not love to see the jousts?" frowned Edward.

"I like to play at the ball," returned Richard.

"Take him away for a false knight," said the Prince wearily.

"*Ahè*, at four years old!" cried Jehanne of Kent indignantly. She came round the bed and caught the younger Prince to her bosom swiftly.

"He is my son," flashed Edward, "and he loves not arms. Take him hence."

The Princess gave Richard to the lady who had brought him, and as he found himself being carried away he began to wail and cry, which completed the Prince's contempt; in truth he was angry with Richard for being well and lusty while his brother lay sick. The Princess noticed his exclamation of annoyance as the child broke into sobs.

"You are not fair to Richard," she said, flushing.

"*Pardi*, you must have your favourite," he retorted gloomily. "If you had given the care to

Edward you do to Richard he might have been on his feet to welcome me.”

Jehanne turned abruptly away, smarting from the injustice of the rebuke. [71]

“If you had spared Limoges,” she answered, “God’s judgment would not have fallen on you in this matter.”

The Prince shrank against the wall and lifted tortured eyes.

Instantly she was on her knees before him.

“Forgive me,” she said passionately.

He did not speak a word; his thin hand lightly touched the silver caul that bound her fair hair, but his eyes had moved to his son.

The little Prince slept again, though uneasily, with moans and twitchings in his limbs.

“I might have spared Limoges,” muttered Edward, “but I had sworn by my father’s soul.”

Jehanne kissed the hand that had been withdrawn from her head.

“Come away for a little while,” she pleaded, “while he sleeps.”

He rose and suffered her to lead him into the next chamber, where he lay exhausted along the couch by the oriel window and sent for his beloved brother, the Duke of Lancaster.

Jehanne sat silently by his side on a little stool, her brow furrowed and her cheeks colourless; she had never seen the Prince so silent, so weak, so troubled.

She was relieved when the magnificent Johan, still in his camail and surtout, full of vigour and energy, entered the chamber.

“How goes the lading of the ship?” asked Edward of Wales. “We sail with the first fair wind.”

“*Pardi*,” said the Duke in his deep voice, “I have no time to go down to the shore yet, but I do not think they will make delays.” [72]

“Surely,” said the Prince. “I am right weary of Acquitaine.”

And he gave a sigh as if he would burst his bosom.

“Yet I must see more of it,” returned Johan, coming to salute the Princess, which he did with good will, being close in sincere friendship with this lady.

The Prince lay back languidly.

“How can you keep a foothold without money?” he asked impatiently.

Johan’s deep eyes rested lovingly on his brother’s changed face.

“By St. George,” he said, “if I can keep these fiefs no other way, I will out of my own revenues and charges support the war—”

Edward looked at him fully, and the tears washed the eyes of the Princess.

“Seigneur,” she said, “you can with a very comfortable heart return to England, knowing how loyally Johan will uphold you here.”

She felt warmly towards Johan, for she knew that it was he who had turned aside the Prince’s vengeance from Jean le Cros and saved him from the crime of taking the life of a son of the Church.

Perhaps the Prince thought of that too; perhaps he thought that the blood of the three thousand slain in Limoges was as heavy a burden to bear as the blood of a bishop.

“Ay, save Acquitaine, Johan,” he murmured, “for the honour of England.” [73]

His eyes turned wistfully to the fading day that died beyond the oriel window. Surely, he thought, I have drunk of the last drop of bitterness. I, Edward of Wales, to return to England a useless man, leaving defeat behind for a younger knight to redeem.

The Duke of Lancaster stood watching him, with many thoughts in his heart, and presently Edward turned to him and spoke, in a voice earnest and feeble.

“Johan, when the King dies I shall be in my grave.”

The Princess broke his speech by a sharp, piteous intake of breath, and caught desperately at his slack hand.

“Oh, Jehanne,” he said, “I have flattered your fears long enough. And now I must speak straightly.”

He paused, for his breath failed him.

“Speak,” answered Johan, “for I am ready to take any charge that you may give me—”

“My son Edward will be King of England,” whispered the Prince; “and he is a young child. Stand you by him and by his mother in their difficulties.”

“I will,” said the Duke gravely.

“I entreat this of you now,” added Edward, “for it well may be that I shall never see you again. I think,” and the bitterness of his failure echoed in his voice, “that I shall die before we regain Acquitaine.”

“Be of better cheer, brother,” answered the Duke, “for I have great hopes that you will recover [74]

in England."

"Nay, I am past mending," said the Prince; "and were it not that I have some desire to draw my last breath in English air, I would die here and leave my bones where I have left my knighthood and my chivalry."

"You scarcely think of me," said Jehanne of Kent, and her eyes reminded him how much he had loved her once; lately he had seemed to fall away from the close confines of her affection.

He returned her gaze sadly.

"Yea, I think of you," he answered, "but men's matters fill my mind. Yet be content. You are a sweet woman, Jehanne."

He caressed her cheek with languid fingers, and again his eyes sought the window and the pale sky beyond, and his face was moody, as if he saw passing in the windy spaces without all the pageants, battles, triumphs, achievements and glories that had gone to make his life–all the great world that was still full of feats of arms, of ambitions, of splendour, of laughter, whirling, receding, leaving him in this quiet chamber, useless, sick, and defeated.

The Duke of Lancaster, who was in command of the troops who had escorted the Prince to Bordeaux and had a hundred matters on his mind, left the chamber.

Jehanne sat silent, forgotten, unnoticed, beside the Prince, who, with his head sunk on his breast, was dreaming of the life that was past and the life he had hoped to live. [75]

Presently candles were brought in, but he made no movement nor did the Princess, stiff and cold on her stool.

The wind, with a gentle persistence, shook the tall window-frame and lifted the arras on the wall; clouds were coming up from beyond the sea and blotting the tawny crimson streaks of the sunset.

Dark settled in the chamber and the candles winked, little points of light in a great gloom.

Pleasant, cheerful noises of horses and men came from the courtyard where the lading and unlading was proceeding; the sounds of the mules and their drivers could be heard as a long procession of them laden with baggage started for the ships.

At last the Prince spoke.

"This is a homeward wind," he said.

As he raised his head to speak he saw the door open and the Spanish doctor enter.

Jehanne turned, and, fearful of bad news, put her finger to her lips.

But Edward got to his feet, caught her aside, and said in the voice of a strong man–

"What news of my son?"

The doctor answered steadily, without fear or hesitancy.

"The Prince is worse, Seigneur, and it were well that you should come."

Edward of Wales bowed his head and followed the doctor into the next apartment. [76]

The candles were lit and the curtains drawn; a smell of herbs, of wax, of incense, was heavy in the air. A priest was kneeling at the foot of the bed; the full Latin words of his whispered prayer came clearly to the Prince's ears.

The little Edward lay on his back with his head flung upwards.

An awful change had come over him since last his father had looked on him; an expression of pain had also given him an expression of maturity, the unnatural flush had faded, leaving him bluish-white, while under his bright eyes was a purple stain.

The Prince staggered to the bed.

"Limoges, Limoges," he muttered.

He cast himself on his knees and clutched the coverlet.

"Dear Lord Jesus, what is this coming to me!" he whispered.

Another doctor moved about; Jehanne stopped and spoke to him. He could tell her nothing save that, despite all the most approved remedies, the Prince had within the last hour become rapidly worse and finally lost consciousness.

Jehanne turned desperately to the great bed where her child lay, breathing heavily, with glazed fixed eyes and dry lips.

"Is it the plague?" she asked.

They could not tell her.

"Oh, dear, dear Lord and St. George," prayed the Prince, "put not this loss on England; punish me not this way!" [77]

The child turned on his side and muttered a few words, all relating to arms and horses and war; his eyes closed jerkily and then fluttered open.

Johan of Lancaster entered; he whispered to the doctors, then came lightly to the bed, walking as softly as a woman for all his great stature and bulk.

He glanced at the child, he glanced at his brother, then touched the kneeling priest on the shoulder.

"He will not die," said the Prince; "in a little while he will wake and be well again."

The priest rose and left the room.

A long swell of wind lifted the Eastern tapestry on the floor, fluttered the long curtains and stirred the aromatic scents and the clouds of incense that hung in the air.

Jehanne of Kent stood rigid, staring down at the pillow; her yellow hair had slipped and hung loose in the silver caul.

And her face showed hollow in the fluttering candlelight.

The little Prince turned from side to side, catching his breath in his throat.

"Seigneur …" he gasped, "let me … mount the white horse … the great horse.…"

He began to cough, and his small fingers pulled at the pillow; he stared straight at his father.

"He does not see me," whispered Edward; "he is blind."

"Why do you leave me alone?" complained the child; "but I … am … not … afraid–never … afraid." [78]

The Prince caught his arm passionately, then turned in a slow horror, for he saw Jehanne and his brother sink to their knees. He looked over his shoulder.

In the doorway stood three priests; the centre one held with upraised hands an object swathed in white silk.

The Host.

"*In nomine patris, filiis, et spiritus sanctus*," he said, and drew aside the white silk, revealing the Eucharist glittering like a captured star.

"No," began Edward, "no—"

He turned again to the bed; a light struggle shook the child's limbs. He twisted his arm out of his father's grasp and pressed his two hands together, pointed heavenwards.

"Saint–George—" he breathed very faintly, then "England."

His hands fell apart and his mouth dropped into a circle; a faint quiver ran through his body, and his head sank on to his shoulder.

The Host was borne round the bed, and no one moved.

Then Edward rose, regardless of the Presence of God.

"Too late," he said in a terrible voice. "My son, my son!"

And before the priest carrying the Eucharist the victor of Cressy sank like a felled sapling, and Jehanne caught his head on her knee, her heart motionless in her bosom. [79]

So died the youngest of the three royal Edwards of England, a few days before the sailing from Bordeaux, and soon after the other two were both at peace in Westminster and Richard was on the throne with Johan of Gaunt for his guardian and many troubles ahead.

TWILIGHT

[80]

Lucrezia Borgia, Duchess d'Este

Three women stood before a marble-margined pool in the grounds of the Ducal palace at Ferrara; behind them three cypresses waved against a purple sky from which the sun was beginning to fade; at the base of these trees grew laurel, ilex, and rose bushes. Round the pool was a sweep of smooth green across which the light wind lifted and chased the red, white and pink rose leaves.

Beyond the pool the gardens descended, terrace on terrace of opulent trees and flowers; behind the pool the square strength of the palace rose, with winding steps leading to balustraded balconies. Further still, beyond palace and garden, hung vineyard and cornfield in the last warm maze of heat.

All was spacious, noble, silent; ambrosial scents rose from the heated earth–the scent of pine, lily, rose and grape.

The centre woman of the three who stood by the pool was the Spanish Duchess, Lucrezia, daughter of the Borgia Pope. The other two held her up under the arms, for her limbs were weak beneath her.

The pool was spread with the thick-veined leaves of water-lilies and upright plants with succulent stalks broke the surface of the water. In between the sky was reflected placidly, and the Duchess looked down at the counterfeit of her face as clearly given as if in a hand-mirror. [81]

It was no longer a young face; beauty was painted on it skilfully; false red, false white, bleached hair cunningly dyed, faded eyes darkened on brow and lash, lips glistening with red ointment, the

lost loveliness of throat and shoulders concealed under a lace of gold and pearls, made her look like a portrait of a fair woman, painted crudely.

And, also like one composed for her picture, her face was expressionless save for a certain air of gentleness, which seemed as false as everything else about her–false and exquisite, inscrutable and alluring–alluring still with a certain sickly and tainted charm, slightly revolting as were the perfumes of her unguents when compared to the pure scents of trees and flowers. Her women had painted faces, too, but they were plainly gowned, one in violet, one in crimson, while the Duchess blazed in every device of splendour.

Her dress, of citron-coloured velvet, trailed about her in huge folds, her bodice and her enormous sleeves sparkled with tight-sewn jewels; her hair was twisted into plaits and curls and ringlets; in her ears were pearls so large that they touched her shoulders.

She trembled in her splendour and her knees bent; the two women stood silent, holding her up–they were little more than slaves.

She continued to gaze at the reflection of herself; in the water she was fair enough. Presently she moistened her painted lips with a quick movement of her tongue. [82]

"Will you go in, Madonna?" asked one of the women.

The Duchess shook her head; the pearls tinkled among the dyed curls.

"Leave me here," she said.

She drew herself from their support and sank heavily and wearily on the marble rim of the pool.

"Bring me my cloak."

They fetched it from a seat among the laurels; it was white velvet, unwieldy with silver and crimson embroidery.

Lucrezia drew it round her shoulders with a little shudder.

"Leave me here," she repeated.

They moved obediently across the soft grass and disappeared up the laurel-shaded steps that led to the terraces before the high-built palace.

The Duchess lifted her stiff fingers, that were rendered almost useless by the load of gems on them, to her breast.

Trails of pink vapour, mere wraiths of clouds began to float about the west; the long Italian twilight had fallen.

A young man parted the bushes and stepped on to the grass; he carried a lute slung by a red ribbon across his violet jacket; he moved delicately, as if reverent of the great beauty of the hour.

Lucrezia turned her head and watched him with weary eyes. [83]

He came lightly nearer, not seeing her. A flock of homing doves passed over his head; he swung on his heel to look at them and the reluctantly departing sunshine was golden on his upturned face.

Lucrezia still watched him, intently, narrowly; he came nearer again, saw her, and paused in confusion, pulling off his black velvet cap.

"Come here," she said in a chill, hoarse voice.

He obeyed with an exquisite swiftness and fell on one knee before her; his dropped hand touched the ground a pace beyond the furthest-flung edge of her gown.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Ormfredo Orsini, one of the Duke's gentlemen, Madonna," he answered.

He looked at her frankly surprised to see her alone in the garden at the turn of the day. He was used to see her surrounded by her poets, her courtiers, her women; she was the goddess of a cultured court and persistently worshipped.

"One of the Orsini," she said. "Get up from your knees."

He thought she was thinking of her degraded lineage, of the bad, bad blood in her veins. As he rose he considered these things for the first time. She had lived decorously at Ferrara for twenty-one years, nearly the whole of his lifetime; but he had heard tales, though he had never dwelt on them.

"You look as if you were afraid of me—"

"Afraid of you–I, Madonna?" [84]

"Sit down," she said.

He seated himself on the marble rim and stared at her; his fresh face wore a puzzled expression.

"What do you want of me, Madonna?" he asked.

"Ahè!" she cried. "How very young you are, Orsini!"

Her eyes flickered over him impatiently, greedily; the twilight was beginning to fall over her, a merciful veil; but he saw her for the first time as an old woman. Slightly he drew back, and his

lute touched the marble rim as he moved, and the strings jangled.

"When I was your age," she said, "I had been betrothed to one man and married to another, and soon I was wedded to a third. I have forgotten all of them."

"You have been so long our lady here," he answered. "You may well have forgotten the world, Madonna, beyond Ferrara."

"You are a Roman?"

"Yes, Madonna."

She put out her right hand and clasped his arm.

"Oh, for an hour of Rome!–in the old days!"

Her whole face, with its artificial beauty and undisguisable look of age, was close to his; he felt the sense of her as the sense of something evil.

She was no longer the honoured Duchess of Ferrara, but Lucrezia, the Borgia's lure, Cesare's sister, Alessandro's daughter, the heroine of a thousand orgies, the inspiration of a hundred crimes. [85]

The force with which this feeling came over him made him shiver; he shrank beneath her hand.

"Have you heard things of me?" she asked in a piercing voice.

"There is no one in Italy who has not heard of you, Madonna."

"That is no answer, Orsini. And I do not want your barren flatteries."

"You are the Duke's wife," he said, "and I am the servant of the Duke."

"Does that mean that you must lie to me?"

She leant even nearer to him; her whitened chin, circled by the stiff goldwork of her collar, touched his shoulder.

"Tell me I am beautiful," she said. "I must hear that once more–from young lips."

"You are beautiful, Madonna."

She moved back and her eyes flared.

"Did I not say I would not have your flatteries?"

"What, then, was your meaning?"

"Ten years ago you would not have asked; no man would have asked. I am old. Lucrezia old!–ah, Gods above!"

"You are beautiful," he repeated. "But how should I dare to touch you with my mouth?"

"You would have dared, if you had thought me desirable," she answered hoarsely. "You cannot guess how beautiful I was–before you were born, Orsini." [86]

He felt a sudden pity for her; the glamour of her fame clung round her and gilded her. Was not this a woman who had been the fairest in Italy seated beside him?

He raised her hand and kissed the palm, the only part that was not hidden with jewels.

"You are sorry for me," she said.

Orsini started at her quick reading of his thoughts.

"I am the last of my family," she added. "And sick. Did you know that I was sick, Orsini?"

"Nay, Madonna."

"For weeks I have been sick. And wearying for Rome."

"Rome," he ventured, "is different now, Madonna."

"Ahè!" she wailed. "And I am different also."

Her hand lay on his knee; he looked at it and wondered if the things he had heard of her were true. She had been the beloved child of her father, the old Pope, rotten with bitter wickedness; she had been the friend of her brother, the dreadful Cesare–her other brother, Francesco, and her second husband–was it not supposed that she knew how both had died?

But for twenty-one years she had lived in Ferrara, patroness of poet and painter, companion of such as the courteous gentle Venetian, Pietro Bembo.

And Alfonso d'Este, her husband, had found no fault with her; as far as the world could see, there had been no fault to find. [87]

Ormfredo Orsini stared at the hand sparkling on his knee and wondered.

"Suppose that I was to make you my father confessor?" she said. The white mantle had fallen apart and the bosom of her gown glittered, even in the twilight.

"What sins have you to confess, Madonna?" he questioned.

She peered at him sideways.

"A Pope's daughter should not be afraid of the Judgment of God," she answered. "And I am not. I shall relate my sins at the bar of Heaven and say I have repented–Ahè–if I was young again!"

"Your Highness has enjoyed the world," said Orsini.

"Yea, the sun," she replied, "but not the twilight."

"The twilight?"

"It has been twilight now for many years," she said, "ever since I came to Ferrara."

The moon was rising behind the cypress trees, a slip of glowing light. Lucrezia took her chin in her hand and stared before her; a soft breeze stirred the tall reeds in the pool behind her and gently ruffled the surface of the water.

The breath of the night-smelling flowers pierced the slumbrous air; the palace showed a faint shape, a marvellous tint; remote it looked and uncertain in outline.

Lucrezia was motionless; her garments were dim, yet glittering, her face a blur; she seemed the ruin of beauty and graciousness, a fair thing dropped suddenly into decay. [88]

Orsini rose and stepped away from her; the perfume of her unguents offended him. He found something horrible in the memory of former allurement that clung to her; ghosts seemed to crowd round her and pluck at her, like fierce birds at carrion.

He caught the glitter of her eyes through the dusk; she was surely evil, bad to the inmost core of her heart; her stale beauty reeked of dead abomination.… Why had he never noticed it before?

The ready wit of his rank and blood failed him; he turned away towards the cypress trees.

The Duchess made no attempt to detain him; she did not move from her crouching, watchful attitude.

When he reached the belt of laurels he looked back and saw her dark shape still against the waters of the pool that were beginning to be touched with the argent glimmer of the rising moon. He hurried on, continually catching the strings of his lute against the boughs of the flowering shrubs; he tried to laugh at himself for being afraid of an old, sick woman; he tried to ridicule himself for believing that the admired Duchess, for so long a decorous great lady, could in truth be a creature of evil.

But the conviction flashed into his heart was too deep to be uprooted. [89]

She had not spoken to him like a Duchess of Ferrara, but rather as the wanton Spaniard whose excesses had bewildered and sickened Rome.

A notable misgiving was upon him; he had heard great men praise her, Ludovico Ariosto, Cardinal Ippolito's secretary and the noble Venetian Bembo; he had himself admired her remote and refined splendour. Yet, because of these few moments of close talk with her, because of a near gaze into her face, he felt that she was something horrible, the poisoned offshoot of a bad race.

He thought that there was death on her glistening painted lips, and that if he had kissed them he would have died, as so many of her lovers were reputed to have died.

He parted the cool leaves and blossoms and came on to the borders of a lake that lay placid under the darkling sky.

It was very lonely; bats twinkled past with a black flap of wings; the moon had burnt the heavens clear of stars; her pure light began to fill the dusk. Orsini moved softly, with no comfort in his heart.

The stillness was intense; he could hear his own footfall, the soft leather on the soft grass. He looked up and down the silence of the lake.

Then suddenly he glanced over his shoulder. Lucrezia Borgia was standing close behind him; when he turned her face looked straight into his.

He moaned with terror and stood rigid; awful it seemed to him that she should track him so stealthily and be so near to him in this silence and he never know of her presence. [90]

"Eh, Madonna!" he said.

"Eh, Orsini," she answered in a thin voice, and at the sound of it he stepped away, till his foot was almost in the lake.

His unwarrantable horror of her increased, as he found that the glowing twilight had confused him; for, whereas at first he had thought she was the same as when he had left her seated by the pool, royal in dress and bearing, he saw now that she was leaning on a stick, that her figure had fallen together, that her face was yellow as a church candle, and that her head was bound with plasters, from the under edge of which her eyes twinkled, small and lurid.

She wore a loose gown of scarlet brocade that hung open on her arms that showed lean and dry; the round bones at her wrist gleamed white under the tight skin, and she wore no rings.

"Madonna, you are ill," muttered Ormfredo Orsini. He wondered how long he had been wandering in the garden.

"Very ill," she said. "But talk to me of Rome. You are the only Roman at the Court, Orsini."

"Madonna, I know nothing of Rome," he answered, "save our palace there and sundry streets —"

She raised one hand from the stick and clutched his arm.

“Will you hear me confess?” she asked. “All my beautiful sins that I cannot tell the priest? All we did in those days of youth before this dimness at Ferrara?” [91]

“Confess to God,” he answered, trembling violently.

Lucrezia drew nearer.

“All the secrets Cesare taught me,” she whispered. “Shall I make you heir to them?”

“Christ save me,” he said, “from the Duke of Valentinois’ secrets!”

“Who taught you to fear my family?” she questioned with a cunning accent. “Will you hear how the Pope feasted with his Hebes and Ganymedes? Will you hear how we lived in the Vatican?”

Orsini tried to shake her arm off; anger rose to equal his fear.

“Weed without root or flower, fruitless uselessness!” he said hoarsely. “Let me free of your spells!”

She loosed his arm and seemed to recede from him without movement; the plasters round her head showed ghastly white, and he saw all the wrinkles round her drooped lips and the bleached ugliness of her bare throat.

“Will you not hear of Rome?” she insisted in a wailing whisper. He fled from her, crashing through the bushes.

Swiftly and desperately he ran across the lawns and groves, up the winding steps to the terraces before the palace, beating the twilight with his outstretched hands as if it was an obstacle in his way.

Stumbling and breathless, he gained the painted corridors that were lit with a hasty blaze of wax light. Women were running to and fro, and he saw a priest carrying the Holy Eucharist cross a distant door. [92]

One of these women he stopped.

“The Duchess—” he began, panting.

She laid her finger on her lip.

“They carried her in from the garden an hour ago; they bled and plastered her, but she died–before she could swallow the wafer–(hush! she was not thinking of holy things, Orsini!)–ten minutes ago—” [93]

THE CAMP OUTSIDE NAMUR

Don Juan of Austria

> “Sa Majesté ne résout rien; du moins, on me tient ignorant de ses intentions. Je pousse des cris, mais en vain. Il est clair qu’on nous laisse ici pour y languir jusqu’à notre dernier soupir.”
>
> *Don Juan to Mendoza, September 16th, 1578*, from “The Camp” outside Namur.
>
> “Nos vies sont en jeu et tout que nous demandons, c’est de les perdre avec honneur.”
>
> *Don Juan to Philip II., September 20th, 1578*, from “The Camp” outside Namur.

The Imperial Army, composed of Germans, Walloons and Spanish regiments, was encamped outside Namur, at the juncture of the Sambre and Meuse, where Charles V. had been entrenched when pressed by the forces of Henri II.

The Commander of the Army was the son of Charles V., Don Juan of Austria, the hero of Christendom armed against the infidel, the victor of Lepanto, the conqueror of Tunis, blessed by the Pope, a brilliant name in Europe, half-brother of the great King Philip and son of a servant girl, near the throne, of the blood royal, but barred for ever from it, a prince yet linked with peasants; he had blazed very brightly over Europe, the King had flattered him, had caressed him and used him.

By the King’s favour he had swept over Italy, Sicily, Africa, a conqueror, almost within touch of a throne; by the King’s favour he had been sent to crush the rebel heretics who were rising against the might of Spain in the Low Countries. [94]

And now the King was silent; it seemed as if he meant to abandon Don Juan. Antonio Perez was always at the King’s ear, and he hated Don Juan; Escovedo, the Prince’s Secretary and favourite, was assassinated in the streets of Madrid by order of Perez.

When Don Juan heard this news he thought that there was no better end preparing for him and that Perez meant his ruin; the King did not answer his letters, and his glory broke like a bubble.

He had been too great, too beloved, too popular; Philip tolerated no rivals.

And now he began to be unfortunate; the Prince William of Orange, one time page to Don Juan’s father and now the Captain of Heretics, marched against him with a powerful army; the Duc D’Anjou joined the cause of the rebels, and the Queen of England, Elizabeth Tudor, at last decided to send succours to the rebellious provinces.

The forces met; the day of Rynemants was almost a defeat for Don Juan.

A haunted, hunted feeling began to possess him; in the brilliant south everything had been right with him; here, in the cursed Low Countries, every step he took seemed a step nearer his grave.

The death of Escovedo weighed on him day and night. [95]

And the King would not write.

Don Juan began to fear and hate his second-in-command, the Prince of Parma, Alessandro Farnese, a man of his own age, but his nephew, for Farnese's mother was Margaret, daughter of Charles V.

This man was in the confidence of the King; Don Juan knew and feared that fact. He began to dread the sight of the dark Italian face; the figure of Farnese seemed to him like that of a spy–or executioner.

When he had fought Boussu at Rynemants he had been ill; when he had held the useless conference with the English envoys he had scarcely been able to hold himself on his horse, and when he returned to the camp on the heights of Bouges outside Namur he fell to his knees as he dismounted and could not rise for the weight of his armour.

They carried him to the quarter of the regiment of Figueroa and lodged him in a pigeon-house or place for fowls belonging to a Flemish farm the Spanish guns had demolished.

No one knew what illness ailed him; some spoke of the plague, some of the Dutch fever, others said he had worn himself out with the fatigues of war and the delights of Italy.

The fever increased on him; he wrote to Mendoza, the Spanish agent at Genoa; he wrote to Andrea D'Aria, his companion in arms of Lepanto; he wrote to the King. But with little hope, for [96] he felt himself abandoned.

Monseigneur François D'Anjou, brother of the King of France, was at Mons and had taken on himself the title of Defender of the Low Countries against the Spanish Tyranny; Don Juan had only eighteen thousand men, of which six thousand were Spanish, old, tried troops, and the rest merely Walloon and German mercenaries of doubtful loyalty.

They had scarcely any artillery and but little powder.

The plague appeared in the camp, numbers of the small army sickened and died.

There came news that the English were sailing for Flushing and that William of Orange was advancing on Namur.

Don Juan of Austria lay in the pigeon-house, prostrate with fever, sad and silent.

It was the end of September; day after day was sunny, with a honey-coloured peaceful light resting on the camp, on the two rivers, on the fortifications of Namur; the windmills stood motionless in the stagnant air; the few willows by the river turned from grey-green to dull amber and shook their long leaves on the soft, muddy bank; the horizon was veiled in mist, yellow, soft and mournful; at night the moon rose pale gold through languid dusky vapours; in the morning the sun rose, glimmering through melancholy mists, and above the camp hung, day and night, the fumes of the plague, of fever, the exhalations of decay and sickness, the close odours of death.

Juan of Austria loathed this place as passionately as he had loved Naples and Sicily; the plain [97] with the two rivers embracing the frowning town of Namur seemed to him hateful as some roadway to Hell; he dreaded the warm moist nights, the long misty days, the veiled Northern skies, the flat, distant melancholy horizon, and he hated these things more because he sometimes felt that he would never see any other skies or fields but these, never see any moon or sun rise over any town but this high battlemented fortress of Namur.

He was trapped, abandoned, forgotten; the hero of Lepanto, the conqueror of Tunis, was left to die miserably in this vile swamp–forsaken!

He resolved, when the fever left his mind clear, that he would not die, that he would live to face Philip in the Escurial and demand an account for this–and for other things.

On September 28th he confessed, on the 28th he received the communion.

His confessor, Francisco Orantes, told him that he was dying, but he laughed that away.

In the evening of that day he fell into a delirium and for two days tossed unconscious, in great torments, talking continually of wars, of soldiers, of conquests and arms.

On the first of October the fever abated and he seemed much recovered; he fell into a little sleep about the dawn, and when it was fully light he woke and sent for the Prince of Parma.

When that general came, Juan of Austria raised himself on his elbow and looked at him with a [98] searching kind of eagerness, and Farnese stood arrested, in the poor doorway, glaring at the sick man.

The pigeon-house, in which Don Juan lay, was the size of a small tent, of clay with niches in the walls for the birds; part of the tiled roof and a portion of one wall had gone, and through this the early, misty Northern sunlight streamed, for the canvas that had been dragged over the aperture was drawn away to admit the air.

On the rough mud floor a carpet of arras had been flung; there were a couple of camp chairs of steel and leather; a pile of armour, helmet, greaves, cuirass, cruises, vambraces, damascened in

black and gold and hung with scarlet straps, was in one corner; above swung a lantern and a crucifix.

Facing the entrance the Emperor’s son lay on a pile of rich cloaks and garments embroidered with a thousand colours in a thousand shapes of fantasy; two cloth of gold cushions served to support his head and gleamed incongruously against the dull clay wall.

He was himself swathed to the breast in a mantle of black and orange, and covering his lower limbs was a robe of crimson samite lined with fox’s fur.

The fine ruffled shirt he wore had been torn in his delirious struggles and showed his throat and the gaunt lines of his shoulders.

[99] His face was colourless with the pure pallor of a blonde complexion, and his long, pale waving hair clung to his damp forehead and hung dishevelled either side of his hollow cheeks; his large grey eyes, whose usual expression was so joyous, careless and ardent, now shone with the brilliancy of fever and were sunk and shadowed beneath with the bluish tinge that stained his close-drawn lips.

His right hand, on which sparkled an emerald ring, clutched at the linen over his heart; the other was taut on the ground with the effort of supporting his body.

In the niche above him a solitary white pigeon sat contented and surveyed his invaded home.

Alessandro Farnese, tall and very slender, dark-haired, from head to foot in black save for a great chain of linked gold and jewels over his velvet doublet, let the improvised curtain fall into place over the doorway and stood leaning against the wall, never moving his sombre eyes from the Prince whose gleaming glance fiercely returned the scrutiny.

“Your Highness is a whole man to-day,” he said; his voice was smooth, low, carefully trained like his expression and his gestures; Philip’s favourites always had this quiet way.

“Whether I shall get well or no I cannot tell,” answered Don Juan hoarsely. “But this I know–that His Majesty hath forsaken me.”

The Prince of Parma took his right elbow in his left hand and put his right hand to his pointed chin.

[100] “You speak too plainly, señor,” he said. His subtle mind disliked boldness of speech and action; he had always been annoyed by these qualities in Don Juan.

“I have done with pretences,” answered the Prince. “I think I must be dying, for I care very little what happens on earth–yet I have some curiosity; it is because of that I sent for you—” he paused gathering his strength. “Why hath the King forsaken me?” he asked intensely.

“Even if this were so,” said Alessandro Farnese, “how should I know it?”

“It is so and you know it,” replied Don Juan. “The King hath cast me down, and he is putting you in my place.”

The Prince of Parma lifted his dark, arched brows.

“The mind of your Highness is still bemused by your sickness,” he answered soothingly. “Any hour may bring a post from Madrid.”

Don Juan dropped from his elbow, and his head sank on the gold brocade cushions.

“I was lost when they killed Escovedo,” he muttered; “there went my last friend. It would have been more honourable to die on the battle-field—”

Farnese answered smoothly–

“Your Highness will win many battles yet.”

The Emperor’s son smiled up at him.

“What did Philip pay you to mislead me?” he asked.

[101] The Italian’s shallow cheek flushed faintly, and a little quiver, it might be of rage or fear, ran through his sensitive frame.

“The fever returns on you, señor,” he said coldly.

Again Don Juan dragged himself into a sitting posture.

“No,” he answered with a terrible air, “my mind is very clear. I see what I have been all my life. Philip’s plaything–no more. And I dreamt to be a King! He used me till I climbed too high and then cast me away. And you, señor, are to take my place. It was never meant that I should leave the Low Countries. It was never meant that I should return again a victor to Madrid–as servant and as brother I have served the King well, and in his own fashion he hath rewarded me.”

He put his hands before his face and a shudder went through his body, for in that moment he thought of all the glorious past that had ended so suddenly and so terribly.

“I suffer!” he moaned. “Jésu and Maria, I suffer!”

He fell prostrate, face downwards, on the tumbled couch, and the strengthening sunlight played with a mocking brilliance on the scattered strands of his fair hair.

The Prince of Parma lifted the curtain before the door and spoke to one of his servants who waited outside, then crossed and knelt beside his general.

“Prince,” he said in a low tone, “the fever has turned your mind—”

Juan raised his head. [102]

"I am no prince," he answered. "I never was–but what I am your mother is, Farnese–you and I alike are tainted."

A sickly pallor crept into the Italian's cheek; he clasped his fingers together as if he prayed for patience.

"But you are too crafty to be deceived as I was," resumed Don Juan faintly. "You would never dream as I dreamt of being 'Infante' of Spain, of being a King! Therefore Philip spares you, for you are a useful man, Farnese, and puts his foot on me because I dared too high–but we are both–his puppets."

The Prince of Parma clenched his hands till the knuckles showed white through the dark skin.

"You–always–hated–me," gasped Don Juan.

"Are you in pain?" asked Farnese gently.

"In the torments of Hell," answered the sick man with a ghostly smile; "there is fire eating my heart, my blood, my brains."

The Prince of Parma's face changed in an extraordinary fashion; it was a slight change, yet one that transformed his expression into that of utter and satisfied cruelty.

But Don Juan kept his eyes closed, and did not notice this look bending over him.

Farnese spoke, and his voice was still very gentle.

"Will your Highness drink this potion?"

The Prince lifted his burning lids and saw his page advancing with a goblet of rock crystal, in which a pale gold liquid floated. [103]

The boy gave this to the kneeling Farnese, who took it between his long, dark, capable hands.

"This draught has often soothed your Highness," he said.

Don Juan dragged himself to a sitting posture; as he moved such a weak giddiness seized him that the clay walls, the rift of sky and the figure of Farnese swung round him like reflections in troubled water.

He set his teeth and put out his hot hands for the goblet; as he drank a sweet languor and a grateful cessation of pain swept over him; he drained the last drop and gave a little sigh as Farnese took the shining cup from his feeble grasp.

As he sank back on his cushions he noticed that a drop of the liquid had fallen on the brocade cushion, and lay there like an amber bead holding a spark of sunlight.

The Prince of Parma rose silently, and beckoning to the page, left the sick man alone.

An exquisite lassitude crept over Don Juan; his limbs relaxed, his breath came easily, he became certain that there were long years of glorious and pleasant life before him; it was only necessary for him to regain his health–to defeat the heretics and return to Spain to confound that villain Perez....

He was slipping out of consciousness; the blue sea of Italy began to rise before his eyes–an endless expanse of celestial colour over which sailed the galleys of Spain, Genoa and Venice bearing down on the infidel fleet.

The victor of Lepanto quivered with joy; he thought he was back in Naples, in Sicily; the warm scent of a thousand flowers floated round the rose and amber pillars of the heathen temples, and from the high windows of gold and painted palaces dark-eyed women looked, leaning on folds of glimmering tapestry and twisting wreaths of roses and laurels in gemmed fingers. [104]

He saw the myrtle with the frail bridal blossoms, he saw the vineyards with the opulent grapes, he saw ladies in dresses stiff with jewels and heavy sleeves slipping from polished shoulders, he saw peasant girls with flushed faces and dusky hair....

Then these pictures faded; he was in the dark silence of the Escurial; his terrible brother was speaking to him, caressing him; then Perez pulled a curtain back, and he saw his confidant Escovedo, lying mangled on a bier, bloody, with a fearful face.

Don Juan moaned and opened his eyes; he was light-headed; he beat his hands on the cushions.

"Escovedo!" he muttered. "Escovedo!"

The pigeon above, startled by his sudden movement, flew out over his head and away into freedom through the broken wall.

Juan of Austria shivered and blenched before the swift flash of the white wings as if an angel had passed him.

"I am a great sinner," he said with trembling lips. He remembered how the Pope had embraced and blessed him after Lepanto; he hoped that, in case he died, God would remember it too, and how he had slain the infidel on the coast of Africa. His mind cleared, he looked round for Farnese, he called his secretary, his page, but no one came. [105]

He lay quite still, thinking now of the great ambition, the great chimera of his life, the passionate desire to be recognised as royal, as a Prince, to one day be a King.

He had dreamt that he might be King of many countries, even King of England with Marie

Stewart for wife, but he had never attained even recognition as a Prince of Spain.

All Philip's promises, all Philip's flatteries had amounted to nothing. While he was useful he was caressed; when he grew too great he was forsaken, left without arms, without money, without men, left with Farnese watching him night and day.

And they had killed the man he loved, his friend, his confidant Escovedo.

That fact rose up horrid, insistent, burning his heart with rage.

He could not forgive Perez; he could not forgive Philip.

In discomfort of mind and body he tossed from side to side. One of the gold cushions slipped from beneath him, and he was too weak to recover it; he lay with his eyes vacantly on it, and presently sat up with sudden strength and pointed at it with a quivering finger.

On the gold brocade was a round black hole where the stuff had been burnt away.

Don Juan began to laugh; he remembered the yellow drop of liquid that had gleamed on the rich fabric; he shouted for some one to come. [106]

There was no answer; he supposed that they, thinking he suffered from the plague, would not through fear approach him.

He waited; his attention wandered from the cushion; he heard the trumpets without and smiled.

Presently a party of horsemen galloped past; he could catch a glimpse of them through the aperture in the wall; one carried his flag–a cross on the royal standard with the proud legend: "In hoc haereticos signo vici Turcos; in hoc signo vincam haereticos." The heavy silk folds recalled these words to the Prince's mind; he thought of his success at Gembloux.

"I could defeat them now," he murmured, "if I was–on horseback–with a thousand men–behind me—"

The Lowland sun was creeping across the floor and glimmering in the armour in the corner, showing the dints and marks in it, the worn straps, the beautiful gold inlay and the long pure white plumes floating above the helmet.

Juan of Austria shivered at the sight of the pale sky, the pale sunlight; he longed passionately for the South, for all the purple heat, the violet shade, the soft hours of noonday silence in a marble chamber overlooking the sea, the glossy darkness of laurel and ilex.

"I will not die here," he said in his throat.

Presently his confessor came, a slow-footed priest, and asked him if he would not make his will. [107]

"No, for I have nothing to leave," he answered, "so I am spared that trouble."

Francisco Orantes then asked if he would have the canvas drawn over the broken roof and wall, for the sun was creeping very near his face.

He answered yes, and it was done; the barn was now only lit by the glimmer from the one small window.

"Father, I am not dying," said Don Juan. "When I die it will be in Spain or Italy; tell the King so–tell him I know that he wants me dead–but that I will not die like this."

The priest, seeing he was out of his wits, made no answer, but approached and felt his wrist and brow.

"Poison," said Don Juan rapidly. "Poison–why not the sword–as with Escovedo? I have made my peace with heaven–but when shall Philip clear himself before God?"

The priest moved away silently as he had come; the sick man lay staring at the partial darkness; his blood was flaming with a returning agony.

"Philip!" he cried. "Philip! Will you bury me in the Escurial? If I die will you put me next my father? My father as well as yours, Philip! Hold my hand, some one–are you all afraid? This is not the plague. I have watched the heretics burning–I am burning now–I shall not go to Hell; I am absolved. Who will absolve Philip? Give me a little ease—" [108]

The priest stood motionless beside the entrance, watching him; Juan dropped into silence, and then Francisco Orantes came again to his side and gazed as intently as the dim light allowed into the young, distorted and beautiful face.

The Prince was unconscious; the priest's bloodless hand crept gently to his heart, which still beat, though reluctantly and faintly.

Farnese entered.

"He sleeps," said Francisco Orantes.

The Prince of Parma made no answer; a slight convulsion shook him, and his face was swept with a look of limitless pride and ambition which distorted his fine features hideously.

The priest glanced up at him and shrunk away.

"This seems a foul end for one who loved life so," he muttered.

Farnese fingered his long gemmed chain.

"You serve Philip," he answered coldly.

Don Juan struggled back to consciousness, opened his eyes and looked up at the two bending over him; a sensation that he had never known before in all his life overcame him–a sensation of wild fear.

He fought with his weakness and dragged himself up.

"Is there no one to help me?" he implored. "To save me from Philip and Philip's men! Jésu whom I served in Africa do not let me die this way!"

Farnese leant swiftly down and caught the Prince by the shoulder. [109]

"Hush!" he said, "Hush!" and forced him gently back into the cushions.

Juan resisted him with all his feeble strength, his eyes glittering with terror.

"You are murdering me as Carlos was murdered–and Escovedo," his voice was hoarse, broken, but tense with fear, "as you will be murdered when Philip is weary of you. I do not want to die–I–will–not—"

"Hush!" said Farnese again.

Juan dragged away from him and crouched back against the wall.

"I leave you heir," he panted, "to all my honours, all my commands. Philip meant you as my successor. I leave you heir to my death of loneliness and exile. When did one of Philip's servants escape this reward?"

The priest shivered and his figure bowed together, but Farnese listened patiently like a man waiting for the cessation of something that soon must end.

The Prince's fear rose and swelled to a stronger passion, hate.

He thought that he saw in these two instruments of the King a symbol of the two things that had dogged his glory all his life, the powerful cruelty of his brother that had used his gifts, his successes, his popularity for his own ends, lured him with the promise of rewards and always withheld them, and the opinion of the world that the degradation of his mother equalled the splendour of his father and would always prevent him taking that last step into royal rank.

It *had* prevented him; he saw that now, he saw how hopeless his ambition had been from the first.... [110]

"If I had my life again I would not serve Philip," he muttered.

Then pain began to seize and grip him, and he became unconscious of everything save the physical agony; he fell on his face and clutched the rich mantles on which he lay, groaned and shrieked in blasphemous ravings.

"He hath not much fortitude after all," said Farnese, who had looked on suffering so often that no anguish could move him; his cold eyes had many times rested on men and women flaming at the stake with the same expression of cruel indifference with which they now rested on this man of his own blood, who had served his turn and was no longer useful to the policies of Spain.

"How long will this last?" asked the priest.

"I cannot tell," answered the Prince of Parma. "He must have great strength."

"He had until he used it in the delights of Italy," said Francisco Orantes. "Such a life as his, señor, does not make for old age—"

"Escovedo! Escovedo!" moaned Don Juan. "Help me! Succour me! I am burning–burning to the bone, the marrow! Jèsu! Jèsu and Maria!"

"Ay, pray for your sins," remarked Farnese sombrely, "or you will go to light the flames that burn to all eternity." [111]

"Nay, señor," said the priest; "he confessed and received absolution."

"Who shall absolve Philip?" murmured Don Juan, who had caught the sentence. "I wish I had not betrayed Don Carlos. How awful it is to die!"

Drops of sweat stood out on his forehead, and his fingers trembled on the brocade covering him.

"The war," he whispered, "the war."

He thought of the great armies sweeping to and fro over the Low Countries, of all the toss and turmoil of Europe through which he had moved so gaily, so splendidly, of the infidel smitten in Africa; he did not think of his childhood at all. Life seemed to have begun for him on the day on which he had first met the King in the green forest glade.

"Pray," urged the priest, "pray, señor."

He shook his head feebly; he was not at all afraid of God–only of Philip. Besides, he did not mean to die.

The dreadful pain was lessening in his veins; he turned over on his side and looked up at Farnese.

"Where shall we put your body when your soul has left us?" asked the priest.

The sick man's eyes gleamed.

"The Escurial," he muttered. "Philip, remembering Lepanto might give me that–if not, then Our

Lady of Montserrat–but I am not dying," he added. "My life is not finished–you must see that–my life is–not–finished."

[112] An extraordinary feeling of peace came over him; he wondered at it and closed his eyes; he again saw the blue Sicilian seas encompassing him and heard their lapping waves in his ears.

"I will sleep now," he thought, "and when I wake I will plan a victory–life is so long and I am so young—"

He smiled, for all the agony had ceased, and he was no longer conscious of his body; his head sank to one side so that his face was turned towards the wall....

Francisco Orantes rose from his knees.

"He died very gently," he said; "his soul passed as lightly as a bird to the bough."

Farnese made the sign of the cross, and his figure dilated with pride, ambition and power; he went to the armour in the corner and picked up the dead man's bâton of command.

Philip buried his brother in the Escurial near the great Emperor who was their father.

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[113]

THE POLANDER

The Polander was a very innocent fellow who came out of Germany to enter the service of my lord Conningsmarke, a Gentleman of a great Quality at this moment in *London*.

He had taught the Polander some while ago at the instance of Captain Vratz, who was an old retainer of his, and who gave this youth a good character, especially for dressing Horses after the German Fashion. The Polander knew nothing of my lord Count Conningsmarke, and nothing about *England*, for he was very simple and ignorant, being but of Peasant birth, but the Captain he knew and loved, for this man had brought him out of Evil Days in Poland, and his heart held little else but a deep Affection for this Captain Vratz.

On a Friday he came to London and inquired for the Governor of my Lord at the Academy of M. Flaubert and this gentleman sent for the Count's Secretary; and there the Polander lay on Saturday night feeling very strange in this new City and constantly praying that he might meet with Captain Vratz soon, who had been to him such a Benefactor.

The next day being the 11th of *February* and bitter cold, Mr. Hanson, the Governor of my Lords, the young Counts of Conningsmarke, came to the Polander and bid him make ready to be carried to the Lodging of my Lord Charles.

[114] This Governor seemed in a great Confusion of mind; he went over words twice when he spoke, which was in the *German* language (for the Polander knew not *English*) and the colour was up and down in his Face and his hands a-tremble.

The Polander stood before him, very tall and strong and humble, with his blue eyes clouded with Bewilderment and Disappointment; for he hoped he would be taken to Captain Vratz, and presently dared to say as much, very timidly.

Upon this Mr. Hanson broke out in a kind of Excitement.

"Would to God!" said he, "that this Swede Vratz had stayed out of England, for I think he will be the Engine of some harm to my Lord." Then he went on to say that he was in no way responsible for the Count Charles but only for the other lord, Philip his younger Brother.

"But I must help a great man where I can," he added, and seemed Troubled.

The Polander Wondered he should speak so to a Servant, but dare say no more but followed him out into the cold streets of *London*. It was bitter enough and the Polander was in *Rags*, but the Buildings and the people so pleased him that he took no heed of the Sharpness of the weather but smiled to himself with pleasure at a City so *Fine*. So they came to *St. Martin's Lane* where the Count Lodged and in a room mean enough, high up, a place strange for a Man of Quality.

[115] "My Lord Lodged in the *Haymarket*" said Mr. Hanson, "but the Chimney smoked so that he was fain to move"–and with that he opened a Door and the Polander followed him into the Count's Chamber.

This was an ill habitation for a Gentleman, being mean and low and of a poor Furnishing. There was a fire on the hearth, very brightly burning, and near the window a Bed, on which my lord the Count Charles lay, wrapped in a Flowered Robe of taffeta stuff.

He was a very young Gentleman, fair and pale, with a look of fear in eyes of an unusual bright blue; at the entry of Mr. Hanson and the Polander he sprang to a sitting posture on the Bed.

"This is the fellow, my Lord," said the Governor.

The Count gave the Polander a Look of a startling keenness.

"Are you trustworthy?" says he.

"I will do anything for Captain Vratz," answers the Polander humbly Yet with obstinacy.

My Lord put his feet, which were in white Satin slippers, very soiled, to the ground. "You are in my service," he says swiftly.

"To Look after Horses," replied the Polander simply, "and to *dress* them in the German Fashion, if it please your Honour."

The Count glanced at the Governor and said:

"This is a fellow of a *great* simplicity and *well suited*."

Mr. Hanson answered with some uneasiness:

"Oh, I know not–Captain Vratz gave him a good Character for faithfulness." [116]

At this the Polander was very satisfied and his eyes held Gratitude.

The Count, leaning on one elbow against the Bed Post, addressed him:

"What is your Name?"

"George Borosky, my Lord."

"Well," said the Count of Conningsmarke, "it is true that I wish you to dress horses in the German fashion, for I believe you are a good Groom and I am here in *England incognito* to raise a *Regiment* of *Horse* for the service of the *King of England* Who is to enter into an Alliance with *Swedeland* and *Holland* against *France*–indeed there is talk of a *Surprise* on *Strasburg* and my Brother has bought one Horse already and is to buy more."

Here he stopped abruptly and the Polander gave a salute after the Military Fashion, not knowing what to say and withdrew against the Wall at the far end of the Chamber. Then my Lord spoke to Mr. Hanson.

"Have you made those Enquiries?" he asked.

"My Lord, I did ask the *Swedish resident* and his answer was–that if you should Meddle in any Way with Esquire Thynne you would have but a bad living in *England*–but as for the Law of it, he could not say."

"And for the Other?" asked my Lord, in a low voice.

"He said, that if you should Duel Mr. Thynne, he could not instruct you as to what the Law might be regarding your Hopes of the Lady Ogle, Esquire Thynne's Wife."

"Monsieur Lienburgh knoweth nought!" cried my Lord impatiently; "What said he as to Riding Out in the Hyde Park on a Sunday?" [117]

"He said it might certainly be done, before and after Sermon time."

My Lord seemed Satisfied with that and looked again towards the Polander, who had heard all this Conversation as it was held in the High Dutch or German, but had made Nothing of it and was only thinking of Captain Vratz.

"You are very Ragged," said the Count, "and have never a Sword—"

Then he questioned him–had he not been long in coming?

And the Polander answered Yes, and there had been fear of the Ship being cast away, owing to the High Storms, he having been twelve days from *Strasburg* to *Hamburg* and fourteen from *Hamburg* to *London*, instead of eight.

"Yes," said my Lord pleasantly, "and I feared you were lost and went to enquire of the Ship at the 'Change, and I would have been unwilling to lose you, for Captain Vratz tells me you are a mighty Able Groom."

"I do love Horses," said the Polander, "and have trusted them always."

"No man of mine can go in such a coat," says my Lord, "but I have none to send to purchase one nor can I go out Myself by reason of the physic *Dr. Harder* gave me, for I must no wise be Chilled, he said."

"Why, I will do this Service for your Lordship, very Heartily," answered Mr. Hanson. [118]

"And a Sword also," said the Count.

"That also," said the Governor, "and Boots." He asked my Lord then how his *Illness* went and the Answer was–better, though the Ague was by no Means gone.

"Now, fellow," said Mr. Hanson, "come with me to make these Purchases."

My Lord took some money from the pocket of his gown and gave it to the Polander.

"That is to discharge your Lodging at Monsieur Flaubert's Academy," he said; "to-night you shall lie here." He spoke in a Languid Tone, but his eyes had an Extraordinary sparkle and brightness.

Mr. Hanson now asked my Lord–How Much he was willing to dispose of on a Sword?

And he answered ten Shillings, and as much for the Coat.

Mr. Hanson then carried the Polander to a shop near and bought a riding Coat and a Pair of Boots and there was some difficulty in getting either large enough for one of his Bulk and Bearing.

They then went down *St. Martin's Lane* but could find never a Sword worth a Groat; then on

Mr. Hanson went as far as *Charing Cross* and then into a Cutler's and bestowed ten Shillings on a Sword for a Servant, which could not be ready till Evening, however.

Mr. Hanson said he would call for it when he came back from the Play that night and took the Polander back to M. Flaubert's Academy, where the Younger Count, a very Gay and Beautiful Gentleman, was learning to ride the Great Horse.

[119] The Polander Paid for his Lodging and waited in the Academy feeling sad for loneliness till Mr. Hanson came back from the Theatre and took him again to the Cutler's; but the Sword was by no means Ready.

"'Tis strange," cried the Governor, "that a Gentleman cannot get a Little Sword for himself in a whole Afternoon!"

"Well, sir," said the Cutler, "pray do not be Impatient. I will send the Sword."

They then left the shop and went towards *St. Martin's Lane*; it was now Snowing and a Great Volume of Wind abroad.

When they reached my Lord's Lodging they found him still in his Gown and Night Cap sitting over the fire and he looked like a sick man save for the great Light and Glitter in his Eyes.

He asked where his Brother was.

"At his Grace of Richmond's," said Mr. Hanson; "We were at the Play together and I have ordered the Broadsword which will come anon."

They were talking without any Regard to the Polander who stood stiff in his New Coat, Longing to see Captain Vratz and to go to the horses he was to look after (and he wondered where the Stables might be as this was too Ill a House to have any). Now Mr. Hanson went up to my Lord in moved fashion.

"Think of the Consequences of this, Count Charles!" he said.

[120] My Lord looked up in a kind of Passion.

"He puts Words on me that are no wise to be borne!"

"Is it for the words he Used or for the sake of the Red Haired Girl you saw at the Hague?" asked Mr. Hanson, biting the end Curls of his Peruke.

"He called me a Hector," said my Lord, "and Laughed at my Horse–and, by God, you shall leave the Lady Ogle Out of this!"

"Your Lordship has not left her Out," answered Mr. Hanson, "for you bid me discover if you would have any Hopes of her if you got rid of her Husband—"

At this Point the Count bid the Polander go down to the Kitchens of the house and dine, and he added that in this place he was known as Carlo Cuski, and not by his Real Name.

Thereupon the Polander went; there was a Man and a Maid and a Boy in the Kitchen who had no Language but *English*, so the Count's man ate his meat in Silence and was presently going to the place appointed to him to sleep in when a young Gentleman, very finely Dressed in Blue, came down, and speaking *German*, bade him Come up to the Count, which he did and found to his vast Joy, Captain Vratz with his Lordship.

"Come here, Fellow," said my Lord; he stood up in the Light of the Fire and his slight figure in the Limp Gown, the Night Cap pulled over his tumbled Hair, his pallid face with the feverish eyes was in a Contrast with the Men of Lesser Quality who were Splendid enough in cut Velvet and Lace and Tassels.

[121] Christopher Vratz lifted his Face flushed with Fairness after the fashion of the Swedelander and looked at the Polander.

"You are my Servant now, Borosky," said he.

"Yes," added my Lord. "I have given you to Vratz," and he Shivered a little closer to the Fire and Held out his hand to the Glow of it, Regarding the three with Eyes so unnaturally blazing that they conveyed a thrill of terror.

"Oh, dear sir," said the Polander, "this is a Greater Joy than I looked for in coming to *England*."

He bent with more Grace than might easily have been expected from his Bulk and kissed the Count's thin hand in a humble Gratitude.

"This is a man," said Captain Vratz, "who will do Anything for me–out of the Great Affection he hath for my Person—"

"Need you set him on a losing Game?" asked the young German, glancing at the pleased, simple face of the Polander. "There is many an *Italian* walking about the Piazza of Covent Garden who would do the Trick for the Matter of Fifty Pounds."

At that my Lord looked up Sharply and seemed Mightily out of Countenance and Captain Vratz answered:

"That is in the Count's hands. I am his Man."

Now the Polander made nothing of all this but only Wished to be away with his Master; and they made so little account of him that they never abated their Talk but treated him like a Dog that had just been bought by a new Master, and so he took it himself and truly his Attention was [122] absorbed by a Broadsword he beheld on a Table near, and that he Surmised was that ordered by

Mr. Hanson at the Cutler's at *Charing Cross* and a fine Weapon too, from the Look.

Near this Weapon was a Black Peruke, and the Polander wondered why a Gentleman of so fair a face as my Lord should have so Black a Wig and he surmised that it belonged to Mr. Hanson.

My Lord walked about the bare floor and seemed in some contained Passion of Excitement.

"It will be a Stain on my Blood," said he, "but one good action at the Wars or one Fight on the Counterscarp will wipe that away—"

And he spoke like a Man exalted in his Courage and ready for a Tragic Turn.

Presently the three–Vratz, Stern the *German* lieutenant, and the Polander–went away, it being then late at Night and Cold.

And before they went the Count gave the Polander the Sword that Mr. Hanson had bestowed Ten Shillings on, and the last that Fellow saw of my Lord was the sight of him in the glimmer of a dying Candle staring after the three of them with a Face very Young, very Ill, very Wild, beneath the tumbled Night Cap.

The three of them went to the Captain's Lodgings; he lay at the *Black Bull* in *Holborn*, in an ill Part of the Town.

Then the Captain called the Polander up to his room and gave him to Drink and after a little said:

"What will You do for Me, George Borosky?"

"Before God, Anything–for the great Gratitude I have to You."

At this Vratz Laughed and cast off his Hat and Wig and his face was Fresh and Ruddy as a Rose under the Gold of his Hair.

"Look you, Borosky," he made answer, "there is a Man in *London* who has put an insult on me–and I did put a Challenge on him by the post having no Gentleman to send, and he returned answer by his Servant that I was not of a Sufficient Quality for a man of his Breeding to fight–and this is a thing difficult to Avenge."

The Polander waited eagerly for his Part in this.

"It is Esquire Thynne of Longleat Hall," continued the Captain, "a Great Jolly *English* Gentleman and a Notable Rake at Court–a man very Rich and splendid–he will be riding along the *Mall* to-morrow on his way to Church and it is we three who must stop him."

With that he took a Blunderbuss from the wall and laid it in the great Hands of the Polander.

"As you love me," he said earnestly, "you will put some bullet into this Tom Thynne."

The Polander stared at the weapon and at his Master, then went on his knees, very Pale in his Countenance.

"This is plain Murder," he answered, very troubled, "and I have Lived an Innocent Life, even at the war, twenty crowns would pay for all I took in Plunder and I have been Compassionate, nor given to Treachery or Swearing—"

"I ask you to do no Wrong," said Vratz, "only to Obey your Master–If a man will not Duel how can one Come at him but this Way?"

"It is a Just thing," added Stern, "to obey those we have an Obligation to–and I am Pledged to you, yet I am willing to be Instructed in the Laws of *England* to discover what Penalty one must Pay for this—"

"Why, None," replied the Captain, "for we will leave the Country by the first pair of oars going to *Gravesend*, and should we be taken–first we have a friend in that Noble Prince, the Count of Conningsmarke, and secondly, all will fall on me as the Principal and none on you as the Agents or mere Engines of my Will–And Afterwards," he added, "you shall be Rich Men."

"Not for Money," said the Polander sadly. "I would rather spend my Days with Horses than the Rich. I would sooner die Old and Comfortable than in Prison in a Strange Country–but I have promised to serve you and if God does not directly tell me it is a Sin I will do this for you."

"You may trust me when I tell you it is no Sin but an Act Necessary to Wipe out Dishonour," returned the Captain.

"I do trust you!" replied the Polander "yet I will also ask God about this matter."

Then the Captain laughed and dismissed him, bidding him be Ready on the Morrow, and the Polander went to a Bed set for him in a Garret of the *Black Bull*. He was Much Troubled in his Mind that the first Service asked of him by the Captain should be a Murder and that on the second night of his stay in a Strange Country he should have such a Task put on him as to Shoot a Gentleman coming from *Church*, for it seemed an unmanly Action.

What Penalties might follow he did not know, for he was Ignorant of the Laws of *England*; to this he gave Little Heed for, however: he had faith in the Captain and that Great Gentleman who was his friend, Charles, Count of Conningsmarke. As he sat in the Dark wondering where the right lay in this Case he decided to make Proof of it and to that end went on his Knees and Recited the *Lord's Prayer* very Gravely and Earnestly. And when he had finished he rose up again and Searched in his Heart to see if he was Strengthened against this Action; but he found no change in his Feelings: so he thought that if it had been anything Wrong God would have this Way told him; so was Comforted and Decided to Help the Captain.

Having come to this Resolve he lay down on his bed, dressed as he was, and Chanced to Dream of Poland which Country he had not seen this Great While–but he saw it in the Dream very Clear with the sparkle of Snow in Winter and the bright-coloured dresses in the Streets.

He thought he saw a Church too and dreamt he stood on the threshold and was thinking with much pleasure of Entering when he was awakened by the voice of Christopher Vratz.

[126] The Polander got to his Feet, Remembering everything and the Captain put in his hand a Blunderbuss and bade him be Silent; the two went down to the stables of the *Black Bull* where was Ernest Stern and three Horses and it was then about Seven of the Clock.

And the Polander, on seeing he was to be Mounted was greatly Encouraged, for he believed no evil could come to him when he was on the back of a Horse, so took this for a Good Omen.

"I wish we had Another Man," said Captain Vratz, "for Esquire Thynne is one to go with a great Medley of Servants about him."

They mounted then and as they Rode out of the Yard the *German* asked what this Mr. Thynne was?

And the Captain made answer that he was a Man Well Known in *London* for his marriage to Elizabeth, my Lady Ogle, last of the Percies, who was heiress to Five Baronies and one of the richest Women in the World; she had been married before, yet was but a child of fifteen and still under Governance at *The Hague* and Mr. Thynne was looked upon as a lucky Man to have all this Wealth without the trouble of a Wife.

"The death of such a One will make a Stir in *England*," said the lieutenant with an air of Misgiving; but Vratz bid him take Courage. "For," he declared, "if there be any Penalties, I will pay them all."

And the Polander Rode behind them patiently, much Remarked by the passers-by for his foreign air and Great Stature, and so they came to the *Mall* where there was a goodly number of [127] People.

And one of Them, who was a Young Man with a Mirror in his hat, Pranking on a Sizeable Horse, the Captain stopped and, Saying he was new come to *London* and Desirous of seeing the Notables, asked if Esquire Thynne had yet passed?

The Englishman, making out this request with some difficulty from the Swedelander's strange accent, answered at length Courteously that Mr. Thynne was Driving Out with His Grace of Monmouth, and would be coming from *Northumberland House*, where they had made a visit, anon, *Northumberland House* being nearly at the End of the *Mall*, on the river at *Charing Cross*.

So they waited and the Sun mounted the Snow Clouds pleasantly but it was yet scarcely light, and the Bells of the Big Churches near by sounded in their first Ringing.

And after a few minutes a Coach and four Horses came swinging on its Leathers with Six Servants Riding at the Sides and Vratz knew the colours.

Before came a Fellow with a Flambeau; the Captain rode Past him and Caught the Reins of the Foremost horses, stopping the coach, and Stern cried out to the Polander: "Shoot!" at the same time Threatening the Coachman. Like one in a Stupour the Polander rode round to the Side of the Coach, and saw the Handsome Face of an *Englishman* with Brown Eyes looking out of the window.

[128] "Shoot!" cried Captain Vratz.

And the Polander raised his Blunderbuss and Fired into the lace-covered Bosom of Esquire Thynne.

"*Damn* your *Foreign* tricks, I'm murdered!" cried the *Englishman*; he fell back on the Seat of the Coach and the Polander Turned and Galloped away up *St. James Street* and *Alban Street* with the Captain and Stern after him; and the Servant with the Flambeau put a Pursuit on them as far as the *Haymarket*, then could go no Further; but the Polander had Cast away his Blunderbuss and that the Servant Caught up and carried back to the *Mall*, where was a Great Press and Mr. Thynne Dying with three bullets in him and the People saying how his Grace of Monmouth had but just left the coach and what a stroke that was, for he might have been Murdered else.

And the three rode to my Lord's Lodgings in *St. Martin's Lane* and asked for him.

"For it may be Well," said the Captain, "that we ask my Lord to let us Lie at the *Swedish Resident's*—"

But when they answered his knock he was told that the Count had gone early that Morning to Windsor wearing a Black Periwig and in a Coat he had borrowed of a Servant. At hearing this news the Captain came back with a Look of Death in his face.

[129] "If he hath Fled to Gravesend—" he said, and They All went Back to the *Black Bull* and Mounted to the Captain's Chamber and sat Still and Silly, looking at each other.

"We have trusted *You*," said Stern, "and there is your Word to it that we are Safe."

"I had the Count of Conningsmarke's Word," answered the Captain, "but he hath failed me—"

"Will you Fail us?" asked Stern.

The Polander said nothing but watched the Captain in a Troubled Way.

The German got to his feet and laid his hand on Vratz's Shoulder.

"If my Lord hath gone to *Gravesend* in a Black Periwig–should not we go after him and slip down *the Thames* to *Margate* where we may likely enough get a Ship for Home?"

The Captain looked up like one Undecided, then in a moment was on his Feet, for there had come a Great Knocking on the Door; nor did those without Long stay at *Knocking* but burst open the door and *Entered*.

They were Constables and the People of the Inn and in front of them a Man in Squire Thynne's Liveries carrying a Musquetoon, and on seeing the three he gave a Cry and called out:

"That is the man did shoot my Master!"

And the Polander saw that it was the Blunderbuss he had Dropt in the *Haymarket*.

"Why do you put this on *Us*?" asked Captain Vratz in his ill English.

A Constable spoke to him and answered:

"We took this Musquetoon to the Maker whose name is thereon, and he told us he had sold it yesterday to one Captain Vratz who lodged at the *Black Bull*." [130]

"I do admit," answered the Captain, "that I was at the shooting of Mr. Thynne, but I went with the design to Challenge him, he having Refused me Satisfaction, and I took these Two with me as Protection, Mr. Thynne being a Gentleman who has commonly a great Press of Servants about him which he might have set on me. And in the *Melée* my Servant fired and that I know nothing of."

At this they were all three disarmed and arrested, at which the Polander Wept mightily.

And when they had a Lodgement in Prison it came to them that my Lord of Conningsmarke had been arrested at *Deptford* by an Agent of the Duke of Monmouth when he had been taking a Pair of Sculls for *Gravesend*.

In the Prison they were separated and the Polander sat alone till his trial and when they Pressed him he said that he had Acted only as His Master Directed and that was the Law he had been brought up in–to obey his Master; and he added that not having been Strengthened against the deed after the Recital of the Lord's Prayer he Concluded that God had meant him to do this thing.

Stern also Confessed to the Fact and accused the Captain of drawing him into a Snare, but Vratz maintained his first Story and would not bring my Lord into the Business. [131]

And the Count of Conningsmarke denied all of them.

Now this Trial was held before the Lord Chief Justice and the other Great Judges with manifest and open Fairness, according to the *English* Law, even to have the Jury part Foreign and giving all rights to the Prisoners, such as having an Interpreter, one *Vandore*, who interpreted to them all the *English* Spoken, putting it into *High Dutch* or *French*.

Yet there was Little Doubt as to the End of this Trial, as all three Confessed to the Design on Esquire Thynne and the Polander to the actual shooting; but Captain Vratz would by no means bring the Count of Conningsmarke in, but took the Whole Matter on his own shoulders; but the other two, Stern from Anger and the Polander from Simplicity, told what they knew of my Lord's part in This.

Yet at the End it was the Count who was Acquitted and the three Humble Ones who were Condemned, and my Lord left Them to the Law; yet even Then Captain Vratz Persisted that he was alone Guilty.

And when the Prisoners were asked what they had to say for Themselves, the Captain Vratz Said that he had not been rightly Examined, Stern that he had gone into the Affair as Second to the Captain and in that Capacity would end it, and the Polander asked God for Mercy.

When in Prison these Three were seen by Dr. Burnet and Dr. Horneck who knew Foreign Languages and to both of these Priests Stern and the Polander Confessed, but Vratz would write nor say Nothing, but to their solicitations Replied with great Composure that the Matter was between him and God and that he Perceived that they wished to draw him to Implicate the Count, which he would by no Means do. [132]

Dr. Horneck was Much Impressed by the Innocent Lives these Men had led and by their Devotion to the Captain and the nice sense of Honour Stern showed and the Humble Ingenuousness of the Polander, and he brought all three together and exhorted Vratz to a Confession.

And Stern added his Words, saying:

"I Forgive you for having Drawn me into this Business, for the Count of Conningsmarke deluded you, but Repent now, for we are very near the Judgment of God."

Thereupon Vratz fell into a passion, and gave him Reproachful Words, saying he Lied.

"Put no Blame on my Lord," he said, "for he is Guiltless."

And with that he was Going, when the Polander Spoke.

"Give me a Word," he said, "for soon I must Die."

But Vratz looked at him with quick Kindled Wrath.

"You too defamed my Lord," he said, "and I thought you were a Faithful Servant." Then he left

them.

And the Polander Wept mightily. [133]

"The Two things I have most trusted In have Betrayed me," he said, "first the Captain who sadly Deceived me in this matter–then I had a great Love for Horses and thought to spend my Life in the care of them, but when this Late Misfortune happened, I was on the back of One."

Stern asked if he might be Buried, not Gibbeted, if he made a Written Confession, and they told him, Yes, maybe, so he wrote what he knew of it all.

Now the Night before their Execution there came a Message from the Captain, Confessing that he had drawn them into this Snare and asking their Forgiveness.

Upon which they Both Returned him a Message of Great Affection and the Polander felt indeed Happy and Almost Satisfied to die if he might be on these Terms with the Captain.

So they came to be Hanged, on the Tenth of *March*, in *Pall Mall* on the Spot where Esquire Thynne had been Murdered; and Vratz was Buried but the other two Hung in Chains, and the Great Frame of the Polander hung near Camden Town long after his crime had been Forgotten by the General.

There was a Fine Marble put up in the Abbey Church of *Westminster* to the Memory of Mr. Thynne, and next year his Widow, the Lady Ogle, married the Duke of Somerset, who was the Proudest Man in *England*.

[134] As for Charles Count of Conningsmarke, he went to the Wars and became Famous for his Achievements, but it was Believed that he was a Haunted Man, and it has been Rumoured that he Confessed to being Troubled, not by Mr. Thynne, or either of the two Soldiers, but by the figure of the Polander in the New Coat and carrying the new Broadsword Mr. Hanson had Bought, smiling, very humble and Grateful.

This Figure Followed him so Persistently that his Death at the Siege of Argos in 1685 was a Release from a Life that had become *Unbearable*.

THE EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF GRACE ENDICOTT [135]

Grace Endicott hath had as remarkable history as any woman of her times, and slander, calumny and malice, as well as curiosity and wonder, having noised and mouthed her story until it hath been used as a scorn against the Nonconformists and the town of Bedford, one who was well acquainted with her here putteth forth the facts as they were known to him, of the which he can solemnly attest and sware the truth, by his faith in Christianity. After this preamble he now giveth the case, leaving the judgment thereof to the charity of the human heart and the Eye of God Almighty, only adding for himself that never was there a stranger instance of the dealings of Heaven and Hell with man and woman.

Mrs. Endicott was born at Edworth, in the county of Bedford, in the year 1652, being the period of the high glory of our late the Lord Protector.

Her family was of the yeomanry and of considerable substance; she early lost her mother and had but one sister, younger than herself.

Her father being a pious man, she was brought up to walk in the ways of righteousness, and was well educated beside in the accomplishments of her sex; and she became a hopeful sprightly maiden, full of winning graces, so that she drew unto her many likely swains, yet would have none of them, being contented enough in her present situation. [136]

In the year 1672, Mrs. Endicott being then twenty years of age and her sister married into a house of her own rank, her father left his farm in charge of a steward and bought a residence in Bedford, where he came to live with this remaining daughter.

Here Mrs. Endicott, by reason of her personal endowment and handsome fortune promised, found herself in the midst of much courtship and flush of friendship from the better sort and received many a treat and compliment; in fine she began to lead a life of uselessness and vanity and to lose pleasure in everything but the gauds of the world.

Full often have I seen her setting forth in a little chariot with pearls on her head and a marvel of silk and braid about her person and a coat on her back of sable fur that would have brought a copyhold.

And many of those who watched this maiden thought the Father of Darkness had set some springe to catch her soul, so different was she from the meekness of her tender years, and this was a curious thing withal, for her people had ever leant to Puritan doctrine, and during the civil war had stood for the Godly side. And those who thus made talk of the lightness of Mrs. Endicott's behaviour soon found a cause for it in the person of Gilbert Farry, who was an attorney of the place.

[137] Now this Farry, for divers reasons, was neither loved nor liked; the main argument against him being that he and his family were unknown in the neighbourhood where he had lived but a few years, and therefore he was, in a manner, a foreigner; nay, some held it that he was foreign indeed, and had false French or Italian blood in him, for his complexion was unnaturally dark and

his temper sudden and gusty.

Though he had money enough, and indeed lived above his station, yet he never honestly proclaimed how he came by it nor openly spoke of his parents or former residence, and this closeness caused people to take up a dislike to him and predict no good of his end.

There was something strange in his dress, for he greatly affected outlandish colours of a brightness ill-befitting a Christian, and often when he went abroad there would be a set of boys of the baser sort calling after him, for he had the affliction of a limp that caused his garments to be the more noticeable; yet methinks it true that he overtopped the Bedford gallants in presence and speech, and the old wives said there would have been many a wench glad enough to take him, for there was nought definite against him and he never missed his church-going, though the malicious said it was but fear of the fine that sent him there.

Now it seemed that from the moment of their first meeting this Farry took no manner of heed of any woman but Mrs. Endicott, and she gave him no discouragements, and her father was friendly enough and clearly looked upon the young man as a suitor, and when wise folks shook their heads he would laugh and bid them wait till affairs were riper. Inasmuch as the whole town took notice of this courtship which went on in open freedom a wonderment began to grow that Farry, having screwed himself into the favour of the father, did not demand the hand of Mrs. Endicott. [138]

And there was much pursing of lips and many a round declaration that Mr. Endicott would have done a wiser thing in lending his countenance to one of his own knowledge and county.

Now about this time, it being near Christmas, Mr. Endicott gave a ball, and the expectants said that his daughter's betrothal would follow this feast, and using curiosity as a cloak for carnal inclinations many worthy folk went who would have served the Lord better by remaining by their own hearth.

The dance was continued till late, indeed when every one became much animated, for Mr. Endicott was open-handed with his meat and drink, and there was music of fiddles and a harp.

At midnight Mr. Farry led out Mrs. Endicott for some new fangled step from the court (and there were many wanted to hear how he came to know it and how he had found occasion to teach her), and they came down the room hand in hand, she in a pink taffeta with trimmings of silvered silks which had been bought in London and her hair trimmed and dressed like a city Madam at least.

So they came down the room, and all eyes were on them; they looked only at each other, and it was commonly averred afterwards that the look on the face of Mrs. Endicott was that of one whom earthly passion hurrieth forward to inevitable actions, maybe of folly or wickedness. [139]

Still gazing at him, she changed hands in the centre of the room, and moving round for the first figure gave him her left.

Then of a sudden her radiant face withered; she cast an affrighted glance at her feet, recoiled like one who has stepped on a springe and with a shriek fell on the ground, passing into fit after fit with many frantic gestures and maniac words.

This thing did completely put an end to that festival, and was blazing matter for talk, for Mrs. Endicott lay ill for many weeks and gave for reason for her sudden disorder that she had had a vision of Hell.

Yea, she declared with floods of tears to all who came about her that Hell itself had opened at her feet, and she gave such details and spoke with such earnestness of the horrid spectacle of smoke and flame and the faces grinning up at her and the hands endeavouring to pull her down that there was none who dare entirely slight or discredit her tale lest they should be casting scorn on one of the Judgments of God; so all made agree to tell her that it was a forewarning brought on her by her careless life and she used all haste to make amends.

She sold all her gauds and fine things and gave the money to the needy; she came often to the prayers and devoted herself to household stuff as was beseeming one in her situation. No longer did she go prinking like an idle wanton lady, but went in a humble habit without adornment and took up thrifty ways and a sober conversation. [140]

Nor would she have any manner of intercourse with Gilbert nor even speak of him; nay, he was of all others the creature she most hated to hear tell of, and though she could give no reason for the aversion she discovered yet she maintained it against her opposition.

Her father argued this matter with her with some heat, declaring that the young man deserved some kindness from her who had so lately encouraged him in a way that had made public comment; in short, being still close in friendship with Mr. Farry, Mr. Endicott made every endeavour to bring him again into his daughter's favour, yet without success, for she was resolved in this and was by no means to be moved.

She gave as her reasons the horror she felt at the sneering irreverent way Mr. Farry had of talking of holy things and the general looseness and idleness of his life.

To such a height was her hatred against him now raised that when one day in springtide he did send her a wattle basket full of the first rose blooms she cast them from her with a shudder, and let them lie in the garden, where the sun sucked the life from them; yet was she commonly fond of flowers.

Yet did she have to suffer him about the house, for her father every day drew nearer with him [141]

in friendship, and even drew up a will leaving most of his goods to Mrs. Grace on condition of her marriage to this Farry.

At this time a wonderful man preached at the Baptist Chapel in Bedford; he had been a soldier in the Parliamentary Army, and of great profanity and wickedness, but having been marvellously converted he had taken to preach the pure Word of God, and there were a many went to listen to him, some to scoff, for he was unlettered to be talking of learned things, but many to pray, moved by the truth that was in him.

Now to hear this preacher, who began to be well known in these parts, went Grace Endicott, and ofttimes took her father and her sister and brother-in-law, for, as hath been told, the family leant to the Noncomformist views. After but a little while Mrs. Endicott became wrapt up in the spiritual life and an ardent convert to the preachings of this poor preacher, Mr. John Bunyan, whose doctrines filled her life with gladness and rejoicings.

Surely she was like a woman transformed, and took no delight save in the meetings at the Baptist Chapel, which were often enough broken by Mr. Bunyan being in Bedford Gaol, for the King had lately issued strong laws against the Nonconformists and had no mind to suffer them to worship in peace.

[142] At first Mr. Endicott was much uplifted by these meetings, and inclined to turn from worldly things and to uphold his daughter in her devotions, but after a while Gilbert Farry worked on him again, and he went but seldom and his fervour died.

Yet truly he in no way interfered with his daughter, but allowed her her will in the matter, and though Farry screwed more and more into his confidence, yet Mrs. Endicott was unmolested in her devotions. About the year 1678 Mr. Endicott sold his house in Bedford and returned to his farm at Edworth, which was at some distance from the chapel where Mr. Bunyan preached.

Yet Mrs. Endicott was nothing daunted by difficulties of road or weather, and attended the meetings as regularly as any grave elder of them all.

Now this persistency of hers gave occasion for Gilbert Farry to influence her father's mind in an evil fashion; it was not in nature, he said, for a woman young and excessively comely (and who had been addicted to gay things) to be so blinded, addicted and possessed by religious zeal as was Grace Endicott. He hinted that John Bunyan was a personable man and one who had not so long been reformed from the most carnal ways of the Devil; he related how the preacher and the maiden held long conversations, going to and from the chapel, and he spread these scandals until they were known to all Bedford. It happened that while things were in this pass, in the winter of this year '78, Mr. Bunyan was appointed to preach and administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper at Gamlingay, which is some distance from Edworth. [143]

Mrs. Endicott made her preparations to go, but when it came to asking the consent of her father it was angrily withheld.

Whereupon she fell into a great travail of mind and besought him with utter earnestness and piteous entreaties to permit her to attend this meeting, until he weakened before her importunities and gave his consent on the two conditions–that she did her household before she went and that she returned the same night at a godly hour.

On the Friday, therefore, Mrs. Endicott, having well looked to all her duties, left her home and went to her brother-in-law's house, where she was to wait for a Baptist minister who was to escort her to Gamlingay.

Here she waited, but the hour became late and the minister did not come; then did Mrs. Endicott implore her relative to lend her a horse, but he had not one which was not at work, save only that on which he and his wife were riding to the meeting themselves.

Hearing this, Mrs. Endicott broke into a passion of despair and paced about the apartment in an extremity of anguish, and made such a plaint that even her own sister thought she showed an excess of sorrow. In the midst of this scene Mr. Bunyan himself came riding past, and Mrs. Endicott had him stopped and bid her brother-in law ask if the preacher would take her upon his pillion.

[144] And down she came and stood on the doorstep to second this request.

"Will you take me, Mr. Bunyan," she asked, "for my soul's sake?"

And he was mute, for he was both loath and unwilling, for he knew the hard things said of him and her in Bedford town.

"It is for my soul," says Mrs. Endicott again; and so he must be persuaded, and take her up behind him through the darkling lanes to Gamlingay.

And the chance was that they had not gone a mile before they passed the man Farry standing by the cross roads, who closely looked at them.

Mr. Bunyan did not salute him, not being of his acquaintance, and Mrs. Endicott stared at him with eyes that might have been of glass, so blank they were; thereupon Gilbert Farry went softly to Edworth and spoke to George Endicott, and said–

"I have seen your daughter riding pillion with John Bunyan to Gamlingay as if they were man and wife."

Now whether or no she pictured Mr. Farry poisoning her father, Mrs. Endicott stayed to the end of the meeting and seemed wrapt in the ecstasy of worship and the joy of the moment.

Yet when the meeting was over her sorrows began again; Mr. Bunyan was riding another way, and there was no manner of means for her to get home. There was much delay and argument, and then she found a woman who had a cart and who would take her as far as her sister-in-law's house, but from there was no convenience, yet mindful of her promise to her father Mrs. Endicott set out on the dark, miry and rough roads and so came to her home, spent with walking and [145] affrighted with loneliness. Still it was not more than eleven of the clock, and it caused her amaze to see the windows dark and the door locked.

With trembling hands she knocked at the door, and her father came to an upper window with a candle in his hand and demanded who was there.

"It is I, father, come home wet and dirty," replied Mrs. Endicott. "I pray you let me in."

"Nay," he answered. "Where you have been all the evening you may go all the night–and never do you cross my threshold until I have your promise not to see John Bunyan again."

"That is to give up my soul's life," she said; "and I cannot."

Thereupon he shut the window and took away the light.

Mrs. Endicott did plead desperately and tearfully but to no avail, for the bitter night winds took her words away and her father heard not.

Then, the storm coming up apace, she was fain to go into the barn, and there to lay her down on the straw till the morning.

When her father made his round he saw her there, with her clothes frozen on her and her eyes wet and wild.

"Good morrow, father," she said. "I have had a dreary night, but it had been worse had not God sustained me."

[146] "No matter for that," he answered; "here you stay until you promise never to frequent meetings again and never to speak to John Bunyan."

Thereupon she hung upon him with vain tears and entreaties, but he would have none of it without her promise, and that she would in no wise give; so at length he flung her from him roughly, and she lay along a byre and wept for comfortlessness.

At noontide up came her brother-in-law, and made the endeavour to conclude a peace, but this was beyond his powers, for George Endicott was obdurate and his daughter would not give her promise; neither would she leave her father's house, but dwelt without it for several days, living on such food as the pity of the servants gave her and sleeping on the ground or in the stalls of the horses.

And day by day came Gilbert Farry and tempted her with promises of love and comfort, but she would have none of it, but remained a beggar before her father's door.

On the tenth day her father came to her and again demanded of her her promise; and if she gave it not, he added, she should no longer have even the shelter of his barns, but be cast out upon the high-road among the knaves and gipsies. Grace Endicott rose up from the straw and stood erect in her torn, soiled garments, with her hair unbound and her cheeks stained with weeping.

[147] "Sir," she made answer, "I stand between Good and Evil, and you would have me choose Evil. This is my immortal soul you ask for. For certainly I was in the power of the Devil from whom I was rescued by Mr. Bunyan, and if you deny me his converse, then I am no better than lost."

But her father was in no way moved, and asked if she would promise or go upon the roads.

"Well and well again," she said with much wildness, "I promise, but it is a lost soul you take into your house."

Thereupon her father took her by the hand and led her in, and as she crossed the threshold she said again–

"It is a damned soul you bring home, my father."

In the parlour was a feast spread and wine laid out and Gilbert Farry waiting, and he took her to him with no excuse and kissed her.

"So you have won," she murmured, and made no resistance.

So for a month she lived quietly in her father's house, until one day near on Christmas she met Mr. Bunyan in the market-place of Bedford town, and he was being taken to prison for his preaching, and there were many of his following going with him with words of encouragement and love. But Grace Endicott denied him, and looked as if she did not know his face, even asking one who stood by, "Who is that fellow?"

At this John Bunyan looked through the press and spoke to her, quoting scripture–

[148] "Whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in Heaven," he said.

"I obey *my* father," answered Mrs. Endicott.

"He that loveth father or mother before Me is not worthy of Me," spake Mr. Bunyan, and went on his way to gaol.

Now all the rest of that day, being Tuesday, Mrs. Endicott was very silent; those among whom

she moved marked it with concern. The next night she came running through the darkness to her sister's house, all wild and beside herself, and implored them all to come home with her, which they did in a great fright.

Upon the way she told them that her father had fallen ill, and was now dying.

This they found true enough; George Endicott was crouching over a hastily lit fire and bemoaning his sins, and in little while without further speech he died. Mrs. Endicott was taken to her sister's home on the way, it being then dawn, and they met Gilbert Farry, and told him Mr. Endicott was sudden dead.

"It is no more than I looked for," said he; whereupon Mrs. Endicott shocked those with her in the cart by laughing, and his remark and her manner of taking it were remembered afterwards.

The end of this business was that the doctors made discovery that George Endicott had been poisoned by a drug given him in his ale; and a drug of this nature had been bought by Mrs. Endicott in Bedford a few hours after John Bunyan had spoken to her; this, together with the circumstances of her late dispute with her father, her being alone with him in the house, the [149] suddenness of his illness and some broken words he had let drop in his last moments, was evidence enough, and Mrs. Endicott was arrested on the awful charge of murdering her father and lodged in Bedford Gaol, to the great scandal and confusion of all Nonconformists and damage to the cause of John Bunyan.

The trial is within the memory of all, and no account of it is here required. Mrs. Endicott defended herself with prudence and spirit and strove to cast the guilt on the man Farry, who was the principal witness against her; and, indeed, his known spite towards her, the fact that Mr. Endicott's will was in his favour and the misty kind of character he bore gave her some handle, but since she could no wise explain the drug she had bought save lamely saying it was for cleaning tiles and that she knew not its deadly properties, the case looked ill against the woman. Nevertheless, her youth, her comeliness, her known piety and long sweet behaviour, the influence of her relatives and the feeling of the people pleaded for her, and there was no one who doubted that she would be acquitted when on the last day of her trial she startled the court by rising up and declaring herself guilty and a helpmate of the Devil from the moment she abjured John Bunyan in her father's barn.

In fine she vowed herself a witch, and baring her arm showed them a purple hoof-print on the flesh that was known for the particular mark and sign of Hell. After this she refused to speak [150] again either to her relatives or to the clergyman, and came forth to be hanged next day in a green tabinet gown with red ribbons. Not a word spoke she while being led through Bedford town, but was composed and seemed in a meditation.

With her own hands she tied down her skirts and put up her hair, and so without a prayer or any plea for mercy was hanged in full sight of all Bedford.

There was afterwards found in her gown a paper which was taken possession of by me, being one of the clergy present, and here published by me that all the facts be known to all who care to read. As for Gilbert Farry, he came to the execution and stood close to the gallows, and when she was dead went westward, leaving his properties in his lodgings, nor was he ever seen or heard of again in Bedford.

And his belongings were principally books in pagan languages and gaudy clothes, which were burnt before the Town Hall, for there was a great distrust of this man, it being thought that he had brought to ruin the soul of Grace Endicott.

Here followeth the paper written by Mrs. Endicott the day before she died:–

"Bedford Gaol, Wednesday, March 25th, 1679.

"Powerful is evil and hard to escape, and wise are those who step aside from the world which is set with springes into one of which I fell, who was once a Chrisom child and spun Church linen at my father's door.

"When I was in my tender years I thought of neither good nor evil, but went [151] my way in empty vanity; then, behold! I had a warning and beheld Hell in its flames and saw that Love was but the Devil and so let go his hand.

"Soon there came a man, wonderful and strong, who took my soul from the embrace of Evil and set it on the road to Heaven and for six years I laboured in that thorny way, and thought I had found peace.

"Yet was the Devil busy, and pursued me and set his hounds on my soul, and his traps for my feet, but the preacher bade me hold fast to him, and surely he was drawing me Heavenwards. Yet through weakness of body I denied him, and the Devil kissed me, and I was a damned soul, and the net was so tight about me I could not move, and being damned could not pray.

"Yet I brooded still on Heaven and the Preacher, and conceived a great wrath against him who had wrung that denial from me, so having the seal of the Devil on me I slew my father and saw him die in the night. And being put on my trial cast spells till they thought me innocent. Yet I was presently weary of this, and did admit my master and to-morrow shall die and be returned to that Great Wickedness of which I am a part, yet once was a saved soul, grace to Master John Bunyan.

“May He whose name I dare not write save others from what befell Grace Endicott.”

Many who read this paper did say she was a mad woman, and many did say she was a witch, and Gilbert Farry the Devil himself, while others swore she was crazed with love for John Bunyan and was innocent and the old man died naturally (for, indeed, the doctors afterwards fell out about his having been poisoned), and yet others held she had lost her wits through the terror she had been in through denying her faith–and who shall make truth out of all this tangle? [152]

THE CUP OF CHICORY WATER

[153]

“Madame se Meurt! Madame est Morte!”

Vanitas vanitatum, dixit Ecclesiastes,
Vanitas vanitatum, et omnia vanitas.

“*O nuit desastreuse! O nuit effroyable, ou retentit tout a coup comme un eclat de tonnerre cette etonnante nouvelle: Madame se meurt! Madame est morte!*”

Madame found herself at the pinnacle of her desires; she had returned to France with news of the treaty of Dover signed, with the friendship of her brother for Louis de Bourbon, with the prospect of yet another conquest to offer to the glorious nation that had adopted her; her triumphant charms had sealed the league between England and France; she had seen Arlington put his name to the paper that rendered void the Triple Alliance. Her influence, they said, and the languishing eyes of Louise de la Querowaille had done it. It was the *coup de theatre*, though a secret one, of a brilliant and unscrupulous policy; it was praised by M. de Louvois and by the King; it was the most dishonourable bargain a sovereign of England had ever set his hand to; it was false, lying, treacherous; it involved the ruin of two nations to satisfy the greed of one man and the ambition of another.

Also it was the seeds from which many years after sprang the hydra-headed league that laid in the slime of defeat the glories of invincible France.

But Madame never knew of that. [154]

All who spoke to her praised her–her, the daughter of an English King and the sister of an English King–for this treaty which betrayed the English people and their allies; she had been always courted for her beauty, her rank; now she found herself courted for her political influence and her skill in the affairs of men–most exquisite of compliments for a clever woman proud of her cleverness.

The greatest nation in the world was beholden to her; there were many to tell her so. Afterwards the Dutch called her a wanton woman, and the English people cursed her as they cursed her brother. But Madame never heard them.

There were two Queens at the Court of France, but Madame was above either; she was the most brilliant, the most admired princess in France, which is to say in the world.

Madame was Henriette-Anne d’Angleterre, Duchesse d’Orleans, sister of Charles Stewart and the sister-in-law of Louis de Bourbon, granddaughter of Henri Quartre and his Medicis Queen, great-granddaughter of Marie Stewart, on both sides of a rich illustrious blood, yet born in the midst of civil war in the beleaguered town of Exeter and brought up a penniless exile.

Now, at five and twenty, at the apogee of her fame with these things forgotten; her brother was restored to her father’s throne, and had avenged himself, God knows, on the English people, Madame lending her delicate aid.

Nine months ago Henriette-Marie de France, Madame’s mother, had died, and Madame had listened to her funeral sermon, preached by the Bishop of Condom. As his glowing eloquence fell on her ears Madame had wept, her gay, light heart touched for the first and perhaps the last time. [155]

She resolved to alter her frivolous, pleasure-loving useless life; she appointed the Bishop her confessor, and made, it may be, some little progress on another path to that which she had followed so far.

His grace of Condom called her a virtuous princess, and, in common with all who knew her, loved her for her gaiety, her charm, her sweetness; his one-time reproof had melted into flatteries now: there could be no censure for her who had detached England from The Triple Alliance.

Her return from England had been celebrated by a succession of balls, fêtes, masques; she had re-conquered France with her dazzling English beauty, her graceful easy manners, and the brilliant success of her mission. Flushed and roseate from her victory she descended like a goddess into her throne in the most glorious court in Europe; she was the idol of the people too, “the most adorable princess who ever lived,” one of her ladies called her. There seemed no word to express her complex charm.

In the midst of her gorgeous triumph Madame was a little grieved, a little stung by the obvious

coldness of Monsieur; his jealousy had been the background of her life for the eight years since she had married him. [156] Defying him, she had come more than once very near to giving him cause for open outraged clamour, but her wit, her courage had saved her; it had always ended in Madame laughing at Monsieur.

She laughed at Monsieur now; it had become a habit, though, knowing him to be something justified and not being shallow herself, there was a little ache to be hidden beneath her sparkling demeanour, an ache strengthened perhaps by a memory of the Bishop of Condom's words and a vague desire to follow them. But there was all her life, she thought; now there was no time for anything but gaiety, applause, the sweet incense of adulation. In the court that toasted Mme d'Armagnac, Louise de la Vallière, Madame Valentinois, Madame de Soissons, she was reckoned the most beautiful woman; she believed that the King loved her; in her heart she believed that he, Adonis and Mars among men, loved her, the unattainable. If she had been free–or even perhaps the wife of any other man–she might have been the Queen of France.

She had coquetted with many; the splendid de Guiche, the romantic de Vardes, Marsillac and Monsieur le Grand Ecuyer, but–the King—

The queen and Monsieur paid her the infinite compliment of being furiously jealous; the d'Armagnacs, the Mancinis, the la Vallières and the lesser beauties spread abroad to dazzle the eyes of majesty were openly overshadowed; Racine wrote for her "Berenice," and all who saw it performed knew who the heroine stood for–and who was Titus.

[157] The past was stormy but glorious, the future vague but golden; she had the praises of Louis and the endearments of Charles in her ears; she had come from England where she had queened it for a period of meteor-like splendour to France, where she was permanently enthroned.

"This is a glorious year for me," said Madame. "I think that I am happier than I have ever been."

It was the twenty-ninth of June, the year 1670, eight days after Madame's return to France. She and Monsieur had gone to St. Cloud; Madame loved the château; despite the commands of her physician, M. Vyelen, she bathed every morning in the river that flowed down from Paris past the park and wandered at night in the moonlight that was so chilly after the heat of the day. Madame, whose short life had been torn with several fierce illnesses, was careless of her health. This day, the twenty-ninth of June, she had passed quietly. Madame de la Fayette had arrived at St. Cloud, and Madame had been pleased to see her; they had walked in the garden gaily and Madame had talked of her stay in England, of the King her brother; speaking of these things pleased her. She laughed, and was very cheerful. An Englishman was painting Monsieur and Mademoiselle, her eldest daughter; she went to see these pictures, and spoke again of England to Madame de la Fayette and Madame d'Epernon.

[158] Dinner was served in the studio; afterwards Madame lay along the couch and slept, her head almost on the shoulder of Madame de la Fayette.

Monsieur sat for his portrait; his extremely handsome, cold face was turned towards his wife; he appeared not to notice her, but once he remarked that her countenance had changed curiously in her sleep. Madame de la Fayette, looking down, noticed that this was so. Madame did not look beautiful or even agreeable now; the lady reflected that it must be that her loveliness lay in her spirit, but reflected again that she was wrong, for she had often seen Madame asleep and never seen her look less than beautiful before.

Monsieur talked indifferently of many things. Presently the sitting was concluded, and Madame awoke. Monsieur remarked that she looked ill; she took up the glass at her girdle and surveyed herself. She wore a tight-laced gown of pearl-coloured satin, embroidered with wreaths of pink roses; it well suited her blue-eyed loveliness. She dropped the mirror.

"I look well enough," she smiled.

Monsieur left the room; he had expressed his intention of going to Paris.

Madame descended with Mme Gourdon into the saloon that looked upon the terraces, the fountains, the parkland. It was a beautiful afternoon, lacking but a few moments of five o'clock; the salon was filled with sunshine that showed the dark walls, the polished floor, the furniture heavy, gilded, and Madame walked up and down talking to M. Boisfeane, the treasurer of Monsieur. She complained, laughing, of a pain in her side, and held her hand to it as she walked; [159] the long window was open and a breeze blowing in ruffled the long auburn curls back from her face. Presently Monsieur entered; he wore a pink velvet riding suit and was booted and spurred; he looked at his wife as if he would have spoken to her, but changed his mind and crossed to the window.

"I asked for a cup of chicory water," said Madame, ignoring him. "Where is Mme de Mecklenbourg?"

As she spoke that lady entered with the Comtesse de Gamaches.

Madame smiled at them; Monsieur turned in the window recess and looked at her; his hands held his gloves behind his back; the sunlight made stars of his spurs and twinkled on his sword-handle. Madame crossed the long room, taking no heed of him; her satin gown rippled with light. She held out her hand delicately.

"I have such a pain in my side," she said. Chicory water had eased her before. She laughed.

Mme de Mecklenbourg handed the cup to Mme de Gourdon, who gave it the Princess.

Monsieur began putting on his gloves, looking, however, at his wife. Monsieur de Boisfeane was choosing a flower from the vase on the side-table, with an idea of fastening it in his cravat.

The heavy pendulum clock struck five. Madame drank.

When she had finished she moved a step away from the three ladies, the cup in one hand, the other clasped to her heart. [160]

"My side," she said in a tone of agony; the colour rushed into her face. "Ah!–the pain–I can no more."

They stood staring at her, Monsieur de Boisfeane with a pink rose held in his hand.

"Ah, my God!" cried Madame; she was now livid, and the cup fell from her grasp. "Hold me up–I cannot stand."

The Comtesse de Gamaches took her under the arms, for she was falling backwards, and Mme de la Fayette took her hands.

As her husband did not move, Mons. Boisfeane dared not offer his aid. The four ladies supported her to the door; she walked with difficulty; her head, with its fair hair outspread, sank against Mme de Gamaches' shoulder; her pearl comb, that had been her mother's, fell out of her locks and rattled on the smooth floor.

Monsieur, moving for the first time since her outcry, picked it up and ordered Mons. Boisfeane to call a doctor.

Madame, moaning, almost fainting, was half lifted, half dragged to her chamber.

This was a handsome room full of the summer sunshine and overlooking the rose terrace. Madame sank across the chair before her dressing-table; Mme de la Fayette held her up while the other ladies unlaced her. In an instant they had her undressed and in a night-gown; they lifted her into the great red-curtained bed.

Her constant complaints and the tears in her blue eyes startled and astonished them; they knew that she was usually patient under pain. [161]

"You are in great anguish?" asked Mme de la Fayette.

"It is inconceivable," she answered. "What have I done?"

She threw herself from side to side in her agony, clutching at the pillows and her thin night-rail. Mme de Gamaches drew the silk curtains over the bright sunlight and the terraces of St. Cloud. Her first physician came, stared down at her as she lay tossing.

He said she had caught a chill from her bathing, that it was nothing; he could offer no remedy.

She sat up in bed, shuddering with pain.

"I am wiser than you think," she cried. "I am dying–send me a confessor."

The doctor repeated that it was nothing dangerous, and left the chamber to prepare a powder.

Madame fell on her side again; her sufferings were horrible. She opened her eyes from a swoon of anguish to see her husband holding back the bed curtains and looking down at her.

She spoke, panting from the pillow.

"Ah, Monsieur!–you have ceased to love me–a long while now–but I–I have never deceived you."

He turned away without a word. [162]

She lay now on her back exhausted; the curtains were drawn so that she was enclosed in her bed. Her sick eyes traced the pattern on the canopy above her; she heard her ladies whispering.

She thought of de Guiche smuggled into her apartments under the guise of a fortune-teller, of his letters–three, four a day–when she was last sick; she thought of Marsillac, of de Vardes, of M. de Lorraine and of the King—

She thought of the King's brother, her husband, of how she had angered, flouted, wounded him, of how she had laughed at him.

All at once she sat up and dragged the curtains apart.

"Look to that water I drank," she gasped. "I am poisoned!" As she spoke she saw that Monsieur was still in her chamber, and she seemed confused. "They mistook one bottle for another," she said, and fell down again in the bed.

A little tremor of horror ran through the ladies. Madame de la Fayette looked at Monsieur; he appeared neither startled nor terrified.

"Give some of the chicory water to a dog," he said, "and watch if it be poison or no."

But Mme de Gamaches said that the cup she had given to Madame had contained the last there was in the bottle.

It was now half-past five; the doctor returned and gave Madame a glass of viper powders mixed with milk; as she dragged herself up to take it she noticed that the sun was still shining brightly through a chink in the curtains, and it shot across her agony; it was a strange thing that the sun glimmered still over the terraces, the rose-beds, the terraces of St. Cloud, and the broad river running from Paris.

The loathsome mixture did her no good; she was smitten with a deadly sickness, and lay quite [163]

still, shivering. M. Vyelen felt her hands, icy cold, her feet as cold.

"I am poisoned," she said; "I am dying."

The room was crowded with people; many of them were weeping. The noise of it came heavily to her ears; her eyes were closed.

She wondered why they should weep; nobody was there whom she had imagined fond of her; neither De Guiche, Marsillac, M. de Lorraine–her brother, De Vardes or–the King.

And these? Would any of these care? She trusted none but the last.

How far to Versailles? Why did they not send for him?

The curtain was drawn again; this time Mme Desbordes. She declared that she had made the chicory water herself and had drunk of it. This to comfort Madame; it was not–as to the last–true.

Madame persisted that she was poisoned. She sat up in bed; the tears lay in her eyes.

"Give me an antidote," she said through locked teeth. She was not going to die, she told herself; it was too horrible. People did not die like this in the midst of glory. She clenched her hand against her side and demanded an antidote.

Sainte-Foy, the valet de chambre of Monsieur, brought her a draught composed of Jesuit's bark and pulverised mummy. Monsieur had sent it, he said; the doctor could recommend no better antidote. She drank it, shivering; the eyes were distracted. [164]

Her ladies whispered and sobbed together; there were now so many men and women in the room that she felt the air close and heavy. She implored Sainte-Foy to open the window; the doctor forbade it.

With that she fell back, tossing in the grip of pain, crying out that she was poisoned.

M. Vyelen brought her a glass of oil; she forced it down, shuddering with nausea.

Then after the administration of several horrible nameless drugs she lay in a half-stupor.

The pain had ceased to be localised; it shuddered through her limbs like her very blood and seemed one with the thick air about her.

Her thoughts raced at a fever pace; she saw the towers of Exeter, the first thing she could remember; she saw the mean room in Paris where her girlhood had been spent and the waves tossing in the channel as she stood on the deck of the ship by her mother's side: a man in cut velvet was there–George Villiers, the first man to profess himself mad for love of her.

Then masques, festivals, adorations, ballets danced with the King, snatched interviews with De Guiche, passionate letters from De Vardes, hunting parties with M. de Lorraine, little scenes with Monsieur, with the Queen Mother,–her last great triumph only a few days ago–and now?

Not the end? Oh, God! Oh, Christ! Not the end!

"She is better," whispered Madame de la Fayette, seeing her lie still. [165]

She opened her poor tortured blue eyes.

"The pain is always the same," she said, "only I have no strength to complain."

Then after a moment–

"Is there no remedy for this agony?"

They wept and whispered and talked. Monsieur was in the ante-chamber. The doctors seemed bewildered, frightened; one felt her pulse; it was beating furiously. She complained of heat though she had tossed the bedclothes off and torn open her night-gown; but there were so many people in the room, and they pressed so close to the bed that she obtained little air.

The curé of St. Cloud had arrived; they argued in the ante-chamber whether he should be admitted or not; to let Madame see a confessor was to admit that she was dying.

She had now been ill for three hours. The room was full of the yellow light of lamps and candles; some of it penetrated through her bed curtains. A spasm of horror shook her. What if she never saw the sun again! She resolved to live at least till dawn–so her thoughts, panting with her pain.

Monsieur came to her bedside; she opened her eyes and looked at him as he stood holding back her curtains. He had a spray of jasmine in the buttonhole of his pink coat; she noted that. He had not worn it when she had fainted in the saloon; since then he had found time to fix it there.

"Will you see the confessor, Madame?" he asked. How little he had changed since she had first known him; she looked up into his cold face, and their eyes met. [166]

"No," she murmured, and her heavy lids fell. "I am not dying. I shall be better soon."

The light hurt her eyes; she was glad when he dropped the curtain and turned away.

How she had lied to Monsieur and laughed at him–especially laughed at him–never with malice; now she was prostrate, helpless before him.

She called Madame de la Fayette.

"Cannot you do anything for me?" she whispered desperately.

She was told that they had sent to Paris for a doctor, to Versailles for the King's physician.

"Versailles," she repeated; her eyes lit.

Madame de la Fayette put her arm about her and held her up in bed; she seemed for the moment a little eased of her agony.

M. Vyelen roused her as she lay in this half swoon to bleed her arm.

All her poor vanity was roused; there was a great ballet on Thursday–she might be there yet–and her arms were her especial beauty.

"My foot!" she pleaded; "Monsieur, bleed my foot."

He insisted; her husband came and added his authority; she must be bled in the arm if M. Vyelen commanded it.

She protested still and moaned; Monsieur helped to support her while the doctor bared her arm. [167]

She looked so pale, so worn with pain, so patient, she lifted her eyes with such a look of dumb helplessness that Monsieur was troubled and turned his face away.

The doctor opened a vein; she shuddered to see the blood run into the basin; she began to make complaint when all his bandaging would not stop the bleeding and her pillow began to be stained with the quick-spreading red.

Monsieur Vyelen had lost his nerve and cut too deeply. Madame de la Fayette had to hold Madame's arm up. Monsieur moved away; the sight of blood made him sick.

Madame, lamentably feeble, strove with a clutching fear of death and demanded the confessor. They endeavoured to dispersuade her, vowing she was better. She shook her head with such a look of anguish that they cleared the room and brought the priest.

Madame de la Fayette remained, holding her up.

She was too weak to do more than repeat the formula of the church. When the priest had gone she lay back and tried hard to think of her real sins, but hopeless confusion engulfed her.

God was so shadowy. No one had ever told her what He wanted of her; she had thought very little about Him, very little about death. She wondered if it would ever be remembered to her that she was very young. What did it mean to be good? She had never wilfully injured any one, she had never felt wicked; but she hoped God would remember she was very young. For a while this thought gave her some ease; then it flashed across her mind that the Queen was no older, and the Queen was virtuous, obviously virtuous. [168]

La Vallière also; she knew Louise de la Vallière was a good woman and one whom she had shamefully treated.

Surely her sins were not difficult to remember now. She fell out of Madame de la Fayette's arms and lay silent on the pillow. The room had filled again; the King's physician, M. Vallot, had arrived.

He was an old man and pompous; he came to the bedside and Madame lifted her head.

"Thank you for your attention, Monsieur," she said. "But I am poisoned. Unless you can treat me for that—" She sank down again.

Monsieur Vallot smiled.

There was no danger, he said; it was merely the pain that frightened her. He retired to consult with the other doctors.

M. le Prince came to see her; she seemed pleased and tried to look at him, but he wore a black and gold brocade, and the candle light on it dazzled her. She half closed her eyes.

"I am dying," she murmured.

M. le Prince was greatly moved; he tried to tell her that she was better.

She shook her head and asked what time it was.

"Nine o'clock, Madame," he answered.

She asked if they might have the window open, and complained of the heat; but no one dared for fear of the doctor. [169]

Then Madame caught hold of Monsieur le Prince's arm so as to draw him down to her, and breathed the question she had so longed to ask.

"The King–does he know? Is he coming?"

The news was at Versailles, he told her; but no one thought her dying–she was not dying.

Monsieur came to her bedside. M. Vallot, he said, had come to him four times and assured him on his life that there was no danger; the other doctors had agreed with him, and he had returned to Versailles.

Madame looked at the pink figure of her husband and the jasmine drooping in his buttonhole.

"I know my state better than the doctors," she said; "and I think there is no remedy."

Her husband moved away with M. le Prince. Every one in the room seemed talking together; their voices echoed in her head horribly. She tried to compose her thoughts, but could not. If she might only have some respite from her pain! Why did not the King come?

Mme d’Epernon brought her a draught of senna that M. Vallot had ordered.

She drank it, and Mme Gamaches, approaching, said that the King had sent for news.

“Tell his Majesty I am dying,” said Madame. Not content with that, she asked them to send M. de Crequi to Versailles to say that she was in great peril.

[170] Meanwhile no remedy had given her any ease; she asked if they could not bring her something to assuage her anguish.

M. Vyelen answered that she must wait; in two hours the senna would relieve her.

“Oh, my God!” cried Madame. “If you were in my pain you would not speak so quietly of waiting.”

For a while she tossed and twisted from side to side. People surged in and out of the room; none of them believed that she was in any danger; the doctor insisted that she was not, that in a while the pain would pass, that the coldness of her hands and feet was only an ordinary symptom of a chill.

Presently she called out that she would be moved; the bed had grown hot and uncomfortable and intolerable. There was a little bed in her dressing-room; they wrapped her in a blue silk mantle and Monsieur and two of her ladies carried her there. She was slight–of the weight of a child.

The clearer atmosphere of the dressing-room and the cool bed seemed to relieve her; she lay still, swathed in her mantle, her auburn hair, that was marvellously fine, in disorder on the pillow.

On the table by the bed stood a couple of candles, and by the light of these they saw her face more clearly than when she was in the curtained bed. And it startled them.

“Do the candles trouble you?” asked Monsieur, his voice unsteady.

[171] “No, Monsieur,” she answered. “Nothing troubles me. To-morrow morning I shall be dead.”

Why did not the King come?

As she had eaten nothing since dinner, they brought her some supper on a silver tray; Monsieur showed some tenderness in holding it for her and in insisting that she should take something which at first she could not bring herself to; but at last she thanked him with a look and drank some soup. All at once her agony became so terrible that they thought she must die on the instant: she shook and stiffened with torment, like one at the stake; her face turned an ashy hue and glistened with moisture; the pupils of her eyes contracted and dilated.

“I am poisoned,” she said.

Some wept to see her cruel sufferings. Monsieur sat by her side and held her hand.

There was a commotion in the ante-chamber–in the bedroom; the door was flung open, and a gentleman in brown and gold, carrying his hat, entered, behind him M. de Crequi.

“The King,” said Monsieur.

Louis came half-way across the dressing-room.

“The doctors wish to see you, Monsieur,” he said; he was very pale and frowning.

All the light in the chamber was about the bed of Madame, where the candles burnt in their silver sticks and shone full on her pillow.

[172] All beauty had been wiped from her face like paint from a mask. Against the blue of her robe and the glimmering hue of her hair her face was like gray wax; the blood had come through the bandages on her arm in a red stain–but he, to her vision was as godlike, as golden glorious as ever.

As he came up to her she controlled her pain with an heroic effort.

“Sire, you lose one of your truest servants to-night,” she said.

He answered in great agitation–

“You are not dying; I will not believe it—”

He seemed afraid to come too near to her; she spoke calmly, with a world of wild feeling in her eyes.

“You know I am not afraid of death–but I am afraid of losing your good thoughts—”

“Talk of God, Madame,” he replied hoarsely.

“Louis–I am dying,” she said. “Come and speak to me–close.”

She made a little feeble movement with her hand, and the King came up to her bed.

“I am poisoned,” she repeated; it seemed she wished to drive him to accept the statement to accuse some one.

“You show great courage, Madame,” he said, and looked at her in a terrified manner.

“I have never been afraid,” she repeated, “but I do not want to die.”

“I will see your doctors,” he said. “There must be some remedy.”

He turned away, seemed glad to go.

Madame clutched hold of Mme de la Fayette. “I am horrible. Give me a mirror.”

She reached out and caught up a heavy glass from her dressing-table; her frail strength could hardly lift it. She looked in it a second, then dropped it on the quilt. [173]

“Madame de la Fayette,” she said, “my nose has shrunk—”

The lady could only weep. It was true; her nose had sunk into her face with a ghastly and corpse-like effect. She tossed herself about; whether in bodily or mental agony it was impossible to tell.

Mme de Gamaches came to say that Mme de la Vallière and Mme de Montespan had come together.

“Admit neither of them,” said Madame. She sent Mme de la Fayette out to them.

The two would share the crown she had left. Why had they come now? They must be glad she was dying–not la Vallière perhaps; she was a gentle woman.

It was now eleven o’clock, and the doctors suddenly informed the King that there was no hope; and those symptoms that two hours before they had vowed meant nothing they now declared the certain signs of gangrene and approaching death, and advised that Madame took the Holy Sacrament.

The King accused them of losing their heads. Monsieur fought his way into the dressing-room where Madame lay and told her, in an agitated manner, what they had said.

“So I have their permission to die?” She gave a tragic smile and fixed her eyes on her husband. “Where is the King?”

As she spoke he returned with the Queen and Mme de Soissons.

Madame lay silent; the King approached her bed; he railed against the doctors: he seemed confused, bewildered. [174]

“I am no physician,” he said, “but I could have suggested thirty remedies they have not tried, and now they say there is no hope.”

He stood irresolute, looking at her; the candlelight could give no colour to his fair face. She could not believe that he would not send away the others and sit by her till the end; she waited for that. For some tenderness on his part, some passion, some regret, she waited; he came up to her bed, kissed her hands and bade her adieu.

“Adieu!” she echoed. She thought she saw tears in his eyes. “Do not weep for me yet, Sire. The first news you hear in the morning will be of my death; weep then.”

She turned her face away from him and he withdrew with Mme de Soissons. Hearing him go, she moved sharply and opened her eyes.

Close to her stood the stooping figure of Maria Teresa.

Madame looked at her curiously; a few days ago she had seen another Spanish Queen with the same look of grave suffering in her face, the butt of her brother’s court. How often she had laughed at both of them–but now–she suddenly stretched out her arms with an eager gesture.

The Queen’s face changed; she moved back.

“God forgive you, Madame la Duchesse,” she said in a voice torn and broken. “God have mercy on you.” With that she burst into tears and hurried from the room, the light running down her silver dress. [175]

Madame was silent; she lay with her hand over her eyes until they came to move her back into her own bed that had been re-made.

Then she asked for the King.

He had returned, she was told, to Versailles.

She never mentioned his name again. With his departure all hope and desire of life had gone; he had fled, forsaken her. She almost wished to die now, so that she might have respite from her pain.

The Mârechal de Granmont was brought to her bedside; she told him that she was poisoned and bid him farewell.

She began to cough.

“It is the death cough,” she said. “Do you remember how my mother coughed just before she died?” She then asked how long she had to live, and expressed again her desire to confess.

The King had gone and the doctors had said there was no hope.

She thought no more of life; she made no complaint of her terrible and sudden death, of her cruel agonies; she made no reflection on the bitterness of dying in the midst of triumph, in the flower of her youth; she tried to face the certainty of approaching Death with what courage she might; she tried to realise a thing that till now she had never thought of.

She confessed again to M. Feuillet; he was a stern priest, and exhorted her in a severe fashion. When he had finished a Capuchin Father, her usual confessor, began to speak to her. [176]

His discourse wearied her; she was trying to realise God for herself. The room was full of people; she saw them in a blur behind the figures of the two priests: she heard their talking, their

sobbing. She noted the lines of her bed curtains, of her coverlet, and these things troubled her.

Presently another figure came to her bedside. After a moment she knew him–Lord Montagu, the English Ambassador. She thought of her brother.

"Tell him–that none loved him better than I—" Her voice failed.

My Lord answered her in English.

"Are you poisoned, Madame? I have heard it said. Is it true?"

"Yes. But in error–I accuse no one. Do not tell my brother; he might wish to take vengeance—"

Here M. Feuillet interrupted; she had spoken in English, but he had caught the word "poison."

"Think of nothing but God, Madame–leaving these earthly matters."

She held up her hand.

"My Lord–that diamond ring; take it to my brother."

He drew it from her finger.

"Tell him I regret nothing so much as his grief. Tell the Duke of York–that–also."

As she said no more the Ambassador drew back into the crowded chamber. [177]

Madame became weaker; an intense chillness had succeeded her heat; her hands and feet were cold; it seemed to her that her heart had almost stopped. With a sudden unutterable pang she remembered her keys. Monsieur would get them; he would read her papers, her letters. If she had only known last night—

Now he would see how she had lied to him—

She strove to put this thought from her; he was the master now and she helpless.

The Capuchin continued his discourse; she prayed him, very sweetly, to leave her in peace for a while.

She received the Holy Eucharist; to her it was a blur of gold vessels, a murmur of words. She fainted three times while they administered it.

Another doctor arrived; he advised a bleeding in her foot.

"Then you must make haste," she whispered.

Her head was whirling; she felt that the room had grown immense, that a great multitude was about her–talking, whispering, sobbing.

She never asked for her children and no one thought to speak of them or bring them; but they sent for M. de Condom.

She felt her foot bared and the prick of the lancet; as they bathed it they cried out she was dying. Very little blood came.

They gave her extreme unction.

She felt herself now in a soft darkness, striving for the light; she thought that this light would either blast or comfort her–and that it was God. [178]

She called out for her husband; he came instantly.

"Will you leave the room now, Monsieur?" she asked. "Have you my keys?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Be merciful," she whispered piteously. "Adieu, Monsieur."

He embraced her silently and went away, leaving her to her darkness.

The clock struck two. M. de Condom arrived; she saw him, heard that he was speaking to her but she did not know what he said. The lapping darkness was wrapping her; she saw through it glimmering points of candles and weeping faces; she saw, too, Exeter towers, very plainly, and the laughing eyes of M. de Guiche.

Then the mists cleared, and she beheld everything in a bright, strong light. She turned to a woman who bent over her pillow and said in English–

"When I am dead give M. de Condom the emerald ring I am having made for him."

Her natural courtesy spared his thanks by speaking in a language he did not understand. Her agonies were suddenly ceased; she turned on her side with a soft sigh.

"I think I could sleep," she said to M. de Condom. "May I, for a little–sleep?"

He said "Yes," and that he would go and pray for her. He descended the steps of her bed; he had hardly crossed the room before she called to him in a sweet voice– [179]

"It has come. I am dying."

He returned to her bedside and held out the crucifix. She half raised herself; her pale, lovely hair hung about her blue wrap. She took the crucifix in her hands and clasped it to her bosom. The darkness was lifting–behind Exeter towers; she saw the Thames as she had seen it from the windows of Whitehall; she heard the priest's voice reciting the prayers for the dying. Her lips were on the crucifix; she gave the responses, but her thoughts were not in the words. The light brightened into a dazzle that blotted everything out. She let the crucifix fall and sank back on her

pillow. The clock chimed the half hour. She moved her lips convulsively and died–after nine hours of agony.

The King was asleep at Versailles and Monsieur was in her private cabinet, weeping furiously and tearing up the multitude of her love-letters by the light of a trembling candle flame.

M. de Condom, preaching her funeral sermon, displayed her as a Christian Princess, entirely virtuous.

THE BURNING OF THE VANITIES

[180]

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE LAST DAY OF CARNIVAL AND THE VISION OF GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA IN THE CITY OF FLORENCE, 1497

"Behold, the sky shall be darkened! Behold, it shall rain fire and flame, stones and rocks; it shall be wild weather. I have placed ye between four winds," saith the Lord–namely, prelates, princes, priests and bad citizens.

"Fly from their vices; gather ye together in charity. Fly from Rome, O Florence, and come to repentance! The Lord saith: 'I will debase the princes of Italy and trample on the pride of Rome; then, O Italy, trouble after trouble shall befall thee, trouble from this side and from that–rumours from the east, rumours from the west, from all sides rumour after rumour.'

"Then men shall yearn for the visions of the prophets, and shall have them not, for the Lord saith, 'Now do I prophesy in my turn.'"

So ended the sermon of Frà Girolamo, preached from a temporary pulpit erected in front of the church of Santa Maria del Fiore, the last day of the Carnival of the year fourteen hundred and ninety-seven, the third year since the expulsion of the Medici, the third year of the Friar's rule in Florence.

[181] The monks of St. Mark's were gathered about the pulpit, and round them the Piangoni, the active supporters of the Friar; beyond them the crowd filled the Piazza from end to end, a crowd reverent, silent, excited.

It was a windless spring; the odours of the flowers in the fields without hung in the breezeless air and filled the city streets with perfume. Above the fine straight lines of the houses and the majestic shape of the church the sky hung pure of cloud and deeply blue as an early violet.

Frà Girolamo paused, gripping the smooth edge of the pulpit, and looked across the gathered multitude.

He wore the habit of the Friars of St. Mark, a loose coarse brown robe and a hood and shoulder-piece in one that fitted closely round his face and neck. He was of the middle height, stooping a little and gaunt; his features were harsh and rudely modelled, his complexion dark and sickly, cheeks and forehead fined with deep furrows, his nose a heavy aquiline, his eyes large, expressive and of a sparkling grey tint; his thick but mobile lips were at that moment compressed in a firmness that had the sweetness of true strength. Truly that expression of noble gentleness illumined the whole ungainly countenance, softened the unlovely lines and gave divine dignity to the common features.

As he stood so, motionless, the monks began to sing psalms and the crowd went to their knees on the paving stones of the great Piazza, their coloured garments shifting and changing in light and shade as they moved. When the men's voices sank on the last pulse of the holy music that [182] rose like incense on the clear thin air, Frà Girolamo took the Host, and raising it with his right hand lifted the left in blessing of the kneeling press of worshippers.

The great and stately door of the church was a fitting background for the frail figure holding the Host of God which gleamed in the lucid rays of the sun that struck straight from heaven on it, like a mystical jewel fed with inner light.

Frà Girolamo flashed his eyes over the crowd, among whom he could distinguish several of the Compagnacci, adherents of the vanished Medici, and many of the Arrabbiati, his bitter foes who had threatened to revive the old orgies of the Medicean rule, the pagan and splendid carnival of Lorenzo, called the Magnificent, now for years since dead in sin.

A strong excitement shook the slender frame of the Friar; his countenance became blanched with the intense emotion that inspired him. In a trembling but powerful voice he cried–

"O Lord, if my deeds be not sincere, if my words be not inspired by Thee, strike me dead on the instant."

The Host was lowered and the people rose from their knees; but the Friar remained in the wooden pulpit.

Now the crowd drew back and made way for a strange procession that was wending across the Piazza.

[183] It was headed by four fair-headed youths attired in white, who bore between them a marble figure of the Infant Christ, pointing with one hand to a wreath of thorns and raising the other in benediction; this was the work of Donato di Bardi, a famous sculptor. After came a company also in white and carrying in their hands red crosses, singing the lauds and hymns of Girolamo

Benivieni in sweet and eager voices.

Behind them followed men and women soberly dressed who collected from the crowd, holding out on silver trays the alms they received; they were begging on behalf of the Monte di Pietà, and had already amassed more gold than had been given in charity in Florence during a year of the old Medicean order.

Next there came a vast number of children decently and quietly dressed, some singing, some repeating prayers, all carrying, dragging or supporting between them a strange and varied number of objects–books, dresses, pictures, statues, masks, false hair, boxes and cases of perfume, lutes, viols, mirrors, ornaments, gauds, manuscripts, cards, dice, cosmetics, chess-boards, cups and balls of gold, and all manner of rich, precious trifles and beautiful gorgeous examples of art.

These were the vanities that had been collected during the Carnival by the very children who, under the rule of Lorenzo, had sung and danced, fought and played profane games in the streets they now traversed in orderly procession; then with the Carnival verses of the Medici on their lips, now with holy hymns.

From every house in Florence they had demanded all vanities to be given to them, and when they received the offerings they sang a devotional work composed by Frà Girolamo. Now laden with these relics of the old pagan rule, they were making their way to the Piazza dei Signori, there to complete the purging of Florence by publicly burning the vanities that had been so long her temptation and her curse.

The Friar descended from the pulpit and joined the procession in company with his personal supporters; chanting and rejoicing, the children made their joyful way, dragging with them the trophies of luxury and wantonness, whose perfume of musk, ambergris and nard gave a heaviness to the air as they passed.

Frà Girolamo held himself, as was his habit, modestly, and kept his eye low in real humility; but in his great heart was a wild exultation that this city of his love had responded to the agonies of his exhortation and was turning from the wickedness of Borgia and Medici to the strong face of God.

Beneath his rough and long robe beat a spirit so lofty and enthusiastic that had it not been hampered and held down to earth by the poor enfeebled body it had walked on the heads of all of them and conversed with Angels.

But since He who made the soul of this Friar directed these things for His own ends, Frà Girolamo, who bore in his bosom a burning light of truth that might have served to redeem the world, worked in the wicked, lovely city of Florence and spent his strength to redeem this little circle of beloved sinners.

When the procession reached the Piazza there was found to be a great eight-sided pyramid there, built up in the centre of the square and reaching near as high as the Palace of the Signori; there were seven stages to this, one for each of the deadly sins. On the apex stood two grotesque and glittering figures, robed in gemmed satin and wearing high-coloured crowns; one was King Carnival, the old monarch of the wanton Medicean orgies; and in his monstrous, under-jawed face and princely garb, in his straight heavy locks and the velvet cap under the circlet of sovereignty, might be traced a malicious likeness to the magnificent Lorenzo, purposely contrived by the artificer as an affront to the banished House.

The other figure was Lucifer, horned, black, and hideous, bearing in the lap of his scarlet robes seven little images representing the seven mortal sins.

The procession paused; the men and women arranging themselves under the Loggia de’ Lanzi and along the Pinghiera, while the children advanced two at a time, and deposited their loads on the various platforms, where the soldiers of the Signori arranged them in piles from the bottom to the base of the pyramid.

So much had been collected, so many and various were the costly offerings, that several hours passed before the final vanity was cast on to the heap and the children retired to a great circle round the Piazza; but all this while there had been no sign of weariness or impatience on the part of the people, who continued with great spirit and gladness to sing their lauds and hymns, mingled with denunciations of the Carnival.

Frà Girolamo stood back from the pile with his hands folded in the sleeves of his robe; his face was largely concealed by the shadow of his hood, which he had partially drawn forward, and he conveyed neither by word nor gesture fanatic rejoicing or common triumph. Rather was his mien sad and grave, as if he weighed what was being done and pondered on that far greater cleansing of Florence of which this was but a symbol–the cleansing of the hearts of her citizens.

Truly when the last child cast down his burden and withdrew, it was a marvellous sight of worldly splendour to behold; all these gauds and glories cast together in this heap under the calm spring sky, half in the shadow of the palace and other noble buildings and half sparkling and glittering in the clear gold of the early sunshine, fainting in the approach of afternoon. Rich and valuable were these vanities, worth many thousands of ducats; a merchant of Venice had offered to buy them for the vast sum of twenty thousand crowns, and the portrait of this man was flung on top of the other baubles.

Carnival costumes were there of satin, silk and tinsel; chaplets and garlands of false flowers; locks and wigs of artificial hair, masks painted and gilt; necklets, bracelets and brocade shoes,

girdles, ribbons and playing cards; chess-men in ivory, silver and ebony; fans in feathers dyed bright colours; books of profane poems with pictures tinted and gilt; lutes, viols and pipes painted and carved; boxes, bottles and caskets of cosmetics, powders, philtres and charms; statues and busts of pagan gods and goddesses, white marble, veined marble, and time-stained alabaster; mirrors set in copper, gold and silver; toy daggers for ladies with handles of jade, sardonyx and emerald; watches of crystal, of filigree, of enamel; caskets of perfumes; paintings of wanton figures, of beautiful women, of heathen scenes; velvet purses embroidered with armorial bearings; gauntlets stitched thickly with silver thread and pearl; mantles edged with vair and sable; sword-hilts fringed with knotted silk and gold; pins for the hair set with rubies and sapphires; false faces and gaudy finery for the carnival; statues in bronze, in gilt, in silver; enamel cups and drinking-horns bound with a rim of precious stones; cushions of brocade and down; boxes of ointment, of unguents; phials of rare perfumes; caskets of sweetmeats, bags of confetti, dice, parti-coloured playing balls, and many trifling things composed the pile. And with the glimmer of the gems, the shining of the gold and silver, the soft gleam of the rich stuffs, the flash of glass and crystal, the strange fantastic look of mask and carnival garment, it seemed as if the ransom of some monarch of the east, a pasha of Turkey or some potentate of Rhodes or Candy Isle was gathered there.

Now an excited and trembling silence of expectancy fell upon the crowd; four of the soldiers of the Signori stepped forward with flaming torches that showed pale and smoky in the daylight, and as Frà Girolamo raised his hand they lit the four corners of the pile, the interior of which was filled with combustibles. [188]

As the flames hesitated, crouched, then seized hold and caught their prey, the trumpeters of Florence blew a blast of triumph, the bells broke out from the palace and the people gave free vent to their wild enthusiasm.

The Friar did not move nor even lift his eyes to the opulent sacrifice; the thick soft smoke spread sideways in a sudden little gust of wind and half obscured his figure.

The people burst out of their ordered ranks; they laughed, shouted, sang their spiritual lauds and crowded about the huge costly bonfire in a press of delirious pleasure; the Piangoni stood near and by the aid of long poles thrust the vanities deeper into the flames and cast back any that had slipped, chanting the while the hymns of Girolamo Benivieni.

The Friar maintained his position; his lips moved as if he ardently communed with himself; so absorbed was he in his own meditations that he did not notice a man standing close, and also motionless amid the circling and excited throng, who was observing him with intense and peculiar attention.

This man, although he wore the sober mantle of an ordinary citizen, and though he appeared to be there in sympathy with the general religious enthusiasm, was nevertheless in air and appearance one of the Arrabbiati or Compagnacci, who intrigued with the outcast Medici and hated the Friar, though they submitted to a force they could not withstand with safety as yet. [189]

He was wrapped so completely in his dark cloak, the hood of which was well drawn over his face, that had any been free enough to observe him they would have had difficulty in judging of his person and character; the thick folds of the common stuff, however, could not disguise the virile grace of his figure, the beautiful poise of his head and the delicate shape of his feet and of the hand that clasped his hood at the chin.

The excited people and friars, breaking into a kind of religious dance, ran round and about this man, and in between him and Frà Girolamo; but he did not move nor once take his eyes from the equally still figure of the Friar, save to occasionally lift them to the pyre of the Vanities, now a burning cone of flames from base to apex, from which rose thick columns of sweet, heavy-scented smoke.

The slow Italian dusk was closing in; the sky deepened above the palace and the towers, the roofs and domes of Florence. The smoke, spreading, filled the Piazza and gave a cloudy unreality to the moving crowd who circled the strengthening light of the fire.

On the upper part of the buildings a pale sun-glow lingered; but the Lion on the Palace steps was absorbed in shade save for the flickering unearthly glow that the burning vanities emitted and that now and then touched the surroundings with a murky crimson reflection. [190]

All the while the bells of the Signori were pealing, and the music of them rose and fell with the hymns. Frà Girolamo suddenly looked up at the flames, the cracking canvas, shrivelling silks, splitting marbles, melting gold and silver, flaring scrolls of manuscript and smoking boxes of perfumes that composed the pyre; then, with bowed head, made his way quickly and unobserved through the crowd and out of the Piazza. He was instantly and closely followed by the tall stranger who had so persistently regarded him, and who now came softly after without attracting his attention.

The streets were deserted; every one being gathered in or near the Piazza, and the Friar passed unnoticed before the fronts of the tall, carved houses; he was swiftly making his way to the Convent of St. Mark, and had turned down an empty side street, deep in shade, when he suddenly paused, as if inwardly troubled, and, turning slowly, beheld the stranger who had also come to a stop a few paces behind him.

Frà Girolamo regarded him earnestly; they were alone in the street at the bottom of which was a glimpse of the Arno's arched bridge; behind them rose the steps and closed door of a hospital, above the garden wall of which showed cypress trees and branches of laurel.

"You," said the tall man in sweet and cultivated Tuscan, "you are Frà Girolamo Savonarola, friar of St. Mark's and ruler of Florence?" [191]

"Girolamo Savonarola I am," answered the Friar; "ruler of Florence I am not, but God's instrument for some good in this city."

The other, still speaking from the depths of the coarse hood that completely concealed his face, made reply–

"Ruler and Master of Florence, Friar, even as Lorenzo was Ruler and Master, even as the Medici were great are you great, and to-day you have had proof of it."

"Who are you?" demanded Frà Girolamo.

"One who loved Lorenzo and found Florence pleasant in his days."

"I did not hate Lorenzo–I would have saved his soul."

"You refused him absolution!"

"Because," replied the Friar, "he would not repent of his sins."

The stranger laughed impatiently.

"Usurper! You hold his place, while his son, at the Borgia's footstool, eats in Rome the husks of charity."

Frà Girolamo answered sternly, while the light of enthusiasm kindled to red fire in his eyes.

"Who are you who speak for the wicked? Piero de' Medici abused his power; he would have sold our liberty to the French–lustful, vain, hollow; he was banished Florence for his sins and a [192] price put upon his head. Woe to this city if he returns! At the Borgia's footstool, you say! It is fitting that such a prince should fly to such a Pope!"

The stranger came a short step nearer and loosened his hand on his hood so that his face was visible to the Friar, who observed that he wore one of the hideous masks of the Medicean Carnival, mottled and spotted to represent a plague-stricken countenance; he noticed the Friar's start of aversion and laughed again.

"This should have gone to feed yonder pyre!" he said. "Oh, credulous Friar, do you think that you have burnt all the sins in Florence?"

Girolamo Savonarola answered simply.

"I have done what God put it into my heart to do. Let Him judge me. For you, ask me what question you would have answered, or if this is but idleness, let me on my way."

"This is your day of triumph," said the other man with a passionate ring in his voice. "You to-day have burnt all the Medici rejoiced in–painting, statuary, music, books, poetry, gay dresses, perfumes, cards and dice; and those people who praised Lorenzo for making this Florence so beautiful and splendid have danced round your pyre in gladness!"

Frà Girolamo regarded him steadily.

"Are not you also," he asked gently, "pleased to see this city brought a little way to repentance?"

"Friar," answered the stranger vehemently, "I am your enemy. I stand for all you would destroy–the lust of the world, the pride of the beautiful, the power of the devil. I am also a ruined, outcast, beggared man, one of those your rule has banished from Florence. If I were discovered I should be murdered, and that would be better than to starve in Rome." [193]

"Your name?" interrupted Frà Girolamo. "Are you one whom I know?"

"You know me," was the haughty response; "but my name is not pleasing to your ears. *You* I hate, ay, and all your works; but there is a day soon when all hates shall be satisfied."

Girolamo Savonarola made quiet answer.

"If you are a follower of Piero de' Medici, I warn you to quit Florence, for I cannot and would not save one of the tyrant's tools from the just anger of the People–the People!–in *them* is my trust against these evils you threaten me with."

He turned to pass on his way, but the young man sprang lightly after him and caught his mantle.

"The People!" he laughed. "Did not the People shout for Lorenzo yesterday? Will they not shout for Piero to-morrow!"

Frà Girolamo looked at him with serene eyes.

"Never for the Medici," he answered. "Never for the tyrant. Florence is free."

"You are a bold man to say so," returned the stranger, standing at his ease, with one foot on the lowest hospital step. "Free! No, Florence is no freer than she was five years ago; only now it is you who rule instead of the Magnificent. But not for long, Friar."

"Again, who are you who stay me in the street with these prophecies?" [194]

The sun had left even the tops of the buildings now, and the lucid light was fading from the heavens where an early star hung chill and pale above the Duomo; the black foliage of the cypress and the sharp, long leaves of the laurel showed clearly over the wall and against the argent flush of twilight; a little fear crept into the Friar's heart, not base fear, or cowardice, or

any trembling for himself, but the shadow of some coming doubt lest after all he had not saved Florence; in the tall, dark-robed figure of the stranger, now standing with his arms folded on his breast and regarding him with eyes that shot evil glimmers from the holes in the mottled green and yellow mask, in this man with his settled enmity, his mocking composure, he saw testified all the hatred, scorn and malice that had opposed his life-work.

"Begone!" he said sternly, "and disturb me not."

The stranger gave him a disdainful salutation and flung up his graceful head.

"Back to your cell, and pray the people in whom you trust keep faithful!" he cried lightly.

"Two thousand crowns to-day for the head of Piero de' Medici–how much in a year's time for thine, O Friar, when Alessandro Borgia cries you excommunicate?"

Frà Girolamo stepped away and his dark eyes lifted to the evening sky. [195]

"The Pope is a broken tool, a vile trader in holy things," he answered with great dignity. "And in Florence, where I am beloved, his authority is worth nothing; here the voice of God alone is strong."

"And the voice of the People," returned the stranger mockingly; and with a low, insulting laugh he moved slowly away and was soon lost in the shadows.

Girolamo Savonarola gazed after him a moment, then proceeded on his way, a strange excitement throbbing in his veins and before his eyes a mistiness of familiar objects, as if an unnatural darkness had fallen.

He walked for a while in this manner, meeting no one, marvelling at the curious emptiness of the city and the increasing blackness; everything seemed strange and unusual. He thought he should have reached his Convent by now, but instead found himself traversing dark, empty streets that were those of Florence yet unknown to him. He turned to retrace his steps, but was like one groping in the labyrinth, roads and houses crossed and recrossed, and he wandered confused. Nowhere was there any light, in either window or in the heaven; he had lost sight of the Duomo and the star above it; as if the Plague had crept through the city was the silence and the loneliness.

Then out of the empty hush came the sound as of harsh wings beating together, and a voice cried strongly–

"Girolamo Savonarola!" [196]

The Friar cast up his eyes to the blinding mist and answered–

"I am here!"

And the voice made reply–

"Come thou and see how the people of Florence love thee!"

With great rejoicing he said, "I come!"

Forward he pressed through the obscurity, and the darkness began to be tinged with red and dispelled as from the spreading glow of flames, and as Frà Girolamo hastened on he found himself suddenly on the Piazza again, standing apart from a vast crowd that was dancing and singing about a huge fire that lit the whole black sky and stained the blank buildings with a lurid colour.

And the voice said, very low and in the Friar's ear–

"These are the people who sang the songs of Lorenzo de' Medici, the people who burnt the vanities. Behold what task they perform now!"

Frà Girolamo looked and saw that the crowd was very brilliantly dressed, that the women wore jewels and paints, the men fine silks and rich weapons, and that they danced in a mad profane style; many were masked and all wreathed with flowers, and the heavy scents they were anointed with hung in the thick air; nor did they sing hymns, but the wanton carnival songs of Lorenzo de' Medici.

And in the midst of their reckless rejoicing flared and blazed the vivid devouring flames, soaring one above the other until they far overtopped the dark palace; the deep crimson glow of them picked out from the darkness the painted, leering faces, the evil masks, the leaping, dancing, abandoned forms. [197]

"This is not Florence," murmured the Friar.

"This is Florence," came the answer. "And these are the people–thy people—"

Frà Girolamo felt a hand on his shoulder, and withdrawing his horrified eyes from the devilish crowd, saw at his side the tall figure of the stranger who had accosted him before the hospital.

"Look closer," he urged. "Look closer. What vain things do they burn now? Not cards, lutes and paintings. Look closer."

The Friar again gazed at the Piazza, and this time discerned above the flames the outline of a huge gallows from which depended several bodies, hung by the necks, and the blood of these men rained down on to the fire, for the crowd with jeering and laughter threw stones at them that broke their flesh.

"They wear monks' habits," said Frà Girolamo, and he strained forward.

At this moment the fire consumed the rope holding one of the victims, and as the crowd gave a shout of rejoicing he fell into the white heat of the fire. In that second the Friar had caught sight of the face; it was the dead tortured countenance of his beloved disciple, Frà Domenico. He gave a cry of anguish, and would have thrown himself into the crowd, but the tall stranger held him back.

And now his maddened eyes noticed a man in scarlet and purple, mounted on a white mule, who rode round the edge of the pyre and urged on the crowd with ribald triumph. This man was old, and wore a triple crown; and at his bridle were two younger men, like him in the face–horribly beautiful, wearing extravagant garments. [198]

“Alessandro Borgia,” said the stranger in the Friar’s ear, “and his two sons, Francesco and Cesare.”

Frà Girolamo tried to speak, but his tongue refused to move.

“Look again,” urged the voice, low, insistent and mocking.

The Friar gazed up through the smoke and flame, and in the horrid blaze saw another figure dangle at the rope’s end, then drop; again, in the instant’s downward fall he saw the face–livid and despairing.

This time his own. His–face and figure.

“See how the people of Florence burn Girolamo Savonarola!” cried the stranger. “These people who wept to hear you preach in the Duomo!”

Frà Girolamo fell back a step and raised a shuddering hand to shut out the awful fire.

The other flung back his mantle, and the great glow of the fire caught the embroideries on the gay dress hitherto concealed beneath.

“You dethroned the Medici,” he said; “these,”–he pointed to the crowd–“will dethrone you.” [199]

Soft blackness rose up, choking the bright flames, blotting out the shouting people, the dim outline of the buildings swirling round the feet of Frà Girolamo and mounting to his eyes. He cast himself on his knees and seemed to sink forward on nothingness; his senses broke and forsook him; he flung out his hands and made an effort to hurl off the darkness as if it were a mantle tossed over his head; he felt his knees strike stone, the blackness rent, tore, lifted and disappeared; he found himself lying up the hospital steps; before him the low wall, the cypress tree, the laurel branches; beyond, the darkening pure sky. And beside him the tall stranger staring at him through the holes of his hideous mask.

The Friar staggered to his feet.

“I have had a vision,” he said under his breath. “Methought you were my guide. Who are you?”

The other tore off the mask, snapping the orange ribbons that bound it to his head, and disclosing a superb face framed in clusters of brown curls, flushed with crimson.

“I am Piero!” he cried. “I am the Medici! And after the burning of Girolamo Savonarola I shall rule again in Florence!”

“Then it was no vision,” answered Frà Girolamo, “but a Devil’s fantasy—”

“A fantasy,” said Piero; “but you shall test its truth.” [200]

The Friar leant against the wall of the hospital and closed his eyes to shut out the picture of the wicked face and red eyes he had last seen with that same smiling expression casting hate on him from beside the death-bed of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

“Lord! Lord!” he cried strongly. “Save me from the snares and delusions of evil!”

Now he opened his eyes and saw about him his own cell in St. Mark, and he lay on his bed, and beside him sat his beloved disciple, Frà Domenico, and he shuddered as one waking from a terrible dream.

“How got I here from the Piazza?” he asked, sitting up. And they told him that a faintness had come over him as would often happen in the pulpit, and that so insensible he had been brought to the Convent.

“Truly,” said Frà Domenico, with love beaming in his eyes, “this was the day of your glory–for all the vanities in Florence were burnt to ashes–yes, even to nothingness was all that wantonness reduced.”

Girolamo Savonarola looked at Frà Domenico, then at his own body.

“To ashes, to nothingness!” he murmured. “Oh, God, make the spirit strong!”

The disciple asked tenderly–

“Father, what troubled you?”

Frà Girolamo made the sign of the cross and replied with a sweet composure– [201]

“Nought–but in the crowd methought that I did see–Piero de’ Medici.”

A WOMAN OF THE PEOPLE

[202]

> "Among all the noble and ignoble sufferers by the guillotine there is no record of cowardice on the part of any–save only in the case of Madame du Barry, a woman of the people who had been mistress of France during the most extravagant years of the reign of Louis XV."–*History of France.*

On the third day of November, 1793, Madame la Comtesse du Barry, arrested for "supplying the Emigrants with money," and for this offence sentenced to death, was brought to the prison of the Concièrgerie.

There were many prisoners that day, among them Philippe, one time Duc d'Orleans, recently Philippe Égalité, the man who had voted for the death of his cousin, the King, and was now to die the same way himself.

Madame du Barry and her companions were conducted through a large Gothic hall, dark and low, down a long stone corridor, also dark and low, and half open one side to grim vaults, through two squat doors and across a courtyard narrowed and cobbled, into another building, up gloomy straight stairs and into a narrow corridor. While the jailer was unlocking doors Madame du Barry looked round her; she perceived that only one of her companions remained–a woman as young and beautiful as herself, with black hair and dusky eyes and a face twisted with terror.

"What is your name?" whispered Madame du Barry. [203]

"Josephine Beauharnais," answered the dark beauty in a feeble voice. "And for God's sake tell me–are we to die–to die?"

"No–no," whispered the fair woman eagerly.

Madame Beauharnais smiled foolishly.

"A wise woman once said that I should be a queen and more," she replied brokenly, "therefore I cannot be going to die—"

"No, no," repeated the Countess, shaking her blonde head.

The jailer came and roughly separated them. Madame du Barry saw the pallid, dazed face of her companion and heard her shriek as she was thrust into a room and the key turned; then she herself was pushed through an open door and locked in.

She stumbled across the threshold and nearly fell, recovered herself and went straight to the window and looked out.

The window was heavily and closely barred from top to bottom, and faced the other portion of the prison through which she had just come, which was only a few yards distant. A small portion of sky was visible and a small strip of cobbled courtyard; nothing else.

The sky was grey with the sullen snows of November, and the cobbles and the walls were splashed and stained with dark patches; Madame du Barry knew what they were: a few days before the Girondists had been gathered in the chapel of the Concièrgerie and then driven out into the courtyard to be massacred.

She had heard a man say that the blood had been ankle-deep. [204]

A peculiar, terrible and sickening smell filled the prison; she had noticed it as soon as she had stepped down into the dark entrance hall. It was very strong in this room where they had put her. She tried to forget what it was.

"I must think," she said to herself; "I must think."

She had been saying that all day. Holding on to her senses and saying to herself that as soon as this horrible and bewildering tumult was over, as soon as she was alone and quiet, away from the abuse, the staring, the rough handling, she would think–straighten things out in her mind, decide what must be done.

And now she was alone she found she could not think; she had acted on impulse, not reflection, all her life; besides, she was rather stupid.

Her mind wandered off to trivial things: the details that had made her life still chiefly interested her; she noticed the dull small room, the wooden bed with a rough coverlet, the broken chair. She pulled out the bed pillow and shuddered to see that it was soiled. Then she began to consider her own dress.

She wore the gown she had been arrested in, a plain yellow taffeta with muslin ruffles at the throat and elbows and a dark green pelerine with a cape.

Her hat had gone; on putting her hands up to her fair curls she found that her hair ribbon had gone too. Her dress was torn and muddy round the hem, and one of her light boots was broken. [205]

She put her hand to her bosom and drew out a string of pearls that she had, the moment before her arrest at her country château, snatched up mechanically and concealed in her dress. The soft lustre and colour of them gave her pleasure and comfort; she handled them lovingly and laid them next her cheek.

She remembered that she had worn them on the occasion when King Louis, at the review, had stood bare-headed at the door of her sedan, her lacquey before the eyes of France.

And she was still as beautiful as she had been then–perhaps more beautiful; therefore it could

not be that they were going to murder her. Beauty like hers was a power. The men who had put her here could not have noticed her.

She looked round, hoping for a mirror, but there was none.

She put her hand to her face, felt her smooth skin, her glossy hair, her delicate neck, the curve of her lips.…

“If I were a plain woman I might be afraid,” she murmured; “but they will not touch *me*.”

Rising impatiently, she moved about the room; she began to be indignant that they had put her in such a place. She knocked on the door and called out, demanding a better apartment–food–clean sheets.

It was absurd that she should be treated thus; they had forgotten who she was, she told herself. [206]

There was no answer to her cries. She began to tremble, and presently returned to the window.

She must think.

She was condemned to death; she had heard the man wearing the tricolor sash and cocked hat say so; but at the time the words had meant little or nothing: they had only been one detail more in the tumult of horror and terror by which she had been surrounded since her arrest. She knew that people were sentenced and left months in prison or set free the next morning; besides, she was not an aristocrat, but a woman of the people. Despite her rapid rise and the brilliance of her shining, she was by birth no better than the draggled women who had shouted at her as she was dragged before the tribunal.

Yes, she was one with these people; the great aristocrats had always scorned her. M. de Choiseul had lost his place for a disdainful word of her; they had all recognised that she was, however gilded by the homage of Louis, only a common creature.

She tried to recall the years of her glory when she had ruled France, and to search in her mind for any cause of offence given to the People who were now the masters. She thought that her conscience was clear: she had never meddled with politics; she had been kind to those dependent on her; she had done her best to amuse a King who was “unamusable.” True, she had used the public treasury as her own, but she had robbed no one, for the money would only have gone to some other woman. No, she could not see that she had done more than fill her part. Certainly, [207] when she had ruled France it had not floated in blood as it was floating now; she had not pulled down God and profaned His Churches; she had not imprisoned the innocent and massacred the helpless.

With the thought that the People had no crime to charge her with she consoled herself, and she was not afraid of the actual charge on which she was condemned, for it was vague and feeble.

The truth they did not know. Having fled to London on the first outbreak of the revolution, she had returned to France–not, as her accusers believed, to fetch her jewels with which to succour the emigrants in England, but to put her wealth and her services at the disposal of those who were engaged in a plot to rescue the Queen.

Marie Antoinette had always looked over the head of Madame du Barry; while the old King lived she had afforded her, under compulsion, a frozen tolerance; when she became Queen the favourite had been banished to a convent, utterly ignored and forgotten.

Yet on an impulse of loyalty Madame du Barry had come impetuously from London to endeavour to rescue the Queen whom she had always admired, whom she admired rather more perhaps for her constant lofty attitude of contempt towards herself; her placid, rather foolish mind had never resented the disdain of an Emperor’s daughter. She was very sorry that her attempt to serve the Queen had been frustrated; she resolved, when she was free, to make [208] another endeavour, though she had already given nearly all the spoils of her years of plunder to help the refugees in England.…

The dusk began to fall; the room was shiveringly cold. No one came to her. She paced up and down the room to keep herself warm and beat her hands on her breast.

Suppose that, after all, they did mean to drag her out to the guillotine?

Many, many had gone already; many, many were yet to go–women as beautiful as herself, as innocent of offence towards the People.

At this thought her spirit shrieked aloud; she fell across the chair by the window and gazed frantically at the strip of darkening sky.

The smell of blood rose intolerably and clung to her nostrils; it reminded her that all her poor reasonings were of no avail, that this was an age of anarchy when none of the old arguments held good.

And she was in the power of creatures without pity, without justice, who stopped for nothing in their swift slaying.

But she would not accept this view; her mind rejected it. She could not and would not believe that she was meant for death.

Suddenly the jailer entered; she had meant to assail him with questions, arguments, reproaches, but when she saw him, though he had no particular appearance of brutality, she could not summon the courage to say one word. [209]

He put a plate of bread and meat and a glass of water on the table. He did not even look at her;

his air was one of absolute indifference.

She noticed his black and broken nails, his dirty neck and greasy clothes; she felt sick, and closed her eyes.

The sound of the closing door penetrated her nausea. She tried to ask for a light, but he had gone and the key was turned in the lock; she rose then and pushed away the fat, almost raw meat, the sight of which made her quiver with disgust. She tried to eat a little of the bread, but it was coarse and dry and stuck in her throat.

Some of the water she drank and the rest she used to bathe her hands and brow, drying them afterwards on her petticoat.

The light faded quickly in this confined chamber, built in as it was; and though the chimes of the Concièrgerie clock told her that it was no more than four, it was soon completely dark.

She faced the fact that they meant to leave her without a light; this did not much trouble her. She felt a dullness creeping over her spirits; she was more conscious of the cold than anything else. Chilled in every limb, she lay down on the distasteful bed and dragged the thin blankets over her. All her terrified and bewildered thoughts were soothed by the exquisite sense of physical relief that ran through her fatigued body. She sighed and dismissed everything till to-morrow; the tension of nerves and brain relaxed. She spread her thick hair between her face and the pillow and slept. [210]

She dreamt of a little episode that had taken place many years ago at Versailles. Marie Antoinette, the childish young Dauphine, had, in her tremendous pride of royal birth and purity, refused to speak to the Comtesse du Barry, who was then the most powerful person in France.

The Austrian Ambassador had besought this concession of her in vain; but at last, on the commands of her mother, the Empress Marie Therèse, she had given way, and had reluctantly promised to speak to the favourite in full court.

It was this scene that Madame du Barry saw now in her sleep.

She thought that she was standing again in the gorgeous gallery at Versailles that looked out on to the terrace; she thought that she was again powdered, perfumed, and clad in rose-coloured velvet and wearing on her breast diamonds that would have bought bread for all the starving people in France.

And across the shining floor came the young Austrian, her immature figure glittering in jewelled brocade and tense with the effort she was making.

“Madame,” she said in a stifled voice, “there are a number of people at Versailles to-day—”

Then her voice broke, her breast heaved, she flushed crimson and hurried away, bursting into tears.

Madame du Barry thought that she was following her, saying–

“Do not be distressed, Madame. I am sorry they have made you speak to me. I shall not do you any harm.” [211]

But the Princess would not turn, but hastened along the gleaming floor.

She woke with a start and a horrid leap of her heart; the room was quite dark but cut by the yellow light coming through the open door; she could see the shape of a man looking in.

“Six o’clock to-morrow, citizeness,” he said in a tired voice, and closed the door.

She tried to concentrate her mind on what he had said. What was it that was to happen at six o’clock to-morrow?

She was quite ignorant of the rules and customs of the prison. Perhaps it meant that she was to be set free in the morning, or taken to a better apartment, or put on her trial–or perhaps it was merely the hour at which he would rouse her and bring her food.

Fatigue overwhelmed her again; she fell into a heavy sleep, this time dreamless.

When she woke the darkness was faintly filled with the glimmer of dawn; she rose, stiff and giddy, and put up her hair with such pins as she could find scattered on the bed.

Mechanically she pulled her coat and gown, her fichu and ruffles into place. The exquisite habits of years of luxurious living asserted themselves without any prompting of the brain, as her beauty, that neither dissipation nor indolence could mar, asserted itself even now, when she was for perhaps the first time in her life unconscious of it. [212]

She felt very feeble, and her head was aching slightly with a dull pain in the temples. She would not go to the window because of the remembrance of the stained courtyard.

The room was very cold, yet close and foul; she wondered who had been confined here before, and whether they had been released or—

She heard doors opening and shutting down the corridor, footsteps and the jangle of keys.

Her own door opened and the jailer appeared, holding a lantern.

He made a gesture for her to pass out; she rose stiffly.

“What is this? Where am I to go? Am I to have no food? I could not eat what you brought last night.”

The man seized her arm and pushed her out into the corridor, then went on to the next door.

Madame du Barry found several people waiting who had evidently been roused as she had been; they all glanced at her curiously, and some recognised her and all noticed her beauty.

On her part she looked for the gipsy-like lady whom she had spoken with last night, but she was not there. From the others Madame du Barry shrank; she thought that their eyes were cold and disdainful.

When some seven were gathered and the last door had been relocked, the jailer conducted them downstairs and across the courtyard, the way Madame du Barry had been brought last night. [213]

She made a resolve, and kept it, of not looking down when she crossed those foul cobbles, but forced herself to look up at the strip of sky sadly coloured with the winter dawn, that–melancholy and remote as it was–yet seemed kinder and more human than either buildings or people. Then the sombre walls closed round them again. A couple of Republican Guards took charge of the prisoners and conducted them to the large, dark Gothic entrance hall–“la salle des pas perdu.”

This was lit by two lanterns and already contained several people besides the soldiers on duty.

There was a great silence. Madame du Barry wished to speak, to ask what was going to happen, but could not; she leant against one of the pillars and looked round with frightened eyes.

Every one was very quiet; a few whispered together, but in the most hushed of tones. The soldiers paced about heavily; one was eating nuts.

Most of the people were poorly dressed and white-faced, as if they had been long in prison, but some were fashionable and neat, and must have been just arrested.

One of these, a young man wearing a handsome travelling dress and his hair elaborately curled, approached Madame du Barry.

His face was vaguely familiar to her; she thought that she must have seen him at Versailles. [214]

“Why did you return to France, Madame?” he asked.

The sound of a refined man’s voice was beyond words grateful to her ears; the numb sensation left her brain. She raised her blue eyes and gave him (unconsciously) the sideway glance she had used with such effect at the court of France.

“They think it was for my jewels,” she whispered; “but I was in a plot to save the Queen.”

He looked at her very kindly, and she was pleased and flattered to a great degree, for she had believed that the aristocracy still despised her, and this man was obviously an aristocrat.

“What are they keeping us here for?” she asked. “What is going to happen?”

He made no immediate answer, and, looking intently at him, she perceived that his face was slightly distorted–or was it that her vision was distracted and gave this abnormal appearance to others?

A soldier passed them, insolently near; when he had gone the young man answered–

“They must have told you? You were tried yesterday?”

She faintly shook her fair head.

“Oh no, you could not call it a trial; they dragged me before some tribunal. A servant denounced me, Monsieur.”

“Do you not know, Madame, what this means?” [215]

A spasm of agony contracted her heart.

“No–no—” she stammered.

He very gently laid his hand on her wrist. “We are all condemned to the guillotine,” he said. “We are waiting for that now–the guillotine.”

Incomprehension and confusion showed in the blue eyes of Madame du Barry; her mouth fell open.

“They are going to kill–*me*?” she asked.

His fingers tightened on her wrist; he answered, and his voice was so low and hoarse that it seemed a whistle in his throat.

“They are watching us. Do not let them see that you care.”

“Oh, I shall be very quiet,” she answered.

He let go of her hand, and it fell like a dead thing to her side.

She was, as she had promised, very quiet, but it was only because she did not, could not, realise what this man had said. Yesterday she had clung to the idea that once she was alone in prison she would think clearly, but she had not, and now the nightmare was closing round her again.

Her weight slipped against the pillar; she felt both sick and giddy. Some one moved a chair towards her and gently pushed her into it; she looked up to see a woman holding some knitting in her left hand.

“The bad air makes you faint,” said this lady kindly and serenely.

[216]

"Was I faint?" asked Madame du Barry.

The lady and the young man exchanged glances over her bent blonde head.

"You must not be afraid," he said. "It is only death."

"And it is very quickly over," added the lady.

"Who are you?" asked Madame du Barry stupidly.

The lady mentioned a great name, the name of a friend of the Queen, the name of a woman who had quietly ignored the favourite at Versailles.

"Yes, I remember you," muttered the Countess and shrank away.

The other woman touched her shoulder. "Madame has behaved like a person of quality," she said gently. "Madame will die as such—"

At this a little blood crept into the poor prisoner's face; she caught at the kind hand on her shoulder.

"Yes, yes," she answered pitifully, "I will try to behave well."

"Are you afraid?" asked the young man.

She looked up at him and thought that his face was beyond doubt horribly distorted now, like a wet clay mask pulled awry by clumsy fingers.

"I am very much afraid–I can't believe it—" Her voice trailed off; she turned her eyes to the woman the other side of her. In that white, calm face was that same dragged look of distortion. Madame du Barry did not know that her own features were now almost unrecognisable through the contraction of terror and anticipation of death. [217]

"Why do you not do something?" she glanced round the assembled prisoners. "All these people cannot be going to–die?"

The lady put her knitting in the pocket of her black silk apron; she had seen the guards unbarring the doors.

"Whatever we are or have been," she answered, "none of us, so far, have failed in this moment."

Madame du Barry sprang up.

"But I cannot–do–it—" she stammered. "I–cannot–I am not an aristocrat–I–I–have nothing to die for–I am only a woman of the people—"

There was no response in the faces of her two companions; they were watching the opening of the doors at the top of the few shallow steps. Madame du Barry watched too; her senses seemed suspended or dulled; her mouth hung open in a childish circle and her eyes showed the white round the pupils.

The doors were flung wide and fastened back; four soldiers entered and took up their places inside the entrance. A shaft of chill white light fell across the lantern-lit gloom, and a rush of bitter air dispersed the close odours of the hall.

Madame du Barry found the name–"salle des pas perdu" running in her head; for the first time in her life she noticed the meaning.… Of course, "The hall of lost footsteps." Of course that was why it was given to entrance places: people came and went, but no one stayed–lost footsteps … lost footsteps.… [218]

She could see a cart outside, a humble, dirty cart with straw in the bottom. A jailer began to call out numbers; the prisoners moved towards the door. She found herself being drawn along by the young man who had spoken to her, found herself mounting the few steps and outside in the raw, cold morning.

She had an appalling sensation of being hurried along too fast for comprehension. If they would only give her time to think! She could not realise anything.

There were very few people before the prison; the one or two there took no notice. A man delivering bread looked over his shoulder, then away again, indifferently.

Some passers-by on the quay stopped to watch.… Madame du Barry wondered what was the matter with these people, with the river, with the houses beyond, with the sky–all seemed unreal, distorted. This was not the world that she knew … she was among grotesque strangers. Following the others meekly, she ascended the cart; there were about twelve people in it, and they had to stand. When the horse started the jerk almost threw her on her knees; the man next her helped her up.

"Where are we going?" she asked. "Where are we going?"

"To Heaven, I hope," was the flippant answer. [219]

A man the other side of her spoke. "One cannot be sure of one's company even in the tumbrils," he remarked, glancing at her. "But poor Duquesne had to go with Philippe Égalité, which was worse," he added.

Madame du Barry looked wildly round for the young aristocrat who had befriended her; he was standing towards the front of the cart, looking with a melancholy air at the river. She could not attract his attention. The lady with the knitting had not come.

They soon left the quay for the more crowded thoroughfares. People began to line the roads, to fill the windows. There was an unusual crowd to-day to watch the passing of the King's favourite.

The wretched object of this attention began to be aware of it, began to understand that the abuse and execrations that were flung after them were chiefly directed against her, began to grasp the meaning of the finger-pointing, the shouting.

She *was* going to her death, and these people were hounding her to it with delight and ferocity.

A convulsion shook her and a light foam frothed on her lips while her eyes turned in her head; she gave a shriek so sharp and ghastly that the men beside her covered their ears; she would have fallen had not the wooden rails of the cart held her up.

This new spectacle of abandoned terror brought the mob rushing after the cart with fresh imprecations of hate and contempt towards the woman who had spent the revenues of France in wanton luxury while such as themselves sweated and starved.

But she was ignorant of her offence towards them; and now the conviction of the truth was borne blazingly into her brain, filled only with one desire–to save her life. [220]

She stretched her hands out over the back of the cart.

"I am no aristocrat!" she cried. "I am a woman of the people! Save me; do not let them take me! I do not want to die!"

Such taunts of vile and horrible abuse answered her that she drew back with her fingers to her lips.

"No, no!" she shrieked. "I never wronged any one of you!"

The surging crowd now almost blocked the progress of the cart; the soldiers who were conducting it had to make a way with their bayonets.

Stones and garbage were hurled at her; dirt splashed on her dress; the jerking of the cart shook her hair down; she continually lost her balance and fell against the wooden side.

"Madame, for God's sake—" said the man next her. "You demean us all."

She put her hands over her face; these others might well be brave, she thought; they were dying for all they believed in, for the sake of what they were, but she had nothing to die for. All she had, all she had ever had, was her beauty, and death would take that from her–and what was left?

Death presented itself to her as an intolerable blackness; she could not, she would not face it. She would resist. They could not be such fiends as to *drag* her to her death. [221]

She clenched her hands. She heard the words they were throwing at her; a sense of rage nerved her against them. She hated them, especially the women. She lifted her head, and her blue eyes had a hot brilliance like madness.

"I am not a wicked woman!" she cried out fiercely, looking over the sea of haggard, angry faces. "What I did any of you women here would have done had it been offered to you as it was offered to me!"

Such of the women who could hear these words replied by a rush of fury that nearly upset the cart, and tried to pull the speaker down among them; the soldiers drove them back, and one man struck Madame du Barry with the flat of his sword and violently bade her be silent.

She crouched down, hiding her eyes and her ears. A little cold rain began to fall; she felt it on her head and shivered.

The cart stopped. She dropped her stiff fingers and looked up; she was face to face with the final horror.

A platform surrounded with soldiers in the midst of an open place crowded with people; at one side a palace and trees–the great square once named after her lover, Louis XV.

From the centre of the platform rose the hideous machine itself, the guillotine, with two tall upright posts dyed red, the plank, the basket, the cloth, a man in a dark coat holding a cord, all outlined against a grey tumultuous sky and the leafless, dry trees of November. [222]

The prisoners began to descend from the cart, began to ascend the steps to the guillotine amid the murmurs and yells of the haggard feverish crowd.

Madame du Barry stood at the foot of the scaffold. One by one her companions passed her. The young man in the handsome great coat murmured "courage" as he stepped up and looked at her with pitying eyes.

Her heart was beating very fast; she did not know what she was thinking or doing, only that all her worst anticipations had not equalled this horror—

There were only three left besides herself. The man in charge of the cart seized hold of her long locks and quickly and roughly cut them off.

"Your turn, my little piece of royalty," he said.

She looked at him blankly; he snatched her small, feeble hands and tied them behind her before she had guessed his intention.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh!"

She was quite bewildered. The world seemed to have stopped. She saw her blonde curls lying at her feet and moved her head stiffly to and fro to see if the ringlets were not still there.

They pushed her forward and told her to mount.

"Up there?" she asked vacantly, and stared at the scaffold.

"Yes, up there," was the answer. She hesitated, looked about her as if she did not understand. The man, becoming impatient, pushed her again, roughly, and she, impeded by her bound arms, could not save herself, but fell in the slime and mud at the foot of the steps. [223]

They dragged her to her feet and up the steps, one either side of her, hurting her arms.

The roar of the crowd that greeted her was prolonged and horrible; she looked round at them; no one who had seen her, even yesterday, would have recognised her then.

Samson approached and caught hold of her fichu.

"May I not keep that?" she asked. He did not even trouble to refuse, but snatched away the muslin, leaving her throat and bosom bare. She struggled to release her arms, turned and saw the plank, the posts, the basket full of heads. Shriek after shriek left her lips. Such desperate strength possessed her that she almost broke from the two men holding her.

"Have mercy on me–I never hurt anything–I was not properly tried–I am not an aristocrat! Why did he denounce me? I was always good to him! Oh, my *God*, my *God*, save me from this!"

For an awful moment the two men and the woman struggled together, she being drawn nearer, nearer the plank. The pearls, last remnant of her guilty greatness, fell from her poor torn bodice on to the dirty boards. Samson stooped to pick them up, and the other man, using brutal force, hurled Madame du Barry to her knees.

"Do not hurt me!" she screamed. They seized her again and pitched her forward on to the plank. She strove unavailingly. [224]

Samson pulled the cord. She saw and smelt blood and slime; she felt herself being swung forward. She shrieked once–twice–and the knife descended, sending her common blood gushing over the other noble blood that stained the oak and iron.

THE ARISTOCRAT [225]

> "Oh, it would be better to be a poor fisherman than to meddle with the governing of men."–*Danton in Prison.*

On a morning in May, 1794, misty bright with the pure soft glow of a spring sun, a man sat under a hedge on the high-road to Paris, near Clamars, a village close to Bourg-la-Reine.

He was in ragged clothes, unshaven, gaunt and pallid; his hair hung damp and dusty round his forehead and neck; his face, which was of aquiline type, had a closed look of physical suffering silently endured; his feet were blistered and bleeding, his dirty stockings had fallen down to his ankles though he had endeavoured to fasten them with wisps of grass; he had neither shoes nor waistcoat; he was thin with the dry horrible thinness of starvation. His eyes, large and deep-set, were flecked with red, and his cracked lips stiffly parted over the white glisten of his teeth.

This man was Marie Jean Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, peer of France, famous mathematician, philosopher, man of letters, politician and Girondist, the friend of Liberty, the dreamer of the dream of a respectable Republic and the People ruling gloriously over France, the denouncer of Robespierre and all the excesses of the Revolution, a man famous for his learned book "Esquise sur l'Esprit Humaine" and suchlike, and for the Roman-like tend of his speeches in *the Senate*.

Neither birth nor learning nor high-minded endeavour, nor patriotism, nor flinging aside ancient prejudices of birth and joining hands with the people in what he had hoped was an enlightened age, had saved him from this: the ignominy of flight, of hiding, the ignominy of sheer starvation. On the fall of his party and the arrest of his colleagues he had fled, and for two months had been sheltered by friends; but he was too great a man to be forgotten; as the principles he had advocated fell most hopelessly to ruin, as the section he had been associated with became more and more an object of public contempt and hatred, as the bloody tyranny of the Robespierre tribunals grew fiercer and more unrestrained, so did the net begin to close more tightly round the Marquis de Condorcet. [226]

His presence in his friend's house began to endanger that friend; he was entreated to stay, at whatever cost, but nevertheless rose early one morning and left the house and left Paris; he had come to the humiliation of flight and concealment, not yet to the humiliation of dragging others with him in his piteous downfall.

For two weeks he had lurked round Paris, hiding in thickets and quarries, living on the food he had with him in his pocket and a few crusts begged from a farmhouse and a few scraps purchased by a day's labour in turning the ground.

These two weeks had served to bring him to the last stage of extremity; the aristocrat, the philosopher, had only two desires–a little food and a little sleep. [227]

Goaded by this intolerable need of food he had left the disused quarry where he had lain hidden for the last two days and stumbled on to the high-road where he sat now, blinking at the sun.

Yesterday he had found an unsuspected treasure, in the shape of two silver pieces, in the inner pocket of his coat, and he resolved to reach the nearest inn and lay this out in food.

What he should do afterwards he was too sick to think; everything had narrowed to that desire for food and rest–the rest that could only come of hunger satisfied; for at present the pangs of starvation would not let him sleep or, for one instant, forget his outraged body.

Yet prudence still whispered in his ear that he meditated a foolish thing; they were looking for him–even the half-witted peasants on the farm where he had worked had suspected him–and at an inn where some one of better intelligence might any moment enter, surely he was not safe.

Then he considered his appearance; certainly the Marquis de Condorcet was well disguised now; his clothes had been at best poor, for he had passed as a servant in his friend's house, and now there was not one sign or mark of anything save the most abject poverty and want about his person; he thought he could defy recognition.

He watched the sun mounting above the hawthorn trees that were clouded with white blossoms, and there seemed to be two orbs of gold fire changing and mingling and slipping giddily about the heavens. [228]

He staggered to his feet and walked stiffly and slowly down the long dusty road, each step an agony, for his feet were chafed raw in his rough hard boots.

He passed a poor cottage standing in an untidy garden; it was the beginning of the village of Clamars.

The winding street led to the inn; though it was still so early the place was open; a boy was whistling while he rubbed down a horse, his plump aspect had something grotesque in it to the famished man.

A woman came out of the inn and threw a pail of dirty water across the street; the Marquis stupidly noticed the long dark trails of wet across the dust that were trickling slowly to his feet. The boy looked up and saw him as he stood hesitating.

"Good morning, citizen."

"Good morning, citizen," answered the Marquis in a voice feeble from weakness and long silence. "Can I get some food here?"

"If you can pay for it, citizen."

"Yes, I can pay."

The boy straightened himself and looked at the wild and miserable figure advancing towards him.

"Who are you, citizen?" he asked, and the Marquis saw suspicion creep into his common dull face. [229]

"I am a servant looking for a place; my last was in Paris–I have walked a long way–I mean to get to Bourg-la-Reine to-night."

"Well, it is not far," answered the peasant with an instant insolence of the poor towards the ragged.

"I must have breakfast first," said the Marquis, putting a great restraint on himself to speak gently and humbly; it was natural to him to be brief and cold with his inferiors.

The youth jerked his head towards the open door.

The Marquis entered the low dark passage and stepped into the common parlour in the front, which was roughly furnished but filled with beauty by the chestnut tree that pressed its load of young clear green leaves against the panes of the small low window.

The Marquis sank on to a chair by this window, with his back to the light and rested his elbows on the stained table in front of him.

The woman whom he had seen with the pail entered, wiping her hands on her rough blue apron; she did not appear to notice his desperate appearance; the light was not good and probably she was used enough to wild and haggard figures stopping here for a moment's respite on some bitter journey.

He asked her briefly for food; she nodded and looked at him, not unkindly. Few indeed could have looked at him unmoved, so obviously had everything left him save mere fainting humanity that cried for succour. [230]

"You are hungry?" she said.

He answered her with an effort; repeated his story of a servant out of place.

"What became of your master?" she asked.

"Dead," he replied, hardly knowing what he said. "The guillotine—"

"Ah, the guillotine–he was, then, an aristocrat?" She put bread, cheese and a bottle of wine on the table, having taken them from a cupboard in the wall.

"Do aristocrats only go to the guillotine?" he replied, while his hand went out to the bread. "No,

there are no longer any aristocrats, and now we execute the good republicans, citizeness."

"Yes," she answered; "but you spoke as if you had lived with aristocrats, citizen."

The Marquis shuddered: so she had noticed it, this stupid woman; his speech stamped him, he could not disguise that.

"I was in a good place," he said.

She left him, and he began eating and drinking, not thinking for the moment of anything but that, the gratification of his necessity.

He ate all the bread and cheese she had brought him before he dare touch the wine; when he did drink it, poor and thin as it was, it restored his blood to nearer its normal beat and heat; his brain began to work more clearly and sanely, his strong intelligence reasserted its sway; he began to form plans, to make resolves.

The woman came in and brought him meat and more bread; he asked her if he could rest there till noon, and she answered that he could stay in the room till then, he would not trouble her, and she was not likely to have more customers before the evening. [231]

Again he was alone; the peace of the dark parlour, the delicious green of the softly-waving leaves outside, the silence and a certain homely perfume from the herbs hanging in bunches from the dark raftered ceiling affected him like a spell.

It was probably foolish to remain here; it would probably be wise to take advantage of his luck and slip away while the inn was quiet, but he could not. The pain of hunger ceased, his great fatigue asserted itself; if they had been galloping red-hot from Paris after him with certain news that he was at this very spot, he must still have done as he did; drop on to the worn chintz settle and sleep.

The gratification of his utter bodily weariness was more exquisite than the gratification of his hunger had been; the humble couch was like down pillows after stones and hedges, and the pursued and hunted man abandoned himself without resistance to the helplessness of sleep.

When he awoke it was about three hours later; he was racked with pain and still exhausted, but he made a violent effort to rouse himself; his mind was quite clear; he knew what he was risking and he would risk it no longer; he forced back the desire to again fall into a stupor of sleep and sat up on the couch.

There was a great noise outside; some one was arriving with loud and angry commands, jingle of harness, clatter of horses' hoofs. [232]

The Marquis guessed that this noise was what had roused him; he rose softly, went to the window and peeped through the screen of leaves.

A well-dressed man was dismounting and another was ordering about the stable-boy with an air of great importance.

The Marquis dropped into his former seat with his back to the light–had he stayed too long?–was there some possible way of immediate escape?

Only by the common passage through which he had come; and it was too late for that, for he could hear the two men already there calling for wine.

Who were they? Was he caught? Could he play his part through and cheat the accursed of their prey?

He asked himself these questions in swift succession, and every nerve in his being braced itself to avoid the final misery of facing the humiliation of falling into his enemies' hands after undergoing every other humiliation of flight, concealment and degradation. He could not have put into words the hatred he felt towards the tyrants with whom for a while he had in his blindness joined, forsaking his own order, believing in his folly that he was leaguing with the right, that he was to be one of the prophets of a new era of liberty and light and hope.

Believing, too, that he and they could forget his gentle blood, that they could forgive it and he ignore it; but it had been the strongest of all strong things; now, when everything else was stripped away it remained: his birth, his blood, his traditions, and the great hate between him and the plebeian that had been for a while cloaked and disguised, now sprang actively to life. [233]

He could not repent too bitterly of his mistaken ideals of patriotism and the general good, his unfortunate ambitions of governing his country, of doing some service to his kind that had led him to this pass of despair, that had made him another figure of tragedy to blend in the bloody carnival being daily enacted; and in this moment of anguish he would rather have died as others of his class had died–at once hating the people and by them hated, tyrants perhaps and men who had done nothing with their lives, but to be envied by men like Marie Jean Caritat who had forsaken his order only to come to this.

The two new-comers entered the room; which was now so light by reason of the level rays of the sun piercing the chestnut leaves that but little part of it was in shadow, and the Marquis, even with his back to the light was clear enough in every detail, as he well felt.

He sat upright, with nothing of the pose of the character he was assuming in his bearing, and looked at the new-comers.

He could see at once that they were of a type particularly hateful to him: the small official of no birth or culture whom chance had thrown to the surface in the turmoil of the revolution, and [234]

whom chance might, and probably would, throw to-morrow to the guillotine; but while their power lasted they used it brutally, these men, and enjoyed to deal fiercely with those of the old *régime*.

One wore the tricolour sash round his rusty black cloth coat, and the tricolour in his cockade; he was perhaps president of the Committee of Public Safety in Bourg-la-Reine, or perhaps the Public Prosecutor; it was obvious that he considered himself a great man; in his native town he was probably bowed down to, being no doubt for the moment a potent instrument for death and terror. His companion seemed a kind of secretary or attendant, subservient and truckling to the more important man; both of them had the loose ungraceful air of low breed in a position of authority.

On their entry both glanced instantly at the Marquis; it was no more than a glance from either of them; he drew a broken breath of relief to think that they passed his appearance.

The woman came hurrying in to wait on them; they ordered wine lavishly and began talking noisily together about local politics.

The Marquis foresaw no difficulty in making an easy escape, but he waited, considering what to do.

[235] He dare not go back to Paris, he dare not go on to Bourg-la-Reine; there was nothing but to creep back to the disused quarries and hide there till perhaps the Robespierre tyranny fell; he had hoped at first to find means to fly to England, but without money that had proved impossible.

Still, the idea returned to him now; it would be better to risk all on that than to return to the quarries; he resolved to push on to the coast; there were several people on the way who would help him could he but reach them; the food and rest had put new daring into him; under the very eyes of two of the men who would deliver him to instant and horrible death if they knew him did he plan calmly his future means of escape.

It occurred to him that this might be the last chance of food for some while and he was again hungry.

When the woman re-entered, attending to the wants of the citizens of Bourg-la-Reine, he beckoned to her and asked her in a low tone to prepare him an omelette before he set out on his journey.

Then, fearful that she might deny him, under the impression that he could not pay, he took one of his silver pieces out of his pocket and laid it on the table.

The woman looked at the money and at him.

“You can stay the night, if you wish, for that,” she said.

“No, citizeness,” he answered. “I must get on.”

“Lodging is dearer in Bourg-la-Reine,” she said. “And what is your need to hasten?”

[236] “I was told of a possible place,” he said.

“Likely they will take you!” she glanced at him pityingly.

Looking beyond her he saw that the two men had stopped their conversation and were watching him. The woman moved away and one of the men (he of the tricolour) stopped her.

“The citizen over there is not very prosperous looking,” he remarked. “Who is he?”

“A servant looking for a place, citizen.”

“He speaks,” was the answer, “like an aristocrat.”

“He has lived with them, I believe, citizen.”

“Has he?” The important man glanced at his companion, who struck his knee softly and cried–

“‘Suspect!’–on the face of it! What did he order–an omelette?”

The other stroked his rough chin and spoke to the woman.

“Ask the citizen-servant how many eggs go to his omelette!”

She stared. “*I* know, citizen.”

“Certainly, citizeness, but does he? Ask him.”

Condorcet had not heard this conversation which was spoken very low and in the patois of the neighbourhood; he feared, however, that it might be about him, and was therefore relieved to hear the simple question the woman put to him when she returned to his little table by the window.

“How many eggs will you have to your omelette, citizen?”

“A dozen,” answered the Marquis.

[237] He saw instantly by the expression of the woman’s face that he had said the wrong thing.

“A dozen eggs!” she echoed.

“Is not that the right number, citizeness?”

She retreated from him and went to the other two men with amazement and suspicion in her face.

"He said–a dozen eggs," she repeated.

The official smiled.

"He is clearly of the people, this citizen, since he has been able to be so lavish with his omelettes!"

He rose and crossed over to where the Marquis sat.

"So you want a dozen eggs for your breakfast, eh?" he said.

Condorcet looked at him and hated him; he was furious with himself for the slip that had brought this attention on himself, but he answered calmly.

"I have seen omelettes made with as many, I thought, citizen."

The other eyed him closely.

"You are a servant looking for a place?"

"Yes, citizen."

His questioner stood over him in the attitude, of a judge and thrust his thumbs into his tricolour sash; he was noticing the make and look of this haggard, ragged figure, the shape of his hands, the pose of the head, the steady gaze of the eyes unknown in one born in servitude.

"Where have you come from?"

"Paris."

"You are very tattered, citizen, to have come such a short way." [238]

Condorcet moved his arms on the table, and put up the right hand to rest his chin in; this attitude, so unconscious, so easy, so coolly reflective and authoritative betrayed him utterly; the fact that he had not risen when spoken to had in itself been almost sufficient to confirm the official's suspicion.

"I have been out of a place," said the Marquis, "some time. I have hopes of another at Bourg-la-Reine."

The other laughed.

"You are a 'suspect,'" he said. "And you lie very badly."

Condorcet's eyes flashed hell-fire for an instant: thereby he further betrayed himself. "Who do you think I am?" he asked.

"An aristocrat."

"You flatter me, citizen." Condorcet's face was dark and violent; he could not keep his tone humble; he could not forget that this man might have been his servant a few years ago–a creature who would never have presumed to address him; all the lessons of the Revolution had not killed his heritage of aristocratic pride.

"Stand up," said the man from Bourg-la-Reine.

The Marquis kept his seat.

"I stand up when I rise to leave the inn, citizen," he answered.

The other man was standing watchfully by the door; the woman had summoned others; they might be seen in the passage, a rough hovering group.

Condorcet knew that he was trapped; his nostrils dilated and his thin lips compressed; he eyed his enemy steadily. [239]

"Now I will go on my way," he said, and rose–a gaunt, ragged figure against the background of sunny chestnut leaves tapping at the thick glass window-panes. He came round the table and he walked easily despite his bleeding feet and the rough boots that galled them. The heavy person of the official barred his way.

"Will you not wait for your dozen eggs?" he sneered and put out a thick hand to seize the Marquis' shoulder, but Condorcet moved swiftly aside.

"Your insolence—" he breathed. "You have no right to detain me."

The people round the door began laughing; Condorcet gave them a bitter look, and in that instant when his eyes were directed his opponent seized him and thrust him backwards against the wall, while he plunged a hand into his torn pocket.

Condorcet shuddered and the blood surged up into his hollow face while the official pulled out a small old book with a discoloured calf cover.

"A foreign language!" he cried, fluttering over the leaves. "I smell treason!"

"Is it treason to read Horace?" asked the Marquis fiercely.

"Do you–a servant–*read* this?" was the triumphant counter question. "Eh, do you *read* this, then?"

The people at the door began to crowd into the room; the Marquis took a step forward; there was no possible supposing that he would escape the malice and fury fronting him; he did not for an instant hope it; instinctively, his right hand went round to his left hip where his sword should have been. [240]

The unmistakable gesture was instantly noticed and excited murmurs went up from the gathered peasants.

"By God, you are an aristocrat!" cried the man from Bourg-la-Reine, seizing him roughly.

"By God I am!" answered Condorcet, and struck him across the face....

They fell on him with quick and hideous noises; he felt himself seized, struck, shaken, pushed, dragged, insulted; he kept his head high and was silent.

They found a rope and tied his arms behind him, and with the ends of this rope struck him across the shoulders. The important official, nursing a smarting face, was incoherent in the coarse violence of his abuse.

The woman trembled at the edge of the group, stupidly afraid.

"Who is he?" she asked again and again.

They took the question up.

"Who are you? *Scélérat!*"

"One who has served the Republic," he replied, white with the pain of his close-bound arms.

They pushed him into the centre of the room while they paused to consider what they should do with their prize, and as he stood there, swaying a little, but upright, the light was full on his face, which had once been so famous in Paris. [241]

The stern outlines, the dark colouring, the fiery expression were the same; unwashed, unshaven, starved as he was, the little timid man, who had lived in Paris, recognised him.

"Deauville! Deauville!" he shrieked to his master, dancing in his excitement, "it is Condorcet! Condorcet!"

The Marquis made no denial; his silence was confirmation and he meant it to be; he knew that he was face to face with the end and he was for no further subterfuge; he had tasted already of the depths of humiliation, he was enduring the extreme of bitterness; there was nothing further to lose or gain in this world for Marie Jean Nicolas de Caritat.

Presently, while some were arguing about his identity, he said in his rough broken voice, with the clear accent that they hated–

"I am Condorcet. Make an end of it."

They had no more doubts; his face and his voice had betrayed him more completely even than his twelve eggs and his Latin Horace; they were elated at the capture of a man so long unsuccessfully searched for; they drank together, congratulating each other.

Only the woman serving them noticed the prisoner–noticed the cords cutting his wrists, the drop of pain on his brow, the effort he was making to keep upright on his feet.

In a dim, vague way she was aware of the mental torture he was enduring, compared to which the torture of cord and bleeding feet was slight; she felt that this was a proud man enduring the extremity of humiliation and that no more awful bitterness could be imagined in this world. [242]

"He suffers," she said under her breath, "he suffers."

Presently they started; four men and the two from Bourg-la-Reine, towards which town's prison they turned.

Condorcet was in the middle; the four with the prisoner went on foot, the others on horseback.

Strange thoughts came to the Marquis de Condorcet as he walked bound between his four rude guards, as he walked painfully, dragging his fatigued body on bleeding feet along the hot dusty high-road that led to his prison.

Thoughts strange because they were so incongruous to his present situation, and because it was curious that in his misery he should be filled with all the old burning pangs of ambition and desire for power and glory.

And yet he could not even die gloriously; no man could have a more ignominious end than he would have, he knew that. He cursed the body that had failed him, that had broken like any peasant's body, that was dragging him down–demeaning him, bringing all his philosophy to mockery. His mind flew back over the salient points of his life; yet there was no need for him to consider his past years: one word covered them all–that word was failure.

Failure–had any failure ever been more bitter, more complete? [243]

For he had conceived loftily and dared greatly, and his fall was terrible and his end abject.

Intolerable became the heat of the sun, intolerable the dust on his dry lips, on his hot lids; intolerable the chafing of his feet, caked with blood and dirt; intolerable the deep pain of his elbows and the cutting of the rope round his wrists; intolerable the agony of fatigue in his weak body, already worn to the last endurance....

He concentrated all his mental powers on self-control; the man whose mind had flown out into the widest realms of thought now brought that same mind to bear on the terrible effort of holding himself upright, so that he might not, before those whom he despised, fall face downwards in the dust.

He dare not think how far it was to Bourg-la-Reine; he looked ahead of him and could see

nothing–no house, no sign of a town; only the dusty hedges, the dusty road....

"Let me keep upright," he muttered to himself, "let me keep upright—"

The sky seemed to be burning–blue it was, but not gentle–he had never understood before that the sky can be both blue and flaming, as bitter and fierce as scarlet.

The grass, too, and the trees, they were not soothing nor peaceful but harsh and glaring.

"How long can I keep upright? How long can I walk?"

He tried to snatch at old mathematical problems, to soothe and calm and distract himself with that; he saw the figures range themselves before him–but they were of fire, gigantic and flaming. [244]

He thought that the trees had caught fire from the unsupportable sky, that the hedgerows were singeing and smoking, that the road was rising up before him in a column of white fire; that all this fiery world was advancing on him; everything was scarlet, and there was a sound in his ears like the beating of many drums.

"He will fall," said the official on horseback, fanning himself with his hat.

Condorcet heard the words, he saw them written before him in the same acrid scarlet that was colouring the world. He tried to protest, to draw himself erect, for he had heard them laughing; but he felt his strength breaking like brittle dry straws; he fell head first as they had meant him to fall, as he had dreaded to fall, and his mouth filled with dust.

When they saw that he was indeed unconscious and that no blows nor kicks could induce him to rise, they lifted him up and dragged him between them to Bourg-la-Reine. As they entered the town he recovered consciousness enough to know that his martyrdom was complete and that he was the object of all the town idlers' ridicule as he was drawn along, ragged, bloody, with a distorted face, between two of his peasant guards.

They brought him to the prison, an old building in bad repair; his head hung down on his breast, shaking from side to side. The soldiers and jailers greeted him and his escort with amusement. [245]

"What have we here?"

"A philosopher citizen–an aristocrat citizen. In here, citizen, and consider this same philosophy of yours!"

They thrust him into a cell several feet below the ground; the foul damp of it hung close round walls and roof.

"The citizen is a little weak in the legs–he will have a little business to transact in Paris; supper and a bed for the citizen."

"Who is he?"

"Condorcet, citizen."

"Ah, at last–manifestly for the guillotine–without a trial."

"Without a trial, surely, citizen."

The heavy door closed on him; the key turned; they went away and drank, and in their drink forgot him.

For a while he lay face downwards on the cold mud floor; the rope had been loosened from his hands; presently he shook them free and sat up.

The cell was half underground and almost entirely dark; the high-placed window was heavily barred across and evidently looked out on some close courtyard, for the light that came from it was pale and uncertain.

Condorcet rose, shuddering strongly; the damp of the place was bitter and insistent, after the heat without the chill was horrible.

He staggered against the door and flung his weight against it.

"You! You!" he whispered. "You think you have me?–No, for I have one friend left." [246]

He slipped down by the door and lay there, thinking.

Often had he wondered quite how the end might come, and speculated how he would meet it; in these days a man would naturally consider a violent death as possible, especially if he meddled with affairs of government; but he had never considered that he would first be so cruelly broken and humbled.

He regretted that he had fled when Robespierre proscribed him; far better to have died then than like this.... But he closed his mind to the past, over which he wrote that one word–failure.

The hard bright philosophy of Voltaire, scorning mystery, cynical of any future state, was of little comfort now; his own book on the human spirit seemed very shallow in the recollection; these things were for life, not for death. Nothing helped now but courage. Just that one quality that would bring him safely into the unknown, the harbour to which he was now so swiftly bound.

He felt very weak and ill; he shivered continually, yet his blood was burning with fever; he dragged himself into a sitting posture, put his hand inside his miserable shirt and took from a cord round his heart–his one friend. A little package containing a phial–poison, bought in a cold dawn at a little druggist's in Paris on that day when he had left the city for ever.

“I have suffered enough,” he said. “Enough.” [247]

But he put the package back, for he thought that they meant to bring him food and a bed, and he would rather die on a bed, and he would rather ease the horrible burning of his cracked throat by a draught of water however stale and vile, before he composed himself to death.

But the time crept on and no one came; there was not a sound without; it was obvious that they had forgotten him; the little light began to fade into Condorcet’s endless night.

He rose to his full thin height and a huge disdain enveloped him; a quiet silence fell on his soul; he knew that he would never speak again; there was nothing left now that he could put into words.

He went to the wall under the window where the damp oozed in a thin trickle and put his lips to it, moistening them.

A little longer he waited, but no one came; his disdain grew; his disdain of all things as they were, as they must be, as they would always be; disdain of the world that had seized him, crushed him, reduced him with all that was fine and noble and far-reaching and splendid in him, to this ugly sordid end.

He stooped and pulled up his stockings, fastening them as neatly as he could under the straps of his breeches; then he moved back and tried to see a star through the window; but darkness of masonry blocked his view; there was no sky visible.

He opened the phial and drank. [248]

“Some one bungled when the world was made,” he thought.

He lay down along the floor and closed his eyes; and presently he spread his arms out in the form of a cross. And presently it grew completely dark in the cell.

In the morning they remembered him and came to take him to Paris.

A terrible figure with a sealed face was lying on the damp prison floor, and the people were spoiled of some sport.

THE BETROTHED OF PEDRO EL JUSTICAR [249]

JEHANNE PLANTAGENET

“Joan, contracted to Pedro the Cruel, but died.”–*History of England.*

“Haro! Mettes moi une emplastre
Sus le coer, car, quant m’en souvient,
Cette souspirer me couvient
Tant sui plains de melancolie–
Elle mouret jone et jolie,
Environ de vingt et deux ans.”

Jean Froissart.

I, Abbess of the Nunnery of St. Bertha, which lieth quietly among the Surrey holmes, am much given to this art of writing, new to women. Sith in my time I have written of dogs, hawks and forestry and tricked out the same with broad and good emblazons of colour, to the glory of God and England.

Now, on fair new parchments scented with the herbs which grow in the convent garden I will write of Jehanne Plantagenet, who was the daughter of our late Lord, Edward, King of England and France.

This King had eight sons and four daughters–Isabeau, Duchess of Bedford; Mary, Duchess of Bretagne; Margaret, Countess of Pembroke, and Jehanne, who died unmarried and whom I loved exceedingly.

She was even more goodly to look upon than her sisters and of a great debonnair gentleness in her manners, tall with eyen gray as glass and hair of a rippling gold. [250]

She was very learned in her devotions and charitable to the poor, having learnt these virtues from her mother, Philippa.

And she was able with her loom to form noble pictures of hunts and jousts and saints in fair colours of blue and red and green, with flowers on the grass and birds in the trees so that they were the wonder of all who beheld them; and her brother, the Prince Johan, had a saddle-cloth she had woven with his armories, Richmond, Lancastre, Aquitaine and Lincoln, mingled with the Leopards of England, which was the marvel of the Spanish Knights when he went with Edward of Wales and Counciell into Spain to fight the Free Companies under the Sire Du Guesclin for the sake of Don Pedro, called Justicar by his people.

It is about this time I would write; this Don Pedro was cast from his throne by Don Enrique of Trastamare, his half-brother, who was aided by the French Free Companies that were lured out of France, where they did much mischief, by the King of that country, Charles, to plunder and despoil Spain.

Now, Pedro and his two daughters, Constantia and Isabeau, fled to Bordeaux, where our Princes were, and besought their protection, which was given right gladly.

And the English made march through Spain with thirty thousand men, and there was a cruel skirmish at Nafara in the spring season, 1367, and it ended in the discomfiture of Enrique and the French, and a right evil day for them, for the English went a-chasing of them and slew them to a goodly number and set on the throne again Sir Pedro of Burgundy. [251]

This was a well foughten battle, and one that gave great renown to our valiant English Knights, who did acquit themselves with much hardiness and caused the Knights of Spain to recule before them in such wise that there was no getting them to another battle.

And this was the conquest of Spayne; now I will tell you of London and of Jehanne Plantagenet whose dame I was.

When came the news of the victory she was very joyous, and took me out with her on to the ramparts beyond the Chepe and the Church of the blessed Saint Paul, where the hawthorn and the eglantine that hath such a sharp sweet smell was burgeoning.

And with her were other maidens who had Knights at the wars, either in Spayne or Almaine or with King Wencelaus, and she questioned them of their lovers and spoke of Sir Johan Chandos in pleasant seeming, and of Sir Bertram Du Guesclin, who was made prisoner, and she spoke of her brother's banners and how all had fallen back before them, and she gave their cry, "St. George, Gayonne!" in a laughing voice, across the fields.

Presently she made wreaths of daisies and cast them down a swift-running stream and watched them go, joyously; and still she spoke of the English and how they had held their Easter in the city of Burgos. [252]

So I had great marvel to find her the day after, pensive in the window, with a sad air, and I asked her ailment, but with no manner of success; she put me by courteously and kept her counsel.

And I who held her in such worship could in no wise pleasure her, even by speaking of the adventures in Spayne and her dear brothers, Edward, Lyon, Edmund and Johan, for she saddened from day to day, and in the night made lamentable sorrows which she would give no reason for, and so from the blithest damosel of the court she was like to become the saddest.

And it fortuned that I discovered the cause, for I heard that our lord the King was to conclude a marriage between this princess and King Don Pedro of Castile, so to make sure the pact between them; certainly I believed this was why she was so downcast, for she would not leave England; yet I had marvel at it, for he of Spayne was a gentle knight and well renouned then, though afterwards dishonoured.

Then the King bid her to him, and in the name of love and lineage commanded her to this match, and she durst not deny him, but afterwards she came to me and drew me into a window above the river and spoke to me.

"Dame," she said, "I am to wed the King of Spayne."

And she took her face in her two hands right mournfully. [253]

Then I advised me well and answered–

"He is a very mighty King and companion at war to your two noble brothers."

"Dame," she said, "I shall not go to Spayne." And with great gentleness she sighed.

Now, it was Sunday evening and a great press of clouds about the sun, all red and violet, and in the water also these colours and the bridge white in the glowing brightness, and I looked out on these things as I answered–

"Ye must do your devoir to your father." And Jehanne Plantagenet made reply–

"Yea, I will do my devoir, please God, but I shall not go to Spayne."

And she lifted her head to aview the sunset, and we heard the sowning of the trumpets as the companies of the King's archers came into the yard.

Then she took my hands and said–

"Dame Alys, give me leave and I will this day tell you something–and something heavy withal."

I had great joy and honour in her amours, and I answered her–

"Behold my heart is as your own."

Whereat she kissed me and said, "Ye shall hear." And her eyes were troublous of grief as she spoke.

"Truly," she said, "when I go to bed right doleful and weary of heart, one comes and parts the curtains and stands looking at me, and it is a lady in a gown of samite with a crown on her hair [254]

and rings on her hands, and she looks at me mournfully and as one who would give me warning.”

Then I was amazed, and made reply: “I desire you by the love of God to tell me who this lady is.”

Then said Jehanne Plantagenet–

“I think it is Blaunche of France, who was first wife to this Don Pedro, and is now in Heaven.”

“Surely,” I said, “this cannot be. Wherefor should she give you warning?”

“Sith you ask me,” said Jehanne Plantagenet, “I believe she gives me warning that I am to marry a right dishonourable and ungentle Knight and one that would slay me even as he slew her.”

Thereon I, right affrighted, bade her speak words of good cheer, for this was a grievous thing she said, and one not for credence that the King Don Pedro had slain Queen Blaunche.

But the Princess was sure of it, for she vowed the vision came as a warning.

“And I,” she said, “sith I would rather die in Westminster than live in Spayne, will not have this marriage.”

Then was I blithe to tell her of the great feastings there would be for her wedding, both in this realm and in Spayne, and how she would be a Queen and have her own court; howbeit, she put it all by.

“Dame Alys,” she said, “say no more, for I have such a love for another man that I may not bear to leave the place where he is.” Then a two times she gave a little sigh, and I was sore amazed. [255]

“Dear lady,” I said, “Who is he?”

She answered me. “A man of war, one of the divers captains of the King’s archers, and I have such a puissant affection for him that I could not turn to any other.”

There was a while stillness and one without touched the dulcimere, and I heard the bells ringing from the Abbey of St. Peter, and the sun was almost set.

Then Jehanne Plantagenet kneeled down to me.

“Peradventure you will be good to me,” and she laid hold of my hands. “This Knight’s name is Sir Paon de Brambre, and I have never spoken to him all my life, though every day I see him and he loves me well. Now I have prayed Christ and Mary to save my soul alive, and I think to-night I shall go with my lady Blaunche, but first I would speak to this Knight I love so well.”

All this she said right graciously, but I wept for ruth while she spoke again.

“Dame Alys, get me this knight here into my chamber after supper that I may take leave of him, let him come in full armour with his shield.”

And though I broke my devoir I let it be established between us that I would bring this captain, and afterwards I found him in a study in the garden and gave him my message, whereat he went right pale.

Now, when I returned to the chamber of Jehanne I found she had lit it full of fair wax candles and was seated on the dais clad in a red gown of Damascus richly besewn; and she looked pale and thin, yet joyous, and bade me beside her until I was to let in secretly the Knight Sir Paon, which I did presently. [256]

And he was all armed save he carried his bassenet; on his arm was a long-pointed shield painted with his armory, and his face was wasted and sad and his eyen blue as Thames water.

Right within the door he went on his knees and folded his hands with never a word.

And from the dais at the other end of the chamber Jehanne Plantagenet looked at him and said a-high–

“Sir, in God’s name, tell me if you have a great love for me?”

And he a little changed countenance and bent his head very slowly.

“God hath holpen me to this moment,” he said, “but He cannot put it into my mouth to say how much I love you.”

“Sir,” she answered him, “ye may always have me for your lady, and though ye are not rich in goods or heritage ye shall be rich in this that she, who was a King’s daughter, loved you exceedingly, and I think you will be a worthy Knight and one full of honours, and when you have a wife I pray you tell her of me and let her be a fair woman, but as for me I am contracted to a villain knight in the name of love and lineage, and yet will not marry him and yet will do my devoir.” [257]

Then Sir Paon shook in his harness, and I had great pity of his dolours.

“Fair sir, recomfort yourself,” said Jehanne, “I have lived gaily and shall die loyal. See you these candles, ten for the ten commandments whole and unbroken, seven for the seven works of charity and the seven deadly sins, five for the Five Wounds and the five senses, three for the Trinity. Now when I am dead and ye see these burning about my tomb and the poor people saying prayers for my soul, I beseech that you shall add a taper to my memory.”

And the water washed his eyen and he could not speak.

“As I so greatly loved this goodly town of London,” said Jehanne, “ye, living here, shall think of

me, even at the time of the jousts and the great feasts, Easter, Christmas and the Holy Trinity, and remember I ever loved you the alder-beste of all in the world.”

And Sir Paon was sore discomfited that she should talk of death, and she came down from the dais.

“Truly,” she said, “this world is nothing and love is a great deal, and it matters not at all if we be dead or alive if we love–one another.”

Then fair and softly she bent a little towards him and held out her hand, and he took it as if it had been God His robe and pressed his tears upon it, but she the while was smiling.

And so they parted, and he went his way and Jehanne kissed me on the brow and said prayers before the candles, and then to bed silently. [258]

And I had great ruth of all I had seen that night and for the dolorous sorrows of these two, and I wished that two that so loved might have been mated.

So I lay awake listening to the bells and the throstle that now and again moved in the orchard boughs as it came to the dawning. And presently I heard sweet words that came from the chamber of Jehanne Plantagenet.

“Lady Blaunche, Lady Blaunche, have you come for me?”

Then I advised with myself well and was very afraid and sat up in bed, but could by no means speak.

For a long while it was silent, and I rose at last and went into the inner chamber, and it was cool with an Eastern light.

And Jehanne Plantagenet was lying out with the chequered curtains of blue and white withdrawn from her visage and the clothes of the bed straight over her and no breath at all in her body.

Round her were burning the candles of fair and pure wax, and she was surely dead.

And because I felt there were Heavenly Spirits in the room I kneeled me down, and these two princesses, Jehanne Plantagenet and Blaunche of France, went hand in hand across the orchards to Paradise.

She was carried through the city she loved with her visage open and her head on a white cushion and buried in a painted tomb behind the High Altar of St. Paul’s Church, and Don Pedro was slain by Don Enrique not long after, and I kept my peace. [259]

Now Sir Paon de Brambre went to Almaine and died fighting….

THE MACEDONIAN GROOM [260]

The Emperor Michael III

How shall I care that I am blind when I have seen enough colour in my days to fill the rest of meagre time?

Here in the Monastery in Armenia I have a little boy to read to me–sometimes Photias, sometimes John Damascenus the Syrian, sometimes the Fathers of the Church.

This I buy with the much money saved when I was in the train of the Emperor Michael now wailing in Hell.

I am very old and repentant, and soon I shall swing censers in Heaven, and my eyes shall be replaced with rubies from God’s own throne; the scent of crushed roses and ambergris shall soothe my nostrils and I shall sit close to the gate that I may look from the gold bars on to the flames of Hell and see the Emperors there, Michaels, Constantines, and Leos and presently the Emperor Basil the Macedonian, being thrust into the deepest pit of all.

It is Christmas eve, and I hear them singing in the choir … such patient men, these monks, but then very few of them have seen Constantinople. I am richer than they, though blind, for I have memories.

I do not miss my sight, for what is there to see here? They have no gold nor silver nor mosaic in their church nor painted curtains or curious robes.

I shall be glad to gain Heaven that I may see the shoes of God, crystal, gilt and pointed and His girdle of great blue stones and the attire of the angels, fine cambric worked with silks from Persia, purple of a live blood colour and green like a split jade. [261]

So I talk and the little boy writes while they sing in the chapel; they humour me because I am so very old and I despise them all.

To-night I have a loosened tongue; I could tell secrets now….

Write, write, write the last scene I saw before I was blind–how the Sclaronion gained the throne

and how the Amorian died.

Come nearer, for my voice is very weak. What if this was the last night of all for me and I should wake to see the banners of God blowing about His throne?

So write, for I know more than I have ever told.

It was the year 866 that the Emperor Michael surnamed the Drunkard, took for his fellow Emperor Basil the Macedonian groom. This was reward for what Basil had done at Kepos, where he had stabbed the Cæsar through the back. This Cæsar Bardas was a clever man, but Basil was more cunning; this Bardas the Cæsar was uncle to the Emperor, and had in his time slain Theoktistos, so he, too, is in Hell, for he died without a prayer. But I have prayed before the images and given them robes of silk pleasant to handle. Basil the groom had come to Constantinople on foot with a wallet on his back and become a stable boy to an officer of the court, and once when the Emperor was driving his own white horses in the Hippodrome, he saw this Basil wrestle with a Bulgarian and overthrow him; the Macedonian had great credit for this, and Michael took him into his service, for he was a man of wonderful strength. [262]

I never saw one taller; his hair was very thick bright brown and curling, his face had a look of hideous power and his neck was massive as the trunk of a young tree.

He had a great gift with horses, for there was never one whom he could not subdue with a touch and a whisper; soon, it seemed, he had this power with the Emperor, too, for Michael made him Chamberlain and cast money into his lap as gifts are cast before the Images.

Who knew what went on outside the mighty palace? I tell you none could guess.... But you have heard of Eudocia Ingerina; she was a daughter of the Martinakes, and the Emperor would have married her, but because her family was so mighty his mother, Theodora, prevented this, and he married Eudocia, the daughter of Dekapolitas....

Then there was Thekla, the sister of Michael, and she loved Basil, but the Emperor married him to Eudocia, who would be Empress some way; she never forgave it, for he had resigned her for fear of his mother, vanished now to Gastria, afterwards to Anthimos.

[263] It was their women behind it all.... Those were great golden days. Eudocia Ingerina, with the Emperor for her lover and the groom for her husband, kept the splendid revels gorgeously, but in her heart she waited for vengeance on Michael and his mother, on all of them who had debarred her from the throne–I knew it always.

At one time I was her chamberlain. She was a woman beautiful and vain; in my perpetual darkness I can see her features, her black hair clinging to her white shoulders, the plates of gold and clanging metal, of wine-red and serpent-green stones about her brow, her long, long eyes and small mouth, expressionless–her perfumed linen and her mantles of furs and silver....

It was worth living then; it is worth living now to think of it. Write, write the colour, the glitter, the glory and the power of it, the days burning into the nights with the lights of a thousand jewelled lamps glowing behind screens of silk, the marble halls strewn with flowers, the slaves with bands of scarlet on their foreheads, the chariot races, the shouting crowds, the taste of wine and fruit, the perfect women with heavy hair, the churches shining with burnished bronze and gold.... Sometimes I dread that Heaven cannot be so delicious....

In May, then, Michael made Basil Emperor with him, joint ruler of the Eastern Empire, sharer of the throne of the Cæsars, and in the winter of that year he gave the imperial title to a third, Basiliskian.

[264] Now there were glorious orgies and splendid riotings of feasts and games; and each wondered which Emperor would first slay the other; and Michael was grown to be afraid of Basil, who was changed from a drunken groom into an Emperor and a graver man.

With this terror on him, he came to Eudocia Ingerina....

Do you think I hear the monks chanting and see darkness?

No, I hear the trumpets; I see the Emperor Michael with his black hair unbound and his whip in his hand as he has returned from the Hippodrome standing against the leopard cat couch, while the sun embraces the snakes on his buskins. And she, Eudocia Ingerina, seated on a stool inset with opal holding lilies in her hand.

“So,” he said, “I am afraid of this Basil whom I took from the kennels; he must go swiftly as he came, Eudocia.”

“You made him my husband,” she answered, and threw the lilies down.

The fine silk curtains were lifting in an Eastern wind; the sun slipped under them and gilded the sloping orange walls of Numidian marble and the girdle of turkis round her waist.

“I am afraid of him,” repeated the Emperor, and he shook.

She looked away and he went on his knees and laid his head on her lap, dropping the whip stained with the blood and foam of his horses. Neither of them had any heed of me standing in the outer peristyle where the bronze pots of roses were, nor of the two slaves in tiger skins. [265]

“Do you weep?” she asked, and lifted his thick hair in her small round fingers.

He looked up with red eyes.

“Basil is dangerous,” he muttered.

She leant towards him delicately.

“Why did you not make me Empress?” she questioned, and rose up, repulsing him.

He got to his feet and went swaying down the corridors with clattering African slaves and Persian guards after him.

That night at the feast one of his madnesses came upon the Emperor; the dæmons got hold of him and he fought them off, howling; then he and Basil and Basiliskian gave commands that the bodies of the Ikonoclast Emperors be taken from their tombs, for they were the dæmons who haunted us. And this was wonderful, for by the light of torches of pine the body of Constantine, fifth of that name, was dragged from his sarcophagus and thrown out on to the sand of the circus; and there was he, ninety years dead, white as shredded ivory, clad in cerecloths of tarnished gold and heavy violet that gave out a thick, sweet scent of spices; and there was John the Grammarian beside him, with a little crown on his head and hair falling into dust across his eye-sockets–aha! we beat them with rods in the vile quarter of the Amaskianon where the dæmons gather and the people were glad because they were image worshippers: these two Emperors could not see, for they were blind, as I am now. Then we burnt them where the common thiefs were executed, and the tomb of Constantine Copronymus was split into fragments [266] to decorate a church the Emperor built at Pharos.

It was all of green Thessalian marble, here clear as water, there thick as sap, carved with grapes, genii, cupids and goats, and in the middle Christ raised on the Cross with a gilt halo; it was so rich and finely carved I think God forgave Michael much to get it back in His church. Look for it when you go to Pharos–green marble, a hand’s length thick.

Behold now I ramble on and come not to what I would say about that evening in the palace of Anthimos on the coast–the Empress Theodora’s house where she had bid us all … Eudocia Ingerina, Basil, Basiliskian, Thekla and all the court.

Listen to me, I was faithful to Michael, therefore am I blinded…. I can tell you everything.

The three Emperors had been hunting that day, and afterwards there was a mighty feast; Eudocia sat by Basil at the table and often whispered to him.

I was one of those who carried Michael senseless with wine to his chamber and laid him on his bed with the vermilion cushions. As I came out I saw the bolts of the door were broken, but I thought nothing of it, as it was Theodora’s house. On a low couch with silver and amber legs lay Basiliskian, with his red hair and his yellow robes tumbled about him; I lay in the outer chamber.

Beautiful were those two rooms, tiled with blue, patterned with carnations and curtained with silks stiff with fruits and flowers of gold; above the couch were saints with long eyes and raised [267] hands, the elders praying all in white on the daisied floor of Heaven, this in mosaic, glittering, and a lamp with square-cut green stones round the base, hanging before.

Flat on his back lay Michael, with his head slipping from the pillows and the roses slipping from his black hair; his white silk robe flowed open on his coat of silver and the clusters of topaz shone in the crossings of his gilt sandals.

The window was wide on the night; there was a moon above the tamarisk trees and a nightingale singing fitfully.

It was very silent after all the noise and riot, and I was half asleep when the door was pushed open and some men entered. There was the third Emperor Basil, a head above them all, the Persian Apelates, Bardas the father of Basil, his brother Marinos, a cousin of his, all peasants these, Peter of Bulgaria and John of Chaldia.

Now I rose up softly and got before them and stood in front of the bedchamber door; for I saw they were all sober.

Basil put out his great hand and gripped my shoulder.

“Basil or Michael?” he asked, and drew his scimitar.

“Michael,” I answered him, for I hated him–the Greek groom!

With that he lifted me out of the way, but I gave a great shout and beat my hand upon the [268] bronze images and cast them against the tiles so that they cracked.

Then they pulled me back, and I heard the nightingale grow louder, and I laughed with rage, for one struck me with a dagger.

I turned round and saw the Emperor Michael staggering in the carved wood doorway, the roses still clinging to his disordered hair. Seeing them, his wits cleared.

“Basil!” he shrieked. “I made you Emperor!”

They left me and turned on him, driving him back into the bedroom, and I lay along the floor with a dagger through my wrist, listening to his shrieks that hushed the nightingale.

Dragging myself to the door, I beheld Basiliskian struggling with the Persian, and saw him fall back across the couch with his scarlet-shod feet up and his mouth open, while the blood gurgled out and hid the wine-stains on his yellow robes.

I did not care for this, but looked for Michael and called loudly, so that they rushed out, drawing the curtains behind them and fled into the corridor.

Now none came, for tumults were such common things, and after a little Basil came back and

looked about him; and after him followed Eudocia Ingerina in a green mantle with a lamp of bright enamel in her hand.

"Have you done it?" she asked, and I knew she had set Basil on, though the Emperor Michael had loved her. "Quick! Have you done it?"

"Yes," he said, and the others came back. [269]

"What if he is not dead?" said John of Chaldia, and shifted his ivory and silver sabre in his grasp.

Then she, flashing emerald colours in her robe, turned on them, and I saw there is more in a woman than her beauty.

"You are not sure?" she cried, and held up the thousand coloured lamp.

"Basiliskian is dead," answered Apelates.

"Is Michael dead?" she gave back.

As she stepped towards the door I heard the soft sound her cambric garments made on the floor, and saw her eyes fixed before her with an expression of expectancy and pleasure–eyes like the black jade they prize in China. But Basil held her back with his swarthy hand on the edge of her mantle.

On the smooth walls of opal-tinted tiles moonlight flushed into lamplight that fell tinted with trembling colour; I saw the dark trees through the window and the great space of clear sky. I pulled at the dagger in my wrist, and I heard the Emperor Michael lamenting within.

At the sound of it all save the woman drew back.

"I struck his hands off," said John of Chaldia, "and he fell on the ground."

Eudocia Ingerina looked at Basil.

"Will you be Emperor or no?" she asked. "If that man in there is not dead–what are *you*?"

His flushed blue eyes rolled towards her; she twitched her robe from his grasp and lifted the thin silk curtains from the carved door.

I, forgotten, caught hold of the ribbings of scented sandal wood and looked in … you may believe what I saw, what I was blinded for seeing. [270]

The Emperor Michael, Lord of the East, Vice-regent of God, the last of the Amorian Cæsars, sat on the floor by the gilt and glorious brocades of his bed.

His hands were smitten off and his garments trailed with sticky blood; his head was bowed on his chest and he uttered bitter complaints. In his black hair some crimson roses still hung; the great rubies and topaz glittered on his breast. Behind him in the rich murk light I could see the other Emperor, a huddled heap of red and yellow, and in the middle of the marble floor (green as the tomb of Copronymus) the two hands of Michael, twisted into a clutching shape, with huge and wonderful rings on the fingers.

With a soft movement like the dappled Persian deer Eudocia Ingerina stole into the chamber; Basil and John of Chaldia were behind her; she stopped before Michael; her lamp showed his creeping blood.

"Well," she said. "Well, shall I not be an Empress after all?"

And she touched him with her foot that was covered with a shoe of green and violet leather, so that he looked up from his incoherent lamentations.

He tried to rise at that, could not, but gave a shudder and raised his arms.

"Eudocia," he said, very loudly, and she stepped back a little, for he was a hideous sight. [271]

"Come kill this man," she cried; and then to Michael: "Who will say masses for you?" and "I would Theodora was here."

Basil drew a little sword with a snake for a handle and Michael shrieked, whereon the woman caught him by his long hair and held him so while the Macedonian plunged the weapon past the topaz Gorgon into his heart; then they both cast him down and struck at him with their feet, even while his breast heaved and his eyes moved, and fled together into the outer chamber.

"To Constantinople," said Basil, and he embraced Eudocia and kissed her, after which she veiled her face with violet and left them. The blood on her feet was almost the last thing I saw.

For Basil found me crawling by the wall; and they took me out and blinded me and sent me here.…

Michael is buried in Chrysopolis, and his soul is in Hell; and Eudocia was an Empress and mother of the Leo who rules now, and no one but I knows that she was there that night … therefore set these things down, for I, who am an old blind monk, shall soon be in Paradise clad warmly in starred brocade and cambric fine enough to go through a reed-joint, lying on a couch covered with soft-coloured woollens, and under my feet a carpet like was woven in the Peloponnesus to cover the mosaic in the church Basil built to assuage God's wrath at the murder of Michael. Did you ever hear of it?

It was one great peacock with a spread tail.… I spoke to a man who had seen it.… [272]

So I in Paradise, near, as I said to the gate (stately as the Adrianople Gate with the church of

St. Diomed near by), shall peep down and see the Emperors, Leos, Constantines, Michaels, howling in Hell, and in the midst Basil and the woman Eudocia, while fiends swing before them censers of dull earth filled with sulphurs....

So on Christmas Eve I take this down from an ancient monk who was chamberlain once at the court of Michael III. and sometimes wanders in his mind.

Now he is fallen asleep, and the chants are over, and I will write no more.

God guard us all from evil. Amen.

Signed by Theophilus, a little scribe in the Monastery of St. John, Armenia, Christmas Eve, 899.

THE PRISONER

[273]

Sophia Dorothea of Zell

> "George I. was married to his cousin, Sophia Dorothea, daughter of the Duke of Zell; accused of an intrigue with a Swedish adventurer, she was repudiated by her husband and imprisoned in a castle in Hanover for thirty-two years previous to her death in 1729."–*History of England.*

December darkened over the dark flats outside Schloss Ahlden; the sluggish gray river, the barren gray road stretched into the bitter mist; above the stunted alders and broken reeds the plovers circled mournfully.

It was the saddest season of the year; but all seasons were sad at Schloss Ahlden. Spring and summer brought little change, save that the monotony of damp cold was changed for the monotony of dusty heat. The Schloss had gloomy towers and careless unadorned rooms; the scanty furniture was old and worn; the servants were old, too, and had a repressed silent air. There were not many of these servants; there were a great number of guards, changed frequently; they were always glad to go–six months seemed a long time at Schloss Ahlden.

The nearest town was Osnabrück, and that was many miles away. There was nothing beautiful nor interesting in all the melancholy country. It seemed strange that any one should have built a castle in a spot so barren and dreary; it seemed as if he who built must have done so knowing that one day it would be used as a prison.

[274] A woman had been confined here for thirty-two years; her husband was a King, her son would be a King, she was by her own birth a Princess and by right Queen of England, a country she had never seen.

For thirty-two years she had seen nothing but the cold, dull rooms, the barren Hayden road, the flats, the river, the alders and the plovers.

For thirty-two years she had driven three miles forth, three miles back along that empty road, stopping always at the turnpike, setting forth and returning at the same hour.

When she had been brought to Schloss Ahlden she was gorgeous–a brilliant woman, very young, vivacious, sparkling, beautiful, full of wit and spirit, of courage and daring.

She had defied them all, defied even the perpetual imprisonment to which she was condemned. Something would happen, she said.

Nothing had happened.

She sat now, a woman older than age, a woman who had never bloomed and faded, who had been frozen in her immature loveliness, chilled by creeping monotony in face and heart, and looked out at the light fading from the road and from the river Aller. The road was dead; never had it responded to her passionate watching; no help had ever come along its dusty length; no messenger spurring to say, "Your husband repents; he bids you come back," or "Your husband is a King now; his people insist that you share his throne," or "Your husband is dead, and your son sets you free!" [275]

Nothing ever happened.

With unbroken regularity her guard was changed. Such servants as could not endure the life left; others came.

These were all the sole incidents in the life at Schloss Ahlden.

There were no letters, no messages, no visitors.

Once her son, after a fierce quarrel with his father, made a desperate attempt to get to her, but she never knew of it, and soon the Prince was reconciled with the King and made no effort to come again.

It was astonishing how strong hope was, how it lived and flourished with nothing to feed on; but it died at last, as the black locks faded to gray, as the robust young body became feeble and

thin, as the glowing cheek sunk and the brilliant eyes grew dim, hope sickened and died at last.

She watched the white road from habit; she ceased to think of it as a highway to deliverance. As the world had forgotten her, so she began to forget the world. Great wars tore Europe, and the man who was her husband and Elector of Hanover played a big part in them, though through the chance of birth and from no great merit; she never heard of these events.

When he became King of England she did hear of it, but it made no difference to her situation.

Her name was never spoken outside the walls of Schloss Ahlden; she was as remote from the minds of men, even from the minds of her children, as if she had been long dead. [276]

A mere memory–Sophia Dorothea of Zell, repudiated by her husband and a prisoner at Ahlden–as one might say–Sophia Dorothea of Zell who died thirty-two years ago and is forgotten.

Her case had caused no sensation; no party espoused her cause; she had no followers, no adherents, no one planned her escape or pitied her, or prayed for her; she was merely forgotten.

Yet she was a living, breathing woman, with power to feel, to endure, to remember–worst of all, that remembering.

The dark crept closer round her as she sat looking out of the window.

The road, the river, the alders, the flats had come to be like the paintings on prison walls; they meant nothing, they did not represent the world, they circled her as surely as walls and moat, they changed as little, they were as cruel in their hard barrenness.

She had been very worldly, very gay, not in the least of a cloistered temperament, not given to caring for things spiritual; she had enjoyed life, she had had a great capacity for living fully and splendidly, a great aptitude for happiness. She remembered now how she had enjoyed life once; it made her feel very, very old.

The world had closed on her early; she was not fifteen when her vivacious, mischievous immature beauty had been wedded to her awkward, slow, selfish young cousin, Georg Ludwig, son of the Electress of Hanover, who was remotely connected with the royal Stewarts of England. [277]

He had never loved her.

And she had laughed at him, even pitied him, not realising the power he possessed over her. Even at twenty-two he had been prosaic, sullen, ungracious, self-important, a Prince without culture, or chivalry, or sensibility, a hard, obstinate man, narrow in heart and brain.

Even her raw ignorance had seen what he lacked. His unlovely person, short and stout, his dull blonde face with the pale prominent eyes, his rude manners and gross self-indulgencies roused aversion in her; his good qualities were not those that made life any easier for her; he was brave in every way, he had much good sense, he was honourable after his fashion. Some women might have been happy with him, not the woman he had married, her bright, impetuous, fastidious nature, avid of enjoyment, was hideously ill-matched with the plodding, dull, coarse character of her husband.

Even their children did not bring them together. When she had been married six years the Revolution hurled the last Stewart from the throne of England and put a Prince of the German Empire in his place. Soon after a law was passed to secure the Protestant succession, and this made the Electress of Hanover heiress to the Throne of England.

For a while Sophia Dorothea had exulted in the prospect of one day being Queen of the second nation in the world.

She bloomed gloriously; her husband was openly unfaithful to her. The little court was coarse and sordid and scandalous, but she had the power of extracting pleasure from her life, of throwing the glamour of youth and health over everything. She was frivolous, bold–never sufficiently moved to be indiscreet, though she sailed near to danger many times. [278]

Then, when she had been married thirteen years, she met Philip, Count von Königsmarck.

After that her life had ended as regarded all those things that made it pleasant, even endurable.

Schloss Ahlden had closed on her youth, her beauty, her high spirits, her courage. Her hot passions had flared and wasted and waned without a vent for thirty-two years, and now she was an old woman, almost passive.

Almost, not quite. At times her servants were afraid of her; at times she was like a tigress enraged.

Even after a lifetime of imprisonment, the passionate spirit at times still ranged and surged against its bonds.

Once she had had a desperate desire to pass, if only once, the turnpike on the Hayden road that marked the limit of her drive.

She would drive the cabriolet herself, drive furiously as if endeavouring to outstrip the guards who always galloped alongside. But no matter how she drove, always at the turnpike she must turn back. Of late she had not been out at all; she spent her days glooming at the window. Her women had been recently changed; only one remained, who had been with her all the time, and she was very old now and sour with long exile from her kind. [279]

She, Madame von Arlestein, had been the confidant of the Princess in the old, old days.

The other attendants who came and went, and the changing officers of the gloomy little garrison, said that this austere, bitter old woman really knew if the Princess was innocent or guilty. Guilty the world had called her before it had forgotten her. Those few who still knew her as a living woman were not so sure.

"Innocent" or "guilty" were two arbitrary words with which to divide her conduct. She had herself always maintained her innocency of putting another man in her husband's place, as firmly as that husband had believed in, and acted upon, the contrary.

But that she had been guilty of loving Philip von Königsmarck was beyond denial. Whether he had ever had more of her than the kiss she had given him when they were discovered together only Sophia Dorothea and the Countess von Arlestein knew. For Count Philip had died, horribly, before the dawn following that fatal night. No one cared much now, even those who waited on her, whether she had kept her marriage vows before God.

Unconsciously they thought of her as pure; they could not think one a wanton who had lived in this awful chastity and renunciation for thirty-two years.

The Captain of the Guard was a young man, born while she was in prison. [280]

Thinking of what he had already crowded into his life, he shuddered when he saw the proud, grievous woman entering the austere little chapel on Sunday, and reflected that during his infancy, his childhood, his youth, his young manhood, she had been doing the same without rest or change, while the beauty withered on her face and hope withered in her heart.

As he rode through the courtyard to-night he looked up at her window, reluctantly but irresistibly.

There was the peaked white blur of her face, the dark, restless eyes fixed on the twilight landscape, the long white hand supporting the sharp chin.

"Herr Jesus!" he muttered. "Why does she not die?"

Sophia Dorothea was thinking the same; she wondered what had kept her alive, what had actually sustained her to grow *old*–yes, to come to that horror, to lead this existence to *old age*.

Why had she not flung away a life so miserable and died at least in the triumph of youth?

She envied Philip von Königsmarck in that he had not lived to grow old.

Hope had upheld her a certain time, but hope was dead. She could recall almost the actual moment when it had finally died, when she had stood at the window watching the road, and known at last that no help would come ever along it to her–known that her husband would not die and release her; but still she had lived and grown old. [281]

The dark gathered, descended and settled.

She leant back in the threadbare velvet chair, and her tired eyes remained fixed on the dusk.

She thought of her husband; he was an old man now, but she pictured him as she had last seen him in the full lustiness of his youth. Her children were grown to middle life, but she saw them still in petticoats. Though both were married and had children of their own, the news had come to her through her women.

She had once had great hopes in her son; she believed that he would have some desire to see his mother.

She divined rightly. Though his attempt to swim the Aller and storm the moat had never been told her, for a long while she had clung to the hope that he had some of the chivalry his father lacked; but he was a man of forty-five now, and she was still a prisoner; that hope had died with the others. Her daughter was a Queen, and that was all Sophia Dorothea knew of her.

She soon ceased to think of them. She rose and went in to her dinner, which was served in the same room, at the same hour, always, always.

Madame von Arlestein was not there; she had the whimsies of old age; they said she was failing fast.

The other ladies were cowed and quiet; they had not been long with their mistress, and two of them had already petitioned to go home.

Sophia Dorothea (Princess of Ahlden she was called, in ghastly compromise between the titles that were hers by right and the nonentity which she really was) was an object of terror to these ladies, by reason of her history, her punishment, her usual silence and her occasional passionate lashes of speech. [282]

Her appearance added to this horror she inspired; she still wore the fashions that were the mode when Mary Stewart set them in England and Madame de Maintenon in France, and this, added to her arrested beauty, more terrible than old age, made her like a creature resurrected from a dusty grave.

When her clothes were renewed, which was seldom, they had been cut on the same pattern, but many of the garments she now wore were those that she had brought with her when she had first come to Schloss Ahlden.

She wore now a gown of faded, crackling red silk, with a short petticoat of frilled blue sarcenet; her hair was piled up with the fan-shaped decoration of stiff lace that had been out of fashion a quarter of a century; her face had a curious bleached look: she was not wrinkled, but her fine

features were as faded as her gown; she seemed bloodless, waxen, only in her eyes was that awful look of restlessness in terrible contrast with the lifelessness of her appearance.

The ladies, each with her own warm life of human interest as a background for her thoughts, pitied her and shuddered at her, and in their hearts they counted the days until they should be relieved of their posts at Schloss Ahlden.

For an hour, as always, they read and sewed after dinner, and, as always, the Princess sat rigid, looking into the fire. In summer she would look into the empty hearth in the same way; she had a great attraction for the fire or the fireplace. [283]

She was never long in a room before she would turn to it and sit in front of it, staring into the flames or the grate ready for them.

The ladies, when alone, would sometimes dare to breathe the rumour that accounted for this; it was almost too horrid for utterance. It had to do with the manner in which Philip von Königsmarck had died.

At the usual time the chaplain came, the unalterable prayer was uttered; the ladies took up their candles, curtsied and waited for the Princess to precede them upstairs.

She, as always, went up to her cold, unadorned room, was undressed and dismissed the ladies, then stood by the great bed with the blue tapestry curtains and sent for Madame von Arlestein.

To-night she did not get into bed; she put on a blue bed-gown and went to the fire that blazed, log on log, in the open hearth, but could not do more than warm a portion of the huge draughty room.

This bedroom had been hers ever since she had been at Schloss Ahlden, and nothing in it had been altered.

The bed stood out into the room facing the fireplace, shrouded with heavy curtains and heavy draperies; either side was a sconce of silver holding five candles against the wooden walls, at the foot was a long casket for clothes and either side of that a leather chair with a fringe round the seat. [284]

The door was to the right of the bed, the mullioned windows to the left; they were hung with dark curtains and before each of them were two more of the formal chairs.

In the corner beyond the windows was a plain dressing-table holding a few toilet articles, and behind it hung a mirror in a tortoiseshell frame.

Before the fireplace were a chair with arms in which Sophia Dorothea now sat and a stool.

Beyond the fireplace were a desk and an upright press for clothes.

On the polished floor lay a worn carpet; the ceiling hung low and dark; above the mantelshelf stood another mirror, and four candles and a clock were reflected in its murky depths.

Firelight and candlelight together caught the shadow of the woman in the chair and flung it large and leaping over wall and ceiling.

At her usual time, neither a minute early nor a minute late, Madame von Arlestein entered.

Her head was swathed in black lace and her shoulders in a black shawl; her black skirts were wide and stiff and rustling. She held a length of fine white muslin that she had been embroidering for twenty years.

As always, she seated herself on the stool, and the delicate needle, guided by her wrinkled hands, flew in and out the embroidery that was beginning to be yellow with age.

Sophia Dorothea sat erect in her chair, the black hair, streaked with white as with powder, hung, still thick in the ruins of its beauty, about her shoulders. The firelight softened and warmed the sharp lines of her face and gave a sparkle to her still glorious eyes. [285]

“Annette,” she said, “I have been thinking of Philip von Königsmarck to-night.”

The old woman looked up from her eternal sewing.

“Oh, Madame,” she answered, “you have not spoken that name for many, many years.”

“Not for thirty-two years,” said the Princess. “I know exactly.”

“Why now?” asked Annette von Arlestein.

“Have you forgotten him?” counter-questioned Sophia Dorothea.

“No.”

“You remember it all?”

“All!”

“It seems very near to-night,” said the Princess.

“Yes, I thought so too.”

The old woman broke her invariable custom and laid her sewing down in her lap and looked at her mistress.

“Perhaps death is coming to one of us,” added Sophia Dorothea. “We are both old. My death would be a relief to a great many. Even you would not be sorry, Annette.”

She spoke knowing that Annette von Arlestein had not shared her imprisonment from any love [286]

or duty, but from necessity. She was as much a prisoner as her mistress. It had been decreed that she who had shared the shame should share the punishment.

"It is too late," said the Countess. "Twenty years ago I might have wished you would die. Twenty years ago I might have cursed you."

The quenchless dark eyes gleamed across at her.

"You would not have stayed if you could have gone. No one else did."

Annette von Arlestein gave a toothless smile.

"No, I should have gone–when I was younger. Life is dull here."

Sophia gave her a ghastly look.

"Yes, it is dull."

A storm was blowing without. The wind cast the rain in gouts on the window; it dripped from the leads and splashed down the wide chimney in heavy drops that hissed on the logs.

"Why do you not finish your sewing?" asked the Princess. "I have never seen you sit idle before."

"Why did you mention Count von Königsmarck?" replied Madame von Arlestein. "I have never heard you speak of him before."

"Every night lately I have been thinking of him. You know that."

"Yes, I know that."

Like an angry stranger demanding admission, the rain surged at the window and the faded curtains rose and fell in the wind.

"Annette," said Sophia Dorothea, "why have we lived, you and I? We could have died, you know. There was the moat, or a table-knife–or a bed-cord. But we lived."

"I suppose," answered the old woman, "we hoped." [287]

"*Mein Gott!* We hoped!"

The Countess looked across at her with dim eyes that seemed to glimmer with malice. "But now–if *he* died to-morrow, it would be too late. There is no more enjoyment for you in this world."

"No more for me of anything," said her mistress calmly. "Königsmarck is dead and youth is dead."

"Why are we talking of this?" asked the old woman peevishly, "when we have been silent so long?"

"I do not know. Get on with your embroidery."

"*Der Herr Jesus!* Why should I finish this work? Who will wear it?"

"Talk, then, talk," said Sophia Dorothea. "Something is different to-night."

"It is the rain," nodded the old woman. Her monstrous shadow wavered behind her like a giant impotently threatening.

"It is memory," answered the Princess. She relaxed in her chair. Her arms, still lovely but colourless as the limbs of the dead, showed where the wide sleeves of dull blue fell apart, and her hands, almost inhumanly slender, clasped the polished knobs of the chair-arms. "Was I beautiful–that night?" she said. "I scarcely knew it."

Annette von Arlestein looked at the ruined face, pale beneath the grey locks, the thin bare throat, the sunk dark eyes, the lined mouth. "I can hardly recall what you were," she muttered; "I can hardly think you are the same." [288]

A veil seemed to drop over her eyes; she too was remembering.

"Annette," said the Princess, "do you think *he* has been just to me?"

"It is so long ago," whispered the Countess.

"*He* has enjoyed these thirty-two years," replied Sophia Dorothea. "He is an old man now; he cannot be very far off answering to judgment. I wonder what God will think of what he has done to me."

The Countess chuckled. Neither of these women had drawn nearer Heaven themselves during their captivity, no thoughts of spiritual consolations had sweetened the bitterness of their earthly punishment and no repentance had softened their hearts.

"There has always been one prick in his side," said Annette von Arlestein. "He was never *sure*–he had no *proof*. There has been a doubt with him all his life. He will never know."

"No one knows but you and I," answered the Princess. She leant forward and looked into the fire. "How I hate him!" she said slowly. "What is he doing at this moment–the King of England–that cold, hideous man?"

"If curses could have blighted him," mumbled the old Countess angrily, "mine had done it long ago. When he sent me here I still had blood in my veins; I enjoyed the world–I had my plans, and schemes, my pleasant seasons—"

The Princess rose; her figure was yet erect and graceful; the warm lights and shades touched it [289]

to youthful curves.

"Was there anything in the marriage service," she said, "to say that he should take his pleasures and his loves where he would and that I must never look beyond my wedding ring?"

She held out her left hand and looked at the mocking symbol on her finger placed there forty-six years ago by the man who held her captive now.

"You might have had more of life," said the Countess. "The punishment could not have been greater if you had changed your fancies as he changed his!" She laughed silently, as if it pleased her to think how her mistress had been cheated.

There was a pause of silence, broken only by the gusty descent of the rain on the window and the splashing of the drops on the glowing logs.

Sophia Dorothea closed her eyes.

"Do you remember," she murmured, and her expression was greedy as the expression of one glimpsing the food he is famishing for, "that night–how *young* I was?"

"Do I remember? It was the last thing that ever happened to me," answered Annette von Arlestein.

Before the mental vision of both the tragedy that had been lying silently in their hearts so long loomed suddenly clear and distinct, as if it had happened yesterday. There was silence.

They saw the scene before them as if they had not been actors in it.

A luxurious bedroom, a white and gilt imitation of Versailles, filled with elegant furniture, fashionable toilet articles and splendid clothes, a bed of white satin and many mirrors–this was what they both saw. [290]

All was brilliant, pretty and cheerful.

At the foot of the bed stood a beautiful woman, Sophia Dorothea, opulent in charms and happiness; her black hair rolled in curls between a braid of pearls and fell on her soft shoulders. White and crimson mingled ravishingly in her face and her dark eyes were soft, yet sparkling.

She wore a gown of white brocade, cut low on the bosom and laced across the muslin shift with a pink cord; the skirt was embroidered with little wreaths of blue roses; the petticoat glimmered with gold thread.

The candles were lit.

Near her stood a handsome creature, Annette von Arlestein, full of sparkle and daring, in a violet gown; she held a blue quilted cloak. On the peach-coloured lining the candle light flickered up and down.

They were both listening … waiting….

"Then you put the cloak on me," said the Princess, "and we thought we were so safe–*he* being away–and I went downstairs."

Madame von Arlestein saw it–the lovely figure muffled in the dark cloak, creeping down the wide, dark stairs, while she stood at the head with a candle, ready to put her hand over it at the slightest sound.

"Then you followed, Annette, to keep watch. I was a fool to go, but he had to leave soon, and I was mad to see him." [291]

"And the Elector was coming home the next day," added the old woman.

Another scene rose before them: the vast dark kitchens beneath the dining-hall that opened on to the back entrance to the palace.

This room was underground, but was lit by the perpetual fire that burnt in the huge grate.

And then, to the memory of both, came the most tragic figure in the tragedy. In the glow of the great fire stood a young man, Philip von Königsmarck, one of a wild and unfortunate family; his brother Charles and his sister Aurora were sadly known to fame, but neither had a fate so dark as his…. Wind and rain increased in violence and swept and howled round the towers of Schloss Ahlden and beat in at the draughty window of the Princess's bedroom.

She put her hands over her eyes; memory was becoming so strong that she felt herself back in that moment she had not talked of for thirty-two years.

"The kitchen was very large," she said, "and he stood waiting for me. Do you remember him, Annette?"

"*Herr Jesus!*" muttered the old woman. "He had on a great coat–light–and black satins under it and high soft boots and a little useless sword with a steel tassle–and a steinkirk cravat. They were fashionable that year, pulled through the buttonhole of the waistcoat—"

The Princess did not move her hand from her eyes; she saw all these details. She saw more; she saw the young Swede's passionate face, his deep blue eyes, the cluster of his blonde hair on his brow. [292]

"You stood at the door," she said, "and we both forgot you, and then—"

Annette remembered.

The bright young beauty had gone straight to her lover's arms, and without a word they had

kissed.

Then he had drawn her to the settle, and she had sat beside him, loosening her cloak, and on her throat, her shoulders, her arms he had kissed her again.

And presently he had gone on his knees and kissed her gown and her cloak and her hands.

The while they never spoke a word, and the Countess von Arlestein watched by the big door.

“You did not hear them come,” said the Princess, dropping her hand from her eyes.

“No,” answered the old woman. “The first I knew of them was when the door opened—”

They could both see that too, in their memory–the door opening on Prince Georg, whose pale eyes saw the Electress in the arms of Philip von Königsmarck while his lips rested on her brow.

A woman had betrayed them: a jealous woman enamoured of the young Count had brought the Elector back a day before he was due and sent him here to the kitchens, which the spy had discovered was the meeting-place. [293]

Sophia Dorothea remembered how she had lifted her head from her lover’s shoulder to see her husband standing within the door, four officers behind him and a fifth holding Madame von Arlestein.

“I am glad I kissed him again,” she muttered.

“The firelight was full in the room–like this,” said the old woman. Her blurred eyes gleamed madly; she seemed inspired by her memories. She got to her feet, and the embroideries fell to the hearth. “He fought for you–with his silly little court sword–but he was one to four, all well armed—”

“The Elector held my wrists,” said the Princess, “and I had never known he was so strong.... I struggled; *Mein Gott*, how fiercely! but I could not shake his hands.”

“They had me against the wall with a bare blade at my breast, and I never moved,” added the Countess. “They had him down–then *she* came in, the spy, the traitress. ‘Eh, Königsmarck,’ she said (how she had always hated you!), and she set her heel on his mouth as he writhed—”

“And I cursed her,” whispered Sophia Dorothea, “and I cursed him and the children I had borne him—”

“Ay, you cursed; but they picked him up and—”

“Stop!” shrieked the Princess. “Have I not lived with that all these years? He was dead.” [294]

“I hope he was dead,” said the Countess; “but the Elector hoped he was alive when the oven door was shut. What did *she* say? ‘This is not the couch my lord looked for to-night. Your oven takes dainty meat, Serenity!’”

“I bit his thumb to the bone,” answered the Princess, clutching the edge of the mantelshelf. “Oh, Jesus, Jesus!”

“Why should the High God hear you?” sneered the old woman.

“I have lain awake at night remembering that I hurt him. He cried out under his breath, and there was blood on his lace—”

“And he struck you in the face as the others stepped back from the fire and gave you a vile name—”

“It was the last word he ever spoke to me.”

“Aye,” muttered the Countess, “we were dragged upstairs and cast into a coach, and no one there ever saw us again nor spoke our names.”

“They drove us through the night to Schloss Ahlden ... thirty-two years ago.”

The Princess paced up and down the hearth.

“I have thought of so many things–if he would have been different, if he had ever loved me–it was the hate of fourteen years vented then–if Philip von Königsmarck cursed me when he saw he was trapped.”

She drew a deep breath and put her pallid fingers to her pallid face.

“I kissed him again,” she said, “when all was over—”

With a fumbling gesture Madame von Arlestein groped for her sewing. “Why do we rip up this?” she asked. [295]

“I have never been kissed since,” added Sophia Dorothea, unheeding.

The Countess pointed a skinny finger at the clock.

“We have never been so late before. Get to your bed, Highness.”

“Not to-night–never since by man, woman nor child–stay with me to-night.”

“Why should I stay? I want my sleep.”

“Who could sleep to-night? Hark at the rain.”

She moved to the upright press in the corner and opened the doors, showing a gulf of shadow.

As she stood there with one hand on either wing of the door, she looked like one peering with

calmly curious eyes beyond the portals of the tomb.

"Why did we recall it all to-night?" whimpered Madame von Arlestein. "I have lost my needle and the thread is entangled."

She pulled discontentedly at her sewing.

Sophia Dorothea stepped into the press and sought among the clothes.

"What are you doing?" asked Madame von Arlestein peevishly.

The Princess stepped out of the press with a dress across her arm.

A dress of faded white brocade embroidered with wreaths of blue roses and a petticoat gleaming dully with tarnished gold thread.

"*Der Herr Jesus!*" cried the Countess. [296]

The Princess closed the press; then she threw off her gown and stood a wraith-like figure in her white shift.

With a ghastly look she put on the brocade, which rustled drearily as if it groaned at being drawn from its tomb. She laced it across the bosom with the pink cord, she spread out the skirts, she shook the yellow lace into place.

With a steady step she crossed the room to the bed.

"In the firelight, in the firelight, like this, eh, Annette?"

"What has happened to you?" quavered the old woman.

"I do not know," answered the Princess. "I feel strange to-night, almost as if hope had come once more; almost as if I should never see the flats and the road and the Aller again; almost as if I should never count the plovers again nor drive three miles forth, three miles back along the Hayden road; almost as if Philip von Königsmarck were near."

"It is the wind," said the Countess.

The storm wailed and shuddered without, and splash, splash fell the rain from the leads.

"It brings the ghosts," she added. She peered at the clock. "*Mein Gott!* It is–*twenty minutes after one*. You should be in bed," she added.

"Do you think I have ever slept at the hour of one to two any night of all the long nights here?" answered Sophia Dorothea. "But this is the first time I have passed it in this dress–in the firelight." [297]

"There was a great clock in the corner," said Madame von Arlestein in her indistinct, failing voice, "and when they shut him in it was just striking two."

"Do you think," asked the Princess violently, "that I did not hear it?"

She came again to the hearth, moving with the rigidity of age; the brocade hung loosely on her hollowed form, showing how the soft flesh that had once filled it out had shrunk and withered.

"What a life mine has been," she said, standing as if she listened to the wind; "that one night and thirty-two years to think over it. For I have never been able to think of anything else, Annette."

"*Twenty minutes after one*," mumbled the Countess; "that was the time you opened the door and stepped into the kitchen—"

The Princess put her hand to her bosom.

"Annette, Annette, are there no spells to conjure him back? But if he came he would not know us–two old women!"

"Get to bed," answered the Countess von Arlestein. "I am tired."

"Go then–leave me," said her mistress.

The old woman took one of the candles from the mantelpiece; her hand shook so that the wax ran down the stick and over her fingers.

"One word," the Princess turned commanding eyes on her. "If I should die first, Annette, you will never let them know the truth."

"I have forgotten the truth," returned the other with something of a sneer. [298]

"No–you *know* it–you and I only. Guilty, they say; but some say, perhaps my son says, innocent. Let it remain unsolved."

"Whatever I said would not be believed now, and I am older than you; I shall die first. Oh, content you, Serenity, I shall not speak."

She moved slowly, a bunchy black figure, towards the door, which she pulled open on the black corridor.

Holding aloft her candle, she peered into this darkness.

"It is so late; the lights are out," she quavered, "and I am afraid of the ghosts in the passages."

"If *he* thought in his heart that I might be innocent, it would trouble him on the day of his death, I think," said the Princess. She seated herself in the worn chair. "I feel very cold," she added.

Madame von Arlestein turned back into the room and let the door swing to behind her.

“My eyes dazzle with the firelight,” said Sophia Dorothea. “Something is going to happen–at last.”

“It was speaking of the past,” answered the Countess. “Why did we when we had been silent so long?”

“I have described a circle,” murmured the Princess, “and I am back again to that night.”

“You are ill. I will call some one—” [299]

“No,” said her mistress in a terrible voice. “Call no one.”

The Countess replaced the candle on the mantelshelf.

“Will you pray?”

“Why should I pray? My prayers were exhausted long ago.”

Her head drooped to one side.

“Get to your bed,” she added. “Leave me here. The fire is falling out, and when it is dead I will go to bed. But now I want to keep watch.”

“Keep watch?”

“I am waiting.”

The storm was subsiding; the casements rattled slightly and mournfully and the rain splashed with a more gentle violence against the panes.

The firelight glimmered along the stiff folds of the white brocade and sparkled in the tarnished gold threads of the petticoat. Sophia Dorothea, gaunt and white, was flushed by this warm glow that was growing fainter and dying as the logs broke and fell into ashes.

For some minutes she sat so; then she looked up at the old woman leaning over her.

“Remember,” she said, “never tell.”

Utter silence again, save for the mutter of the departing wind and the patter of the ceasing rain.

“She is ill,” muttered Madame von Arlestein, and hobbled to the door.

She clapped her hands and cried out for help in a feeble voice that fell uselessly, unheard, into the dark passages of Schloss Ahlden. [300]

Then came a sound that silenced her, the clock striking two.

“*Ach, Gott in Himmel!*” she muttered, cold with fright. “I heard that oven door closing again—”

She hurried back to her mistress, the clear clang of iron still in her ears.

Sophia Dorothea lay back in her chair; her face was tilted upwards; she looked as fresh, as beautiful, as young as on that night thirty-two years ago. There seemed no white in her hair and her limbs filled triumphantly the rich brocade.

“I am getting blind,” said Annette von Arlestein, “and this cursed firelight–but you look as you looked *then*—” She peered closer and gave a cracked scream.

It was a corpse she stared at; Sophia Dorothea had gone.

THE YELLOW INTAGLIO [301]

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

“D. M. C.
Johannes jacet hic Mirandula caetera morut
Et Tagus et Ganges forsan et Antipodes
Ob. an. sal. McLXXXIII, vix. an. XXXII.

Hieronimus Beninienius ne disiunetus post mortem locus orsa
separet quor animas

In vita coniunxit amor hac humo
supposita ponu curarit

Ob. an. M.D.XXXXII. vix. an. lxxxix Mens. vi.”

Tablet to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in the Church of St. Mark, Florence.

Giovanni Pico, Conte della Mirandola, sat at the window of his apartment; the midday glow of a gentle winter sun was on his face; against the straight pink-toned marble front of the Palazzo opposite three dark pines rose and flung their long shadows up the street. The November sky was clear and cold in colour–the blue of chilly water.

Below in the street was silence, and in the chamber with the dull terra-cotta walls and sandstone floor was silence too.

Giovanni Pico was ill of slow fever that had long sucked his strength. He sat in a polished chair with gilt on it, and rested his long white hands on the sides of it; he wore a straight robe of soft red from his ears to his ankles; his sleeves were tight, and of gold net over orange velvet, and fell in embroidered points to his finger tips.

[302] Round the high, close collar of his gown was a fine chain of silver and amber beads, which, passing several times round his throat, fell to his waist.

His hair, which was smooth and thick and fair, was parted in the middle and combed either side of his face; it fell in large curls on his breast and was finely scented. His countenance was sweet and good and lovely, the gray eyes large and gentle, the lips calm and sweetly curved. At present he was very pale, and there was a stillness in his expression and a motionlessness in his attitude that made his head and bust look like a carving in tinted alabaster.

The chamber was simple but beautiful. A low bed covered with silk draperies stood in one corner and near it was a table bearing costly books and a silver lamp.

On a dark cabinet stood a little broken figure of Tanagra, showing a dancing woman with a full robe held out; near her was an elusive glass of blue colour on a milk-white stem, like a bubble trembling to disperse. Above the bed hung a black crucifix and under it a red light burned with a quivering flame.

A scent of sandal-wood, nard and spikenard, was in the chamber; stirred occasionally by the breeze that whispered over Florence and entered the open window, this perfume strengthened and was wafted out into the street.

[303] The sick man never moved as the hours went by; save that his eyes were opened and fixed with an enigmatic look on the quiet street below, he might have been asleep.

This young man, who sat alone gazing at Florence this November midday was one of the most famous people in Italy. The “Phoenix of Genius,” they called him, and he had early been renowned for his precocious learning, his vast industry, his beauty and his noble nature. To all his qualities his princely rank gave lustre; he had been one of the most intimate friends of Lorenzo il Magnifico, and there was no one who could excel the brilliance of his reputation. As a prince who preferred letters to arms and distinction in the arts to any other ambition, he was unique; no man could ever have been more courted and praised and extolled than this man had been.

But to-day he was forgotten.

For it was the day fixed for the entry of the King of France into Florence, and though he came under the pretence of peace and an invitation to a treaty, he came stained with Italian blood and in the guise of a conqueror. And the Conte della Mirandola had been among the brightest in the bright rule of the resplendent Medici. Giovanni Pico had been at the death-bed of the great Lorenzo, who had spoken almost his last words to the gentle youth who had heard the Friar he had brought to Florence, Frà Girolamo, refuse the haughty ruler absolution unless he gave Florence her liberty.

And Lorenzo had turned his face to the wall and refused, and died with his sins on his head, [304] and now his sons were eating the bread of charity in Rome, and Frà Girolamo was the greatest man in Florence, and Charles of France was entering the proud city at the twenty-first hour to-day.

Giovanni Pico thought of these things and of his dead friend, Lorenzo dei Medici; he believed that it was better for that Prince to have died, in pain of soul, than to have lived to see Florence to-day, changed indeed as it was since the days of his rule.

The Conte della Mirandola was changed also. It would have amazed Lorenzo to know that his most brilliant courtier was yearning for the plain habit of the brotherhood of St. Mark, and that the most learned and splendid noble in Florence wished to leave the world and follow Frà Girolamo Savonarola the steep way to Heaven.

But so it was with Giovanni. For some years past the eloquence of the Friar had wrought much with him; and lately, as the fierce politics of Italy sifted and clashed–as all the things he had known and loved fell and were broken–Giovanni Pico turned, as so many of the Florentines, to the shelter offered by the brotherhood of St. Mark.

Now, as he gazed down into the empty street, he wished that he had not so long delayed; he wished that he was, even now, in the dark robe of a brother of St. Mark, lying in his cell, face downwards, before the crucifix, praying for mercy for his soul and for those long years he had filled with worldly learning and in following the vain shadows of heathen philosophy.

[305] He moved his fair head and sighed and lifted his right hand vaguely and looked at it. On the second finger was a yellow intaglio of a bull wreathed with flowers. It gave him pleasure even now in the midst of his thoughts of God. He watched the liquid light slip in and out of it in glints of amber and gold, and in looking at the exquisite workmanship and reflecting that there was not such another in the world, he forgot the convent of St. Mark in his joy in the heathen jewel.

The red hanging was lifted from the doorway and a dark figure entered–a monk in a russet gown, with a thin face and ardent eyes.

The young Prince looked up.

"Frà Girolamo!"

Savonarola approached him, looked at him with some tenderness in his harsh features.

"Why are you at the window?" he asked.

Giovanni Pico smiled in a melancholy manner. "I wish to see the French," he answered. "Seated here I can view them, where the street ends, passing—"

He raised his pure face.

"On such a day as this can you find time for me?" he murmured.

Frà Girolamo's eyes were flaming and troubled with many thoughts.

"It was you who persuaded the Medici to summon me to Florence," he said. "But for you I should never have been here, doing what I can to save the city. Judge, then, if I cannot find time [306] to come and watch with you a little when you are sick."

"So sick!" smiled Giovanni. "I feel as if I was very old and had outlived all that I ever loved. What are my attainments now, or the praises I garnered? Where is the Prince who flattered me and the courtiers who bowed down? Gone, leaving a great emptiness; and you are the one person now who can bring me peace."

"Will you follow the Lord?" asked Frà Girolamo quickly.

"I will. I will leave the world; though I am 'lighter than vanity,' I have the strength to do that. I will be one of your humble friars. Hark, what was that?"

A sound of trumpets quivered in the gentle stillness, and the sick man leant forward, gripping the arms of his chair.

"The French," said Savonarola, and stepped out on to the balcony. "We have no fear of them; they come to treat with the Republic, not to conquer her, and Capponi is stronger than King Charles."

He might have added that he was himself stronger than either, and that when he had walked into the French camp to warn the King of the Lord's wrath if he behaved dishonourably to Florence that monarch had cowered before him.

Still, the fact was that King Charles had come as a conqueror into Italy, and that a foreign army was entering Florence, and this fact rankled in the mind of both Dominican and noble.

[307] Giovanni Pico rang the silver handbell on the table near him, and two pages came from the next apartment. The Prince bade them lift him up and carry him out on to the balcony, which was done; and he hung weak as a woman between them, yet managed with their help to reach the balcony, and supported against the stone balustrade to stand feebly in the sunshine.

At the end of the street, a couple of houses away, was a good view of the Ponte Vecchio which spanned the Arno, and was to-day gaily decorated with flags and triumphal arches.

A great crowd of people had already assembled, and were running to and fro, shouting and laughing and hustling against one another; some had already overflowed into this side-street, which a while before had been so quiet, while at every window heads appeared and figures began to show on the roofs. Most of the houses were hung with arras and flags.

"We have no decoration," said Pico della Mirandola.

Savonarola gave him a quick look, then passed into the chamber; he seemed like a man exalted in his soul.

But the friend of Lorenzo dei Medici remained on the balcony, supported by his pages and leaning on the stone that was pale gold in the winter sun.

A huge noise encroached on the lesser noises of the crowd–a noise like the din of an enormous fair, beating of drums, blowing pipes, and the shriek of trumpets, the clatter of arms and the sound of horses' hoofs and horses' harness as they jostled together.

[308] A varie-coloured throng came jostling over the bridge; the foremost, before whom a little space was with some difficulty cleared, was mounted on a tall and handsome charger, over which a gorgeous baldaquin was upheld.

Giovanni noticed that this man was riding with his lance levelled–the sign of a conqueror; and as he hesitated, not knowing which way to turn, the Florentine had a good view of his person, which was extraordinarily misshapen.

He wore black velvet, and sat hunched together on the saddle, his body being prodigiously small, his legs long and twisted, his feet huge and deformed. A rich and cumbersome mantle of cloth of gold hung from his shoulders, emphasizing the meanness of his presence; his head was huge and lolled on his chest; his mouth was gaping; his hair so pale as to be almost white. This was all Giovanni could see of his face before a footman seized his bridle and he was guided out of sight.

Giovanni knew this horseman for the King of France. He was followed by four big drums played at the double, and two pipes; and close behind him, endeavouring to regain their places at his side, which they had lost in the jostle of the turning, came the two Cardinals of St. Piero in Vincoli St. Malo, and at a short distance some French Marshals, who were closely followed by the Royal bodyguard of bowmen; then some French knights on foot and the Swiss vanguard–the finest infantry in Europe, splendid in many colours, bearing burnished street-halberds and [309]

distinguished by the waving plumes on the helmets of the officers.

After them came the agile, small, Gascon Infantry, and then the gorgeous Cavalry, the finest knights among the French aristocracy, glittering in their gold and silver armour, their brocade mantles, their chains of gold and sparkling jewels.

Above their heads floated the silk pennons they carried, while the velvet banners clung round their poles in the breezeless air.

Tall and fierce-looking Scotch archers armed with terrible and heavy weapons came after these.

The French Artillery had gone on to Rome by another route, and there were no guns with the army; but their numbers, their strange attire and stranger weapons, the richness of their appointments, the discipline they used in their marching, made them a new and terrifying spectacle to a city that only knew mercenaries.

The knights, soldiers, and archers were still pouring over the bridge when Giovanni whispered to his pages to help him back to his chair.

He sank into it in his old attitude–his hands on the arms, his head resting against the back; only now his eyes were closed, and the steady sound of the passing army was in his ears.

Girolamo Savonarola stood in the corner of the chamber; he also was listening to the sounds of the French entering Florence, and though he stood very still, with his hands on his breast, there was something triumphant in his face.

"Frà Girolamo," said Giovanni under his breath, "if I–should not live to enter your order, will you bury me in the habit of it?"

The Friar made no answer to this; he moved nearer the window and remarked, "Angelo Poliziano died this morning."

"Ah!" A half-breath parted the young man's full, pale lips, and a deeper look of sadness troubled the smooth calm of his gentle features. Poliziano was a name nearly as brilliant as his own, a man who had also been present at il Magnifico's death-bed. It seemed as if all the friends of the old dynasty were following that dynasty's fate.

"No one to-day will remember Poliziano," said Giovanni, following out his thoughts; "and no one would remember Pico–if I were to die to-day." He added instantly, turning his head towards the Friar, "Save only you, Frà Girolamo."

Savonarola approached his chair and looked down at him with deep, sparkling eyes.

"Are you very ill?" he asked earnestly.

The young Prince smiled sweetly up at him.

"I am dying," he said.

Frà Girolamo was startled; he lifted his right hand and let it fall on his heart.

"I received the viaticum this morning," said Pico della Mirandola. "I have been surprised by death … too soon.… I would have died a Friar, and I would have died before I heard yonder army crossing the Arno."

Savonarola still did not speak; his dark face was stained by a dusky flush of pain. He loved this beautiful young man who was so devoted and humble a follower of his doctrines–this prince whom neither great birth, great gifts, great fortune nor great praise had spoiled, and he hoped that he would not die. It was a marvellous thing if he, broken and ill, was to be spared and this youth to be taken in the flower of his days.

"Oh, what have I done with my life!" whispered Giovanni, and the tears sparkled in his long clear eyes.

"Are you at peace?" asked the Friar abruptly.

"Nay, not quite at peace, for I love the things of this world and cannot wholly forget them, even while every breath I draw brings me nearer the Judgment of God."

The Friar looked at him earnestly.

"Why should you die, Giovanni? I think you will live."

"No; death entered my chamber this morning and is here now, waiting his time."

"Should I bring your friends or your physician?"

"Let me die alone," answered Giovanni. "I have been too much in crowds all my life."

"You have no great sins to answer for," returned the Friar. "You need not be afraid to appear before God, Conte."

"I am not afraid," replied the young man faintly. "But I am very loth to leave the world, and that troubles me."

A light of enthusiasm and joy sprang into the Friar's eyes. He clasped his thin, nervous hands convulsively together.

"Could I but have brought you within the walls of St. Mark's–into that great peace where the spirit of St. Antonine still dwells, where it is indeed like Heaven for the great company of angels painted by Frà Beato Angelico that beam from the walls!"

“Alas!” said the Conte della Mirandola; “such joy is not for me!”

Clouds had crept over the perfect blue; faint silver veils they were, and a pale rain descended and a low wind rose, stirring the boughs of the cypresses and the arras hanging before the houses.

Still could be heard the shouting, the tramp, the jostle of arms, the running to and fro, the tap of the drums, the whistle of the pipes.

And Pico della Mirandola could not close his ears to these sounds; he was thinking more of Florence than of God, and because of this the tears ran down his cheeks.

The Friar seemed to guess his thoughts.

“Florence is in God’s hands, and I am his instrument to preserve her people.”

Giovanni took his eyes from the rain and the cypresses and the soft grey sky, and looked at the Friar.

“Can you preserve Florence against a Borgia Pope and a French Conqueror?” he whispered.

“As God’s lieutenant, I can,” said Frà Girolamo in a firm and splendid voice.

Giovanni closed his eyes.

“I must forget Florence,” he answered. “I must forget the world.” [313]

He drew the yellow intaglio from his finger and, still with his eyes closed, dropped it on the floor; it rolled away against the wall.

With slow movements he unwound the chain from his neck and cast that down too.

Then he opened his eyes.

“Bury me in your holy and humble habit,” he asked. “I have longed to wear it in life, and in death maybe I might be thought not unworthy–and lay me in St. Mark’s Church.”

“Giovanni, both these things will I do–yet I still think that you will not die.”

The Prince shook his head and called one of his pages, who came with his eyes red from weeping for this sickness of his master.

And Giovanni bade the boy take away the figure of Tanagra and all the heathen vanities of the room and bring him the crucifix above the bed.

Sadly the youth obeyed, and when he brought the crucifix Giovanni clasped it gladly in his two slim white hands and pressed it to his heart, murmuring some prayers in his throat.

The rain drifted in through the open window, a slight, sweet spray, and the perfumes of the chamber were lost in the freshness of it. Giovanni gazed at the lightly blowing clouds and the dark tops of the cypresses stirring against them, and he thought that these trees were like souls–rooted to the earth, yet striving to be free, bending and moaning in their efforts heavenwards.

“Will you not rest in your bed?” asked Frà Girolamo, for he saw a slow pallor coming over the young man’s face. [314]

“No,” said Giovanni; “but out of your great goodness, pray for me now.”

And Savonarola knelt down and began to recite the penitential psalms in a low but strong voice.

And Giovanni Pico listened, but there was a languor and a weakness in his heart and in his mind, and he began to think of spring flowers, white and scented; of long galleries, cool with shade, looking into square courtyards full of orange trees with a fountain in the centre; of heathen statues, broken and white against a background of ilex and laurel; of the sea heated by the sun and sparkling with violet and blue; of engraved gems, yellow, tawny and orange; of alabaster heads of women, tinted faintly on the cheeks and lips and gilded in the hair-net. And none of these things were of Heaven, yet they occupied the whole of Giovanni Pico’s thoughts, and he forgot the crucifix in his slack hands; he forgot the Friar reciting the psalms; he forgot the army passing without, and his spirit turned backwards to the delights of dead springs and summers.

The Friar continued praying.

Giovanni closed his eyes; he thought that he was walking by a fountain round which little close violets grew beneath their leaves, and that a woman in a long green gown was plucking these violets and giving them to him till his hands were over-full, and the little flowers fell down in a shower on the surface of the water of the fountain and floated there above the reflection of the [315] blue sky; and he stretched out his hands to regain them, and as he did so he noticed that his hands were bare, and with a cry he started up, crying, “Where is my intaglio ring?” And the crucifix fell to the floor.

Frà Girolamo picked up the holy symbol, and his glance was red with bitter fire.

“What are your thoughts in this hour?” he cried. “Do you still dream of the lusts and pleasures of the world?”

Giovanni bent his head and wept.

“Speak to me of God,” he whispered. “I am a great sinner.”

Savonarola placed the crucifix again in his hands, and now he grasped it so hard that the sharp

edges of it entered his flesh, and at the pain he groaned, and was glad, for he felt his mind quickened with thoughts of God. Resolutely he drove all soft and beautiful images from him–all memories, all philosophies and learning, and they faded like snow before fire in front of the awful visage of God that began to rise slowly and terribly before Giovanni Pico.

The world turned the colour of dark smoke, and One with a long spear of living flame strode across the Heavens calling Judgment, and there was a drum beating and a trumpet calling.

[316] He thought that he heard the voice of Lorenzo whispering in Hell, and he tried to lift his head to look for his friend, but it was so heavy that it would not move, and he cried out–

“There is a great change in him,” said Frà Girolamo, rising from his knees. “Surely he is dying.”

The cypress trees shook in the veil of the rain and the low clouds sailed more swiftly above the pink-fronted houses. Steadily the French knights went past the street, and the chamber was full of the sound of their armour and horses; but Giovanni Pico was in darkness, labouring up to God.

He rose up from his chair and stood erect a moment, the pale light of the fading afternoon clear on his blood-red gown and his fair locks and the dark crucifix he held, as with blind eyes he stared across the room.

“Death is terrible,” he said. He fell on his knees. “Friar, death is terrible.” He fell on his face. “Death is very terrible.”

They raised him up and laid him on his bed in the shadow, and as they lifted him his crimson gown fell apart and showed his striped hose and his pearl embroidered garters and the cross-work of jewels on his shoes; and his bed was very rich and lovely and carved with little dancing figures of fauns; and Frà Girolamo was grieved that he should die amid all this vanity, and prayed heartily to the Lord to forgive it. Then he bethought him that the Prince had wished to die in the habit of his own order, and feeling assured that he was yet many hours off death, he bid the pages watch by their master and left them to go himself to the convent of St. Mark to fetch a [317] friar’s robe.

Giovanni Pico lay very still; his face was white and fallen and his eyes closed. The two boys looked at him and whispered together; they greatly loved their master, and they did not love, though they feared, Frà Girolamo.

One of them tip-toed out of the room and brought back the figure of Tanagra; the other took from a press a lustre dish of peaches and late white roses opening on to golden hearts, and took them to his master, who was muttering prayers with a feeble voice.

The boy held up the dish and said softly: “My noble lord, do not grieve so at what the Friar says, for surely Heaven is beautiful as Tuscany when the blossoms come out, and there is a pleasant company there seated on the grass and plaiting roses into crowns while God walks among them, very splendid and gentle.”

Giovanni opened his eyes and saw the flowers and fruit and smelt the rich perfume of them and faintly smiled; then he saw the figure of Tanagra, and his smile deepened, and all the world rushed round him again.

“There is great comfort in these things,” said the second page; “and wherefore should a Prince die like a poor Friar?”

He picked up the long chain Giovanni had flung down and brought it to the bed.

[318] “My ring,” said the dying man: “the yellow intaglio—”

They found it where it had spun away against the wall, and tenderly brought it to him and slipped it on his finger, and he looked at it, still smiling.

Then one of them fetched a psalter, illuminated in colour and gold, with knobs of turkis on the cover, and put that in his right hand; and the other brought a casket showing a painting of Venus and Adonis on the lid and opened it, and from it took long locks of fair and dark hair that had once belonged to all the women Giovanni Pico had loved.

This casket he laid on the bed, and Giovanni looked at it; and God receded very far away again.

“What are those bells?” he asked.

“King Charles is being received in the Duomo by the Signorie, my lord.”

Pico della Mirandola moved his pale lips slowly.

“I hope Piero Capponi will know how to–deal with–these French–I hope–Frà Girolamo will save Florence–I wish Lorenzo had lived—”

He lifted the yellow ring to his cheek and fell, as they thought, asleep.

But when Frà Girolamo returned with the humble robe of a brother of St. Mark’s, Pico della Mirandola was dead amid his vanities, with the rare intaglio on his finger.

[319] And Savonarola used no word of reproach, but permitted him to be buried in the friar’s habit and in the Church of St. Mark.

THE END

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GOD'S PLAYTHINGS ***

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