morning, just before he handed the list to the master of ceremonies, the king had written down these two names with his own hand.

Not the court only, but also the king himself, was watching for these two names. For he wished to see the effect of them, and, by the different expression of faces, estimate the number of the friends of these two nominees. The young queen alone exhibited the same unconcerned affability; her heart only beat with uniform calmness, for she did not once suspect the importance of the moment.

Even the voice of the master of ceremonies trembled slightly, as he now read, "To the place of high chamberlain to the queen, his majesty appoints my Lord Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey."

An approving murmur was heard, and almost all faces manifested glad surprise.

"He has a great many friends," muttered the king. "He is dangerous, then!" An angry look darted from his eyes upon the young earl, who was now approaching the queen, to bend his knee before her and to press to his lips the proffered hand.

Behind the queen stood Lady Jane, and as she beheld thus close before her the young man, so handsome, so long yearned for, and so secretly adored; and as she thought of her oath, she felt a violent pang, raging jealousy, killing hatred toward the young queen, who had, it is true, without suspecting it, robbed her of the loved one, and condemned her to the terrible torture of pandering to her.

The chief master of ceremonies now read in a loud solemn voice, "To the place of master of horse, his majesty appoints my Lord Thomas Seymour, Earl of Sudley."

It was very well that the king had at that moment directed his whole attention to his courtiers, and sought to read in their appearance the impression made by this nomination.

Had he observed his consort, he would have seen that an expression of delighted surprise flitted across Catharine's countenance, and a charming smile played round her lips.

But the king, as we have said, thought only of his court; he saw only that the number of those who rejoiced at Seymour's appointment did not come up to that of those who received Surrey's nomination with so much applause.

Henry frowned and muttered to himself, "These Howards are too powerful. I will keep a watchful eye upon them."

Thomas Seymour approached the queen, and, bending his knee before her, kissed her hand. Catharine received him with a gracious smile. "My lord," said she, "you will at once enter on service with me, and indeed, as I hope, in such manner as will be acceptable to the whole court. My lord, take the fleetest of your coursers, and hasten to Castle Holt, where the Princess Elizabeth is staying. Carry her this letter from her royal father, and she will follow you hither. Tell her that I long to embrace in her a friend and sister, and that I pray her to pardon me if I cannot give up to her exclusively the heart of her king and father, but that I also must still keep a place in the same for myself. Hasten to Castle Holt, my lord, and bring us Princess Elizabeth."

CHAPTER X.

THE KING'S FOOL.

Two years had passed away since the king's marriage, and still Catharine Parr had always kept in favor with her husband; still her enemies were foiled in their attempts to ruin her, and raise the seventh queen to the throne.

Catharine had ever been cautious, ever discreet. She had always preserved a cold heart and a cool head. Each

morning she had said to herself that this day might be her last; that some incautious word, some inconsiderate act, might deprive her of her crown and her life. For Henry's savage and cruel disposition seemed, like his corpulency, to increase daily, and it needed only a trifle to inflame him to the highest pitch of rage—rage which, each time, fell with fatal stroke on him who aroused it.

A knowledge and consciousness of this had made the queen cautious. She did not wish to die yet. She still loved life so much. She loved it because it had as yet afforded her so little delight. She loved it because she had so much happiness, so much rapture and enjoyment yet to hope from it. She did not wish to die yet, for she was ever waiting for that life of which she had a foretaste only in her dreams, and which her palpitating and swelling heart told her was ready to awake in her, and, with its sunny, brilliant eyes, arouse her from the winter sleep of her existence.

It was a bright and beautiful spring day. Catharine wanted to avail herself of it, to take a ride and forget for one brief hour that she was a queen. She wanted to enjoy the woods, the sweet May breeze, the song of birds, the green meadows, and to inhale in full draughts the pure air.

She wanted to ride. Nobody suspected how much secret delight and hidden rapture lay in these words. No one suspected that for months she had been looking forward with pleasure to this ride, and scarcely dared to wish for it, just because it would be the fulfilment of her ardent wishes.

She was already dressed in her riding-habit, and the little red velvet hat, with its long, drooping white feather, adorned her beautiful head. Walking up and down the room, she was waiting only for the return of the lord chamberlain, whom she had sent to the king to inquire whether he wished to speak with her before her ride.

Suddenly the door opened, and a strange apparition showed itself on the threshold. It was a small, compact

masculine figure, clad in vesture of crimson silk, which was trimmed in a style showy and motley enough, with puffs and bows of all colors, and which, just on account of its motley appearance, contrasted strangely enough with the man's white hair, and earnest and sombre face.

"Ah, the king's fool," said Catharine, with a merry laugh. "Well, John, what is it that brings you here? Do you bring me a message from the king, or have you made a bold hit, and wish me to take you again under my protection?"

"No, queen," said John Heywood, seriously, "I have made no bold hit, nor do I bring a message from the king. I bring nothing but myself. Ah, queen, I see you want to laugh, but I pray you forget for a moment that John Heywood is the king's fool, and that it does not become him to wear a serious face and indulge sad thoughts like other men."

"Oh, I know that you are not merely the king's fool, but a poet also," said Catharine, with a gracious smile.

"Yes," said he, "I am a poet, and therefore it is altogether proper for me to wear this fool's cap, for poets are all fools, and it were better for them to be hung on the nearest tree instead of being permitted to run about in their crazy enthusiasm, and babble things on account of which people of sense despise and ridicule them. I am a poet, and therefore, queen, I have put on this fool's dress, which places me under the king's protection, and allows me to say to him all sorts of things which nobody else has the courage to speak out. But to-day, queen, I come to you neither as a fool nor as a poet, but I come to you because I wish to cling to your knees and kiss your feet. I come because I wish to tell you that you have made John Heywood forever your slave. He will from this time forth lie like a dog before your threshold and guard you from every enemy and every evil which may press upon you.

Night and day he will be ready for your service, and know neither repose nor rest, if it is necessary to fulfil your command or your wish."

As he thus spoke, with trembling voice and eyes dimmed with tears, he knelt down and bowed his head at Catharine's feet.

"But what have I done to inspire you with such a feeling of thankfulness?" asked Catharine with astonishment. "How have I deserved that you, the powerful and universally dreaded favorite of the king, should dedicate yourself to my service?"

"What have you done?" said he. "My lady, you have saved my son from the stake! They had condemned him—that handsome noble youth—condemned him, because he had spoken respectfully of Thomas More; because he said this great and noble man did right to die, rather than be false to his convictions. Ah, nowadays, it requires such a trifle to condemn a man to death! a couple of thoughtless words are sufficient! And this miserable, lick-spittle Parliament, in its dastardliness and worthlessness, always condemns and sentences, because it knows that the king is always thirsty for blood, and always wants the fires of the stake to keep him warm. So they had condemned my son likewise, and they would have executed him, but for you. But you, whom God has sent as an angel of reconciliation on this regal throne reeking with blood; you who daily risk your life and your crown to save the life of some one of those unfortunates whom fanaticism and thirst for blood have sentenced, and to procure their pardon, you have save my son also."

"How! that young man who was to be burned yesterday, was your son?"

"Yes, he was my son."

"And you did not tell the king so? and you did not intercede for him?"

"Had I done so, he would have been irretrievably lost! For you well know the king is so proud of his impartiality and his virtue! Oh, had he known that Thomas is my son he would have condemned him to death, to show the people that Henry the Eighth everywhere strikes the guilty and punishes the sinner, whatever name he may bear, and whoever may intercede for him. Ah, even your supplication would not have softened him, for the high-priest of the English Church could never have pardoned this young man for not being the legitimate son of his father, for not having the right to bear his name, because his mother was the spouse of another man whom Thomas must call father."

"Poor Heywood! Yes, now I understand. The king would, indeed, never have forgiven this; and had he known it, your son would have inevitably been condemned to the stake."

"You saved him, queen! Do you not believe now that I shall be forever thankful to you?"

"I do believe it," said the queen, with a pleasant smile, as she extended her hand for him to kiss. "I believe you, and I accept your service."

"And you will need it, queen, for a tempest is gathering over your head, and soon the lightning will flash and the thunders roll."

"Oh, I fear not! I have strong nerves!" said Catharine, smiling. "When a storm comes, it is but a refreshing of nature, and I have always seen that after a storm the sun shines again."

"You are a brave soul!" said John Heywood, sadly.

"That is, I am conscious of no guilt!"

"But your enemies will invent a crime to charge you with. Ah, as soon as it is the aim to calumniate a neighbor and plunge him in misery, men are all poets!"

"But you just now said that poets are crack-brained, and should be hung to the first tree. We will, therefore, treat these slanderers as poets, that is all."

"No, that is not all!" said John Heywood, energetically. "For slanderers are like earth-worms. You cut

them in pieces, but instead of thereby killing them, you multiply each one and give it several heads."

"But what is it, then, that I am accused of?" exclaimed Catharine, impatiently. "Does not my life lie open and clear before you all? Do I ever take pains to have any secrets? Is not my heart like a glass house, into which you can all look, to convince yourselves that it is a soil wholly unfruitful, and that not a single poor little flower grows there?"

"Though this be so, your enemies will sow weeds and make the king believe that it is burning love which has grown up in your heart."

"How! They will accuse me of having a love-affair?" asked Catharine, and her lips slightly trembled.

"I do not know their plans yet; but I will find them out. There is a conspiracy at work. Therefore, queen, be on your guard! Trust nobody, for foes are ever wont to conceal themselves under hypocritical faces and deceiving words."

"If you know my enemies, name them to me!" said Catharine, impatiently. "Name them to me, that I may beware of them."

"I have not come to accuse anybody, but to warn you. I shall, therefore, take good care not to point out your enemies to you; but I will name your friends to you."

"Ah, then, I have friends, too!" whispered Catharine, with a happy smile.

"Yes, you have friends; and, indeed, such as are ready to give their blood and life for you."

"Oh, name them, name them to me!" exclaimed Catharine, all of a tremble with joyful expectation.

"I name first, Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury. He is your true and staunch friend, on whom you can build. He loves you as queen, and he prizes you as the associate whom God has sent him to bring to completion, here at the court of this most Christian and bloody king, the holy work of the Reformation, and to cause the light of knowledge to illuminate this night of superstition and priestly domination. Build strongly on Cranmer, for he is your surest and most invariable supporter, and should he sink, your fall would inevitably follow. Therefore, not only rely on him, but also protect him, and look upon him as your brother; for what you do for him, you do for yourself."

"Yes, you are right," said Catharine, thoughtfully. "Cranmer is a noble and staunch friend; and often enough already he has protected me, in the king's presence, against those little pin-prickings of my enemies, which do not indeed kill, but which make the whole body sore and faint."

"Protect him, and thus protect yourself."

"Well, and the other friends?"

"I have given Cranmer the precedence; but now, queen, I name myself as the second of your friends. If Cranmer is your staff, I will be your dog; and, believe me, so long as you have such a staff and so faithful a dog, you are safe. Cranmer will warn you of every stone that lies in your way, and I will bite and drive off the enemies, who, hidden behind the thicket, lurk in the way to fall upon you from behind."

"I thank you! Really, I thank you!" said Catharine, heartily. "Well, and what more?"

"More?" inquired Heywood with a sad smile.

"Mention a few more of my friends."

"Queen, it is a great deal, if one in a lifetime has found two friends upon whom he can rely, and whose fidelity is not guided by selfishness. You are perhaps the only crowned head that can boast of such friends."

"I am a woman," said Catharine, thoughtfully, "and many women surround me and daily swear to me unchanging faithfulness and attachment. How! are all these unworthy the title of friends? Is even Lady Jane Douglas unworthy; she, whom I have called my friend these many long years, and whom I trust as a sister? Tell me, John

Heywood, you who, as it is said, know everything, and search out everything that takes place at court, tell me, is not Lady Jane Douglas my friend?"

John Heywood suddenly became serious and gloomy, and looked on the ground, absorbed in reflection. Then he swept his large, bright eyes all around the room, in a scrutinizing manner, as if he wished to convince himself that no listener was really concealed there, and stepping close up to the queen, he whispered: "Trust her not; she is a papist, and Gardiner is her friend."

"Ah, I suspected it," whispered Catharine, sadly.

"But listen, queen; give no expression to this suspicion by look, or words, or by the slightest indication. Lull this viper into the belief that you are harmless; lull her to sleep, queen. She is a venomous and dangerous serpent, which must not be roused, lest, before you suspect it, it bite you on the heel. Be always gracious, always confidential, always friendly toward her. Only, queen, do not tell her what you would not confide to Gardiner and Earl Douglas likewise. Oh, believe me, she is like the lion in the doge's palace at Venice. The secrets that you confide to her will become accusations against you before the tribunal of blood."

Catharine shook her head with a smile. "You are too severe, John Heywood. It is possible that the religion which she secretly professes has estranged her heart from me, but she would never be capable of betraying me, or of leaguing herself with my foes. No, John, you are mistaken. It would be a crime to believe thus. My God, what a wicked and wretched world it must be in which we could not trust even our most faithful and dearest friends!"

"The world is indeed wicked and wretched, and one must despair of it, or consider it a merry jest, with which the devil tickles our noses. For me, it is such a jest, and therefore, queen, I have become the king's fool, which at least gives me the right of spurting out upon the crawling

brood all the venom of the contempt I feel for mankind, and of speaking the truth to those who have only lies, by dripping honey, ever on their lips. The sages and poets are the real fools of our day, and since I did not feel a vocation to be a king, or a priest, a hangman, or a lamb for sacrifice, I became a fool."

"Yes, a fool, that is to say, an epigrammatist, whose biting tongue makes the whole court tremble."

"Since I cannot, like my royal master, have these criminals executed, I give them a few sword-cuts with my tongue. Ah, I tell you, you will much need this ally. Be on your guard, queen: I heard this morning the first growl of the thunder, and in Lady Jane's eyes I observed the stealthy lightning. Trust her not. Trust no one here but your friends Cranmer and John Heywood."

"And you say, that in all this court, among all these brilliant women, these brave cavaliers, the poor queen has not a single friend, not a soul, whom she may trust, on whom she may lean? Oh, John Heywood, think again, have pity on the poverty of a queen. Think again. Say, *only* you two? No friend but you?"

And the queen's eyes filled with tears, which she tried in vain to repress.

John Heywood saw it and sighed deeply. Better than the queen herself perhaps, he had read the depths of her heart, and knew its deep wound. But he also had sympathy with her pain, and wished to mitigate it a little.

"I recollect," said he, gently and mournfully—"yes, I recollect, you have yet a third friend at this court."

"Ah, a third friend!" exclaimed Catharine, and again her voice sounded cheery and joyous. "Name him to me, name him! For you see clearly I am burning with impatience to hear his name."

John Heywood looked into Catharine's glowing countenance with a strange expression, at once searching and mournful, and for a moment dropped his head upon his breast and sighed.

"Now, John, give me the name of this third friend."

"Do you not know him, queen?" asked Heywood, as he again stared steadily in her face. Do you not know him? It is Thomas Seymour, Earl of Sudley."

There passed as it were a sunbeam over Catharine's face, and she uttered a low cry.

John Heywood said, sadly: "Queen, the sun strikes directly in your face. Take care that it does not blind your bright eyes. Stand in the shade, your majesty, for, hark! there comes one who might report the sunshine in your face for a conflagration."

Just then the door opened, and Lady Jane appeared on the threshold. She threw a quick, searching glance around the room, and an imperceptible smile passed over her beautiful pale face.

"Your majesty," said she solemnly, "everything is ready. You can begin your ride when it pleases you. The Princess Elizabeth awaits you in the anteroom, and your master of horse already holds the stirrup of your steed."

"And the lord chamberlain?" asked Catharine, blushing, "has he no message from the king to bring me?"

"Ay!" said the Earl of Surrey as he entered. "His majesty bids me tell the queen that she may extend her ride as far as she wishes. The glorious weather is well worth that the Queen of England should enjoy it, and enter into a contest with the sun."

"Oh, the king is the most gallant of cavaliers," said Catharine, with a happy smile. "Now come, Jane, let us ride."

"Pardon me, your majesty," said Lady Jane, stepping back. "I cannot to-day enjoy the privilege of accompanying your majesty. Lady Anne Ettersville is to-day in attendance."

"Another time, then, Jane! And you, Earl Douglas, you ride with us?"

"The king, your majesty, has ordered me to his cabinet."

"Behold now a queen abandoned by all her friends!" said Catharine cheerily, as with light, elastic step she passed through the hall to the courtyard.

"Here is something going on which I must fathom!" muttered John Heywood, who had left the hall with the rest. "A mousetrap is set, for the cats remain at home, and are hungry for their prey."

Lady Jane had remained behind in the hall with her father. Both had stepped to the window, and were silently looking down into the yard, where the brilliant cavalcade of the queen and her suite was moving about in motley confusion.

Catharine had just mounted her palfrey; the noble animal, recognizing his mistress, neighed loudly, and, giving a snort, reared up with his noble burden.

Princess Elizabeth, who was close to the queen, uttered a cry of alarm. "You will fall, queen," said she, "you ride such a wild animal."

"Oh, no, indeed," said Catharine, smiling; "Hector is not wild. It is with him as with me. This charming May air has made us both mettlesome and happy. Away, then, my ladies and lords! our horses must be to-day swift as birds. We ride to Epping Forest."

And through the open gateway dashed the cavalcade. The queen in front; at her right, the Princess Elizabeth; at her left, the master of horse, Thomas Seymour, Earl of Sudley.

When the train had disappeared, father and daughter stepped back from the window, and looked at each other with strange, dark, and disdainful looks.

"Well, Jane?" said Earl Douglas, at length. "She is still queen, and the king becomes daily more unwieldy and ailing. It is time to give him a seventh queen."

"Soon, my father, soon."

"Loves the queen Henry Howard at last?"

"Yes, he loves her!" said Jane, and her pale face was now colorless as a winding-sheet.

"I ask, whether *she* loves *him?*"

"She will love him!" murmured Jane, and then suddenly mastering herself, she continued: "but it is not enough to make the queen in love; doubtless it would be still more efficient if some one could instill a new love into the king. Did you see, father, with what ardent looks his majesty yesterday watched me and the Duchess of Richmond?"

"Did I see it? The whole court talked about it."

"Well, now, my father, manage it so that the king may be heartily bored to-day, and then bring him to me. He will find the Duchess of Richmond with me."

"Ah, a glorious thought! You will surely be Henry's seventh queen."

"I will ruin Catharine Parr, for she is my rival, and I hate her!" said Jane, with glowing cheeks and flashing eyes. "She has been queen long enough, and I have bowed myself before her. Now she shall fall in the dust before me, and I will set my foot upon her head."

CHAPTER XI.

THE RIDE.

It was a wondrous morning. The dew still lay on the grass of the meadows, over which they had just ridden to reach the thicket of the forest, in whose trees resounded the melodious voices of blithe birds. Then they rode along the banks of a babbling forest stream, and spied the deer that came forth into the glade on the other side, as if they wanted, like the queen and her train, to listen to the song of the birds and the murmuring of the fountains.

QUEEN CATHARINE PAR.

OB. 1548.

FROM THE ORIGINAL OF HOLBEIN, IN THE COLLECTION OF

DAWSON TURNER ESQ^RE A.M. F.R.A. & L.S.

Catharine felt a nameless, blissful pleasure swell her bosom. She was to-day no more the queen, surrounded by perils and foes; no more the wife of an unloved, tyrannical husband; not the queen trammelled with the shackles of etiquette. She was a free, happy woman, who, in presageful, blissful trepidation, smiled at the future, and said to each minute, "Stay, stay, for thou art so beautiful!"

It was a sweet, dreamy happiness, the happiness of that hour. With glad heart, Catharine would have given her crown for it, could she have prolonged this hour to an eternity.

He was at her side—he of whom John Heywood had said, that he was among her most trustful and trusty friends. He was there; and even if she did not dare to look at him often, often to speak to him, yet she felt his presence, she perceived the glowing beams of his eyes, which rested on her with consuming fire. Nobody could observe them. For the court rode behind them, and before them and around them was naught but Nature breathing and smiling with joy, naught but heaven and God.

She had forgotten however that she was not quite alone, and that while Thomas Seymour rode on her left, on her right was Princess Elizabeth—that young girl of fourteen years—that child, who, however, under the fire of suffering and the storms of adversity, was early forced to precocious bloom, and whose heart, by the tears and experience of her unhappy childhood, had acquired an early ripeness. Elizabeth, a child in years, had already all the strength and warmth of a woman's feelings. Elizabeth, the disowned and disinherited princess, had inherited her father's pride and ambition; and when she looked on the queen, and perceived that little crown wrought on her velvet cap in diamond embroidery, she felt in her bosom a sharp pang, and remembered, with feelings of bitter grief, that this crown was destined never to adorn her head,

since the king, by solemn act of Parliament, had excluded her from the succession to the throne.*

But for a few weeks this pain had been more gentle, and less burning. Another feeling had silenced it. Elizabeth who was never to be queen or sovereign—Elizabeth might be a wife at least. Since she was denied a crown, they should at least allow her instead a wife's happiness; they should not grudge her the privilege of twining in her hair a crown of myrtle.

She had been early taught to ever have a clear consciousness of all her feelings; nor had she now shrunk from reading the depths of her heart with steady and sure eye.

She knew that she loved, and that Thomas Seymour was the man whom she loved.

But the earl? Did he love her in return? Did he understand the child's heart? Had he, beneath the childish face, already recognized the passionate, proud woman? Had he guessed the secrets of this soul, at once so maidenly and chaste, and yet so passionate and energetic?

Thomas Seymour never betrayed a secret, and what he had, it may be, read in the eyes of the princess, and what he had, perhaps, spoken to her in the quiet shady walks of Hampton Court, or in the long, dark corridors of Whitehall, was known to no one save those two. For Elizabeth had a strong, masculine soul; she needed no confidant to share her secrets; and Thomas Seymour had feared even, like the immortal hair-dresser of King Midas, to dig a hole and utter his secret therein; for he knew very well that, if the reed grew up and repeated his words, he might, for these words, lay his head on the block.

Poor Elizabeth! She did not even suspect the earl's secret and her own were not, however, the same; she did not suspect that Thomas Seymour, if he guessed her secret, might, perhaps, avail himself of it to make thereof a brilliant foil for his own secret.

He had, like her, ever before his eyes the diamond

* Tytler, p. 340.

crown on the head of the young queen, and he had noticed well how old and feeble the king had become of late.

As he now rode by the side of the two princesses, he felt his heart swell with a proud joy, and bold and ambitious schemes alone occupied his soul.

The two women understood nothing of this. They were both too much occupied with their own thoughts; and while Catharine's eyes swept with beaming look the landscape far and wide, the brow of the princess was slightly clouded, and her sharp eye rested with a fixed and watchful gaze on Thomas Seymour.

She had noticed the impassioned look which he had now and then fastened on the queen. The slight, scarcely perceptible tremor of his voice, when he spoke, had not escaped her.

Princess Elizabeth was jealous; she felt the first torturing motions of that horrible disease which she had inherited from her father, and in the feverish paroxysms of which the king had sent two of his wives to the scaffold.

She was jealous, but not of the queen; much more, she dreamed not that the queen might share and return Seymour's love. It never came into her mind to accuse the queen of an understanding with the earl. She was jealous only of the looks which he directed toward the queen; and because she was watching those looks, she could not at the same time read the eyes of her young stepmother also; she could not see the gentle flames which, kindled by the fire of his looks, glowed in hers.

Thomas Seymour had seen them, and had he now been alone with Catharine, he would have thrown himself at her feet and confided to her all the deep and dangerous secrets that he had so long harbored in his breast; he would have left to her the choice of bringing him to the block, or of accepting the love which he consecrated to her.

But there, behind them, were the spying, all-observing, all-surmising courtiers; there was the Princess Elizabeth, who, had he ventured to speak to the queen, would have

conjectured from his manner the words which she could not understand; for love sees so clearly, and jealousy has such keen ears!

Catharine suspected nothing of the thoughts of her companions. She alone was happy; she alone gave herself up with full soul to the enjoyment of the moment. She drew in with intense delight the pure air; she drank in the odor of the meadow blossoms; she listened with thirsty ear to the murmuring song which the wind wafted to her from the boughs of the trees. Her wishes extended not beyond the hour; she rested in the full enjoyment of the presence of her beloved. He was there—what needed she more to make her happy?

Her wishes extended not beyond this hour. She was only conscious how delightful it was thus to be at her beloved's side, to breathe the same air, to see the same sun, the same flowers on which his eyes rested, and on which their glances at least might meet in *kisses* which were denied to their lips.

But as they thus rode along, silent and meditative, each occupied with his own thoughts, there came the assistance for which Thomas Seymour had prayed, fluttering along in the shape of a fly.

At first this fly sported and buzzed about the nose of the fiery, proud beast which the queen rode; and as no one noticed it, it was not disturbed by Hector's tossing of his mane, but crept securely and quietly to the top of the noble courser's head, pausing a little here and there, and sinking his sting into the horse's flesh, so that he reared and began loudly to neigh.

But Catharine was a bold and dexterous rider, and the proud spirit of her horse only afforded her delight, and gave the master of horse an opportunity to praise her skill and coolness.

Catharine received with a sweet smile the encomiums of her beloved. But the fly kept creeping on, and, impelled by a diabolic delight, now penetrated the horse's ear.

The poor, tormented animal made a spring forward. This spring, instead of freeing him from his enemy, made him penetrate the ear still farther, and sink his sting still deeper into the soft fleshy part of the same.

Stung by the maddening pain, the horse cast off all control, and, heedless of bridle and scorning the bit, dashed forward in a furious run—forward over the meadow swift as an arrow, resistless as the lightning.

"On, on, to the queen's rescue!" thundered the master of horse, and with mad haste, away flew he also over the meadow.

"To the help of the queen!" repeated Princess Elizabeth, and she likewise spurred her horse and hurried forward, accompanied by the whole suite.

But what is the speed of a horse ever so swift, but yet in his senses, compared with the raving madness of a crazy courser, that, despising all subjection, and mocking at the bridle, dashes ahead, foaming with the sense of freedom and unrestraint, uncontrollable as the surge lashed by the storm!

Already far behind them lay the meadows, far behind them the avenues leading through the woods, and over brooks and ditches, over meadows and wastes, Hector was dashing on.

The queen still sat firmly in the saddle; her cheeks were colorless; her lips trembled; but her eye was still bright and clear. She had not yet lost her presence of mind; she was perfectly conscious of her danger. The din of screaming, screeching voices, which she heard at first, had long since died away in silence behind her. An immense solitude, the deep silence of the grave, was around her. Naught was heard save the panting and snorting of the horse; naught but the crash and clatter of his hoofs.

Suddenly, however, this sound seemed to find an echo. It was repeated over yonder. There was the same snorting and panting; there was the same resounding trampling of hoofs.

And now, oh, now, struck on Catharine's ear the sound of a voice only too well loved, and made her scream aloud with delight and desire.

But this cry frightened anew the enraged animal. For a moment, exhausted and panting, he had slackened in his mad race; now he sprang forward with renewed energy; now he flew on as if impelled by the wings of the wind.

But ever nearer and nearer sounded the loved voice, ever nearer the tramp of his horse.

They were now upon a large plain, shut in on all sides by woods. While the queen's horse circled the plain in a wide circuit, Seymour's, obedient to the rein, sped directly across it, and was close behind the queen.

"Only a moment more! Only hold your arms firmly around the animal's neck, that the shock may not hurl you off, when I lay hold of the rein!" shouted Seymour, and he set his spurs into his horse's flanks, so that he sprang forward with a wild cry.

This cry roused Hector to new fury. Panting for breath, he shot forward with fearful leaps, now straight into the thicket of the woods.

"I hear his voice no more," murmured Catharine. And at length overcome with anxiety and the dizzy race, and worn out with her exertions, she closed her eyes; her senses appeared to be about leaving her.

But at this moment, a firm hand seized with iron grasp the rein of her horse, so that he bowed his head, shaking, trembling, and almost ashamed, as though he felt he had found his lord and master.

"Saved! I am saved!" faltered Catharine, and breathless, scarcely in her senses, she leaned her head on Seymour's shoulder.

He lifted her gently from the saddle, and placed her on the soft moss beneath an ancient oak. Then he tied the horses to a bough, and Catharine, trembling and faint, sank on her knees to rest after such violent exertion.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DECLARATION.

Thomas Seymour returned to Catharine. She still lay there with closed eyes, pale and motionless.

He gazed on her long and steadily; his eyes drank in, in long draughts, the sight of this beautiful and noble woman, and he forgot at that moment that she was a queen.

He was at length alone with her. At last, after two years of torture, of resignation, of dissimulation, God had granted him this hour, for which he had so long yearned, which he had so long considered unattainable. Now it was there, now it was his.

And had the whole court, had King Henry himself, come right then, Thomas Seymour would not have heeded it; it would not have affrighted him. The blood had mounted to his head and overcome his reason. His heart, still agitated and beating violently from his furious ride and his anxiety for Catharine, allowed him to hear no other voice than that of passion.

He knelt by the queen and seized her hand.

Perhaps it was this touch which roused her from her unconsciousness. She raised her eyes and gazed around with a perplexed look.

"Where am I?" breathed she in a low tone.

Thomas Seymour pressed her hand to his lips. "You are with the most faithful and devoted of your servants, queen!"

"Queen!" This word roused her from her stupor, and caused her to raise herself half up.

"But where is my court? Where is the Princess Elizabeth? Where are all the eyes that heretofore watched me? Where are all the listeners and spies who accompany the queen?"

"They are far away from here," said Seymour in a tone