

Just then was heard without a flourish of trumpets and the clatter of horse-hoofs.

"The queen has returned," said John Heywood, with a countenance beaming with joy, as he fixed his smiling gaze full of mischievous satisfaction on Lady Jane. "Nothing further now remains for you to do, but dutifully to meet your mistress upon the great staircase, for, as you so wisely said before, *the queen still lives.*"

Without waiting for an answer, John Heywood ran out and rushed through the anteroom and down the steps to meet the queen. Lady Jane watched him with a dark, angry look; and as she turned slowly to the door to go and meet the queen, she muttered low between her closely-pressed lips: "The fool must die, for he is the queen's friend!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CONFIDANT.

THE queen was just ascending the steps of the great public staircase, and she greeted John Heywood with a friendly smile.

"My lady," said he aloud, "I have a few words in private to say to you, in the name of his majesty."

"Words in private!" repeated Catharine, as she stopped upon the terrace of the palace. "Well, then, fall back, my lords and ladies; we wish to receive his majesty's mysterious message."

The royal train silently and respectfully withdrew into the large anteroom of the palace, while the queen remained alone with John Heywood on the terrace.

"Now, speak, John."

"Queen, heed well my words, and grave them deep on your memory! A conspiracy is forged against you, and in

a few days, at the great festival, it will be ripe for execution. Guard well, therefore, every word you utter, ay, even your very thoughts. Beware of every dangerous step, for you may be certain that a listener stands behind you! And if you need a confidant, confide in no one but me! I tell you, a great danger lies before you, and only by prudence and presence of mind will you be able to avoid it."

This time the queen did not laugh at her friend's warning voice. She was serious; she even trembled.

She had lost her proud sense of security and her serene confidence—she was no longer guiltless—she had a dangerous secret to keep, consequently she felt a dread of discovery; and she trembled not merely for herself, but also for him whom she loved.

"And in what consists this plot?" asked she, with agitation.

"I do not yet understand it; I only know that it exists. But I will search it out, and if your enemies lurk about you with watchful eyes, well, then, I will have spying eyes to observe them."

"And is it I alone that they threaten?"

"No, queen, your friend also."

Catharine trembled. "What friend, John?"

"Archbishop Cranmer."

"Ah, the archbishop!" replied she, drawing a deep breath.

"And is he all, John? Does their enmity pursue only me and him?"

"Only you two!" said John Heywood, sadly, for he had fully understood the queen's sigh of relief, and he knew that she had trembled for another. "But remember, queen, that Cranmer's destruction would be likewise your own; and that as you protect the archbishop, he also will protect you with the king—you, queen, and your *friends.*"

Catharine gave a slight start, and the crimson on her cheek grew deeper.

"I shall always be mindful of that, and ever be a true and real friend to him and to you; for you two are my only friends: is it not so?"

"No, your majesty, I spoke to you of yet a third, of Thomas Seymour."

"Oh, he!" cried she with a sweet smile. Then she said suddenly, and in a low quick voice: "You say I must trust no one here but you. Now, then, I will give you a proof of my confidence. Await me in the green summer-house at twelve o'clock to-night. You must be my attendant on a dangerous excursion. Have you courage, John?"

"Courage to lay down my life for you, queen!"

"Come, then, but bring your weapon with you."

"At your command! and is that your only order for to-day?"

"That is all, John! only," added she, with hesitation and a slight blush, "only, if you perchance meet Earl Sudley, you may say to him that I charged you to greet him in my name."

"Oh!" sighed John Heywood, sadly.

"He has to-day saved my life, John," said she, as if excusing herself. "It becomes me well, then, to be grateful to him."

And giving him a friendly nod, she stepped into the porch of the castle.

"Now let anybody say again, that chance is not the most mischievous and spiteful of all devils!" muttered John Heywood. "This devil, chance, throws in the queen's way the very person she ought most to avoid; and she must be, as in duty bound, very grateful to a lover. Oh, oh, so he has saved her life? But who knows whether he may not be one day the cause of her losing it!"

He dropped his head gloomily upon his breast, when suddenly he heard behind him a low voice calling his name; and as he turned, he saw the young Princess Elizabeth hastening toward him with a hurried step.

She was at that moment very beautiful. Her eyes gleamed with the fire of passion; her cheeks glowed; and about her crimson lips there played a gentle, happy smile. She wore, according to the fashion of the time, a close-fitting high-necked dress, which showed off to perfection the delicate lines of her slender and youthful form, while the wide standing collar concealed the somewhat too great length of her neck, and made her ruddy, as yet almost childish face stand out as it were from a pedestal. On either side of her high, thoughtful brow, fell, in luxurious profusion, light flaxen curls; her head was covered with a black velvet cap, from which a white feather drooped to her shoulders.

She was altogether a charming and lovely apparition, full of nobleness and grace, full of fire and energy; and yet, in spite of her youthfulness, not wanting in a certain grandeur and dignity. Elizabeth, though still almost a child, and frequently bowed and humbled by misfortune, yet ever remained her father's own daughter. And though Henry had declared her a bastard and excluded her from the succession to the throne, yet she bore the stamp of her royal blood in her high, haughty brow; in her keen, flashing eye.

As she now stood before John Heywood, she was not, however, the haughty, imperious princess, but merely the shy, blushing maiden, who feared to trust her first girlish secret to another's ear, and ventured only with trembling hand to draw aside the veil which concealed her heart.

"John Heywood," said she, "you have often told me that you loved me; and I know that my poor unfortunate mother trusted you, and summoned you as a witness of her innocence. You could not at that time save the mother, but will you now serve Anne Boleyn's daughter, and be her faithful friend?"

"I will," said Heywood, solemnly, "and as true as there is a God above us, you shall never find me a traitor."

"I believe you, John; I know that I may trust you."

Listen then, I will now tell you my secret—a secret which no one but God knows, and the betrayal of which might bring me to the scaffold. Will you then swear to me, that you will never, under any pretext, and from any motive whatsoever, betray to anybody, so much as a single word of what I am now about to tell you? Will you swear to me, never to intrust this secret to any one, even on your death-bed, and not to betray it even in the confessional?”

“Now as regards that, princess,” said John, with a laugh, “you are perfectly safe. I never go to confession, for confession is a highly-spiced dish of popery on which I long since spoilt my stomach; and as concerns my death-bed, one cannot, under the blessed and pious reign of Henry the Eighth, altogether know whether he will be really a participant of any kind, or whether he may not make a far more speedy and convenient trip into eternity by the aid of the hangman.”

“Oh, be serious, John—do, I pray you! Let the fool’s mask, under which you hide your sober and honest face, not hide it from me also. Be serious, John, and swear to me that you will keep my secret.”

“Well, then, I swear, princess; I swear by your mother’s spirit to betray not a word of what you are going to tell me.”

“I thank you, John. Now lean this way nearer to me, lest the breeze may catch a single word of mine and bear it farther. John, I love!”

She saw the half-surprised, half-incredulous smile which played around John Heywood’s lips. “Oh,” continued she, passionately, “you believe me not. You consider my fourteen years, and you think the child knows nothing yet of a maiden’s feelings. But remember, John, that those girls who live under a warm sun are early ripened by his glowing rays, and are already wives and mothers when they should still be dreaming children. Well, now, I too am the daughter of a torrid zone, only mine has not been the sun of prosperity, and it has been sorrow and

misfortune which have matured my heart. Believe me, John, I love! A glowing, consuming fire rages within me; it is at once my delight and my misery, my happiness and my future.

“The king has robbed me of a brilliant and glorious future; let them not, then, grudge me a happy one, at least. Since I am never to be a queen, I will at least be a happy and beloved wife. If I am condemned to live in obscurity and lowliness, at the very least, I must not be prohibited from adorning this obscure and inglorious existence with flowers, which thrive not at the foot of the throne, and to illuminate it with stars more sparkling than the refulgence of the most radiant kingly crown.”

“Oh, you are mistaken about your own self!” said John Heywood, sorrowfully. “You choose the one only because the other is denied. You would love only because you cannot rule; and since your heart, which thirsts for fame and honor, can find no other satisfaction, you would quench its thirst with some other draught, and would administer love as an opiate to lull to rest its burning pains. Believe me, princess, you do not yet know yourself! You were not born to be merely a loving wife, and your brow is much too high and haughty to wear only a crown of myrtle. Therefore, consider well what you do, princess! Be not carried away by your father’s passionate blood, which boils in your veins also. Think well before you act. Your foot is yet on one of the steps to the throne. Draw it not back voluntarily. Maintain your position; then, the next step brings you again one stair higher up. Do not voluntarily renounce your just claim, but abide in patience the coming of the day of retribution and justice. Only do not yourself make it impossible, that there may then be a full and glorious reparation. *Princess Elizabeth* may yet one day be queen, provided she has not exchanged her name for one less glorious and noble.”

“John Heywood,” said she, with a bewitching smile, “I have told you I love him.”

"Well, love him as much as you please, but do it in silence, and tell him not of it; but teach your love resignation."

"John, he knows it already."

"Ah, poor princess! you are still but a child, that sticks its hands in the fire with smiling bravery and scorches them, because it knows not that fire burns."

"Let it burn, John, burn! and let the flames curl over my head! Better be consumed in fire than perish slowly and horribly with a deadly chill! I love him, I tell you, and he already knows it!"

"Well, then, love him, but, at least, do not marry him!" cried John Heywood, surlily.

"Marry!" cried she, with astonishment. "Marry! I had never thought of it."

She dropped her head upon her breast, and stood there, silent and thoughtful.

"I am much afraid I made a blunder, then!" muttered John Heywood. "I have suggested a new thought to her. Ah, ah, King Henry has done well in appointing me his fool! Just when we deem ourselves the wisest, we are the greatest fools!"

"John," said Elizabeth, as she raised her head again and smiled to him in a glow of excitement, "John, you are entirely right; if we love, we must marry."

"But I said just the contrary, princess!"

"All right!" said she, resolutely. "All this belongs to the future; we will busy ourselves with the present. I have promised my lover an interview."

"An interview!" cried John Heywood, in amazement. "You will not be so foolhardy as to keep your promise?"

"John Heywood," said she, with an air of approaching solemnity, "King Henry's daughter will never make a promise without fulfilling it. For better or for worse, I will always keep my plighted word, even if the greatest misery and ruin were the result!"

John Heywood ventured to offer no further opposition.

There was at this moment something peculiarly lofty, proud, and truly royal in her air, which impressed him with awe, and before which he bowed.

"I have granted him an interview because he wished it," said Elizabeth; "and, John, I will confess it to you, my own heart longed for it. Seek not, then, to shake my resolution; it is as firm as a rock. But if you are not willing to stand by me, say so, and I will then look about me for another friend, who loves me enough to impose silence on his thoughts."

"But who, perhaps, will go and betray you. No, no, it has been once resolved upon, and unalterably; so no one but I must be your confidant. Tell me, then, what I am to do, and I will obey you."

"You know, John, that my apartments are situated in yonder wing, overlooking the garden. Well, in my dressing-room, behind one of the large wall pictures, I have discovered a door leading into a lonely, dark corridor. From this corridor there is a passage up into yonder tower. It is unoccupied and deserted. Nobody ever thinks of entering that part of the castle, and the quiet of the grave reigns throughout those apartments, which nevertheless are furnished with a magnificence truly regal. There will I receive him."

"But how shall he make his way thither?"

"Oh, do not be concerned; I have thought over that many days since; and while I was refusing my lover the interview for which he again and again implored me, I was quietly preparing everything so as to be able one day to grant it to him. To-day this object is attained, and to-day have I fulfilled his wish, voluntarily and unasked; for I saw he had no more courage to ask again. Listen, then. From the tower, a spiral staircase leads down to a small door, through which you gain entrance into the garden. I have a key to this door. Here it is. Once in possession of this key, he has nothing further to do but remain behind in the park this evening, instead of leaving the cas-

tle; and by means of this he will come to me, for I will wait for him in the tower, in the large room directly opposite the staircase landing. Here, take the key; give it to him, and repeat to him all that I have said."

"Well, princess, there remains for you now only to appoint the hour at which you will receive him there."

"The hour," said she, as she turned away her blushing face. "You understand, John, that it is not feasible to receive him there by day, because there is by day not a single moment in which I am not watched."

"You will then receive him by night!" said John Heywood, sadly. "At what hour?"

"At midnight! And now you know all; and I beg you, John, hasten and carry him my message; for, look, the sun is setting, and it will soon be night."

She nodded to him with a smile, and turned to go.

"Princess, you have forgotten the most important point. You have not yet told me his name."

"My God! and you do not guess it? John Heywood, who has such sharp eyes, sees not that there is at this court but a single one that deserves to be loved by a daughter of the king!"

"And the name of this single one is——"

"Thomas Seymour, Earl of Sudley!" whispered Elizabeth, as she turned away quickly and entered the castle.

"Oh, Thomas Seymour!" said John Heywood, utterly astounded. As if paralyzed with horror, he stood there motionless, staring up at the sky and repeating over and over, "Thomas Seymour! Thomas Seymour! So he is a sorcerer who administers a love-potion to all the women, and befools them with his handsome, saucy face. Thomas Seymour! The queen loves him; the princess loves him; and then there is this Duchess of Richmond, who will by all means be his wife! This much, however, is certain, he is a traitor who deceives both, because to both he has made the same confession of love. And there again is that imp, chance, which compels me to be the confidant of both

these women. But I will be well on my guard against executing both my commissions to this sorcerer. Let him at any rate become the husband of the princess; perhaps this would be the surest means of freeing the queen from her unfortunate love."

He was silent, and still gazed up thoughtfully at the sky. "Yes," said he then, quite cheerfully, "thus shall it be. I will combat the one love with the other. For the queen to love him, is dangerous. I will therefore so conduct matters that she must hate him. I will remain her confidant. I will receive her letters and her commissions, but I will burn her letters and not execute her commissions. I am not at liberty to tell her that the faithless Thomas Seymour is false to her, for I have solemnly pledged my word to the princess never to breathe her secret to any one; and I will and must keep my word. Smile and love, then; dream on thy sweet dream of love, queen; I wake for thee; I will cause the dark cloud resting on thee to pass by. It may, perhaps, touch thine heart; but thy noble and beautiful head—that at least it shall not be allowed to crush; that——"

"Now, then, what are you staring up at the sky for, as if you read there a new epigram with which to make the king laugh, and the parsons rave?" asked a voice near him; and a hand was laid heavily on his shoulder.

John Heywood did not look round at all; he remained in the same attitude, gazing up steadily at the sky. He had very readily recognized the voice of him who had addressed him; he knew very well that he who stood near him was no other than the bold sorcerer whom he was just then cursing at the bottom of his heart; no other than Thomas Seymour, Earl of Sudley.

"Say, John, is it really an epigram?" asked Thomas Seymour again. "An epigram on the hypocritical, lustful, and sanctimonious priestly rabble, that with blasphemous hypocrisy fawn about the king, and are ever watchful how they can set a trap for one of us honorable and

brave men? Is that what Heaven is now revealing to you?"

"No, my lord, I am only looking at a hawk which hovers about there in the clouds. I saw him mount, earl, and only think of the wonder—he had in each talon a dove! Two doves for one hawk. Is not that too much—wholly contrary to law and nature?"

The earl cast on him a penetrating and distrustful look. But John Heywood, remaining perfectly calm and unembarrassed, continued looking at the clouds.

"How stupid such a brute is, and how much to his disadvantage will his very greediness be! For since he holds a dove in each claw, he will not be able to enjoy either of them; because he has no claw at liberty with which to tear them. Soon as he wishes to enjoy the one, the other will escape; when he grabs after that, the other flies away; and so at last he will have nothing at all, because he was too rapacious and wanted more than he could use."

"And you are looking after this hawk in the skies? But you are perhaps mistaken, and he whom you seek is not above there at all, but here below, and perchance quite close to you?" asked Thomas Seymour significantly.

But John Heywood would not understand him.

"Nay," said he, "he still flies, but it will not last long. For verily I saw the owner of the dovecot from which the hawk has stolen the two doves. He had a weapon; and he, be ye sure of it—he will kill this hawk, because he has robbed him of his pet doves."

"Enough, enough!" cried the earl, impatiently. "You would give me a lesson, but you must know I take no counsel from a fool, even were he the wisest."

"In that you are right, my lord, for only fools are so foolish as to hearken to the voice of wisdom. Besides, each man forges his own fortune. And now, wise sir, I will give you a key, which you yourself have forged, and behind which lies your fortune. There, take this key; and if you at midnight slip through the garden to the

tower over yonder, this key will open to you the door of the same, and you can then without hesitation mount the spiral staircase and open the door which is opposite the staircase. Behind that you will find the fortune which you have forged for yourself, sir blacksmith, and which will bid you welcome with warm lips and soft arms. And so commending you to God, I must hasten home to think over the comedy which the king has commanded me to write."

"But you do not so much as tell me from whom this message comes?" said Earl Sudley, retaining him. "You invite me to a meeting and give me a key, and I know not who will await me there in that tower."

"Oh, you do not know? There is then more than one who *might* await you there? Well, then, it is the youngest and smallest of the two doves who sends you the key."

"Princess Elizabeth?"

"You have named her, not I!" said John Heywood, as he disengaged himself from the earl's grasp and hurried across the courtyard to betake himself to his lodgings.

Thomas Seymour watched him with a scowl, and then slowly directed his eyes to the key that Heywood had given him.

"The princess then awaits me," whispered he, softly. "Ah, who can read it in the stars? who can know whither the crown will roll when it tumbles from King Henry's head? I love Catharine, but I love ambition still more; and if it is demanded, to ambition must I sacrifice my heart."

CHAPTER XVII.

GAMMER GURTON'S NEEDLE.

SLOWLY and lost in gloomy thought, John Heywood walked toward his lodgings. These lodgings were situated in the second or inner court of the vast palace of White-