"He knows everything. And until that moment he will allow no one to suspect his wrath and fury. He says he will make the queen perfectly secure, in order to get into his hands thereby sure proof of her guilt. Well, we will furnish him this evidence; and hence it follows that the queen is inevitably lost."

"But hark! The doors are opened, and the master of ceremonies comes to summon us to the golden gallery."

"Just walk in," muttered John Heywood, gliding along behind them. "I am still here; and I will be the mouse that gnaws the net in which you want to catch my noble-minded lioness."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE QUEEN'S ROSETTE.

THE golden gallery, in which the tourney of the poets was to take place, presented to-day a truly enchanting and fairy-like aspect. Mirrors of gigantic size, set in broad gilt frames, ornamented with the most perfect carved work, covered the walls, and threw back, a thousand times reflected, the enormous chandeliers which, with their hundreds and hundreds of candles, shed the light of day in the vast hall. Here and there were seen, arranged in front of the mirrors, clusters of the rarest and choicest flowers, which poured through the hall their fragrance, stupefying and yet so enchanting, and outshone in brilliancy of colors even the Turkish carpet, which stretched through the whole room and changed the floor into one immense flower-bed. Between the clumps of flowers were seen tables with golden vases, in which were refreshing beverages; while at the other end of the enormous gallery stood a gigantic sideboard, which contained the choicest and rarest dishes. At present the doors of the sideboard, which, when open, formed a room of itself, were closed.

They had not yet come to the material enjoyments; they were still occupied in absorbing the spiritual. The brilliant and select company that filled the hall was still for some time condemned to be silent, and to shut up within them their laughter and gossip, their backbiting and slander, their flattery and hypocrisy.

Just now a pause ensued. The king, with Croke, had recited to his court a scene from "Antigone"; and they were just taking breath from the wonderful and exalted enjoyment of having just heard a language of which they understood not a word, but which they found to be very beautiful, since the king admired it.

Henry the Eighth had again leaned back on his golden throne, and, panting, rested from his prodigious exertion; and while he rested and dreamed, an invisible band played a piece of music composed by the king himself, and which, with its serious and solemn movement, strangely contrasted with this room so brilliant and cheerful—with this splendid, laughing and jesting assembly.

For the king had bidden them amuse themselves and be gay; to give themselves up to unrestrained chit-chat. It was, therefore, natural for them to laugh, and to appear not to notice the king's exhaustion and repose.

Besides, they had not for a long time seen Henry so cheerful, so full of youthful life, so sparkling with wit and humor, as on this evening. His mouth was overflowing with jests that made the gentlemen laugh, and the beautiful, brilliant women blush, and, above all, the young queen, who sat by him on the rich and splendid throne, and now and then threw stolen and longing glances at her lover, for whom she would willingly and gladly have given her royal crown and her throne.

When the king saw how Catharine blushed, he turned to her, and in his tenderest tone begged her pardon for his jest, which, however, in its sauciness, served only to make

his queen still more beautiful, still more bewitching. His words were then so tender and heartfelt, his looks so full of love and admiration, that nobody could doubt but that the queen was in highest favor with her husband, and that he loved her most tenderly.

Only the few who knew the secret of this tenderness of the king, so open and so unreservedly displayed, comprehended fully the danger which threatened the queen; for the king was never more to be dreaded than when he flattered; and on no one did his wrath fall more crushingly than on him whom he had just kissed and assured of his favor.

This was what Earl Douglas said to himself, when he saw with what a cordial look Henry the Eighth chatted with his consort.

Behind the throne of the royal pair was seen John Heywood, in his fantastic and dressy costume, with his face at once noble and cunning; and the king just then broke out into loud, resounding laughter at his sarcastic and satirical observations.

"King, your laugh does not please me to-day," said John Heywood, earnestly. "It smacks of gall. Do you not find it so, queen?"

The queen was startled from her sweet reveries, and that was what John Heywood had wished. He, therefore, repeated his question.

"No, indeed," said she; "I find the king to-day quite like the sun. He is radiant and bright, like it."

"Queen, you do not mean the sun, but the full moon," said John Heywood. "But only see, Henry, how cheerfully Earl Archibald Douglas over there is chatting with the Duchess of Richmond! I love that good earl. He always appears like a blind-worm, which is just in the notion of stinging some one on the heel, and hence it comes that, when near the earl, I always transform myself into a crane. I stand on one leg; because I am then sure to have the other at least safe from the earl's sting. King, were I like you, I would not have those killed that the blind-worm has stung; but I would root out the blind-worms, that the feet of honorable men might be secure from them."

The king cast at him a quick, searching look, which John Heywood answered with a smile.

"Kill the blind-worms, King Henry," said he; "and when you are once at work destroying vermin, it will do no harm if you once more give these priests also a good kick. It is now a long time since we burnt any of them, and they are again becoming arrogant and malicious, as they always were and always will be. I see even the pious and meek bishop of Winchester, the noble Gardiner, who is entertaining himself with Lady Jane over there, smiling very cheerfully, and that is a bad sign; for Gardiner smiles only when he has again caught a poor soul, and prepared it as a breakfast for his lord. I do not mean you, king, but his lord—the devil. For the devil is always hungry for noble human souls; and to him who catches one for him he gives indulgence for his sins for an hour. Therefore Gardiner catches so many souls; for since he sins every hour, every hour he needs indulgence."

"You are very spiteful to-day, John Heywood," said the queen, smiling, while the king fixed his eyes on the ground, thoughtful and musing.

John Heywood's words had touched the sore place of his heart, and, in spite of himself, filled his suspicious soul with new doubts.

He mistrusted not merely the accused, but the accusers also; and if he punished the one as criminals, he would have willingly punished the others as informants.

He asked himself: "What aim had Earl Douglas and Gardiner in accusing the queen; and why had they startled him out of his quiet and confidence?" At that moment, when he looked on his beautiful wife, who sat by him in such serene tranquillity, unembarrassed and smiling, he felt a deep anger fill his heart, not against Catharine, but against Jane, who accused her.

She was so lovely and beautiful! Why did they envy him her? Why did they not leave him in his sweet delusion? But perhaps she was not guilty. No, she was not. The eye of a culprit is not thus bright and clear. The air of infidelity is not thus unembarrassed—of such maidenly delicacy.

Moreover, the king was exhausted and disgusted. One can become satiated even with cruelty; and, at this hour, Henry felt completely surfeited with bloodshed.

His heart—for, in such moments of mental relaxation and bodily enfeeblement, the king even had a heart—his heart was already in the mood of pronouncing the word pardon, when his eye fell on Henry Howard, who, with his father, the Duke of Norfolk, and surrounded by a circle of brilliant and noble lords, was standing not far from the royal throne.

The king felt a deadly stab in his breast, and his eyes darted lightning over toward that group.

How proud and imposing the figure of the noble earl looked; how high he overtopped all others; how noble and handsome his countenance; how kingly was his bearing and whole appearance!

Henry must admit all this; and because he must do so, he hated him.

Nay! no mercy for Catharine! If what her accusers had told him were true—if they could give him the proofs of the queen's guilt, then she was doomed. And how could he doubt it? Had they not told him that in the rosette, which the queen would give Earl Surrey, was contained a love-letter from Catharine, which he would find? Had not Earl Surrey, in a confidential hour, yesterday imparted this to his sister, the Duchess of Richmond, when he wished to bribe her to be the messenger of love between the queen and himself? Had she not accused the queen of having meetings by night with the earl in the deserted tower?

Nay, no compassion for his fair queen, if Henry Howard was her lover.

He must again look over at his hated enemy. There he still stood by his father, the Duke of Norfolk. How sprightly and gracefully the old duke moved; how slim his form; and how lofty and imposing his bearing! The king was younger than the duke; and yet he was fettered to his truckle-chair; yet he sat on his throne like an immovable colossus, while *he* moved freely and lightly, and obeyed his own will, not necessity. Henry could have crushed him—this proud, arrogant earl, who was a free man, whilst his king was nothing but a prisoner to his own flesh, a slave of his unwieldy body.

"I will exterminate it—this proud, arrogant race of Howards!" muttered the king, as he turned with a friendly smile to the Earl of Surrey.

"You have promised us some of your poems, cousin!" said he. "So let us now enjoy them; for you see, indeed, how impatiently all the beautiful women look on England's noblest and greatest poet, and how very angry with me they would be if I still longer withhold this enjoyment from them! Even my fair queen is full of longing after your songs, so rich in fancy; for you well know, Howard, she loves poetry, and, above all things, yours."

Catharine had scarcely heard what the king said. Her looks had encountered Seymour's, and their eyes were fixed on each other's. But she had then cast down to the floor her eyes, still completely filled with the sight of her lover, in order to think of him, since she no longer dared gaze at him.

When the king called her name, she started up and looked at him inquiringly. She had not heard what he had said to her.

"Not even for a moment does she look toward me!" said Henry Howard to himself. "Oh, she loves me not! or at least her understanding is mightier than her love. Oh, Catharine, Catharine, fearest thou death so much that thou canst on that account deny thy love?"

With desperate haste he drew out his portfolio. "I

will compel her to look at me, to think of me, to remember her oath," thought he. "Woe to her, if she does not fulfil it—if she gives me not the rosette, which she promised me with so solemn a vow! If she does it not, then I will break this dreadful silence, and before her king, and before her court, accuse her of treachery to her love. Then, at least, she will not be able to cast me off; for we shall mount the scaffold together."

"Does my exalted queen allow me to begin?" asked he aloud, wholly forgetting that the king had already given him the order to do so, and that it was *he* only who could grant such a permission.

Catharine looked at him in astonishment. Then her glance fell on Lady Jane Douglas, who was gazing over at her with an imploring expression. The queen smiled; for she now remembered that it was Jane's beloved who had spoken to her, and that she had promised the poor young girl to raise again the dejected Earl of Surrey and to be gracious to him.

"Jane is right," thought she; "he appears to be deeply depressed and suffering. Ah, it must be very painful to see those whom one loves suffering. I will, therefore, comply with Jane's request, for she says this might revive the earl."

With a smile she bowed to Howard. "I beg you," said she, "to lend our festival its fairest ornament—to adorn it with the fragrant flowers of your poesy. You see we are all burning with desire to hear your verses."

The king shook with rage, and a crushing word was already poised upon his lip. But he restrained himself. He wanted to have proofs first; he wanted to see them not merely accused, but doomed also; and for that he needed proofs of their guilt.

Henry Howard now approached the throne of the royal pair, and with beaming looks, with animated countenance, with a voice trembling with emotion, he read his love-song to the fair Geraldine.

A murmur of applause arose when he had read his first sonnet. The king only looked gloomily, with fixed eyes; the queen alone remained uninterested and cold.

"She is a complete actress," thought Henry Howard, in the madness of his pain. "Not a muscle of her face stirs; and yet this sonnet must remind her of the fairest and most sacred moment of our love."

The queen remained unmoved and cold. But had Henry Howard looked at Lady Jane Douglas, he would have seen how she turned pale and blushed; how she smiled with rapture, and how, nevertheless, her eyes filled with tears.

Earl Surrey, however, saw nothing but the queen; and the sight of her made him tremble with rage and pain. His eyes darted lightning; his countenance glowed with passion; his whole being was in desperate, enthusiastic excitement. At that moment he would have gladly breathed out his life at Geraldine's feet, if she would only recognize him—if she would only have the courage to call him her beloved.

But her smiling calmness, her friendly coolness, brought him to despair.

He crumpled the paper in his hand; the letters danced before his eyes; he could read no more.

But he would not remain mute, either. Like the dying swan, he would breathe out his pain in a last song, and give sound and words to his despair and his agony. He could no longer read; but he improvised.

Like a glowing stream of lava, the words flowed from his lips; in fiery dithyrambic, in impassioned hymns, he poured forth his love and pain. The genius of poesy hovered over him and lighted up his noble and thoughtful brow.

He was radiantly beautiful in his enthusiasm; and even the queen felt herself carried away by his words.

His plaints of love, his longing pains, his rapture and his sad fancies, found an echo in her heart.

She understood him; for she felt the same joy, the same sorrow and the same rapture; only she did not feel all this for him.

But, as we have said, he enchanted her; the current of his passion carried her away. She wept at his laments; she smiled at his hymns of joy.

When Henry Howard at length ceased, profound silence reigned in the vast and brilliant hall.

All faces betrayed deep emotion; and this universal silence was the poet's fairest triumph; for it showed that envy and jealousy were dumb, and that scorn itself could find no words.

A momentary pause ensued; it resembled that sultry, ominous stillness which is wont to precede the bursting of a tempest; when Nature stops a moment in breathless stillness, to gather strength for the uproar of the storm.

It was a significant, an awful pause; but only a few understood its meaning.

Lady Jane leaned against the wall, completely shattered and breathless. She felt that the sword was hanging over their heads, and that it would destroy *her* if it struck her beloved.

Earl Douglas and the Bishop of Winchester had involuntarily drawn near each other, and stood there hand in hand, united for this unholy struggle; while John Heywood had crept behind the king's throne, and in his sarcastic manner whispered in his ear some epigrams, that made the king smile in spite of himself.

But now the queen arose from her seat, and beckoned Henry Howard nearer to her.

"My lord," said she, almost with solemnity, "as a queen and as a woman I thank you for the noble and sublime lyrics which you have composed in honor of a woman! And for that the grace of my king has exalted me to be the first woman in England, it becomes me, in the name of all women, to return to you my thanks. To the poet is due a reward other than that of the warrior. To the victor on the battle-field is awarded a laurel crown. But you have gained a victory not less glorious, for you have conquered hearts! We acknowledge ourselves vanquished, and in the name of all these noble women, I proclaim you their knight! In token of which, accept this rosette, my lord. It entitles you to wear the queen's colors; it lays you under obligation to be the knight of all women!"

She loosened the rosette from her shoulder, and handed it to the earl.

He had sunk on one knee before her, and already extended his hand to receive this precious and coveted pledge.

But at this moment the king arose, and, with an imperious gesture, held back the queen's hand.

"Allow me, my lady," said he, in a voice quivering with rage—"allow me first to examine this rosette, and convince myself that it is worth enough to be presented to the noble earl as his sole reward. Let me see this rosette."

Catharine looked with astonishment into that face convulsed with passion and fury, but without hesitation she handed him the rosette.

"We are lost!" murmured Earl Surrey, while Earl Douglas and Gardiner exchanged with each other looks of triumph; and Jane Douglas murmured in her trembling heart prayers of anxiety and dread, scarcely hearing the malicious and exultant words which the Duchess of Richmond was whispering in her ear.

The king held the rosette in his hand and examined it. But his hands trembled so much that he was unable to unfasten the clasp which held it together.

He, therefore, handed it to John Heywood. "These diamonds are poor," said he, in a curt, dry tone. "Unfasten the clasp, fool; we will replace it with this pin here. Then will the present gain for the earl a double value; for it will come at the same time from me and from the queen."

"How gracious you are to-day!" said John Heywood, smiling—"as gracious as the cat, that plays a little longer with the mouse before she devours it."

"Unfasten the clasp!" exclaimed the king, in a thundering voice, no longer able to conceal his rage. Slowly John Heywood unfastened the clasp from the ribbon. He did it with intentional slowness and deliberation; he let the king see all his movements, every turn of his fingers; and it delighted him to hold those who had woven this plot in dreadful suspense and expectation.

Whilst he appeared perfectly innocent and unembarrassed, his keen, piercing glance ran over the whole assembly, and he noticed well the trembling impatience of Gardiner and Earl Douglas; and it did not escape him how pale Lady Jane was, and how full of expectation were the intent features of the Duchess of Richmond.

"They are the ones with whom this conspiracy originated," said John Heywood to himself. "But I will keep silence till I can one day convict them."

"There, here is the clasp!" said he then aloud to the king. "It stuck as tightly in the ribbon as malice in the hearts of priests and courtiers!"

The king snatched the ribbon out of his hand, and examined it by drawing it through his fingers.

"Nothing! nothing at all!" said he, gnashing his teeth; and now, deceived in his expectations and suppositions, he could no longer muster strength to withstand that roaring torrent of wrath which overflowed his heart. The tiger was again aroused in him; he had calmly waited for the moment when the promised prey would be brought to him; now, when it seemed to be escaping him, his savage and cruel disposition started up within him. The tiger panted and thirsted for blood; and that he was not to get it, made him raging with fury.

With a wild movement he threw the rosette on the ground, and raised his arm menacingly toward Henry Howard.

"Dare not to touch that rosette," cried he, in a voice of thunder, "before you have exculpated yourself from the guilt of which you are accused."

Earl Surrey looked him steadily and boldly in the eye. "Have I been accused, then?" asked he. "Then I demand, first of all, that I be confronted with my accusers, and that my fault be named!"

"Ha, traitor! Do you dare to brave me?" yelled the king, stamping furiously with his foot. "Well, now, I will be your accuser and I will be your judge!"

"And surely, my king and husband, you will be a righteous judge," said Catharine, as she inclined imploringly toward the king and grasped his hand. "You will not condemn the noble Earl Surrey without having heard him; and if you find him guiltless, you will punish his accusers?"

But this intercession of the queen made the king raging. He threw her hand from him, and gazed at her with looks of such flaming wrath, that she involuntarily trembled.

"Traitoress yourself!" yelled he, wildly. "Speak not of innocence—you who are yourself guilty; and before you dare defend the earl, defend yourself!"

Catharine rose from her seat and looked with flashing eyes into the king's face blazing with wrath. "King Henry of England," said she, solemnly, "you have openly, before your whole court, accused your queen of a crime. I now demand that you name it!"

She was of wondrous beauty in her proud, bold bearing—in her imposing, majestic tranquillity.

The decisive moment had come, and she was conscious that her life and her future were struggling with death for the victory.

She looked over to Thomas Seymour, and their eyes met. She saw how he laid his hand on his sword, and nodded to her a smiling greeting.

"He will defend me; and before he will suffer me to

be dragged to the Tower, he himself will plunge his sword into my breast," thought she, and a joyous, triumphant assurance filled her whole heart.

She saw nothing but him, who had sworn to die with her when the decisive moment came. She looked with a smile on the blade which he had already half drawn from its scabbard; and she hailed it as a dear, long-yearned-for friend.

She saw not that Henry Howard also had lain his hand on his sword; that he, too, was ready for her defence, firmly resolved to slay the king himself, before his mouth uttered the sentence of death over the queen.

But Lady Jane Douglas saw it. She understood how to read the earl's countenance; she felt that he was ready to go to death for his beloved; and it filled her heart at once with woe and rapture.

She, too, was now firmly resolved to follow her heart and her love; and, forgetting all else besides these, she hastened forward, and was now standing by Henry Howard.

"Be prudent, Earl Surrey," said she, in a low whisper. "Take your hand from your sword. The queen, by my mouth, commands you to do so!"

Henry Howard looked at her astonished and surprised; but he let his hand slip from the hilt of his sword, and again looked toward the queen.

She had repeated her demand; she had once more demanded of the king—who, speechless and completely overcome with anger, had fallen back into his seat—to name the crime of which she was accused.

"Now, then, my queen, you demand it, and you shall hear it," cried he. "You want to know the crime of which you are accused? Answer me then, my lady! They accuse you of not always staying at night in your sleeping-room. It is alleged that you sometimes leave it for many hours; and that none of your women accompanied you when you glided through the corridors and up the secret

stairs to the lonely tower, in which was waiting for you your lover, who at the same time entered the tower through the small street door."

"He knows all!" muttered Henry Howard; and again he laid his hand on his sword, and was about to approach the queen.

Lady Jane held him back. "Wait for the issue," said she. "There is still time to die!"

"He knows all!" thought the queen also; and now she felt within herself the daring courage to risk all, that at least she might not stand there a traitoress in the eyes of her lover.

"He shall not believe that I have been untrue to him," thought she. "I will tell all—confess all, that *he* may know why I went and whither."

"Now answer, my Lady Catharine!" thundered the king. "Answer, and tell me whether you have been falsely accused. Is it true that you, eight days ago, in the night between Monday and Tuesday, left your sleeping-room at the hour of midnight, and went secretly to the lonely tower? Is it true that you received there a man who is your lover?"

The queen looked at him in angry pride. "Henry, Henry, woe to you, that you dare thus insult your own wife!" cried she.

"Answer me! You were not on that night in your sleeping-room?"

"No," said Catharine, with dignified composure, "I was not there."

The king sank back in his seat, and a real roar of fury sounded from his lips. It made the women turn pale, and even the men felt themselves tremble.

Catharine alone had not heeded it at all; she alone had heard nothing save that cry of amazement which Thomas Seymour uttered; and she saw only the angry and upbraiding looks which he threw across at her.

She answered these looks with a friendly and confident