

am tired, and I require not your erudition, but sleep. Good-night, John."

The king left the hall, leaning on Earl Douglas's arm.

"Earl Douglas does not wish me to accompany the king," whispered John Heywood. "He is afraid the king might blab out to me a little of that diabolical work which they will commence at midnight. Well, I call the devil, as well as the king, my brother, and with his help I too will be in the green-room at midnight. Ah, the queen is retiring; and there is the Duke of Norfolk leaving the hall. I have a slight longing to see whether the duke goes hence luckily and without danger, or if the soldiers who stand near the coach, as Wriothsesley says, will perchance be the duke's bodyguard for this night."

Slipping out of the hall with the quickness of a cat, John Heywood passed the duke in the anteroom and hurried on to the outer gateway, before which the carriages were drawn up.

John Heywood leaned against a pillar and watched. A few minutes, and the duke's tall and proud form appeared in the entrance-hall; and the footman, hurrying forward, called his carriage.

The carriage rolled up; the door was opened.

Two men wrapped in black mantles sat by the coachman; two others stood behind as footmen, while a fifth was by the open door of the carriage.

The duke first noticed him as his foot had already touched the step of the carriage.

"This is not my equipage! These are not my people!" said he; and he tried to step back. But the pretended servant forced him violently into the carriage and shut the door.

"Forward!" ordered he. The carriage rolled on. A moment still, John Heywood saw the duke's pale face appear at the open carriage window, and it seemed to him as though he were stretching out his arms, calling for help—then the carriage disappeared in the night.

"Poor duke!" murmured John Heywood. "The gates of the Tower are heavy, and your arm will not be strong enough to open them again, when they have once closed behind you. But it avails nothing to think more about him now. The queen is also in danger. Away, then, to the queen!"

With fleet foot John Heywood hastened back into the castle. Through passages and corridors he slipped hurriedly along.

Now he stood in the corridor which led to the apartments of the queen.

"I will constitute her guard to-night," muttered John Heywood, as he hid himself in one of the niches in the corridor. "The fool by his prayers will keep far from the door of his saint the tricks of the devil, and protect her from the snares which the pious Bishop Gardiner and the crafty courtier Douglas want to lay for her feet. My queen shall not fall and be ruined. The fool yet lives to protect her."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE QUEEN

FROM the niche in which John Heywood had hid himself he could survey the entire corridor and all the doors opening into it—could see everything and hear everything without being himself seen, for the projecting pilaster completely shaded him.

So John Heywood stood and listened. All was quiet in the corridor. In the distance was now and then heard the deadened sound of the music; and the confused hum of many voices from the festive halls forced its way to the listener's ear.

This was the only thing that John Heywood perceived. All else was still.

But this stillness did not last long. The corridor was lighted up, and the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps was heard.

It was the gold-laced lackeys, who bore the large silver candelabra to light the queen, who, with her train of ladies, was passing through the corridor.

She looked wondrously beautiful. The glare of the candles borne before her illumined her countenance, which beamed with cheerfulness. As she passed the pillar behind which John Heywood was standing, she was talking in unrestrained gayety with her second maid of honor; and a clear and lively laugh rang from her lips, which disclosed both rows of her dazzling white teeth. Her eyes sparkled; her cheeks were flushed with a rich red; bright as stars glittered the diamonds in the diadem that encircled her lofty brow; like liquid gold shone her dress of gold brocade, the long trail of which, trimmed with black ermine, was borne by two lovely pages.

Arrived at the door of her bed-chamber, the queen dismissed her pages and lackeys, and permitted only the maid of honor to cross the threshold of her chamber with her.

In harmless gossip the pages glided down the corridor and the staircase. Then came the lackeys who bore the candelabra. They also left the corridor.

Now all was quiet again. Still John Heywood stood and listened, firmly resolved to speak to the queen yet that night, even should he be obliged to wake her from sleep. Only he wanted to wait till the maid of honor also had left the queen's room.

Now the door opened, and the maid of honor came out. She crossed the corridor to that side where her own apartments were situated. John Heywood heard her open the door and then slide the bolt on the inside.

"Now but a brief time longer, and I will go to the queen," muttered John Heywood.

He was just going to leave his lurking-place, when he

perceived a noise as if a door were slowly and cautiously opened.

John Heywood cowered again close behind the pillar, and held his breath to listen.

A bright light fell over the corridor. A dress came rustling nearer and nearer.

John Heywood gazed astounded and amazed at the figure, which just brushed past without seeing him.

That figure was Lady Jane Douglas—Lady Jane, who, on account of indisposition, had retired from the feast in order to betake herself to rest. Now, when all rested, she watched—when all laid aside their festive garments, she had adorned herself with the same. Like the queen, she wore a dress of gold brocade, trimmed with ermine, and, like her, a diadem of diamonds adorned Lady Jane's brow.

Now she stood before the queen's door and listened. Then a fierce sneer flitted across her deathly pale face, and her dark eyes flashed still more.

"She sleeps," muttered she. "Only sleep, queen—sleep till we shall come to wake you! Sleep, so that I can wake for you."

She raised her arm threateningly toward the door, and wildly shook her head. Her long black ringlets encircled and danced around her sullen brow like the snakes of the furies; and pale and colorless, and with demon-like beauty, she resembled altogether the goddess of vengeance, in scornful triumph preparing to tread her victim beneath her feet.

With a low laugh she now glided adown the corridor, but not to that staircase yonder, but farther down to the end, where on the wall hung a life-size picture of Henry the Sixth. She pressed on a spring; the picture flew open, and through the door concealed behind it Lady Jane left the corridor.

"She is going to the green-room to a meeting with Henry Howard!" whispered John Heywood, who now

stepped forth from behind the pillar. "Oh, now I comprehend it all; now the whole of this devilish plot is clear to me; Lady Jane is Earl Surrey's lady-love, and they want to make the king believe that it is the queen. Doubtless this Surrey is with them in the conspiracy, and perhaps he will call Jane Douglas by the name of the queen. They will let the king see her but a moment. She wears a gold brocade dress and a diamond diadem like the queen; and thereby they hope to deceive Henry. She has the queen's form precisely; and everybody knows the astonishing similarity and likeness of Lady Jane's voice to that of the queen. Oh, oh, it is a tolerably cunning plot! But nevertheless you shall not succeed, and you shall not yet gain the victory. Patience, only patience! We likewise will be in the green-room, and face to face with this royal counterfeit we will place the genuine queen!"

With hurried step John Heywood also left the corridor, which was now lonely and still, for the queen had gone to rest.

Yes, the queen slept, and yet over yonder in the green-room everything was prepared for her reception.

It was to be a very brilliant and extraordinary reception; for the king, in his own person, had betaken himself to that wing of the castle, and the chief master of ceremonies, Earl Douglas, had accompanied him.

To the king, this excursion, which he had to make on foot, had been very troublesome; and this inconvenience had made him only still more furious and excited, and the last trace of compassion for his queen had disappeared from the king's breast, for on Catharine's account he had been obliged to make this long journey to the green-room; and with a grim joy Henry thought only how terrible was to be his punishment for Henry Howard and also for Catharine.

Now that Earl Douglas had brought him hither, the king no longer had any doubts at all of the queen's guilt. It was no longer an accusation—it was proof. For never

in the world would Earl Douglas have dared to bring him, the king, hither, if he were not certain that he would give him here infallible proofs.

The king, therefore, no longer doubted; at last Henry Howard was in his power, and he could no more escape him. So he was certain of being able to bring these two hated enemies to the block, and of feeling his sleep no longer disturbed by thoughts of his two powerful rivals.

The Duke of Norfolk had already passed the gates of the Tower, and his son must soon follow him thither.

At this thought the king felt an ecstasy so savage and bloodthirsty, that he wholly forgot that the same sword that was to strike Henry Howard's head was drawn on his queen also.

They were now standing in the green-room, and the king leaned panting and moaning on Earl Douglas's arm.

The large wide room, with its antique furniture and its faded glory, was only gloomily and scantily lighted in the middle by the two wax candles of the candelabrum that Earl Douglas had brought with him; while further away it was enveloped in deep gloom, and seemed to the eye through this gloom to stretch out to an interminable length.

"Through the door over there comes the queen," said Douglas; and he himself shrank at the loud sound of his voice, which in the large, desolate room became of awful fulness. "And that, there, is Henry Howard's entrance. Oh, he knows that path very thoroughly; for he has often enough already travelled it in the dark night, and his foot no longer stumbles on any stone of offence!"

"But he will perchance stumble on the headsman's block!" muttered the king, with a cruel laugh.

"I now take the liberty of asking one question more," said Douglas; and the king did not suspect how stormily the earl's heart beat at this question. "Is your majesty satisfied to see the earl and the queen make their appear-

ance at this meeting? Or, do you desire to listen to a little of the earl's tender protestations?"

"I will hear not a little, but all!" said the king. "Ah, let us allow the earl yet to sing his swan-like song before he plunges into the sea of blood!"

"Then," said Earl Douglas, "then we must put out this light, and your majesty must be content merely to hear the guilty ones, and not to see them also. We will then betake ourselves to the boudoir here, which I have opened for this purpose, and in which is an easy-chair for your majesty. We will place this chair near the open door, and then your majesty will be able to hear every word of their tender whisperings."

"But how shall we, if we extinguish this our only light, at last attain to a sight of this dear loving pair, and be able to afford them the dramatic surprise of our presence?"

"Sire, as soon as the Earl of Surrey enters, twenty men of the king's bodyguard will occupy the anteroom through which the earl must pass; and it needs but a call from you to have them enter the hall with their torches. I have taken care also that before the private back-gate of the palace two coaches stand ready, the drivers of which know very well the street that leads to the Tower!"

"Two coaches?" said the king, laughing. "Ah, ah, Douglas, how cruel we are to separate the tender, loving pair on this journey which is yet to be their last! Well, perhaps we can compensate them for it, and allow these turtledoves to make the last trip—the trip to the stake—together. No, no, we will not separate them in death. Together they may lay their heads on the block."

The king laughed, quite delighted with his jest, while, leaning on the earl's arm, he crossed to the little boudoir on the other side, and took his place in the armchair set near the door.

"Now we must extinguish the light; and may it please

your majesty to await *in silence* the things that are to come."

The earl extinguished the light, and deep darkness and a grave-like stillness now followed.

But this did not last long. Now was heard quite distinctly the sound of footsteps. They came nearer and nearer—now a door was heard to open and shut again, and it was as though some one were creeping softly along on his toes in the hall.

"Henry Howard!" whispered Douglas.

The king could scarcely restrain the cry of savage, malicious delight that forced its way to his lips.

The hated enemy was then in his power; he was convicted of the crime; he was inevitably lost.

"Geraldine!" whispered a voice, "Geraldine!"

And as if his low call had already been sufficient to draw hither the loved one, the secret door here quite close to the boudoir opened. The rustling of a dress was very distinctly heard, and the sound of footsteps.

"Geraldine!" repeated Earl Surrey.

"Here I am, my Henry!"

With an exclamation of delight, the woman rushed forward toward the sound of the loved voice.

"The queen!" muttered Henry; and in spite of himself he felt his heart seized with bitter grief.

He saw with his inward eye how they held each other in their embrace. He heard their kisses and the low whisper of their tender vows, and all the agonies of jealousy and wrath filled his soul. But yet the king prevailed upon himself to be silent and swallow down his rage. He wanted to hear everything, to know everything.

He clenched his hands convulsively, and pressed his lips firmly together to hold in his panting breath. He wanted to hear.

How happy they both were! Henry had wholly forgotten that he had come to reproach her for her long

silence; she did not think about this being the last time she might see her lover.

They were with each other, and this hour was theirs. What did the whole world matter to them? What cared they whether or not mischief and ruin threatened them hereafter?

They sat by each other on the divan, quite near the boudoir. They jested and laughed; and Henry Howard kissed away the tears that the happiness of the present caused his Geraldine to shed.

He swore to her eternal and unchanging love. In blissful silence she drank in the music of his words; and then she reiterated, with jubilant joy, his vows of love.

The king could scarcely restrain his fury.

The heart of Earl Douglas leaped with satisfaction and gratification. "A lucky thing that Jane has no suspicion of our presence," thought he—"otherwise she would have been less unrestrained and ardent, and the king's ear would have imbibed less poison."

Lady Jane thought not at all of her father; she scarcely remembered that this very night would destroy her hated rival the queen.

Henry Howard had called her his Geraldine only. Jane had entirely forgot that it was not she to whom her lover had given this name.

But he himself finally reminded her of it.

"Do you know, Geraldine," said Earl Surrey—and his voice, which had been hitherto so cheerful and sprightly, was now sad—"do you know, Geraldine, that I have had doubts of you? Oh, those were frightful, horrible hours; and in the agony of my heart I came at last to the resolution of going to the king and accusing myself of this love that was consuming my heart. Oh, fear naught! I would not have accused you. I would have even denied that love which you have so often and with such transporting reality sworn to me. I would have done it in order to see whether my Geraldine could at last gain courage and strength to

acknowledge her love openly and frankly; whether her heart had the power to burst that iron band which the deceitful rules of the world had placed around it; whether she would acknowledge her lover when he was willing to die for her. Yes, Geraldine, I wanted to do it, that I might finally know which feeling is stronger in you—love or pride—and whether you could then still preserve the mask of indifference, when death was hovering over your lover's head. Oh, Geraldine, I should deem it a fairer fate to die united with you, than to be obliged to still longer endure this life of constraint and hateful etiquette."

"No, no," said she, trembling, "we will not die. My God, life is indeed so beautiful when you are by my side! And who knows whether a felicitous and blissful future may not still await us?"

"Oh, should we die, then should we be certain of this blissful future, my Geraldine. There, above, there is no more separation—no more renunciation for us. There above, you are mine, and the bloody image of your husband no longer stands between us."

"It shall no longer do so, even here on earth," whispered Geraldine. "Come, my beloved; let us fly far, far hence, where no one knows us—where we can cast from us all this hated splendor, to live for each other and for love."

She threw her arms about her lover, and in the ecstasy of her love she had wholly forgotten that she could never indeed think to flee with him, that he belonged to her only so long as he saw her not.

An inexplicable anxiety overpowered her heart; and in this anxiety she forgot everything—even the queen and the vengeance she had vowed.

She now remembered her father's words, and she trembled for her lover's life.

If now her father had not told her the truth—if now he had notwithstanding sacrificed Henry Howard in order to ruin the queen—if she was not able to save him, and through her fault he were to perish on the scaffold—

But still this hour was hers, and she would enjoy it.

She clung fast to his breast; she drew him with irresistible force to her heart, which now trembled no longer for love, but from a nameless anxiety.

"Let us fly! Let us fly!" repeated she, breathlessly. See! This hour is yet ours. Let us avail ourselves of it; for who knows whether the next will still belong to us?"

"No! it is no longer yours," yelled the king, as he sprang like a roused lion from his seat. "Your hours are numbered, and the next already belongs to the hangman!"

A piercing shriek burst from Geraldine's lips. Then was heard a dull fall.

"She has fainted," muttered Earl Douglas.

"Geraldine, Geraldine, my loved one!" cried Henry Howard. "My God, my God! she is dying! You have killed her! Woe to you!"

"Woe to yourself!" said the king, solemnly. "Here with the light! Here, you folks!"

The door of the anteroom opened, and in it appeared four soldiers with torches in their hands.

"Light the candles, and guard the door!" said the king, whose dazzled eyes were not yet able to bear this bright glare of light which now suddenly streamed through the room.

The soldiers obeyed his orders. A pause ensued. The king had put his hand before his eyes, and was struggling for breath and self-control.

When at length he let his hand glide down, his features had assumed a perfectly calm, almost a serene expression.

With a hasty glance he surveyed the room. He saw the queen in her dress glistening with gold; he saw how she lay on the floor, stretched at full length, her face turned to the ground, motionless and rigid.

He saw Henry Howard, who knelt by his beloved and was busy about her with all the anxiety and agony of a

lover. He saw how he pressed her hands to his lips; how he put his hand to her head to raise it from the floor.

The king was speechless with rage. He could only lift his arm to beckon the soldiers to approach; to point to Henry Howard, who had not yet succeeded in raising the queen's head from the floor.

"Arrest him!" said Earl Douglas, lending words to the king's mute sign. "In the king's name arrest him, and conduct him to the Tower!"

"Yes, arrest him!" said the king; and, as with youthful speed he walked up to Henry Howard and put his hand heavily on his shoulder, he with terrible calmness continued: "Henry Howard, your wish shall be fulfilled; you shall mount the scaffold for which you have so much longed!"

The earl's noble countenance remained calm and unmoved; his bright beaming eye fearlessly encountered the eye of the king flashing with wrath.

"Sire," said he, "my life is in your hand, and I very well know that you will not spare it. I do not even ask you to do so. But spare this noble and beautiful woman, whose only crime is that she has followed the voice of her heart. Sire, I alone am the guilty one. Punish me, then—torture me, if you like—but be merciful to her."

The king broke out into a loud laugh. "Ah, he begs for her!" said he. "This little Earl Surrey presumes to think that his sentimental love-plaint can exercise an influence on the heart of his judge! No, no, Henry Howard; you know me better. You say, indeed, that I am a cruel man, and that blood cleaves to my crown. Well, now, it is our pleasure to set in our crown a new blood-red ruby; and if we want to take it from Geraldine's heart's blood, your sonnets will not hinder us from doing so, my good little earl. That is all the reply I have to make to you; and I think it will be the last time that we shall meet on earth!"

"There above we shall see each other again, King Henry of England!" said Earl Surrey, solemnly. "There

above Henry the Eighth will no more be the judge, but the condemned criminal; and your bloody and accursed deeds will witness against you!"

The king laughed. "You avail yourself of your advantage," said he. "Because you have nothing more to lose and the scaffold is sure of you, you do not stick at heaping up the measure of your sins a little more, and you revile your legitimate, God-appointed king! But you should bear in mind, earl, that before the scaffold there is yet the rack, and that it is very possible indeed that a painful question might there be put to the noble Earl Surrey, to which his agonies might prevent him from returning an answer. Now, away with you! We have nothing more to say to each other on earth!"

He motioned to the soldiers, who approached the Earl of Surrey. As they reached their hands toward him, he turned on them a look so proud and commanding that they involuntarily recoiled a step.

"Follow me!" said Henry Howard, calmly; and, without even deigning the king a single look more, with head proudly erect, he walked to the door.

Geraldine still lay on the ground—her face turned to the floor. She stirred not. She seemed to have fallen into a deep swoon.

Only as the door with a sullen sound closed behind Earl Surrey, a low wail and moan was perceived—such as is wont to struggle forth at the last hour from the breast of the dying.

The king did not heed it. He still gazed, with eyes stern and flashing with anger, toward the door through which Earl Surrey had passed.

"He is unyielding," muttered he. "Not even the rack affrights him; and in his blasphemous haughtiness he moves along in the midst of the soldiers, not as a prisoner, but as a commander. Oh, these Howards are destined to torment me; and even their death will scarcely be a full satisfaction to me."

"Sire," said Earl Douglas, who had observed the king with a keen, penetrating eye, and knew that he had now reached the height of his wrath, at which he shrank from no deed of violence and no cruelty—"sire, you have sent Earl Surrey to the Tower. But what shall be done with the queen, who lies there on the floor in a swoon?"

The king roused himself from his reverie; and his bloodshot eyes were fixed on Geraldine's motionless form with so dark an expression of hate and rage, that Earl Douglas exultingly said to himself: "The queen is lost! He will be inexorable!"

"Ah, the queen!" cried Henry, with a savage laugh. "Yea, verily, I forgot the queen. I did not think of this charming Geraldine! But you are right, Douglas; we must think of her and occupy ourselves a little with her! Did you not say that a second coach was ready? Well, then, we will not hinder Geraldine from accompanying her beloved. She shall be where he is—in the Tower, and on the scaffold! We will therefore wake this sentimental lady and show her the last duty of a cavalier by conducting her to her carriage!"

He was about to approach the figure of the queen lying on the floor. Earl Douglas held him back.

"Sire," said he, "it is my duty—as your faithful subject, who loves you and trembles for your welfare—it is my duty to implore you to spare yourself and preserve your precious and adored person from the venomous sting of anger and grief. I conjure you, therefore, do not deign to look again on this woman, who has so deeply injured you. Give me your orders—what am I to do with her—and allow me first of all to accompany you to your apartments."

"You are right," said the king, "she is not worthy of having my eyes rest on her again; and she is even too contemptible for my anger! We will call the soldiers that they may conduct this traitress and adulteress to the tower, as they have done her paramour."

"Yet for that there is needed still a formality. The queen will not be admitted into the Tower without the king's written and sealed order."

"Then I will draw up that order."

"Sire, in that cabinet yonder may be found the necessary writing-materials, if it please your majesty."

The king leaned in silence on the earl's arm, and allowed himself to be led again into the cabinet.

With officious haste Earl Douglas made the necessary arrangements. He rolled the writing-table up to the king; he placed the large sheet of white paper in order, and slipped the pen into the king's hand.

"What shall I write?" asked the king, who, by the exertion of his night's excursion, and of his anger and vexation, began at length to be exhausted.

"An order for the queen's imprisonment, sire."

The king wrote. Earl Douglas stood behind him, with eager attention, in breathless expectation, his look steadily fixed on the paper over which the king's hand, white, fleshy, and sparkling with diamonds, glided along in hasty characters.

He had at length reached his goal. When at last he should hold in his hand the paper which the king was then writing—when he had induced Henry to return to his apartments before the imprisonment of the queen had taken place—then was he victorious. Not that woman there would he then imprison; but, with the warrant in his hand, he would go to the real queen, and take her to the Tower.

Once in the Tower, the queen could no longer defend herself; for the king would see her no more; and if before the Parliament she protested her innocence in ever so sacred oaths, still the king's testimony must convict her; for he had himself surprised her with her paramour.

No, there was no escape for the queen. She had once succeeded in clearing herself of an accusation, and proving

her innocence, by a rebutting *alibi*. But this time she was irretrievably lost, and no *alibi* could deliver her.

The king completed his work and arose, whilst Douglas, at his command, was employed in setting the king's seal to the fatal paper.

From the hall was heard a slight noise, as though some person were cautiously moving about there.

Earl Douglas did not notice it; he was just in the act of pressing the signet hard on the melted sealing-wax.

The king heard it, and supposed that it was Geraldine, and that she was just waking from her swoon and rising.

He stepped to the door of the hall, and looked toward the place where she was lying. But no—she had not yet risen; she still lay stretched at full length on the floor.

"She has come to; but she still pretends to be in a swoon," thought the king; and he turned to Douglas.

"We are done," said he; "the warrant for imprisonment is prepared, and the sentence of the adulterous queen is spoken. We have done with her forever; and never shall she again behold our face, or again hear our voice. She is sentenced and damned, and the royal mercy has nothing more to do with this sinner. A curse on the adulteress! A curse on the shameless woman who deceived her husband, and gave herself up to a traitorous paramour! Woe to her, and may shame and disgrace forever mark her name, which——"

Suddenly the king stopped and listened. The noise that he had heard just before was now repeated louder and quicker; it came nearer and nearer.

And now the door opened and a figure entered—a figure which made the king stare with astonishment and admiration. It came nearer and nearer, light, graceful, and with the freshness of youth; a gold-brocade dress enveloped it; a diadem of diamonds sparkled on the brow; and brighter yet than the diamonds beamed the eyes.

"No, the king was not mistaken. It was the queen.

She was standing before him—and yet she still lay motionless and stiff upon the floor yonder.

The king uttered a cry, and, turning pale, reeled a step backward.

"The queen!" exclaimed Douglas, in terror; and he trembled so violently that the paper in his hand rattled and fluttered.

"Yes, the queen!" said Catharine, with a haughty smile. "The queen, who comes to scold her husband, that, contrary to his physician's orders, he still refrains from his slumbers at so late an hour of the night."

"And the fool!" said John Heywood, as with humorous pathos he stepped forward from behind the queen—"the fool, who comes to ask Earl Douglas how he dared deprive John Heywood of his office, and usurp the place of king's fool to Henry, and deceive his most gracious majesty with all manner of silly pranks and carnival tricks."

"And who"—asked the king, in a voice quivering with rage, fastening his flashing looks on Douglas with an annihilating expression—"who, then, is that woman there? Who has dared with such cursed mummery to deceive the king, and calumniate the queen?"

"Sire," said Earl Douglas, who very well knew that his future and that of his daughter depended on the present moment, and whom this consciousness had speedily restored to his self-possession and calmness—"sire, I beseech your majesty for a moment of private explanation; and I shall be entirely successful in vindicating myself."

"Do not grant it him, brother Henry," said John Heywood; "he is a dangerous juggler; and who knows whether he may not yet, in his private conversation, convince you that he is king, and you nothing more than his lickspittle, fawning, hypocritical servant Earl Archibald Douglas."

"My lord and husband, I beg you to hear the earl's justification," said Catharine, as she extended her hand to the king with a bewitching smile. "It would be cruel to condemn him unheard."

"I will hear him, but it shall be done in your presence, Kate, and you yourself shall decide whether or not his justification is sufficient."

"No indeed, my husband; let me remain an entire stranger to this night's conspiracy, so that spite and anger may not fill my heart and rob me of the supreme confidence which I need, to be able to walk on at your side happy and smiling in the midst of my enemies."

"You are right, Kate," said the king, thoughtfully. "You have many enemies at our court; and we have to accuse ourselves that we have not always succeeded in stopping our ear to their malicious whisperings, and in keeping ourselves pure from the poisonous breath of their calumny. Our heart is still too artless, and we cannot even yet comprehend that men are a disgusting, corrupt race, which one should tread beneath his feet, but never take to his heart. Come, Earl Douglas, I will hear you; but woe to you, if you are unable to justify yourself!"

He retired to the embrasure of the large window of the boudoir. Earl Douglas followed him thither, and let the heavy velvet curtain drop behind them.

"Sire," said he, hardily and resolutely, "the question now is this: Whose head would you rather give over to the executioner, mine or the Earl of Surrey's? You have the choice between the two. You are aware that I have ventured for a moment to deceive you. Well, send me to the Tower then, and set free the noble Henry Howard, that he may henceforth disturb your sleep and poison your days; that he may further court the love of the people, and perhaps some day rob your son of the throne that belongs to him. Here is my head, sire; it is forfeited to the headsman's axe, and Earl Surrey is free!"

"No, he is not free, and never shall be!" said the king, grinding his teeth.

"Then, my king, I am justified; and instead of being angry with me, you will thank me? It is true I have played a hazardous game, but I did so in the service of my