

king. I did it because I loved him, and because I read on your lofty clouded brow the thoughts that begirt with darkness my master's soul, and disturbed the sleep of his nights. You wanted to have Henry Howard in your power; and this crafty and hypocritical earl knew how to conceal his guilt so securely under the mask of virtue and loftiness of soul! But I knew him, and behind this mask I had seen his face distorted with passion and crime. I wanted to unmask him; but for this, it was necessary that I should deceive first him, and then for the hour even yourself. I knew that he burned with an adulterous love for the queen, and I wanted to avail myself of the madness of this passion, in order to bring him surely and unavoidably to a richly-deserved punishment. But I would not draw the pure and exalted person of the queen into this net with which we wanted to surround Earl Surrey. I was obliged, then, to seek a substitute for her; and I did so. There was at your court a woman whose whole heart belongs, after God, to the king alone; and who so much adores him, that she would be ready at any hour gladly to sacrifice for the king her heart's blood, her whole being—ay, if need be, even her honor itself—a woman, sire, who lives by your smile, and worships you as her redeemer and savior—a woman whom you might, as you pleased, make a saint or a strumpet; and who, to please you, would be a shameless Phyrne or a chaste veiled nun."

"Tell me her name, Douglas," said the king, "tell me it! It is a rare and precious stroke of fortune to be so loved; and it would be a sin not to want to enjoy this good fortune."

"Sire, I will tell you her name when you have first forgiven me," said Douglas, whose heart leaped for joy, and who well understood that the king's anger was already mollified and the danger now almost overcome. "I said to this woman: 'You are to do the king a great service; you are to deliver him from a powerful and dangerous foe! You are to save him from Henry Howard!' 'Tell me

what I must do!' cried she, her looks beaming with joy. 'Henry Howard loves the queen. You must be the queen to him. You must receive his letters, and answer them in the queen's name. You must grant him interviews by night, and, favored by the darkness of the night, make him believe that it is the queen whom he holds in his arms. He must be convinced that the queen is his lady-love; and in his thoughts, as in his deeds, he must be placed before the king as a traitor and criminal whose head is forfeited to the headsman's axe. One day we will let the king be a witness of a meeting that Henry Howard believes he has with the queen; it will then be in his power to punish his enemy for his criminal passion, which is worthy of death!' And as I thus spoke to the woman, sire, she said with a sad smile: 'It is a disgraceful and dishonorable part that you assign me; but I undertake it, for you say I may thereby render a service to the king. I shall disgrace myself for him; but he will perhaps bestow upon me in return a gracious smile; and then I shall be abundantly rewarded.'"

"But this woman is an angel!" cried the king, ardently—"an angel whom we should kneel to and adore. Tell me her name, Douglas!"

"Sire, as soon as you have forgiven me! You know now all my guilt and all my crime. For, as I bade that noble woman, so it came to pass, and Henry Howard has gone to the Tower in the firm belief that it was the queen whom he just now held in his arms."

"But why did you leave me in this belief, Douglas? Why did you fill my heart with wrath against the noble and virtuous queen also?"

"Sire, I dared not reveal the deception to you before you had sentenced Surrey, for your noble and just moral sense would have been reluctant to punish him on account of a crime that he had not committed; and in your first wrath you would also have blamed this noble woman who has sacrificed herself for her king."

"It is true," said the king, "I should have misjudged this noble woman, and, instead of thanking her, I should have destroyed her."

"Therefore, my king, I quietly allowed you to make out an order for the queen's incarceration. But you remember well, sire, I begged you to return to your apartments before the queen was arrested. Well, now, *there* I should have disclosed to you the whole secret, which I could not tell you in the presence of that woman. For she would die of shame if she suspected that you knew of her love for the king, so pure and self-sacrificing, and cherished in such heroic silence."

"She shall never know it, Douglas! But now at length satisfy my desire. Tell me her name."

"Sire, you have forgiven me, then? You are no longer angry with me that I dared to deceive you?"

"I am no longer angry with you, Douglas; for you have acted rightly. The plan, which you have contrived and carried out with such happy results, was as crafty as it was daring."

"I thank you, sire; and I will now tell you the name. That woman, sire, who at my wish gave herself up a sacrifice to this adulterous earl, who endured his kisses, his embraces, his vows of love, in order to render a service to her king—that woman was my daughter, Lady Jane Douglas!"

"Lady Jane!" cried the king. "No, no, this is a new deception. That haughty, chaste, and unapproachable Lady Jane—that wonderfully beautiful marble statue really has then a heart in her breast, and that heart belongs to me? Lady Jane, the pure and chaste virgin, has made for me this prodigious sacrifice, of receiving this hated Surrey as her lover, in order, like a second Delilah, to deliver him into my hand? No, Douglas, you are lying to me. Lady Jane has not done that!"

"May it please your majesty to go yourself and take a look at that fainting woman, who was to Henry Howard the queen."

The king did not reply to him; but he drew back the curtain and reëntered the cabinet, in which the queen was waiting with John Heywood.

Henry did not notice them. With youthful precipitation he crossed the cabinet and the hall. Now he stood by the figure of Geraldine still lying on the floor.

She was no longer in a swoon. She had long since regained her consciousness; and terrible were the agonies and tortures that rent her heart. Henry Howard had incurred the penalty of the headsman's axe, and it was she that had betrayed him.

But her father had sworn to her that she should save her lover.

She durst not die then. She must live to deliver Henry Howard.

There were burning, as it were, the fires of hell in her poor heart; but she was not at liberty to heed these pains. She could not think of *herself*—only of *him*—of Henry Howard, whom she must deliver, whom she must save from an ignominious death.

For *him* she sent up her fervent prayers to God; for him her heart trembled with anxiety and agony, as the king now advanced to her, and, bending down, gazed into her eyes with a strange expression, at once scrutinizing and smiling.

"Lady Jane," said he then, as he presented her his hand, "arise from the ground and allow your king to express to you his thanks for your sublime and wonderful sacrifice! Verily, it is a fair lot to be a king; for then one has at least the power of punishing traitors, and of rewarding those that serve us. I have to-day done the one, and I will not neglect to do the other also. Stand up, then, Lady Jane; it does not become you to lie on your knees before me."

"Oh, let me kneel, my king," said she, passionately; "let me beseech you for mercy, for pity! Have compassion, King Henry—compassion on the anxiety and agony

which I endure. It is not possible that this is all a reality! that this juggling is to be changed into such terrible earnest! Tell me, King Henry—I conjure you by the agonies which I suffer for your sake—tell me, what will you do with Henry Howard? Why have you sent him to the Tower?”

“To punish the traitor as he deserves,” said the king, as he cast a dark and angry look across at Douglas, who had also approached his daughter, and was now standing close by her.

Lady Jane uttered a heartrending cry, and sank down again, senseless and completely exhausted.

The king frowned. “It is possible,” said he—“and I almost believe it—that I have been deceived in many ways this evening, and that now again my guilelessness has been played upon in order to impose upon me a charming story. However, I have given my word to pardon; and it shall not be said that Henry the Eighth, who calls himself God’s vicegerent, has ever broken his word; nor even that he has punished those whom he has assured of exemption from punishment. My Lord Douglas, I will fulfil my promise. I forgive you.”

He extended his hand to Douglas, who kissed it fervently. The king bent down closer to him. “Douglas,” whispered he, “you are as cunning as a serpent; and I now see through your artfully-woven web! You wanted to destroy Surrey, but the queen was to sink into the abyss with him. Because I am indebted to you for Surrey, I forgive you what you have done to the queen. But take heed to yourself, take heed that I do not meet you again on the same track; do not ever try again, by a look, a word, ay, even by a smile, to cast suspicion on the queen. The slightest attempt would cost you your life! That I swear to you by the holy mother of God; and you know that I have never yet broken that oath. As regards Lady Jane, we do not want to consider that she has misused the name of our illustrious and virtuous consort in order to draw this

lustful and adulterous earl into the net which you had set for him; she obeyed your orders, Douglas; and we will not now decide what other motives besides have urged her to this deed. She may settle that with God and her own conscience, and it does not behoove us to decide about it.”

“But it behoves me, perhaps, my husband, to ask by what right Lady Jane has dared to appear here in this attire, and to present to a certain degree a counterfeit of her queen?” asked Catharine in a sharp tone. “I may well be allowed to ask what has made my maid of honor, who left the festive hall sick, now all at once so well that she goes roaming about the castle in the night time, and in a dress which seems likely to be mistaken for mine? Sire, was this dress perchance a craftily-devised stratagem, in order to really confound us with one another? You are silent, my lord and king. It is true, then, they have wanted to carry out a terrible plot against me; and, without the assistance of my faithful and honest friend, John Heywood, who brought me here, I should without doubt be now condemned and lost, as the Earl of Surrey is.”

“Ah, John, it was you then that brought a little light into this darkness?” cried the king, with a cheerful laugh, as he laid his hand on Heywood’s shoulder. “Now, verily, what the wise and prudent did not see, that the fool has seen through!”

“King Henry of England,” said John Heywood, solemnly, “many call themselves wise, and yet they are fools; and many assume the mask of folly, because fools are allowed to be wise.”

“Kate,” said the king, “you are right; this was a bad night for you, but God and the fool have saved you and me. We will both be thankful for it. But it is well if you do as you before wished, and ask and inquire nothing more concerning the mysteries of this night. It was brave in you to come here, and I will be mindful of it. Come, my little queen, give me your arm and conduct me to my apartments. I tell you, child, it gives me joy to be able

to lean on your arm, and see your dear sprightly face blanched by no fear or terrors of conscience. Come, Kate, you alone shall lead me, and to you alone will I trust myself."

"Sire, you are too heavy for the queen," said the fool, as he put his neck under the other arm. "Let me share with her the burden of royalty."

"But before we go," said Catharine, "I have, my husband, one request. Will you grant it?"

"I will grant you everything that you may ask, provided you will not require me to send you to the Tower."

"Sire, I wish to dismiss my maid of honor, Lady Jane Douglas, from my service—that is all," said the queen, as her eyes glanced with an expression of contempt, and yet at the same time of pain, at the form of her friend of other days, prostrate on the floor.

"She is dismissed!" said the king. "You will choose another maid of honor to-morrow. Come, Kate!"

And the king, supported by his consort and John Heywood, left the room with slow and heavy steps.

Earl Douglas watched them with a sullen, hateful expression. As the door closed after them he raised his arm threateningly toward heaven, and his trembling lips uttered a fierce curse and execration.

"Vanquished! vanquished again!" muttered he, gnashing his teeth. "Humbled by this woman whom I hate, and whom I will yet destroy! Yes, she has conquered this time; but we will commence the struggle anew, and our envenomed weapon shall nevertheless strike her at last!"

Suddenly he felt a hand laid heavily on his shoulder, and a pair of glaring, flaming eyes gazed at him.

"Father," said Lady Jane, as she threw her right hand threateningly toward heaven—"father, as true as there is a God above us, I will accuse you yourself to the king as a traitor—I will betray to him all your accursed plots—if you do not help me to deliver Henry Howard!"

Her father looked with an expression almost melancholy in her face, painfully convulsed and pale as marble. "I will help you!" said he. "I will do it, if you will help me also, and further my plans."

"Oh, only save Henry Howard, and I will sign myself away to the devil with my heart's blood!" said Jane Douglas, with a horrible smile. "Save his life, or, if you have not the power to do that, then at least procure me the happiness of being able to die with him."

CHAPTER XXXII.

UNDECEIVED.

PARLIAMENT, which had not for a long time now ventured to offer any further opposition to the king's will—Parliament had acquiesced in his decree. It had accused Earl Surrey of high treason; and, on the sole testimony of his mother and his sister, he had been declared guilty of *lèse majesté* and high treason. A few words of discontent at his removal from office, some complaining remarks about the numerous executions that drenched England's soil with blood—that was all that the Duchess of Richmond had been able to bring against him. That he, like his father, bore the arms of the Kings of England—that was the only evidence of high treason of which his mother the Duchess of Norfolk could charge him.*

These accusations were of so trivial a character, that the Parliament well knew they were not the ground of his arrest, but only a pretext for it—only a pretext, by which the king said to his pliant and trembling Parliament: "This man is innocent; but I will that you condemn him, and therefore you will account the accusation sufficient."

* Tytler, p. 402. Burnet, vol. i, p. 95.