The Queen's Quair

by Maurice Hewlett

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THE QUEEN’S QUAIR OR THE SIX YEARS’

TRAGEDY

THE QUEEN’S QUAIR OR The Six Years’ Tragedy

BY MAURICE HEWLETT

‘Improbus ille puer, crudelis tu quoque Mater’

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CONTENTS

PAGE Author’s Prologue 1 BOOK THE FIRST MAIDS’ ADVENTURE CHAP. 1. Here you are in the Antechamber 7 2. Here You step into the Fog 25 3. Superficial Properties of the Honeypot 36 4. Rough Music Here 47 5. Here are Flies at the Honeypot 67 6. The Fool’s Whip 77 7. Gordon’s Bane 91 8. The Divorce of Mary Livingstone (To an Italian Air) 106 9. Air of St. Andrew: Adonis and the Scapegoat 121 10. They Look and Like 135 11. Prothalamium: Venus wins Fair Adonis 146 12. Epithalamium: End of all Maids’ Adventure 169 BOOK THE SECOND MEN’S BUSINESS 1. Opinions of French Paris upon some Late Events 191 2. Griefs and Consolations of Adonis 201 3. Divers Uses of a Hardy Man 214 4. Many Dogs 229

5. Midnight Experiences of Jean-Marie-Baptiste Des-Essars 236 6. Venus in the Toils 250 7. Aftertaste 270 8. King’s Evil 287 9. The Washing of Hands 306 10. Extracts from the Diurnall of the Master of Sempill 318 11. Armida Doubtful in the Garden 328 12. Scotchmen’s Business 340 BOOK THE THIRD MARKET OF WOMEN 1. Stormy Opening 351 2. The Brainsick Sonata 363 3. Descant upon a Theme as Old as Jason 381 4. She Looks Back Once 394 5. Medea in the Bedchamber 404 6. Kirk o’ Field 414 7. The Red Bridegroom 430 8. The Bride’s Prelude 451 9. The Bride’s Tragedy 474 10. The Knocking at Borthwick 484 11. Appassionata 490 12. Addolorata 502 Epilogue 506

AUTHOR’S PROLOGUE

If one were in the vein for the colours and haunted mists of Romance; if the thing, perhaps, were not so serious, there might be composed, and by me, a Romance of Queens out of my acquaintance with four ladies of that degree; among whom—to adopt the terms proper—were the Queen of Gall, the Queen of Ferment, and the Queen of Wine and Honey. You see that one would employ, for the occasion, the language of poets to designate the Queen-Mother of France, the Queen-Maid of England, and the too-fair Queen of Scots: to omit the fourth queen from such a tale would be for superstition’s sake, and not for lack of matter—I mean Queen Venus, who (God be witness) played her part in the affairs of her mortal sisters, and proclaimed her prerogatives by curtailing theirs. But either the matter is too serious, or I am. I see flesh and spirit involved in all this, truth and lies, God and the Devil—dreadful concernments of our own, with which Romance has no profitable traffic. La Bele Isoud, the divine Oriana, Aude the Fair (whom Roland loved)—tender ghosts, one and all of them, whose heartaches were so melodious that they have filled four-and-twenty pleasant volumes, and yet so unsubstantial that no one feels one penny the worse, or the better, for them afterwards. But here! Ah,

here we have real players in a game tremendously real; and the hearts they seem to play with were once bright with lively blood; and the lies they told should have made streaks on lips once vividly incarnate—and sometimes did it. Real! Why, not long ago you could have seen a little pair of black satin slippers, sadly down at heel, which may have paced with Riccio's in the gallery at Wemyss, or tapped the floor of Holyroodhouse while King Henry Darnley was blustering there, trying to show his manhood. A book about Queen Mary—if it be honest—has no business to be a genteel exercise in the romantic: if the truth is to be told, let it be there.

A quair is a cahier, a quire, a little book. In one such a certain king wrote fairly the tale of his love-business; and here, in this other, I pretend to show you all the tragic error, all the pain, known only to her that moved in it, of that child of his children's children, Mary of Scotland. What others have guessed at, building surmise upon surmise, she knew; for what they did, she suffered. Some who were closest about her—women, boys—may have known some: Claude Nau got some from her; my Master Des-Essars got much. But the whole of it lay in her heart, and to know her is to hold the key of that. Suppose her hand had been at this pen; suppose mine had turned that key: there might have resulted 'The Queen's Quair.' Well! Suppose one or the other until the book is done—and then judge me.

Questions for King Œdipus, Riddle of the Sphinx, Mystery of Queen Mary! She herself is the Mystery; the rest is simple enough. There had been men in Scotland from old time, and Stuarts for six generations to break themselves upon them. Great in thought, frail in deed, adventurous, chivalrous, hardy, short of hold, doomed to fail at the touch—so ventured, so failed the Stuarts from the first James to the fifth. There had been men in Scotland, but no women. Forth from the Lady of Lorraine came the lass, born in an unhappy hour, tossing high her young head, saying, 'Let me alone to rule wild Scotland.' They had but to give her house-room: no mystery there. The mystery is that any mystery has been found. Maids' Adventure—with that we begin. A bevy of maids to rule wild Scotland! What mystery is there in that?

Or—since Mystery is double-edged, engaging what we dare not, as well as what we cannot, tell—what mystery but that?

A hundred books have been written, a hundred songs sung; men enough of these latter days have broken their hearts for Queen Mary's. What is more to the matter is that no heart but hers was broken in time. All the world can love her now; but who loved her then? Not a man among them. A few girls went weeping; a few boys laid down their necks that she might walk free of the mire. Alas! the mire swallowed them up, and she must soil her pretty feet. This is the nut of the tragedy; pity is involved rather than terror. But no song ever pierced the fold of her secret, no book ever found out the truth, because none ever sought her heart. Here, then, is a book which has sought nothing else, and a song which springs from that only: called, on that same account, 'The Queen's Quair.'

BOOK THE FIRST MAIDS' ADVENTURE

CHAPTER I HERE YOU ARE IN THE ANTECHAMBER

It is quite true that when they had buried the little wasted King Francis, and while the days of Black Dule still held, the Cardinal of Lorraine tried three times to see his niece, and was three times refused. Not being man enough to break a way in, he retired; but as he knew very well that the Queen-Mother, the King, the King of Navarre, and Madame Marguerite went in and out all day long, he had a suspicion that they, or the seasons, were more at fault than the hidden mourner. 'A time, times, and half a time,' he said, 'have good scriptural warrant. I will try once more—at this hour of high mass.' So he did, and saw Mary Livingstone, that strapping girl, who came into the antechamber, rather flushed, and devoutly kissed his ring.

'How is it with the Queen my niece?'

'Sadly, Eminence.'

‘I must know how sadly, my girl. I must see her. It is of great concern.’

The young woman looked scared. ‘Eminence, she sees only the Queen-Mother.’

‘The more reason,’ says he, ‘why she should see somebody else. She may be praying one of these fine days that she never see the Queen-Mother again.’

Livingstone coloured up to the eyes. ‘Oh, sir! Oh, Lord Cardinal, and so she doth, and so do we all! They are dealing wickedly with our mistress. It is true, what I told you, that she sees the Queen-Mother: that is because her Majesty will not be denied. She forces the doors—she hath had a door taken down. She comes and goes as she will; rails at our lady before us all. She, poor lamb, what can she do? Oh, sir, if you could stop this traffic I would let you in of my own venture.’

‘Take me in, then,’ said the cardinal: ‘I will stop it.’

In the semi-dark he found his niece, throned upon the knee of Mary Beaton for comfort, in heavy black weeds, out of which the sharp oval of her face and the crescent white coif gleamed like two moons, the old within the new. Two other maids sat on the floor near by; each had a hand of her—pitiful sentinels of spoiled treasure. When the gentleman-usher at the curtain was forestalled by the great man’s quick entry, four girls rose at once, as a covey of partridges out of corn, and all but the Queen fell upon their knees. She, hugging herself as if suddenly chilled, came forward a little, not very far, and held out to the cardinal an unwilling hand. He took it, laid it on his own, kissed, and let it drop immediately. Then he stood upright, sniffed, and looked about him, being so near the blood royal himself that he could use familiarity with princes. It was clear that he disapproved.

‘Faith of a gentleman!’ he said: ‘one might see a little better, one might breathe a little better, here, my niece.’

‘The room is well enough,’ said the Queen.

It was dark and hot, heavy with some thick scent.

As she pronounced upon it the cardinal paused half-way to the shutter; but he paused too slightly. The Queen flushed all over and went quickly between him and the window—a vehement action. ‘Leave it, leave it alone! I choose my own way. You dare not touch it.’ She spoke furiously; he bowed his grey head and drew back. Then, in a minute, she herself flung back the shutters, and stood trembling in the sudden glory revealed. The broad flood of day showed him the waves of storm still surging over her; but even as he approved she commanded herself and became humble—he knew her difficult to resist in that mood.

‘I thought you would treat me as the Queen-Mother does. That put me in a rage. I beg your pardon, my lord.’ As she held out her hand again, this time he took it, and drew her by it along with him to the open window. He made her stand in the sun. Far below the grey curtain-wall were the moat, the bridges, the trim gardens and steep red roofs of Orleans, the spired bulk of the great church; beyond all that the gay green countryside. A fresh wind was blowing out there. You saw the willows bend, the river cream and curd. The keen strength of day and the weather made her blink; but he braced her to meet it by his words.

‘Madam,’ said he, ‘needs must your heart uplift to see God’s good world still shining in its place, patient until your Majesty tires of sitting in the dark.’

She smiled awry, and drummed on the ledge with her long fingers, looking wilfully down, not choosing to agree. The maids, all clustered together, watched their beloved; but the cardinal had saner eyes than any of them. As he saw her, so may you and I.

A tall, slim girl, petted and pettish, pale (yet not unwholesome), chestnut-haired, she looked like a flower of the heat, lax and delicate. Her skin—but more, the very flesh of her—seemed transparent, with colour that warmed it from within, faintly, with a glow of fine rose. They said that when she drank you could see the red wine run like a fire down her throat; and it may partly be believed. Others have reported that her

heart could be discerned beating within her body, and raying out a ruddy light, now fierce, now languid, through every crystal member. The cardinal, who was no rhapsodist of the sort, admitted her clear skin, admitted her patent royalty, but denied that she was a beautiful girl—even for a queen. Her nose, he judged, was too long, her lips were too thin, her eyes too narrow. He detested her trick of the sidelong look. Her lower lids were nearly straight, her upper rather heavy: between them they gave her a sleepy appearance, sometimes a sly appearance, when, slowly lifting, they revealed the glimmering hazel of the eyes themselves. Hazel, I say, if hazel they were, which sometimes seemed to be yellow, and sometimes showed all black: the light acted upon hers as upon a cat's eyes. Beautiful she may not have been, though Monsieur de Brantôme would never allow it; but fine, fine she was all over—sharply, exquisitely cut and modelled: her sweet smooth chin, her amorous lips, bright red where all else was pale as a tinged rose; her sensitive nose; her broad, high brows; her neck which two hands could hold, her small shoulders and bosom of a child. And then her hands, her waist no bigger than a stalk, her little feet! She had sometimes an intent, considering, wise look—the look of the Queen of Desire, who knew not where to set the bounds of her need, but revealed to no one what that was. And belying that look askance of hers—sly, or wise, or sleepy, as you choose—her voice was bold and very clear, her manners were those of a lively, graceful boy, her gestures quick, her spirit impatient and entirely without fear. Her changes of mood were dangerous: she could wheedle the soul out of a saint, and then fling it back to him as worthless because it had been so easily got. She wrote a beautiful bold hand, loved learning, and petting, and a choice phrase. She used perfumes, and dipped her body every day in a bath of wine. At this hour she was nineteen years old, and not two months a widow.

All this the cardinal knew by heart, and had no need to observe while she stood strumming at the window-sill. His opinion—if he had chosen to give it—would have been: these qualities and perfections, ah, and these imperfections, are all very proper

to a prince who has a principality; for my niece, I count greatly upon a wise marriage—wise for our family, wise for herself. He would have been the last to deny that the Guises had been hampered by King Francis' decease. All was to do again—but all could be done. This fretful, fair girl was still Queen of Scotland, allons! Dowager of France, but Queen of Scotland, worth a knight's venture. Advance pawns, therefore! He was a chess-player, passionate for the game.

He surveyed the maids of honour, bouncing Livingstone and the rest of them, too zealous after their mistress's ease, and too jealous lest the world should edge them out; and found that he had more zest for the world and the spring weather. 'Ah, madam,' he said, 'ah, my niece, this cloister-life of stroking, and kindly knees, is not one for your Majesty. There are high roads out yonder to be traversed, armies to set upon them, cities and towns and hill-crests to be taken. But you sit at home in the dark, nursed by your maids!'

She raised her eyebrows, not her eyes. 'Why,' says she, 'the King, my husband, is dead, and most of his people glad of it, I believe. If my kingdom lies within these four walls, and my government is but over these poor girls, they are my own. What else should I do? Walk abroad to mass? Ride abroad to the meadows? And be mocked by the people for a barren wife, who never was wife at all? And be browbeat openly by the Apothecary's Daughter? Is this what you set before me, Lord Cardinal?'

The cardinal put up his chin and cupped his beard. 'The rich may call themselves poor, the poor dare not. You have a realm, my niece, and a fair realm. You stand at the door of a second. You may yet have a third, it seems to me.'

Queen Mary looked at him then, with a gleam in her eyes which answered for a smile. But she hid her mind almost at once, and resumed her drumming.

'King Charles is hot for me,' she said. 'He is a brave lad. I should be Queen of France again—of France and England and Scotland.' She laughed softly to herself,

as if snug in the remembrance that she was still sought.

The cardinal became exceedingly serious. ‘I have thought of that. To my mind there is a beautiful justice——! What our family can do shall be done—but, alas——!’

She broke in upon him here. ‘Our family, my lord! Your family! Ah, that was a good marriage for me, for example, which you made! That ailing child! Death was in his bed before ever I was put there. My marriage! My husband! He used to cry all night of the pain in his head. He clung to the coverlet, and to me, lest they should pull him out to prayers. Marriage! He was cankered from his birth. What king was Francis, to make me a queen?’

The cardinal lifted his fine head. ‘It was my sister Marie who made you a queen, madam, by the grace of God and King James. Through your parentage you are Queen of Scotland, and should be Queen of England—and you shall be. God of gods, you may be queen of whatso realm you please. What do I learn? The whole world’s mind runs upon the marrying of you. The Archduke Ferdinand hath here his ambassadors, attendant on the Queen-Mother’s pleasure—which you allow to be yours also. Don Carlos, his own hand at the pen, writes for a hope of your Majesty’s. The Earl of Huntly, a great and religious prince in Scotland, urges the pretensions of his son, the Lord of Gordon. Are these to be laid before the Queen-Mother? To the duchess, your grandmother, writeth daily the Duke of Châtelherault concerning his son, the Earl of Arran. On his side is my brother the Constable. More! They bring me word from England that the Earl of Lennox, next in blood to your Majesty, next indeed to both your thrones, is hopeful to come to France—he, too, with a son in his pocket, young, apt, and lovely as a love-apple. All these hopeful princes, madam——’

Queen Mary coloured. With difficulty she said: ‘I hear of every one of them for the first time.’

‘Oh, madam,’ cried the cardinal, ‘so long as you sit on your maids’ knees and give

the keys of your chamber to the Queen-Mother, you will only hear what she please to tell you. And more'—he raised his voice, and gave it severity—'I take leave to add that so long as your Majesty hath Mistress Livingstone here for your husband, your Majesty can look for no other.'

'I am never likely to look on a better,' says Queen Mary, and put her hand behind her. Mary Livingstone stooped quickly and snatched a kiss from the palm, while the cardinal gazed steadily out of doors. But he felt more at ease, being sure that he had leavened his lump.

And so he had. The sweet fact of great marriages beyond her doors, and the sour fact of the Queen-Mother within them, worked a ferment in her brain and set her at her darling joy of busy scheming. What turned the scale over was the mortifying discovery that Catherine de' Medici was in reality dying to get rid of her. She flew into a great rage, changed her black mourning for white, announced her departure, paid her farewells, and went to her grandmother's court at Rheims. Queen Catherine watched her, darkling, from a turret as she rode gaily out in her troop of Guises. 'There,' she is reported to have said, I know not whether truly or not, 'there goes Madam Venus a-hunting the apple. Alas for Shepherd Paris!' The reflection is a shrewd one at least; but it was not then so certain that Orleans had seen the last of Queen Mary. It was no way to get her out of France to tell her there was nothing you desired so much.

The old duchess, her grandam, talked marriages and the throne of Scotland, therefore, into ears only half willing. The little Queen was by no means averse to either, but could not bring herself to lose hold upon France. 'Better to be Dowager of France than an Empress in the north,' she said; and then 'Fiddle-de-dee, my child,' the old lady retorted; 'give me a live dog before a dead lion. Your desire here is to vex La Medicis. You would make eyes at King Charles, and we should all lose our heads. Do you wish to end your days at Loches? The Duke of Milan found cold

quarters there, they tell me. No, no. Marry a king's son and recover England from the Bastard.' Thus all France spake of our great Elizabeth.

Queen Mary, though she loved her grandmother, pinched her lip, looked meek, and hardened her heart. She had obstinacy by the father's mother's side—a Tudor virtue.

It was just after she had gone to Nancy, to the court of her cousin of Lorraine, that she veered across to the side of the Guises and determined to adventure in Scotland. Two Scots lords came overseas to visit her there: one was the Lord James Stuart, her base-brother, the other a certain Father Lesley, an old friend of her mother's. The priest was a timid man, but by good hap and slenderness of equipage gained her first. She might have been sure he was a faithful friend, though doubtful if a very wise one. Faithful enough he proved in days to come: at this present she found him a simple, fatherly man, of wandering mind, familiar, benevolent, soon scared. He was enchanted with her, and said so. He praised her person, the scarlet of her lips, the bright hue of her hair. 'A bonny brown, my child,' he said, touching it, 'to my partial eyes.' She laughed as she told him that in Paris also they had liked the colour. 'They will call it foxy in Scotland,' he said, with a sniff; and she found out afterwards that they did. At first she was 'madam' here, and 'your Majesty' there; but as the talk warmed him he forgot her queenship in her extreme youth, had her hand in his own and patted it with the other. Then it came to 'Child, this you should do,' or 'Child, I hope that is not your usage'; and once he went so far as to hold her by the hands at arms' length and peer at her through his kind, weak eyes, up and down, as he said to himself, 'Eh, sirs, a tall bit lassie to stand by Bruce's chair! But her mother was just such another one—just such another.'

She thought this too far to go, even for a churchman, and drew off with a smile and shake of the head—not enough to humiliate him.

He cautioned her with fearful winks and nods against the Lord James Stuart, her half-brother, hinting more than he dared to tell. 'That man hath narrow eyes,' he

said; then, recollecting himself, ‘and so hath your Majesty by right of blood. All the Stuarts have them—the base and the true. But his, remark, are most guarded eyes, so that you shall not easily discover in what direction he casts his looks. But I say, madam,’—and he raised his wiry voice,—‘I say that the throne is ever at his right hand; and I do think that he looks ever to the right.’

The Queen’s eyes were plain enough at this—squirrel-colour, straight as arrows. Being free-spoken herself, she disliked periphrasis. ‘Does my brother desire my throne? Is this your meaning?’

He jumped back as if she had whipped him, and crossed himself vehemently, saying, ‘God forbid it! God forbid it!’

‘I shall forbid it, whether or no,’ said the Queen. ‘But I suppose you had some such meaning behind your speech.’ And she pressed him until she learned that such indeed was the belief in Scotland.

‘Your misborn brother, madam,’ he said, whispering, ‘will tell you nothing that he believeth, and ask you nothing that he desireth; nor will he any man. He will urge you to the contrary of what he truly requires. He will take his profit of another man’s sin and rejoice to see his own hands clean. My heart,’ he said, forgetting himself,—and ‘Ah, Jesu!’ she records, ‘I was called that again, and by another mouth,’—‘My heart, if you tender the peace of Holy Church in your land, keep your brother James in France under lock and key.’

She laughed at his alarms. ‘I wish liberty to all men and their consciences sir. I am sure I shall find friends in Scotland.’

He named the great Earl of Huntly and his four sons; but by now she was tired of him and sent him away. All the effect of the poor man’s speeches had been to make her anxious to measure wits with her base-brother. He came in two or three days later with a great train, and she had her opportunity.

What she made of it you may judge by this, that it was he and no other who spurred

her into Scotland. He did it, in a manner very much his own, by first urging it and then discovering impossible fatigues in the road. This shows him to have been, what he was careful to conceal, a student of human kind.

A certain French valet of the Earl of Bothwell's—Nicolas Hubart, from whose Confessions I shall have to draw liberally by-and-by, and of whom, himself, there will be plenty to say—made once an acute observation of the great Lord James, when he said that he was that sort of man who, if he had not a black cloak for Sunday, would be an atheist or even an epicurean. There was no one, certainly, who had a more intense regard for decent observance than he. It was his very vesture: he would have starved or frozen without it. It clothed him completely from head to foot, and from the heart outwards. Much more than that. There are many in this world who go about it swathed up to the eyes, imposing upon those they meet. But this man imposed first of all upon himself. So complete was his robing, he could not see himself out of it. So white were his hands, so flawless of grit, he could never see them otherwise. Supposing Father Lesley to have been right, supposing that James Stuart did—and throughout—plot for a throne, he would have been the first to cry out upon the vice of Brutus. It may well be doubted whether he once, in all his life, stood alone—so to speak—naked before his own soul. Perhaps such a man can hardly be deemed a sinner, whatever he do. There are those at this hour who say that the Lord James was no sinner. How should he be? they cry. His own soul never knew it.

This tall, pale, inordinately prim nobleman, with his black beard, black clothes, and (to the Queen's mind) black beliefs, seemed to walk for ever in a mask of sour passivity. He never spoke when to bow the head could be an answer, he never affirmed without qualification, he never denied or refused anything as of his own opinion. He was allowed to have extraordinarily fine manners, even in France, where alacrity of service counted for more than the service itself; and yet Queen Mary declared that she had never seen a man enter a doorway so long after he had

opened the door. He seldom looked at you. His voice was low and measured. He cleared his throat before he spoke, and swallowed the moment he had finished, as if he were anxious to engulf any possible effect of his words. Of all the ties upon a man he dreaded most those of the heart-strings: she never moved him to natural emotion but once. But, at this first coming of his, he paid her great court, and bent his stiff knees to her many times a day: this notwithstanding that, as Mary Seton affirmed, he had water on one of them. She said that she had that from his chaplain, but her love of mischief had betrayed her love of truth. The Lord James always stood to his prayers.

When the Queen saw him first it was in the presence of her women, of Lord Eglinton, of the Marquis D'Elbœuf, and others—persons who either hated him with reason or despised him with none. He moved her then, almost with passion, to go 'home' to Scotland, saying that it behoved princes to dwell among their own people. But at a privy audience a few days later, he held to another tune altogether, pursing his lips, twiddling his two thumbs, looking up and down and about. Now he said that he was not sure; that there were dangers attending a Popish Queen, and those not only within the kingdom but without it. She begged him to explain himself.

'Better bide, madam,' said he, 'until the wind change in England.'

Any word of England always excited her. The colour flew to her face. 'What hath my sister in England to do with my kingdom, good brother?'

'Why, madam,' he said, 'it has come to my sure knowledge that you shall get no safe-conduct from the English Queen, to go smoothly to Scotland.'

He never watched any one, or was never observed to be watching; but his guarded eyes, glancing at her as they shifted, showed him that, being angry now, she was beautiful—like a spirit of the fire.

'I should be offended at what you report if I believed it possible,' she said after a while. 'And yet England is not the only road, nor is it the best road, to my kingdom.'

‘No indeed, madam,’ he agreed; ‘but it is the only easy road for a young and delicate lady.’

‘Let my youth, brother, be as God made it,’ she answered him; ‘but as for my delicacy, I am thankfully able to bear fatigue and to thrive upon it. If my good sister, or you, my lord’—she spoke very clearly—‘think to keep me from my own by threats of force or warnings of danger, I would have you understand that the like of those is a spur to me.’

This was a thing which, in fact, he had understood perfectly.

‘I am not a shying horse,’ she continued, ‘to swerve at a heap of sand. I believe I shall find loyalty in my country, and cheerful courage there to meet my own courage. There be those that laugh at danger there, as well as those who weep.’

He said suavely here that she misjudged him, that only his tenderness for her person was at fault. ‘We grow timid where we love much, madam.’

At this she looked at him so unequivocally that he changed the subject.

‘If your Majesty,’ he pursued, ‘knows not the mind of the English Queen, or misdoubts my reading of it, let application be made to Master Throckmorton. I am content to be judged out of his mouth.’

Master Throckmorton was English Ambassador to the Queen of Scots, a friend of the Lord James’s. His lordship, indeed, had the greater confidence in giving this advice in that he had already convinced Master Throckmorton of what he must do, and what say, if he wished to get Queen Mary into Scotland—as, namely, decline to help her thither; decline, for instance, a letter of safe-conduct through English soil.

‘Let application be made presently, brother,’ said the incensed young lady, and gladly turned to her pleasures.

She had been finding these of late in a society not at all to the mind of the Lord James. Three days before this conversation the Earl of Bothwell, no less, had come

to court, making for the North from Piedmont.

In years to come she could remember every flash and eddy of that shifting garden scene when first he came to her. A waft of scented blossom, the throb of a lute, and she could see the peacock on the wall, the gay June borders, the grass plats and bright paths in between, quivering with the heat they gave out. There was a fountain in the midst of the quincunx, on the marble brim of which she sat with her maids and cousin D'Elbœuf, dipping her hand, and now and then flicking water into their faces. A page in scarlet and white had come running up to say that the Duke was nearing with his gentlemen; and presently down the long alley she saw them moving slowly—crimson cloaks and bared heads, the Duke in the midst, wearing his jewelled bonnet. He was talking, and laughing immoderately with some one she knew not at all, who swung his hat in his hand, and to whom, as she remembered vividly, the struck poppies bowed their heads. For he hit them as he went with his hat, and looked round to see them fall. The Duke's tale continued to the very verge of the privy garden; indeed he halted there, in the face of her usher, to finish it. She saw the stranger throw back his head to laugh. 'What a great jowl he hath,' she said to Mary Fleming; and she, in a hush, said, 'Madam, it is the Earl Bothwell.' A few moments later the man was kneeling before her, presented by the Duke himself. She had time to notice the page to whom he had thrown his hat and gloves—a pale-faced, wise-looking French boy, who knelt also, and watched her from a pair of grey eyes 'rimmed with smut-colour.' His name, she found out afterwards, was Jean-Marie-Baptiste Des-Essars. She liked his manly looks from the first—little knowing who and what he was to be to her. Jean-Marie-Baptiste Des-Essars! Keeper of the Secret des Secrets—where should I be without him?

The Earl of Bothwell—whom she judged (in spite of the stricken poppies) to be good-humoured—was a galliard of the type esteemed in France by those—and they were many—who pronounced vice to be their virtue. A galliard, as they say, if ever there was one, flushed with rich blood, broad-shouldered, square-jawed, with a

laugh so happy and so prompt that the world, rejoicing to hear it, thought all must be well wherever he might be. He wore brave clothes, sat a brave horse, kept brave company bravely. His high colour, while it betokened high feeding, got him the credit of good health. His little eyes twinkled so merrily that you did not see they were like a pig's, sly and greedy at once, and bloodshot. His tawny beard concealed a jaw underhung, a chin jutting and dangerous. His mouth had a cruel twist; but his laughing hid that too. The bridge of his nose had been broken; few observed it, or guessed at the brawl which must have given it him. Frankness was his great charm, careless ease in high places, an air of 'take me or leave me, I go my way'; but some mockery latent in him, and the suspicion that whatever you said or did he would have you in derision—this was what first drew Queen Mary to consider him. And she grew to look for it—in those twinkling eyes, in that quick mouth; and to wonder about it, whether it was with him always—asleep, at prayers, fighting, furious, in love. In fine, he made her think.

Mary Livingstone liked not the looks of him from the first, and held him off as much as she could. She slept with her mistress in these days of widowhood, but refused to discuss him in bed. She said that he had a saucy eye—which was not denied—and was too masterful.

'You can tell it by the hateful growth of hair he hath,' she cried. 'When he lifts up his head to laugh—and he would laugh, mind you, at the crucified Saviour!—you can see the climbing of his red beard, like rooted ivy on an old wall.'

It is true that his beard was reddish, and gross-growing; his hair, however, was dark brown, thick and curling. Mary Livingstone sniffed at his hair. He stayed ten days at Nancy, saw the Queen upon each of them, and on each held converse with her. She liked him very well, studied him, thought him more important than he really was. He laughed at her for this, and taxed her with it; but so pleasantly that she was not at all offended. The Lord James would not speak of him, nor he of the Lord James: he

shrugged at any reference to him.

‘Let it be enough, madam, to own that we do not love each other,’ he said when she pressed him. ‘We view the world differently, that lord and I; for I look on the evil and the good with open face and what cheer I can muster, and he looks through his fingers and sadly. We speak little one with the other: what he thinks of me I know not. I think him a——’

‘Well, my lord? You think my brother a——?’

‘A king’s son, madam,’ he said, demurely; but she saw the gleam in his eye.

He spoke fluent French, and was very ready with his Italian. He was a latinist, a student of warfare, had read Machiavelli. He scared away a good many poetasters by a real or an affected truculence; threatened to duck one of them in the fountain, and proved that he could do it by ducking another. The effect of this was, as he had intended, that Queen Mary for a day laughed with him at the art of poetry, which was no art of his. That day he had a private half-hour, and spoke freely of himself and his ventures.

‘A man rich in desires,’ he confessed himself, ‘and therefore of great wealth. Put the peach on the wall above me, madam, and I shall surely grow to handle it. And this other possession is mine, that while I strive and stretch after my prize I can laugh at my own pains, and yet not abate them.’

She considered every word he said, and dubbed him Democritus, her laughing philosopher.

‘You will have need of my sect in Scotland, madam,’ he replied with a bow. ‘Despise it not; for in that grey country the very skies invite us to mingle tears. You have a weeper beside you even now—the Lord Heraclitus, a king’s son.’

She had no difficulty in discovering her stiff brother James under this thin veil.

All was going on thus well with my Lord of Bothwell when Mary Livingstone heard

him rate his page in the forecourt one morning as she came back from the mass. She caught sight also of ‘his inflamed and wicked face,’ and saw the little French boy flinch and turn his shoulder to a flood of words, of which she understood not half. She guessed at them from the rest. ‘They must needs be worse; and yet how can they be? And oh! the poor little Stoic with his white face!’ The good girl snapped her lips together as she hurried on. ‘He shall see as little of my bonny Queen as I can provide for,’ she promised herself. ‘I have heard sculduddery enough to befoul all Burgundy.’ Being a wise virgin, she said little to her mistress save to urge her to beg the French boy from his master.

‘Why do you want him, child?’ the Queen asked.

‘He hath a steadfast look, and loves you. I think he will serve your needs. Get him if you care,’ was all the reply she could win.

The thing was easily done, lightly asked and lightly accorded.

‘Baptist, come hither,’ had cried my lord; and the boy knelt before the lady. ‘I have sold thee, Baptist.’

‘Very good, monseigneur.’

The Queen sparkled and smiled upon him. ‘Wilt thou come with me, Jean-Marie?’

‘Yes, willingly, madam.’

‘And do me good service?’

‘Nobody in the world shall do better, madam.’

‘But you are positive, my boy!’

‘I do well to be positive, madam, in such a cause as your Majesty’s.’

She turned to the Earl. ‘What is his history?’

He shrugged. ‘The Sieur Des-Essars—a gentleman of Brabant—disporting in La Beauce, accosts a pretty Disaster (to call her so) with a speaking eye——’

Jean-Marie-Baptiste held up his hand. ‘Monseigneur, ah——!’

‘How now, cockerel?’

‘You speak of my mother, sir,’ he said, his lip quivering.

‘By the Mass, and so I do!’ said the Earl.

The Queen patted the lad’s shoulder before she sent him away. ‘You shall tell me all about your mother, Jean-Marie, when we are in Scotland.’

Jean-Marie-Baptiste Des-Essars quickly kissed her sleeve, and became her man. More of him in due time, and of what he saw out of his ‘smut-rimmed’ eyes.

When English Mr. Throckmorton was reported as within a day’s ride of Nancy, my Lord Bothwell thought it wise to take leave. His odour in England was not good, and he knew very well that the Lord James would not sprinkle him with anything which would make it better. So he presented himself betimes in the morning, said his adieux and kissed hands.

‘Farewell, my lord,’ says Queen Mary. ‘Lorraine will be the sadder for your going.’

‘And ever fare your Majesty well,’ he answered her gaily, ‘as in Scotland you shall, despite the weepers.’

‘Do you go to Scotland, my lord?’

‘Does your Majesty?’ says he, his little eyes all of a twinkle.

‘My question was first, my lord.’

‘And the answer to mine is the answer to your Majesty’s.’

‘My Lord Democritus, am I to laugh when you leave me?’

‘Why, yes, madam, rather than to lament that I outstay my welcome.’

She showed her pleasure; at least, he saw it under the skin. So he left her; and Mary Livingstone, as she said, could ‘fetch her breath.’

Now, as to Mr. Throckmorton—if the Lord James had desired, as assuredly he did, to get his sister to Scotland, unwedded and in a hurry; if the Queen of England

desired it—which is certain,—neither could have used a better means than this excellent man. The Queen was in a royal rage when he, with great troubles and many shakings of his obsequious head, was obliged to own the safe-conduct through England refused. She shut herself up with her maids, and endlessly paced the floors, avoiding their entreating arms. They besought her to rest, to have patience, to sit on their knees, consult her uncles of Lorraine. ‘I shall sit in no chair, nor lie in any bed, until I am at sea,’ she promised them, and then cried: ‘What! am I a kennel-dog to the Bastard in England?’

Nothing in the world should stop her. She would go to her country by sea, and as soon as they could fit out the galleys. And she had her way—with suspicious ease, if she had had patience to observe it; for it happened to be the way of three other persons vitally interested in her: the Queen-Mother of France, who wished to get rid of her; the Queen of England, who hoped she would get rid of herself; and the Lord James Stuart, uncomfortably illegitimate, who hid his designs from his own soul, and looked at affairs without seeming to look.

Two galleys and four great ships took her and her adventurous company from Calais, on a day in August of high sun and breeze, with a misty brown bank on the horizon where England should lie. Guns shot from the forts were answered from the ships; to the Oriflamme of France the Scots Queen answered with her tressured Lion, and the English Leopards and Lilies. Of all the gallant company embarked there was none who looked more ardently to the north than she who was to sit in the high seat at Stirling. Let Mary Fleming look down, and Mary Beaton raise her eyebrows; let Mary Seton shrug and Mary Livingstone toss her young head; they are greatly mistaken who suppose that Mary Stuart went unwillingly to Scotland, or wetted her pillow with tears. She cried when she bade adieu to her grandmother—tears of kindness those. But her heart was high to be Queen, and her head full of affairs. How she judged men! What measures she devised! Ask Mary Livingstone whether they two slept of nights, or whether they talked of the deeds of

Queen Mary—what she should do, what avoid, how walk, how safeguard herself. She lay in a pavilion on the upper deck, and turned her face to where she thought Scotland should be. But Mary Livingstone showed Scotland her back, and sheltered her Queen in her arms.

CHAPTER II HERE YOU STEP INTO THE FOG

Now, when they had been three days at sea, standing off Flamborough in England, the wind veered to the southeast, and dropped very soon. They had to row the ships for lack of meat for the sails to fill themselves; the face of the world was changed, the sun blotted out. It became chilly, with a thin rain; there drew over the sea a curtain of soft fog which wrapped them up as in a winding-sheet, and seemed to clog the muscles of men's backs, so that scarcely way could be made. In this white darkness—for such it literally was—the English took the Earl of Eglinton in his ship, silently, without a cry to be heard; but in it also they lost the Queen's and all the rest of her convoy. Rowing all night and all next day, sounding as they went in a sea like oil, the Scots company drew past St. Abb's, guessed at Dunbar, found and crept under the ghost of the Bass, came at length with dripping sheets into Leith Road by night, and so stayed to await the morn. They fired guns every hour; nobody slept on board.

That night which they began with music, some dancing and playing forfeits, was one of deathly stillness. The guns made riot by the clock; but the sea-fog drugged all men's spirits. The Queen was pensive, and broke up the circle early. She went to bed, and lay listening, as she said, to Scotland. As it wore towards dawn she could have heard, if yet wakeful, great horns blown afar off on the shore, answering her guns, the voices of men and women, howling, quarrelling, or making merry after their fashion; steeple bells; sometimes the knocking of oars as unseen boats rowed about her. Once the sentry on the upper deck challenged: 'Qui va là?' in a shrill voice. There was smothered laughter, but no other reply. He fired his piece, and

there came a great scurry in the water, which woke the Queen with a start.

‘Was that the English guns? Are we engaged?’

‘No, no, madam; you forget. We are in our own land by now, safe between the high hills of Scotland. ’Twas some folly of the guard.’

She was told it had gone six o’clock, and insisted on rising. Father Roche, her confessor, said mass; and after that Mary Seton had a good tale for her private ear. Monsieur de Bourdeilles, it seems, the merry gentleman, had held Monsieur de Châtelard embraced against his will under one blanket all night, to warm himself. This Monsieur de Châtelard, a poet of some hopefulness, owned himself Queen Mary’s lover, and played the part with an ardour and disregard of consequence which are denied to all but his nation. A lover is a lover, whether you admit him or not; his position, though it be self-chosen, is respectable: but no one could refuse the merits of this story. Monsieur de Bourdeilles was sent for—a wise-looking, elderly man.

‘Sieur de Brantôme,’ says the Queen—that was his degree in the world—‘how did you find the warmth of Monsieur de Châtelard?’

‘Upon my faith, madam,’ says he, ‘your Majesty should know better than I did whether he is alight or not.’

‘I think that is true,’ said Queen Mary; ‘but now also you will have learned, as I have, to leave him alone.’

The Grand Prior—a Guise, the Queen’s uncle and a portly man—came in to see his niece. He reported a wan light spread abroad: one might almost suppose the sun to be somewhere. If her Majesty extinguished the candles her Majesty would still be able to see. It was curious. He considered that a landing might be made, for news of the ships was plainly come ashore. Numberless small boats, he said, were all about, full of people spying up at the decks. Curious again: he had been much entertained.

‘You shall show yourself to them, madam, if you will be guided by me,’ says Mary

Livingstone. The Grand Prior was not against it.

‘Well,’ says the Queen, ‘let us go, then, to see and be seen.’

One of the maids—Seton, I gather—made an outcry: ‘Oh, ma’am, you will never go to them in your white weed!’

‘How else, child?’

Seton caught at her hand. ‘Like the bonny Queen Mab—like the Fairy Vivien that charmed Tamlane out of his five wits. Thus you should go!’

The Queen turned blushing to the Grand Prior.

‘How shall I show myself, good uncle?’

‘My niece, you are fair enough now.’

‘Is it true?’ she said. ‘Then I will be fairer yet. Get me what you will; make a queen of me. Fleming, you shall choose.’

Mary Fleming, a gentle beauty, considered the case. ‘I shall dress your Majesty in the white and green,’ she declared, and was gone to get it.

So they dressed her in white and green, with a crown of stars for her hair, and covered her in a carnation hood against the cold. Then she was brought out among the four of them to lean on the poop and see the people. A half-circle of stately, cloaked gentlemen—all French, and mainly Guises—stood behind; but Monsieur de Châtelard, shaking like a leaf, sought the prop of a neighbouring shoulder for his arm. It was modestly low, and belonged to Des-Essars, the new page.

‘My gentle youth,’ said the poet, after thanking him for his services, ‘I am sick because I love. Do you see that smothered goddess? Learn then that I adore her, and so was able to do even in the abominable arms of Monsieur de Brantôme.’

‘I also consider her Majesty adorable,’ replied the page with gravity; ‘but I do not care to say so openly.’

‘If your wound be not kept green,’ Monsieur de Châtelard reproved him, ‘if it is

covered up, it mortifies, you bleed internally, and you die.'

Des-Essars bowed. 'Why, yes, sir. There is no difficulty in that.'

'Far from it, boy—far from it! Exquisite ease, rather.'

'It is true, sir,' said Des-Essars. 'Well! I am ready.'

'And I, boy, must get ready. Soothsayers have assured me that I shall die in that lady's service.'

'I intend to live in it,' said Des-Essars; 'for she chose me to it herself.'

Monsieur de Châtelard considered this alternative. 'Your intention is fine,' he allowed; 'but my fate is the more piteous.'

Whether the people knew their Queen or not, they gave little sign of it. They seemed to her a grudging race, unwilling to allow you even recognition. She had been highly pleased at first: watched them curiously, nodded, laughed, kissed her hand to some children—who hid their faces, as if she had put them to shame. Some pointed at her, some shook their heads; none saluted her. Most of them looked at the foreign servants: a great brown Gascon sailor, who leaned half-naked against the gunwale; a black in a yellow turban; a saucy Savoyard girl with a bare bosom; and some, nudging others, said, 'A priest! a priest!'—and one, a big, wild, red-capped man, stood up in his boat, and pointed, and cried out loud, 'To hell with the priest!' The cold curiosity, the uncouth drab of the scene, the raw damp—and then this savage burst—did their work on her. She was sensitive to weather, and quick to read hearts. Being chilled, her own heart grew heavy. 'I wish to go away. They stare; there is no love here,' she said, and went down the companion, and sat in her pavilion without speaking. She let Mary Livingstone take her hand. At that hour, I know, her thought was piercingly of France, and the sun, and the peasant girls laughing to each other half across the breezy fields.

Barges came to board the Queen's galley; strong-faced gentlemen, muffled in cloaks, sat in the stern; all others stood up—even the rowers, who faced forward like

Venetians and pushed rather than pulled the slow vessels. Running messengers kept her informed of arrivals: the Provost of Edinburgh was come, the Captain of the Castle, the Lord of Lethington, Maitland by name, secretary to her mother the late Queen; her half-brothers, the Lords James and Robert Stuart, and more—all civil, all with stiff excuses that preparations were so backward. She would see none but her brothers, and, at the Lord James' desire, Mr. Secretary Maitland of Lethington. Him she discerned to be a taut, nervous, greyish man, with a tired face. She was prepared to like him for her mother's sake; but he was on his guard, unaccountably, and she too dispirited to pursue. Des-Essars, in his Secret Memoirs, says that he remembers to have noticed, young as he was, how this Lethington's eyes always sought those of the Lord James before he spoke. 'Sought,' he says, 'but never found them.' Sharply observed for a boy of fourteen.

Well, here was a dreary beginning, which must nevertheless be pushed to some kind of ending. Before noon she was landed—upon a muddy shore, the sea being at the ebb—without cloth of estate, or tribune, or litter, with a few halberdiers to make a way for her through a great crowd. She looked at the ooze and slimy litter. 'Are we amphibians in Scotland?' she asked her cousin D'Elbœuf. His answer was to splash down heroically into the mess and throw his cloak upon it. 'Gentlemen,' he cried out in his own tongue, 'make a Queen's way!' He had not long to wait. A tragic cry from Monsieur de Châtelard informed all Leith that he was wading ashore. Fine, but retarding action! His cloak was added late to a long line of them—all French: the Marquis's, the Grand Prior's, Monsieur D'Amville's, Monsieur de Brantôme's, Monsieur de La Noue's, many more. There were competitions, encouraging cries, great enthusiasm. The people jostled each other to get a view; the Scots lords looked staidly on, but none offered their cloaks.

Thus it was that she touched Scottish soil, as Mr. Secretary remarked to himself, through a foreign web. A little stone house, indescribably mean and close, was open to her to rest in while the horses were made ready. Thither came certain lords—Earls

of Argyll and Atholl, Lords Erskine, Herries, and others—to kiss hands. She allowed it listlessly, not distinguishing friend from unfriend. All faces seemed alike to her: wooden, overbold, weathered faces, clumsy carvings of an earlier day, with watchful, suspicious eyes put in them to make them alive. Her ladies were with her, and her uncles. The little room was filled to overflowing, and in and out of the passage-ways elbowed the French gallants shouting for their grooms. No one was allowed to have any speech with the Queen, who sat absorbed and unobservant in the packed assembly, a French guard all about her, with Mary Livingstone kneeling beside her, whispering French comfort in her ear.

Above the surging and the hum of the shore could be heard the beginnings of clamour. The press at the doors was so great they could scarcely bring up the horses; and when the hackbutters beat them back the people murmured. Monsieur D'Amville's charger grew restive and backed into the crowd: they howled at him for a Frenchman, and were not appeased to discover by the looks of him that he was proud of the fact. There was much sniffing and spying for priests,—well was it for Father Roche and his mates that, having been warned, they lay still among the ships, intending not to land till dusk. How was her Majesty to be got out? It seemed that she was a prisoner. The Master of the Horse could do nothing for his horses; the Master of the Household was penned in the doorway. If it had not been for the Lord James, Queen Mary must have spent the night on the sea-shore. But the people fell back this way and that when, bareheaded, he came out of the house. 'Give way there—make a place,' he said, in a voice hardly above the speaking tone; and way and place were made.

Two or three of the French lords observed him. 'He has the gestures of a king, look you.'

'You are right; and, they tell me, a king's desires. Do you see that he measures them with his eye before he speaks, as if to judge what strength he should use?'

They brought up the horses; the Queen came out. Up a steep, straggling street, finally, they rode in some kind of broken order, in a lane cut, as it were, between dumb walls of men and women. Monsieur de Brantôme remarked to his neighbour that it was for all the world as if travelling mountebanks were come to town. Very few greeted her, none seemed to satisfy any feeling but curiosity. They pointed her out to one another. ‘Yonder she goes. See, yonder, in the braw, cramoisy hood!’ ‘See, man, the bonny long lass!’ ‘I mind,’ said one, ‘to have seen her mother brought in. Just such another one.’ Some cried, ‘See you, how she arches her fine neck.’ Others, ‘She hath the eyes of all her folk.’ ‘A dangerous smiler: a Frenchwoman just.’

She did not hear these things, or did not notice them, being slow to catch at the Scots tongue. But one wife cried shrilly, ‘God bless that sweet face!’ and that she recognised, and laughed her glad thanks to the kindly soul.

Most eyes were drawn to the French princes, and missed her in following them and their servants. The Grand Prior made them wonder: his stateliness excused him the abhorred red cross; but chief of them all seemed Monsieur de Châtelard, very splendid in white satin and high crimson boots, and a tall feather in his cap. Some thought he was the Pope’s son, some the Prince of Spain come to marry the Queen; but, ‘Havers, woman, ’tis just her mammet,’ said one in Mary Beaton’s hearing. The Queen laughed when this was explained to her, and remembered it for Monsieur de Brantôme. But she only laughed those two times between Leith shore and Holyroodhouse.

Her spirits mended after dinner. She held an informal court, and set herself diligently to please and be pleased. She desired the Lord of Lethington, in the absence of a Lord Chamberlain, to make the presentations; he was to stand by her side and answer all questions. He spoke her language with a formal ease which she found agreeable, betrayed a caustic humour now and again, was far more to her taste

than at first. She saw the old Duke of Châtelherault and his scared son, my Lord of Arran.

‘Hamiltons, madam,’ said Lethington tersely, and thought he had said all; but she had to be told that they claimed to stand next in blood to herself and the throne of Scotland.

‘The blood has been watered, it seems to me,’ she said. ‘One can see through that old lord.’

‘Madam, that is his greatest grief. He cannot, if he would, conceal his pretensions.’

‘Explain yourself, sir.’

‘Madam, you can see that he is empty. But he pretends to fulness.’

‘And that white son of his, my Lord of Arran? Does he too pretend to be full—in the head, for example?’

She embarrassed Mr. Secretary.

Mary Livingstone, at this point, came to her flushed and urgent: ‘Madam, madam, my good father!’ A jolly gentleman was before her, who, in the effusion of his loyalty, forgot to kneel. ‘Your knees, my lord, your knees!’ his daughter whispered; but the fine man replied, ‘No, no, my bairn. I stand up to fight for the Queen, and she shall e’en see all my gear.’

Queen Mary, not ceremonious by nature, smiled and was gracious: they conversed by these signs of the head and mouth, for he had no French.

To go over names would be tedious, and so might have proved to her Majesty had not Lethington fitted each sharply with a quality. Such a man was of her Majesty’s religion—my Lord Herries, now; such of Mr. Knox’s—see that square-browed, frowning Lord of Lindsay. Mr. Knox had reconciled this honourable man and his wife. It was whispered—this for her Majesty’s ear!—that all was not well between my Lord of Argyll and his lady, her Majesty’s half-sister. Would Mr. Knox

intervene? At her Majesty's desire beyond doubt he would do it. The Duke of Châtelherault held all the west as appanage of the Hamiltons, except a small territory round about Glasgow, to which her Majesty's kinsman Lennox laid claim. The claim was faint, since the Lennox was in England. It was supposed that fear of the Hamiltons kept him there; but if her Majesty would be pleased she could reconcile the two houses.

The Queen blinked her eyes. 'Reconciliation seems to be your Mr. Knox's prerogative. I have not yet learned from you what mine may be.'

'Yours, madam,' said Lethington, 'is the greater, because gentler, hand—to put it no higher than that! Moreover, the Stuarts of Lennox share your Majesty's faith; and Mr. Knox——'

'Ah,' cried the Queen, 'I conceive your Mr. Knox is Antipope!'

Mr. Secretary confessed that some had called him so.

'And what does my cousin Châtelherault call him?' she asked.

He explained that the Duke paid him great respect.

'Let me understand you,' said Queen Mary. 'The Duke is master of the west, and Mr. Knox of the Duke. Who is master of Mr. Knox?'

'Oh, madam, he will serve your Majesty. I am sure of him.'

She was not so sure: she wondered. Then she found that she was frowning and pinching her lip, so broke into a new line.

'Let us take the south, Monsieur de Lethington. Who prevails in those parts?'

He told her that there were many great men to be considered there: my Lord Herries, my Lord Hume, the Earl of Bothwell. This name interested her, but she was careful not to single it out.

'And is Mr. Knox the master of these?'

'Not so, madam. My Lord Herries is of the old religion; and my Lord of

Bothwell——’

‘Does he laugh?’

‘I fear, madam, it is a mocking spirit.’

‘Why,’ says she, ‘does he laugh at Mr. Knox?’

Mr. Secretary detected the malice. ‘Alas! your Majesty is pleased to laugh at her servant.’

‘Well, let us leave M. de Boduel to his laughter. Who rules the north?’

‘The Earl of Huntly is powerful there, madam.’

‘I have had intelligence of him. He is a Catholic. Well, well! And now you shall tell me, Mr. Secretary, where my own kingdom is.’

‘Oh, madam, it is in the hearts of your people. You have all Scotland at your feet.’

‘Let us take a case. Have I, for example, your Mr. Knox at my feet?’

‘Surely, madam.’

‘We shall see. I tell you fairly that I do not choose to be at his. He has written against women, I hear. Is he wed?’

‘Madam, he is twice a widower.’

‘He is severe. But he should be instructed in his theme. He may have reason. Where is my brother?’

‘The Lord James is at his prayers, madam.’

‘I hope he will remember me there. I see that I shall need advocacy.’

Her head ached, her eyes were stiff with watching. She said her good-night and retired. At that hour there was a great shouting and crying in the courtyard, and out of the midst there spired a wild music of rebecks, fiddles, scrannel-pipes, and a monstrous drum out of tune. The French lords said, ‘Tenez, on s’amuse!’ and raised their eyebrows. The Queen shivered over a sea-coal fire. Now at last she

remembered all fair France, saw it in one poignant, long look inwards, and began to cry. ‘I am a fool, a fool—but, oh me! I am wretched,’ she said, and rocked herself about. The comfort of women—kisses, strokings, mothering arms—was applied; they put her to bed, and Mary Livingstone sat by her. This young woman was in high feather, surveyed the prospect with calmness, not at all afraid. Her father, she said, had put before her the desires of all those gentry: he had never had such court paid him in his long life. This it was to be father to a maid of honour. The Duke had taken him apart before dinner, urging the suit of his son Arran for the Queen’s hand. The Lord James had spoken of an earldom; Lethington could not see enough of him. ‘Hey, my lamb,’ she ended, stroking the Queen’s hot face, ‘we will have them all at your feet ere this time seven days; and a lass in her teens shall sway wild Scotland!’ The Queen sighed, and snuggled her cheek into the open hand.

Just as she was dozing off there was to be heard a scurry of feet along the corridor, the crash of a door admitting a burst of sound—in that, the shiver of steel on steel, a roar of voices, a loud cry above all, ‘He hath it! He hath it!’ The Queen started up and held her heart. ‘What do they want of me? Is it Mr. Knox?’ Livingstone ran into the antechamber among the huddling women there. Des-Essars came to them bright-eyed to say it was nothing. It was Monsieur D’Elbœuf fighting young Erskine about a lady. The duel had been arranged at supper. They had cleared the tables for the fray.

CHAPTER III SUPERFICIAL PROPERTIES OF THE HONEYPOT

When they told her what was the name Mr. Knox had for her, and how it had been caught up by all the winds in town, Queen Mary pinched her lip. ‘Does he call me Honeypot? Well, he shall find there is wine in my honey—and perchance vinegar too, if he mishandle me. Or I may approve myself to him honey of Hymettus, which has thyme in it, and other sane herbs to make it sharp.’

A honey-queen she looked as she spoke, all golden and rose in her white weeds, her

face aflower in the close coif, finger and thumb pinching her lip. She seemed at once wise, wholesome, sweet, and tinged with mischief; even the red Earl of Morton, the 'bloat Douglas,' as they called him, who should have been cunning in women, when he saw her preside at her first Council, said to his neighbour, 'There is wine in the lass, and strong wine, to make men drunken. What was Black James Stuart about to let her in among us?' It was a sign also of her suspected store of strength that Mr. Knox was careful not to see her. He had called her 'Honeypot' on hearsay.

No doubt she approved herself: those who loved her, and, trembling, marked her goings, owned it to each other by secret signs. And yet, in these early days, she stood alone, a growing girl in a synod of elders, watching, judging, wondering about them, praying to gods whom they had abjured in a tongue which they had come to detest. For they were all for England now, while she clung the more passionately to France. If she used deceit, is it wonderful? The arts of women against those half-hundred pairs of grudging, reticent eyes; a little armoury of smiles, blushes, demure, down-drooping lids! Was it the instinct to defend, or the relish for cajolery? She had the art of unconscious art. She looked askance, she let her lips quiver at a harsh decree, she kissed and took kisses where she could. She laughed for fear she should cry, she was witty when most at a loss. She refused to see disapproval in any, pretended to an open mind, and kept the inner door close-barred. Never unwatched, she was never found out; never off the watch, she never let her anxiety be seen. Alone she did it. Not Mary Livingstone herself knew the half of her effort, or shared her moments of dismay; for that whole-hearted girl saw Scotland with Scots eyes.

But she succeeded—she pleased. The lords filled Holyroodhouse, their companies the precincts; every man was Queen Mary's man. The city wrought at its propynes and pageants against her entry in state. Mr. Knox, grimly surveying the company at his board, called her Honeypot.

There were those of her own religion who might have had another name for her. One

morning there was a fray after her mass, when the Lord Lindsay and a few like him hustled and beat a priest. They waited for him behind the screen and gave him, in their phrase, ‘a bloody comb.’ Now, here was a case for something more tart than honey—at least, the clerk thought so. He had come running to her full of his griefs: the holy vessels had been tumbled on the floor, the holy vestments were in shreds; he (the poor ministrant) was black and blue; martyrdom beckoned him, and so on.

‘Nay, good father, you shall not take it amiss,’ she had said to him. ‘A greater than you or I said in a like case, “They know not what they do.”’

‘Madam,’ says the priest, ‘there spake the Son of God, all-discerning, not to be discerned of the Jews. But I judge from the feel of my head what they do, and I think they themselves know very well—and their master also that sent them, their Master Knox.’

‘I will give you another Scripture, then,’ replied she. ‘It is written, “By our stripes we are healed.”’

‘Your pardon, madam, your pardon!’ cried the priest: ‘I read it otherwise. St. Peter saith, “By His stripes we are healed”—a very different matter.’

She grew red. ‘Come, come, sir, we are bandying words. You will not tell me that you have no need of heavenly physic, I suppose?’

‘I pray,’ said he, ‘that your Majesty have none. Madam, if it please you, but for your Majesty’s kindred, the Lord James and his brethren, I had been a dead man.’

‘You tell me the best news of my brothers I have had yet,’ said she, and sent him away.

She used a gentler method with Lord Lindsay when he next showed her his rugged, shameless face. He told her bluntly that he would never bend the knee to Baal.

‘Well,’ she said, with a smile, ‘you shall bend it to me instead.’ And she looked so winning and so young, and withal so timid lest he should refuse, that (on a sudden

impulse) down he went before her and kissed her hand.

‘I knew that I could make him ashamed,’ she said afterwards to Mary Livingstone.

‘I would have had him whipped!’ cried the flaming maid.

‘You are out, my dear,’ said Queen Mary. ‘’Twas better he should whip himself.’

Although she took enormous pains, she succeeded not nearly so well with her bastard brothers and their sister, Lady Argyll, the handsome, black-browed woman. James, Robert, and John, sons of the king her father, and Margaret Erskine, all alike tall, sable, stiff and sullen, were alike in this too, that they were eager for what they could get without asking. The old needy Hamilton—Duke of Châtelherault as he was—let no day go by without begging for his son. These men let be seen what they wanted, but they would not ask. The vexatious thing with their sort is, that you may give a man too much or too little, and never be sure which of you is the robber. Now, the Lord James greatly coveted the earldom of Moray. Would he tell her so, think you? Not he, since he would not admit it to his very self. She received more than a hint that it would be wise to reward him, and told him that she desired it. He bowed his acceptance as if he were obedient unto death.

‘Madam, if it please your Majesty to make me of your highest estate, it is not for me to gainsay you.’

‘Why, no,’ says the Queen, ‘I trow it is not. You shall be girt Earl of Mar at the Council, for such I understand to be your present desire.’

It was not his desire by any means, yet he could not bring himself to say so. Her very knowledge that he had desires at all tied his tongue.

‘Madam,’ he said, sickly-white, ‘the grace is inordinate to my merits: and, indeed, how should duty be rewarded, being in its own performance a grateful thing? True it is that my lands lie farther to the north than those of Mar; true it is that in Moray—to name a case—there are forces which, maybe, would not be the worse of a watchful eye. But the earldom of Moray! Tush, what am I saying?’

‘We spake of the earldom of Mar,’ she said drily. ‘That other, I understand, is claimed by my Lord of Huntly, as a right of his, under my favour.’

He added nothing, but bit his lip sideways, and looked at his white hands. She had done more wisely to give him Moray at once; and so she might had he but asked for it. But when she opened her hands he shut his up, and where she spoke her mind he never did. She ought to have been afraid of him, for two excellent reasons: first, she never knew what he thought, and next, everybody about her asked that first. Instead, he irritated her, like a prickly shift.

‘Am I to knock for ever at the shutters of the house of him?’ she asked of her friends. ‘Not so, but I shall conclude there is nobody at home.’

Healthy herself, and high-spirited, and as open as the day when she was in earnest, she laughed at his secret ways in private and made light of them in public. It was on the tip of her saucy tongue more than once or twice to strike him to earth with the thunderbolt: ‘Did you hasten me to Scotland to work my ruin, brother? Do you reckon to climb to the throne over me?’ She thought better of it, but only because it seemed not worth her while. There was no give-and-take with the Lord James, and it is dull work whipping a dead dog.

Meantime the prediction of Mary Livingstone seemed on the edge of fulfilment. Queen Mary ruled Scotland; and her spirits rose to meet success. She was full of courage and good cheer, holding her kingdom in the hollow of her palms. Honeypot? Did Mr. Knox call her so? It was odd how the name struck her.

‘Well,’ she said, with a shrug, ‘if they find me sweet and hive about me, shall I not do well?’

She made Lethington Secretary of State without reserve, and remarked that he was every day in the antechamber.

The word flew busily up and down the Canongate, round about the Cross: ‘Master Knox hath fitted her with a name, do you mind? “She is Honeypot,” quoth he. Heard

you ever the like o' that?' Some favoured it and her, some winked at it, some misfavoured; and these were the grey beards and white mutches. But one and all came out to see her make her entry on the Tuesday.

One hour before she left Holyrood, Mr. Knox preached from his window in the High Street to a packed assembly of blue bonnets and shrouded heads, upon the text, Be wise now therefore, O ye Kings—a ring of scornful despair in his accents making the admonition vain. 'I shall not ask ye now what it is ye are come out for to see, lest I tempt ye to lie; for I know better than yourselves. Meat! "Give us meat," ye cry and clamour; "give us meat for the gapes, meat for greedy eyes!" Ay, and ye shall have your meat, fear not for that. Jags and slashes and feathered heads, ye shall have; targeted tails, and bosoms decked in shame, but else as bare as my hand. Fill yourselves with the like of these—but oh, sirs, when ye lie drunken, blame not the kennel that holds ye. If that ye crave to see prancing Frenchmen before ye, minions and jugglers, leaping sinners, damsels with timbrels, and such-like sick ministers to sick women's desires, I say, let it be so, o' God's holy name; for the day cometh when ye shall have grace given ye to look within, and see who pulls the wires that sets them all heeling and reeling, jigging up and down—whether Christ or Antichrist, whether the Lord God of Israel or the Lord Mammon of the Phœnicians. Look ye well in that day, judge ye and see.'

He stopped, as if he saw in their midst what he cried against; and some man called up, 'What more will you say, sir?'

Mr. Knox gathered himself together. 'Why, this, my man, that the harlotry of old Babylon is not dead yet, but like a snake lifteth a dry head from the dust wherein you think to have crushed her. Bite, snake, bite, I say; for the rather thou bitest, the rather shall thy latter end come. Heard ye not, sirs, how they trounced a bare-polled priest in the house of Rimmon, before the idol of abomination herself, these two days by past? I praise not, I blame not; I say, him that is drunken let him be drunken

still. More becomes me not as yet, for all is yet to do. I fear to prejudge, I fear to offend; let us walk warily, brethren, until the day break. But I remember David, ruler in Israel, when he hoped against hope and knew not certainly that his cry should go up as far as God. For no more than that chosen minister can I look to see the number of the elect made up from a froward and stiff-necked generation. Nay, but I can cry aloud in the desert, I can fast, I can watch for the cloud of the gathering wrath of God. And this shall be my prayer for you and for yours, Be wise, etc.' He did pray as he spoke, with his strong eyes lifted up above the housetops—a bidding prayer, you may call it, to which the people's answer rumbled and grew in strength. One or two in the street struck into a savage song, and soon the roar of it filled the long street:

The hunter is Christ, that hunts in haste,

The hounds are Peter and Paul;

The Pope is the fox, Rome is the rocks,

That rubs us on the gall.

A gun in the valley told them that the Queen was away. It was well that she was guarded.

Des-Essars, the Queen's French page, in that curious work of his, half reminiscence and half confession, which he dubs Le Secret des Secrets, has a note upon this day, and the aspect of the crowd, which he says was dangerous. 'Looking up the hill,' he writes, 'towards the Netherbow Port, where we were to stop for the ceremony of the keys, I could see that the line of sightseers was uneven, ever surging and ebbing like an incoming sea. Also I had no relish for the faces I saw—I speak not of them at the windows. Certainly, all were highly curious to see my mistress and their own; and yet—or so I judged—they found in her and her company food for the eyes and none for the heart. They appeared to consider her their property; would have had her go slow, that they might fill themselves with her sight; or fast, that they might judge of

her horsemanship. We were a show, forsooth; not come in to take possession of our own; rather admitted, that these close-lipped people might possess us if they found us worthy—ah, or dispossess us if they did not. Here and there men among them hailed their favourites: the Lord James Stuart was received with bonnets in the air; and at least once I heard it said, “There rides the true King of Scots.” My Lord Chancellor Morton, riding immediately before the Queen’s Grace, did not disdain to bandy words with them that cried out upon him, “The Douglas! The Douglas!” He, looking round about, “Ay, ye rascals,” I heard him say, “ye know your masters fine when they carry the sword.” He was a very portly, hearty gentleman in those days, high-coloured, with a full round beard. But above all things in the world the Scots lack fineness of manners. It was not that this Earl of Morton desired to grieve the Queen by any freedom of his; but worse than that, to my thinking, he did not know that he did it. As for my lords her Majesty’s uncles, their reception was exceedingly unhappy; but they cared little for that. Foolish Monsieur de Châtelard made matters worse by singing like a boy in quire as he rode behind his master, Monsieur d’Amville. This he did, as he said, to show his contempt for the rabble; but all the result was that he earned theirs. I saw a tall, gaunt, bearded man at a window, in a black cloak and bonnet. They told me that was Master Knox, the strongest man in Scotland.’

It is true that Master Knox watched the Queen go up, with sharp eyes which missed nothing. He saw her eager head turn this way and that at any chance of a welcome. He saw her meet gladness with gladness, deprecate doubt, plead for affection. ‘Out of the strong came forth sweetness: but she is too keen after sweet food.’ She smiled all the while, but with differences which he was jealous to note. ‘She deals carefully; she is no so sure of her ground. Eh, man, she goes warily to work.’

A child at a window leaped in arms and called out clearly: ‘Oh, mother, mother, the braw leddy!’ The Queen laughed outright, looked up, nodded, and kissed her hand.

‘Hoots, woman,’ grumbled Mr. Knox, ‘how ye lick your fingers! Fie, what a sweet tooth ye have!’

She was very happy, had no doubts but that, as she won the Keys of the Port, she should win the hearts of all these people. Stooping down, she let the Provost kiss her hand. ‘The sun comes in with me, tell the Provost,’ she said to Mr. Secretary, not trusting her Scots.

‘Madam, so please you,’ the good man replied, clearing his throat, ‘we shall make a braver show for your Grace’s contentation upon the coming out from dinner. Rehearse that to her Majesty, Lethington, I’ll trouble ye.’

‘Ah, Mr. Provost, we shall all make a better show then, trust me,’ she said, laughing; and rode quickly through the gate.

She was very bold: everybody said that. She had the manners of a boy—his quick rush of words, his impulse, and his dashing assurance—with that same backwash of timidity, the sudden wonder of ‘Have I gone too far—betrayed myself’ which flushes a boy hot in a minute. All could see how bold she was; but not all knew how the heart beat. It made for her harm that her merits were shy things. I find that she was dressed for the day in ‘a stiff white satin gown sewn all over with pearls.’ Her neck was bare to the cleft of the bosom; and her tawny brown hair, curled and towered upon her head, was crowned with diamonds. Des-Essars says that her eyes were like stars; but he is partial. There were many girls in Scotland fairer than she. Mary Fleming was one, a very gentle, modest lady; Mary Seton was another, sharp and pure as a profile on a coin of Sicily. Mary Livingstone bore herself like a goddess; Mary Beaton had a riper lip. But this Mary Stuart stung the eyes, and provoked by flashing contrasts. Queen of Scots and Dryad of the wood; all honey and wine; bold as a boy and as lightly abashed, clinging as a girl and as slow to leave hold, full of courage, very wise. ‘Sirs, a dangerous sweet woman. Here we have the Honeypot,’ says Mr. Knox to himself, and thought of her at night.

After dinner, as she came down the hill, they gave her pageants. Virgins in white dropped out of machines with crowns for her; blackamoors, Turks, savage men came about her with songs about the Scriptures and the fate of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. She understood some, and laughed pleasantly at all. Even she took not amiss the unmannerly hint of the Lawn Market, where they would have burned a mass-priest in effigy—had him swinging over the faggots, chalice and vestment, crucifix and all. ‘Fie, sirs, fie! What harm has he done, poor soul?’ was all she said.

The Grand Prior was furiously angry; seeing which, the Earl of Morton cut the figure down, and then struck out savagely with the flat of his blade, spurring his horse into the sniggering mob. ‘Damn you, have done with your beastliness—down, dogs, down!’ The Lord James looked away.

At the Salt Tron they had built up a door, with a glory as of heaven upon it. Here she dismounted and sat for a while. Clouds above drew apart; a pretty boy in a gilt tunic was let down by ropes before her. He said a piece in gasps, then offered her the Psalter in rhymed Scots. She thought it was the Geneva Bible, and took it with a queer lift of the eyebrows, which all saw. Arthur Erskine, to whom she handed it, held it between finger and thumb as if it had been red hot; and men marked that, and nudged each other. The boy stood rigid, not knowing what else to do; quickly she turned, looked at him shyly for a moment, then leaned forward and took him up in her arms, put her cheek to his, cuddled and kissed him. ‘You spake up bravely, my lamb,’ she said. ‘And what may your name be?’ She had to look up to Lethington for his reply, but did not let go of the child. His name was Ninian Ross. ‘I would I had one like you, Ninian Ross!’ she cried in his own tongue, kissed him again, and let him go.

People said to each other, ‘She loves too much, she is too free of her loving—to kiss and dandle a bairn in the street.’

‘Honeypot, Honeypot!’ said grudging Mr. Knox, looking on rapt at all this.

Des-Essars writes: ‘She believed she had won the entry of the heart; she read in the castle guns, bells of steeples, and hoarse outcry of the crowd, assurance of what she hoped for. I was glad, for my part, and disposed to thank God heartily, that we reached Holyroodhouse without injury to her person or insult to cut her to the soul.’

I think Des-Essars too sensitive: she was fully as shrewd an observer as he could have been. At least, she returned in good spirits. If any were tired, she was not; but danced all night with her Frenchmen. Monsieur de Châtelard was a happy man when he had her in his arms.

‘Miséricorde—O Queen of Love! Thus I would go through the world, though I burned in hell for it after.’

‘Thus would not I,’ quoth she. ‘You are hurting me. Take care.’

They brought her news in the midst that the Earl of Bothwell was in town with a great company, and would kiss her hands in the morning if he might.

‘Let him come to me now while I am happy,’ she said. ‘Who knows what to-morrow may do for me?’

She sent away Châtelard, and waited. Soon enough she saw the Earl’s broad shoulders making a way, the daring eyes, the hardy mouth. ‘You are welcome, my lord, to Scotland.’

‘But am I welcome to your Majesty?’

‘You have been slow to seek my welcome, sir.’

‘Madam, I have been slow to believe it.’

‘You need faith, Monsieur de Boduel.’

‘I wish that your Majesty did!’

‘Why so?’

‘That your Majesty might partake of mine.’

They chopped words for half an hour or more. But she had her match in him.

She was friends with all the world that night, or tried to think so. Yet, at the going to bed, when the lights were out, the guards posted, and state-rooms empty save for the mice, she came up to Mary Livingstone and stroked her face without a word, coaxing for assurance of her triumph. Wanting it still—for the maid was glum—she supplied it for herself. ‘We rule all Scotland, my dear, we rule all Scotland!’

But Mary Livingstone held up her chin, to be out of reach of that wheedling hand. Coldly, or as coldly as she might, she looked at the eager face, and braved the glimmering eyes.

‘Ay,’ she said, ‘ay, you do. You and John Knox betwixt you.’

The Queen laughed. ‘Shall I marry Mr. Knox? He is twice a widower.’

‘He would wed you the morn’s morn if you would have him,’ says Livingstone. ‘’Tis a fed horse, that Knox.’

‘He feeds on wind, I think,’ the Queen said; and the maid snorted, implacable.

‘’Tis a better food than your Earl of Bothwell takes, to my mind.’

‘And what is his food?’

‘The blood of women and their tears,’ said Mary Livingstone.

CHAPTER IV ROUGH MUSIC HERE

The Earl of Huntly came to town, with three tall sons, three hundred Gordons, and his pipers at quickstep before him, playing, ‘Cock o’ the North.’ He came to seek the earldom of Moray, a Queen’s hand for his son George, and to set the realm’s affairs on a proper footing; let Mr. Knox and his men, therefore, look to themselves. His three sons were George, John, and Adam. George, his eldest, was Lord Gordon, with undoubted birthrights; but John of Findlater, so called, was his dearest, and should have married the Queen if he had not been burdened with a stolen wife in a tower, whom he would not put out of his head while her husband was alive. So George must have the Queen, said Huntly. That once decided, his line was clear. ‘Madam,

my cousin,' he intended to say, 'I give you all Scotland above the Highland line in exchange for your light hand upon the South. Straighter lad or cleanlier built will no maid have in the country, nor appanage so broad. Is it a match?' Should it not be a match, indeed? Both Catholics, both sovereign rulers, both young, both fine imps. If she traced her descent from Malcolm Canmore, he got his from Gadiffer, who, as every one knows, was the brother of Perceforest, whose right name was Betis, whose ancestor was Brutus' self, whose root was fast in Laomedon, King of Troy. 'The boy and girl were born for each other,' said Huntly. So he crossed the Forth at Stirling Brig, and marched down through the green lowland country like a king, with colours to the wind and the pipes screaming his hopes and degree in the world. But he came slowly because of his unwieldy size. He was exceedingly fat, white-haired and white-bearded, and had a high-coloured, windy, passionate face, flaming blue eyes, and a husky voice, worn by shrieking at his Gordons. Such was the old Earl of Huntly, the star of whose house was destined to make fatal conjunctions with Queen Mary's.

His entry into Edinburgh began at the same rate of pomp, but ended in the screaming of men whose pipes were slit. There were Hamiltons in the city, Hepburns, Murrays, Keiths, Douglases, red-haired Campbells. The close wynds vomited armed men at every interchange of civilities on the cawsey; a match to the death could be seen at any hour in the tilt-yard; the chiefs stalked grandly up and down before their enemies' houses, daring one another do their worst. It seemed that only Huntly and his Gordons had been wanting to set half Scotland by the ears. The very night of their incoming young John of Findlater spied his enemy Ogilvy—the husband of the stolen wife—walking down the Luckenbooths arm-in-arm with his kinsman Boyne. He stepped up in front of him, lithe as an otter, and says he, 'Have I timed my coming well, Mr. Ogilvy?' Ogilvy, desperate of his wife, may be excused for drawing upon him; and (the fray once begun) you cannot blame John Gordon of Findlater for killing him clean, or Ogilvy of Boyne for wounding John of Findlater.

Hurt as he was, the young man was saved by his friends. Little he cared for the summons of slaughter sued out against him in the morning, with his enemy dead and three hundred Gordons to keep his doors.

The Earl his father treated the affair as so much thistledown thickening the wind; but his own performances were as exorbitant as his proposals. He quarrelled with the high Lord James Stuart about precedence. Flicking his glove in the sour face, 'Hoots, my lord, you are too new an Earl to take the gate of me,' he said. He assumed the title of Moray—which was what he had come to beg for—in addition to his own. 'She dare not refuse me, man. It is well known I have the lands.' The Lord James turned stately away at this hearing, and Huntly ruffled past him into the presence, muttering as he went, 'A king's mischance, my sakes!' He had a fine command of scornful nicknames; that was one of them. He called Mr. Secretary Lethington the Grey Goose—no bad name for a tried gentleman whose tone was always symptomatic of his anxieties. The Earl of Bothwell was a 'Jack-Earl,' he said; but Bothwell laughed at him. The Duke and his Hamiltons were 'Glasgow tinklers'; the Earl of Morton, 'Flesher Morton.' His pride, indeed, seemed to be of that inordinate sort which will not allow a man to hate his equals. He hated whole races of less-descended men; he hated burgesses, Forbeses, Frenchmen, Englishmen; but his peers he despised. Catholic as he was, he went to the preaching at Saint Giles' in a great red cloak, wearing his hat, and stood apart, clacking with his tongue, while Mr. Knox thundered out prophecies. 'Let yon bubbly-jock bide,' he told his son, who was with him. ''Tis a congested rogue, full of bad wind. What! Give him vent, man, and see him poison the whole assembly.' Mr. Knox denounced him to his face as a Prophet of the Grove, and bid him cry upon his painted goddess. The great Huntly tapped his nose, then the basket of his sword, and presently strode out of church by a way which his people made for him.

Queen Mary was amused with the large, boisterous, florid man, and very much admired his sons. They were taller than the generality of Scots, sanguine,

black-haired, small-headed, with the intent far gaze in their grey eyes which hawks have, and all dwellers in the open. She saw but two of them, the eldest and the youngest—for John of Findlater, having slain his man, lay at home—and set herself to work to break down their shy respect. For their sakes she humoured their preposterous father; allowed, what all her court was at swords drawn against, that his pipers should play him into her presence; listened to what he had to say about Gadiffer, brother of Perceforest, about Knox and his ravings, about the loyal North. He expanded like a warmed bladder, exhibited his sons' graces as if he were a horsedealer, openly hinted at his proposals in her regard. She needed none of his nods and winks, being perfectly well able to read him, and of judgment perfectly clear upon the inflated text. In private she laughed it away. 'I think my Lord of Gordon a very proper gentleman,' she said to Livingstone; 'but am I to marry the first long pair of legs I meet with? Moreover, I should have to woo him, for he fears me more than the devil. Yet it is a comely young man. I believe him honest.'

'The only Gordon to be so, then,' said Livingstone tersely. This was the prevailing belief: 'False as Gordon.'

Then came Ogilvy of Boyne and his friends before the council, demanding the forfeiture of John Gordon of Findlater for slaughter. Old Huntly pished and fumed. 'What! For pecking the feathers out of a daw! My fine little man, you and your Ogilvys should keep within your own march. You meet with men on the highways.' The young Queen, isolated on her throne above these angry men, looked from one to another faltering. Suddenly she found that she could count certainly upon nobody. Her brother James had kept away; the Earl of Bothwell was not present; my Lord Morton the Chancellor blinked a pair of sleepy eyes upon the scene at large. 'Let the law take its course,' she faintly said; and old Huntly left the chamber, sweeping the Ogilvys out of his road. That was no way to get the Earldom of Moray and a royal daughter-in-law into one's family. He himself confessed that the time had come for serious talk with the Queen.

Even this she bore, knowing him Catholic and believing him honest. When, after some purparley, at a privy audience, he came to what he called ‘close quarters,’ and spoke his piece about holy church, sovereign rulers, and fine imps, she laughed still, it is true, but more shrewdly than before. ‘Not too fast, my good lord, not too fast. I approve of my Lord Gordon, and should come thankfully to his wedding. Yet I should be content with a lowlier office there than you seem to propose me. And if he come to my wedding, I hope he will bring his lady.’ She turned to the Secretary. ‘Tell my lord, Mr. Secretary, what other work is afoot.’

Hereupon Lethington enlarged upon royal marriages, their nature and scope, and flourished styles and titles before the mortified old man. He spoke of the Archduke Ferdinand, that son of Cæsar; of Charles the Most Christian King, a boy in years, but a very forward boy. He dwelt freely and at length upon King Philip’s son of Spain, Don Carlos, a magnificent young man. Mostly he spoke of the advantage there would be if his royal mistress should please to walk hand in hand with her sister of England in this affair. Surely that were a lovely vision! The hearts of two realms would be pricked to tears by the spectacle—two great and ancient thrones, each stained with the blood of the other, flowering now with two roses, the red and the white! The blood-stains all washed out by happy tears—ah, my good lord, and by the kisses of innocent lips! It were a perilous thing, it were an unwarrantable thing, for one to move without the other. ‘I speak thus freely, my Lord of Huntly,’ says Lethington, warming to the work, ‘that ye may see the whole mind of my mistress, her carefulness, and how large a field her new-scaled eyes must take in. This is not a business of knitting North to South. She may trust always to the affection of her subjects to tie so natural a bond. Nay, but the comforting of kingdoms is at issue here. Ponder this well, my lord, and you will see.’

The Earl of Huntly was crimson in the face. ‘I do see, madam, how it is, that my house shall have little tenderness from your Majesty’s’—he was very angry. ‘I see that community of honour, community of religion count for nothing. Foh! My life

and death upon it!' He puffed and blew, glaring about him; then burst out again. 'I will pay my thanks for this where they are most due. I know the doer—I spit upon his deed. Who is that man that cometh creeping after my earldom? Who looketh aslant at all my designs? Base blood stirreth base work. Who seeketh the life of my fine son?'

The Queen flushed. 'Stay, sir,' she said, 'I cannot hear you. You waste words and honour alike.'

He shook his head at her, as if she were a naughty child; raised his forefinger, almost threatened. 'Madam, madam, your brother James——'

She got up, the fire throbbing in her. 'Be silent, my lord!'

'Madam——'

'Be silent.'

'But, madam——'

Lethington, much agitated, whispered in her ear; she shook him away, stamped, clenched her hands.

'You are dismissed, sir. The audience is finished. Do you hear me?'

'How finished? How finished?'

'Go, go, my lord, for God's sake!' urged the Secretary.

'A pest!' cried he, and fumed out of the Castle.

She rode down the Canongate to dinner that day at a hand-gallop, the people scouring to right and left to be clear of heels. Her colour was bright and hot, her hair streamed to the wind. 'Fly, fly, fly!' she cried, and whipped her horse. 'A hateful fool, to dare me so!' Lethington, Argyll, James her brother, came clattering and pounding behind. 'She is fey! She is fey! She rides like a witch!' women said to one another; but Mr. Knox, who saw her go, said to himself, 'She is nimble as a boy.' Publicly—since this wild bout made a great commotion in men's thoughts—he

declared, ‘If there be not in her a proud mind, a crafty wit, and an indurate heart against God and His truth, my judgment faileth me.’ Neither he nor his judgments were anything to her in those days; she heard little of his music, rough or not. And yet, just at that time, had she sent for him she could have won him for ever. ‘Happy for her,’ says Des-Essars, writing after the event, ‘thrice happy for her if she had! For I know very well—and she knew it also afterwards—that the man was in love with her.’

At night, having recovered herself, she was able to laugh with the maids at old Huntly, and to look with kind eyes upon the graces of his son Gordon.

‘If I cared to do it,’ she said, ‘I could have that young man at my feet. But I fear he is a fool like his father.’

She tried him: he danced stiffly, talked no French, and did not know what to do with her hand when he had it, or with his own either. She sparkled, she glittered before him, smiled at his confusion, encouraged him by softness, befooled him. It was plain that he was elated; but she held her own powers so lightly, and thought so little of his, that she had no notion of what she was doing—to what soaring heights she was sending him. When she had done with him, a strange tremor took the young lord—a fixed, hard look, as if he saw something through the wall.

‘What you see? What you fear, my lord?’ she stammered in her pretty Scots.

‘I see misfortune, and shame, and loss. I see women at the loom—a shroud for a man—hey, a shroud, a shroud!’ He stared about at all the company, and at her, knowing nobody. Slowly recovering himself, he seemed to scrape cobwebs from his face. ‘I have drunk knowledge this night, I think.’

She plumbed the depth of his case. ‘Go now, my lord; leave me, now.’

‘One last word to you, madam, with my face to your face.’

‘What would you say to me?’

He took her by the hand, with more strength than she had believed in him. ‘Trust Gordon,’ he said, and left her.

‘I shall believe your word,’ she called softly after him, ‘and remember it.’

He lifted his hand, but made no other sign; he carried a high head through the full hall, striding like a man through heather, not to be stopped by any.

She thought that she had never seen a prouder action. He went, carrying his devotion, like a flag into battle. Beside him the Earl of Bothwell looked a pirate, and Châtelherault a pantaloon.

‘He deserves a fair wife, for he would pleasure her well,’ she considered; then laughed softly to herself, and shook her head. ‘No, no, not for me—such a dreamer as that. I should direct his dreams—I, who need a man.’

That pirate Earl of Bothwell used a different way. He bowed before her the same night, straightened his back immediately, and looked her full in the face. No fear that this man would peer through walls for ghosts! She was still tender from the thoughts of her young Highlander; but you know that she trusted this bluff ally, and was not easily offended by honest freedoms. She had seen gallants of his stamp in France.

‘Pleasure and good answers to your Grace’s good desires,’ he laughed.

She looked wisely up at him, keeping her mouth demure.

‘Monsieur de Boduel, you shall lead me to dance if you will.’

‘Madam, I shall.’ He took her out with no more ceremony, and acquitted himself gaily: a good dancer, and very strong, as she had already discovered. What arms to uphold authority! What nerve to drive our rebels into church! Ah, if one need a man!...

She asked him questions boldly. ‘What think you, my lord, of the Earl of Huntly?’

‘Madam, a bladder, holding a few pease. Eh, and he rattles when you do shake him!

Prick him, he is gone; but the birds will flock about for the seeds you scatter. They are safer where they lie covered, I consider.'

She followed this. 'I would ask you further. There is here a remarkable Mr. Knox: what am I to think of him?'

He stayed awhile, stroking his beard, before he shrugged in the French manner, that is, with the head and eyebrow.

'In Rome, madam, we doff caps to the Pope. I am friendly with Mr. Knox. He is a strong man.'

'As Samson was of old?'

He laughed freely. 'Oh, my faith, madam, Delilah is not awanting. There's a many and many.'

She changed the subject. 'They tell me that you are of the religion, Monsieur de Boduel, but I am slow to believe that. In France I remember——'

'Madam,' says he, 'my religion is one thing, my philosophy another. Let us talk of the latter. There is one God in a great cloud; but the world, observe, is many-sided. Sometimes, therefore, the cloud is rent towards the south; and the men of the south say, "Behold! our God is hued like a fire." Or if, looking up, they see the sun pale in a fog, with high faith they say one to another, "Yonder white disc, do you mark, that is the Son of God." Sometimes also your cloud is parted towards the north. Then cry the men of those parts, "Lo! our God, like a snow-mountain!" Now, when I am in the south I see with the men of the south, for I cannot doubt all the dwellers in the land; but when I am in the north, likewise I say, There is something in what you report. So much for philosophy—to which Religion, with a rod in hand, cries out: "You fool, you fool! God is neither there nor here; but He is in the heart." There you have it, madam.'

She bowed gravely. 'I have heard the late king, my father-in-law, say the same to Madame de Valentinois; and she agreed with him, as she always did in such matters.

It is a good thought. But in whose heart do you place God? Not in all?'

'In a good heart, madam. In a crowned heart.'

'The crowned heart,' said she, 'is the Douglas badge. Do you place Him then in the heart of Monsieur de Morton?'

This tickled him, but he felt it also monstrous. 'God forbid me! No, no, madam. Douglas wears it abroad—not always with credit. But the crowned heart was the heart of the Bruce.'

She was pleased; the sudden turn warmed her. 'You spoke that well, and like a courtier, my lord.'

'Madam,' he cried, covering his own heart, 'that is what I would always do if I had the wit. For I am a courtier at this hour.'

Pondering this in silence, she suffered him to lead her where he would; and took snugly to bed with her the thought that, in her growing perplexities, she had a sure hand upon hers when she chose to call for it.

As for him, Bothwell, he must have gone directly from this adventure in the tender to play his bass in some of the roughest music of those days. That very night—and for the third time—he, with D'Elbœuf and Lord John Stuart, went in arms, with men and torches, to Cuthbert Ramsay's house, hard by the Market Cross; and, being refused as before, this time made forceful entry.

To the gudeman's 'What would ye with me, sirs, good lack?' they demanded sight of Alison, his handsome daughter, now quaking in her bed by her man's side; and not sight only, but a kiss apiece for the sake of my Lord Arran. She was, by common report, that lord's mistress—but the fact is immaterial.

'Come down with me, man—stand by me in this hour,' quoth she.

But her husband plainly refused to come. 'Na, na, my woman, thou must thole the assize by thysel',' said the honest fellow.

She donned her bedgown, tied up her hair, and was brought down shamefast by her father.

‘Do me no harm, sirs, do me no harm!’

‘Less than your braw Lord of Arran,’ says Bothwell, and took the firstfruits.

The low-roofed parlour full of the smoke of torches, flaring lights, wild, unsteady gentlemen in short cloaks, flushed Alison in the midst—one can picture the scene. The ceremony was prolonged; there were two nights’ vigil to be made up. On a sudden, half-way to the girl’s cold lips, Lord Bothwell stops, looks sidelong, listens.

‘The burgh is awake. Hark to that! Gentlemen, we must draw off.’

They hear cries in the street, men racing along the flags. From the door below one calls, ‘The Hamiltons! Look to yourselves! The Hamiltons!’

Almost immediately follows a scuffle, a broken oath, the ‘Oh, Christ!’ and fall of a man. Lord Bothwell regards his friends—posterior parts of three or four craning out of window, D’Elbœuf tying up his points, John Stuart dancing about the floor. ‘Gentlemen, come down.’

He wrapped his cloak round his left arm, whipped out his blade, and went clattering down the stair. The others came behind him. From the passage they heard the fighting; from the door, as they stood spying there, the whole town seemed a roaring cave of men. Through and above the din they could catch the screaming of Lord Arran, choked with rage, tears, and impotence.

‘Who is the doxy, I shall ask ye: Arran or the lass?’ says Bothwell, making ready to rush the entry.

Just as he cleared the door he was stabbed by a dirk in the upper arm, and felt the blood go from him. All Edinburgh seemed awake—a light in every window and a woman to hold it. Hamiltons and their friends packed the street: some twenty Hepburns about Ramsay’s door kept their backs to the wall. For a time there was

great work.

In the midst of the hubbub they heard the pipes skirling in the Cowgate.

‘Here comes old Huntly from his lodging,’ says Lord John to his neighbour. This was Bothwell, engaged with three men at the moment, and in a gay humour.

‘Ay, hark to him!’ he called over his shoulder; and then, purring like some fierce cat, ‘Softly now—aha, I have thee, friend!’ and ran one of his men through the body.

The pipes blew shrilly, close at hand, the Gordons plunged into the street. Led by their chief, by John of Findlater and Adam (a mere boy), they came rioting into battle.

‘Aboyne! Aboyne! Watch for the Gordon!’—they held together and clove through the massed men like a bolt.

‘Hold your ground! I’ll gar them give back!’ cried old Huntly; and Bothwell, rallying his friends, pushed out to meet him: if he had succeeded the Hamiltons had been cut in two. As it was, the fighting was more scattered, the mêlée broken up; and this was the state of affairs when the Lord James chose to appear with a company of the Queen’s men from the Castle.

For the Lord James, in his great house at the head of Peebles Wynd—awake over his papers when all the world was asleep or at wickedness—had heard the rumours of the fight; and then, even while he considered it, heard the Gordons go by. He heard old Huntly encouraging his men, heard John of Findlater: if he had needed just advantage over his scornful enemy he might have it now. He got up from his chair and stood gazing at his papers, rubbing together his soft white hands. Anon he went to the closet, awoke his servant, and bade him make ready for the street. Cloaked, armed and bonneted, followed by the man, he went by silent ways to the Castle.

When he came upon the scene of the fray, he found John Gordon of Findlater at grapple with a Hamilton amid a litter of fallen men. He found Adam Gordon pale by the wall, wounded, smiling at his first wound. He could not find old Huntly, for he

was far afield, chasing men down the wynds. D'Elbœuf had slipped away on other mischief, Bothwell (with a troublesome gash) had gone home to bed. He saw Arran battering at Ramsay's door, calling on his Alison to open to him—and left the fool to his folly. It was Huntly he wanted, and, failing him, took what hostages he could get. He had John of Findlater pinioned from behind, young Adam from before, and the pair sent off guarded to the Castle.

To Arran, then, who ceased not his lamentations, he sternly said, 'Fie, my lord, trouble not for such a jade at such an hour; but help me rather to punish the Queen's enemies.'

Arran turned upon him, pouring out his injuries in a stream.

The Lord James listened closely: so many great names involved! Ah, the Earl of Bothwell! Alas, my lord, rashness and vainglory are hand-in-hand, I fear. The Marquis D'Elbœuf! Deplorable cousin of her Majesty. The Lord John! Tush—my own unhappy brother! One must go deeply, make free with the knife, to cut out of our commonwealth the knot of so much disease.

'My Lord of Arran,' he concluded solemnly, 'your offence is deep, but the Queen's deeper than you suppose. I cannot stay your resentment against the Earl of Bothwell; it is in the course of nature and of man that you should be moved. But the Earl of Huntly is the more dangerous person.'

My Lord James it was who led the now sobbing Arran to his lodging, and sought his own afterwards, well content with the night's work. It is not always that you find two of your enemies united in wrong-doing, and the service of the state the service of private grudges.

When the archers had cleared the streets of the quick, afterwards came down silently the women and carried off the hurt and the dead. The women's office, this, in Edinburgh.

The Queen was yet in her bed when Huntly came swelling into Holyroodhouse,

demanding audience as his right. But the Lord James had been beforehand with him, and was in the bedchamber with the Secretary, able to stay, with a look, the usher at the door. ‘It is proper that your Majesty should be informed of certain grave occurrents,’ he began to explain; and told her the story of the night so far as was convenient. According to him, the Earl of Bothwell mixed the brew and the Earl of Huntly stirred it. D’Elbœuf was not named, John Stuart not named—when the Queen asked, what was the broil about? Ah, her Majesty must hold him excused: it was an unsavoury tale for a lady’s ear. ‘I should need to be a deaf lady in order to have comfortable ears, upon your showing,’ she said sharply. How well he had the secret of egging her on! ‘Rehearse the tale from the beginning, my lord; and consider my ears as hardened as your own.’ He let her drag it out of him by degrees: Arran’s mistress, Bothwell’s night work, so hard following upon night talk with her; Huntly’s furious pride: rough music indeed for young ears. But she had no time to shrink from the sound or to nurse any wound to her own pride. At the mere mention of Bothwell’s name Mary Livingstone was up in a red fury, and drove her mistress to her wiles.

‘And this is the brave gentleman,’ cried the maid, ‘this is the gallant who holds my Queen in his arms, and goes warm from them to a trollop’s of the town! Fit and right for the courtier who blasphemes with grooms in the court—but for you, madam, for you! Well—I hope you will know your friends in time.’

The Queen looked innocently at her, with the pure inquiry of a child. ‘What did he want with the girl? Some folly to gall my Lord Arran, belike.’ Incredible questions to Livingstone!

Just then they could hear old Lord Huntly storming in the antechamber. ‘There hurtles the true offender, in my judgment,’ said the Lord James.

‘He uses an unmannerly way of excuse,’ says the Queen, listening to his rhetoric.

‘Madam,’ said Mr. Secretary here, ‘I think he rather accuses. For his sort are so, that

they regard every wrong they do as a wrong done to themselves. And so, perchance, it is to be regarded in the ethic part of philosophy.'

'Why does he rail at my pages? Why does he not come in?' the Queen asked. Whereupon the Lord James nodded to the usher at the door.

Delay had been troublesome to the furious old man, fretting his nerves and exhausting his indignation before the time. He was out of breath as well as patience; so the Queen had the first word, which he had by no means intended. She held up her finger at him.

'Ah, my Lord of Huntly, you angered me the other day, and I overlooked it for the love I bear to your family. And now, when you have angered me again, you storm in my house as if it was your own. What am I to think?'

He looked at her with stormy, wet eyes, and spoke brokenly, being full of his injuries. 'I am hurt, madam, I am sore affronted, traduced, stabbed in the back. My son, madam——!'

She showed anger. 'Your son! Your son! You have presumed too far. You offer me marriage with your son, and he leaves me for a fray in the street!'

Startled, he puffed out his cheeks. 'I take God to witness, liars have been behind me. Madam, my son Gordon had no hand in the night's work. He was not in my house; he was not with me; I know not where he was. A fine young man of his years, look you, madam, may not be penned up like a sucking calf. No, no. But gallant sons of mine there were—who have suffered—whose injuries cry aloud for redress. And, madam, I am here to claim it at your hands.'

'Speak your desires of me: I shall listen,' said she.

The old man looked fixedly at his enemy across the bed. 'Ay, madam, and so I will.' He folded his arms, and the action, and the weight of his wrongs, stemmed his vehemence for a while. Dignity also he gained by his restraint, a quality of which he stood in need; and truly he was dignified. To hear his account, loyalty to the throne

and to his friends was all the source of his troubles. He had come down with proffers of alliance to the Queen, and they laughed him to scorn. He with his two sons rose out of their beds to quell a riot, to succour their friends——

'And whom do you call your friends?' cried the Queen, interrupting him quickly.

He told her the Hamiltons—but there certainly he lied—good friends of his and hopeful to be better. The Queen calmed herself. 'I had understood that you went to the rescue of my Lord Bothwell,' she began; and true it was, he had. But now he laughed at the thought, and maybe found it laughable.

'No, no, madam,' he said: 'there are no dealings betwixt me and the border-thieves. But the Duke hath made a treaty with me; and it was to help my Lord Arran, his son, that I and mine went out.' Well! he had stayed the riot, he had carved out peace at the sword's edge. 'Anon'—and he pointed out the man—'Anon comes that creeper by darksome ways, and rewards my sons with prison-bars—he, that has sought my fair earldom and all! Ay, madam, ay!'—his voice rose—'so it is. Of all the souls in peril last night, some for villainy's sake, some to serve their wicked lusts, some for love of the game, and some for honesty and truth—these last are rewarded by the jail. Madam, madam, I tell your Majesty, honest men are not to be bought and sold. You may stretch heart-strings till they crack; you may tempt the North, and rue the spoiling of the North. I know whose work this is, what black infernal stain of blood is in turmoil here. I know, madam, I say, and you know not. Some are begotten by night, and some in stealth by day—when the great world is at its affairs, and the house left empty, and nought rife in it but wicked humours. Beware this kind, madam—beware it. What they have lost by the bed they may retrieve by the head. Unlawful, unlawful—a black strain.'

The Lord James was stung out of himself. 'By heaven, madam, this should be stopped!'

The Queen put up her hand. 'Enough said. My Lord Huntly, what is your pleasure of

me?'

Old Huntly folded up his wrath in his arms once more. 'I ask, madam, the release of my two sons—of my son Findlater, and of Adam, my young son, wounded in your service, sorely wounded, and in bonds.'

'You frame your petition unhappily,' said the Queen with spirit. 'This is not the way for subjects to handle the prince.'

He extended his arms, and gaped about him. 'Subjects, she saith! Handling, she saith! Oh, now, look you, madam, how they handle your subject and my boy. He hath fifteen years to his head, madam, and a chin as smooth as your own. I fear he is hurt to the death—I fear it sadly; and it turns me sick to face his mother with the news. Three sons take I out, and all the hopes I have nursed since your Majesty lay a babe in your mother's arm. With one only I must return, with one only—and no hopes, no hopes at a'—madam, an old and broken man.' He was greatly moved; tears pricked his eyelids and made him fretful. 'Folly, folly of an old fool! To greet before a bairn!' He brought tears into the Queen's eyes.

'I am sorry for your son Adam,' she said gently; 'but do not you grieve for him. He is too young to suffer for what he did under duress. You shall not weep before me. I hate it. It makes me weep with you, and that is forbidden to queens, they say.'

A man had appeared at the curtain of the door, and stood hidden in it. The Lord James went to him while the Queen was turned to the Secretary.

'Mr. Secretary,' said she, 'you shall send up presently to the Castle. I desire to know how doth Sir Adam of Gordon. Bring me word as soon as may be.' She had returned kindly to the old Earl when her brother was back by the bed.

'Madam,' he said to her, but looked directly at his foe, 'the injuries of my Lord Huntly's family are not ended, it appears. They bring me news——'

That was a slip; the Queen's cheeks burned. 'Ah, they bring you news, my lord!'

He hastened to add: ‘And I, as my duty is, report to your Majesty, that Sir John Gordon of Findlater hath, within this hour, broken ward. He is away, madam, leaving an honest man dead in his room.’ He had made a false step in the beginning, but the news redeemed him.

The Queen looked very grave. ‘What have you to say to this, Lord of Huntly?’

‘I say that he is my very son, madam,’ cried the stout old chief, ‘and readier with his wits than that encroacher over there.’

Mr. Secretary Lethington covered a smile; the Queen did not. But she replied: ‘And I say that he is too ready with his wits; and to you, my lord, I say that you must fetch him back. I will not be defied.’

She saw his dogged look, and admired it in him. Well she knew how to soften him now!

‘There shall be no bargain between you and me,’ she continued, looking keenly at him; ‘but as I have passed my word, now pass you yours. I will take care of the boy. He shall be here, and I will teach him to love his Queen better than his father can do it, I believe. That is my part. Now for yours: go you out and bring me back Sir John.’

Old Huntly ran forward to the bed, fell on his knees beside it, and took the girl’s hand. The tears he now felt were kindlier, and he let them come. ‘Oh, if you and I could deal, my Queen,’ he said, ‘all Scotland should go laughing. If we could deal, as now we have, with the hearts’ doors open, and none between! Why, I see the brave days yet! I shall bring back Findlater, fear not for it; and there shall be Gordons about you like a green forest—and yourself the bonny, bonny rose bowered in the midst! God give your Majesty comfort, who have given back comfort and pride unto me!’

The Queen’s eyes shone with wet as she laughed her pleasure. ‘Go then, my lord; deal fairly by me.’

He left her there and then, swelling with pride, emotion, and vanity inflamed, meaning to do well if any man ever did. He brushed aside Lethington with a sweep of the arm—'Clear a way there—clear a way!'

In this Gordon conflict the iniquities of Lord Bothwell were forgotten, for the Queen's mind was now set upon kind offices. She took young Adam into her house and visited him every day. As you might have expected, where the lad was handsome and the lady predisposed to be generous, she looked more than she said, and said more than she need. Young Adam fell in love with this glimmering, murmuring, golden princess. Fell, do I say? He slipped, rather, as in summer one lets oneself slip into the warm still water. Even so slipped he, and was over the ears before he was aware. Whatever she may have said, he made mighty little reply: the Gordons were always modest before women, and this one but a boy. He hardly dared look at her when she came, though for a matter of three hours before he had never taken his eyes from the door through which she was to glide in upon him like a Queen of Fays. And the fragrance she carried about her, the wonder of her which filled the little chamber where he lay, the sense of a goddess unveiling, of daily miracle, of her stooping (glorious condescension!), and of his lifting-up—ah, let him who has deified a lady tell the glory if he dare! The work was done: she was amused, the miracle wrought. She had found him a sulky boy, she left him a budded knight. Here was one of the conquests she made every day without the drawing of a sword. Most women loved her, and all boys and girls. But although these are, after all, the pick of the world—to whom she was the Rose of roses—we must consider, unhappily, the refuse. They were the flies at the Honeypot.

Mary Livingstone, not seriously, chid her mistress. 'Oh, fie! oh, fie!' she would say. 'Do you waste your sweet store on a bairn? They call you too fond already. Do you wish to have none but fools about you?'

'If it is foolish to love me, child,' said the Queen, pretending to pout, 'you condemn

yourself. And if it is foolish of me to love you, or to love Love—again you condemn yourself, who teach me day by day. Are you jealous of the little Gordon, or of the little Jean-Marie? Or is it Monsieur de Châtelard whom you fear?'

'Châtelard, forsooth! A parrokeet!'

The Queen laughed. 'If you are jealous, Mary Livingstone, you must cut off my hands and seal my mouth; for should you take away all my lovers, I should stroke the pillars of the house till they were warm, and kiss the maids in the kitchen until they were clean. I must love, my dear, and be loved: that I devoutly believe.'

'Lord Jesus, and so do I!' groaned the good girl, and thanked Him on whom she called that Bothwell's day was over. For although she said not a word of the late scandal, she watched every day and lay awake o' nights for any sign that he was in the Queen's thoughts. All she could discover for certain was that he came no more to Court. And yet he was in or near Edinburgh. The old Duke of Châtelherault had himself announced one day in a great taking, with a pitiful story of his son Arran. Lord Bothwell's name rang loud in it. His son Arran, cousin (he was careful to say) of her Majesty's, being highly incensed at the affront he had suffered, had challenged the Earl of Bothwell to a battle of three on a side. The weapons had been named, the men chosen. My Lord Bothwell had kept tryst, Arran (on his father's counsel) had not. Thereupon my Lord Bothwell cries aloud, in the hearing of a score persons, 'We'll drag him out by the lugs, gentlemen!' and set about to do it. 'My son Arran, madam, goes in deadly fear; for so ruthless a man, a man so arrogant upon the laws as this Lord of Bothwell vexeth not your Majesty's once prosperous realm. Alas, that such things should be! Madam, I gravely doubt for my son's safety.'

'Why, what would you have of me, cousin?' says the Queen. 'I cannot fight your son's battle. Courage I cannot give him. Am I to protect him in my house?'

'It is protection, indeed, madam, that I crave. But your Majesty knows very well in what guise I would have him enter your house.'

This was too open dealing to be dextrous in such a delicate market.

‘Upon my word, cousin,’ says the Queen, ‘I think that you carry your plans of protection too far if you propose that I should shelter him in my bed.’

The old Duke looked so confounded at this blunt commentary that she repented later, and promised that she would try a reconciliation. ‘But I cannot move in it myself,’ she told him. ‘There are many reasons against that. Do you say that my Lord Bothwell threatens the life of your son?’

‘Indeed, madam, I do fear it.’

‘Well, I will see that he does not get it. Leave me to deal as I can.’

The Queen sent for Mr. Knox.

CHAPTER V HERE ARE FLIES AT THE HONEYPOT

‘The Comic Mask now appears,’ says Le Secret des Secrets in a reflective mood, ‘the Comic Mask, with a deprecatory grin, to show how it was the misfortune of Scotland at this time that, being a poor country, every funded man in it was forced to fatten his glebe at the cost of his neighbour’s. So house was set against house, friendship made a vain thing, and loyalty a marketable thing. More than that, every standard of value set up to be a beacon or channel-post or point of rally (whichever you chose to make it), became ipso facto a tower of vantage, from which, if you were to draw your dues, it was necessary to scare everybody else. When Mr. Knox sourly called Queen Mary a Honeypot, he intended to hold her out to scorn; but actually he decried his countrymen who saw her so; and not saw her only, but every high estate beside. For them the Church was a honeypot, the council, the command of the shore, the wardenry of the marches. “Come,” they said, “let us eat and drink of this store, but for God’s sake keep off the rest, or it will never hold out.” Round about, round about, came the buzzing flies, at once eager and querulous; and while they sipped they looked from the corners of their eyes lest some other should get

more than his share; and the murmurs of the feasters were as often “Give him less” as “Give me more.” Yet it would be wrong, I conceive, to call the Scots lords all greedy; safer to remember that most of them must certainly have been hungry.’ So Monsieur Des-Essars obtrudes his chorus—after the event.

Young Queen Mary, hard-up against the event, had no chorus but trusty Livingstone of the red cheeks and warm heart; nor until her first Christmas was kept and gone was she conscious of needing one. She had maintained a high spirit through all the dark and windy autumn days, finding Bothwell’s effrontery as easy to explain as the Duke’s poltroonery, or the hasty veering of old Huntly. Bothwell, she would extenuate, held her cheap because women were his pastime, the Duke sought her protection because he was a coward, Huntly shied off because his vanity was offended. If men indeed had ever been so simple to be explained, this world were as easy to manage as a pasteboard theatre. The simplicity was her own; but she shared the quality with another when she sent for Mr. Knox because she thought him her rival, and when he came prepared to play the part.

The time was November, with the floods out and rain that never ceased. It was dark all day outside the palace; raw cold and showers of sleet mastered the town; but within, great fires made the chambers snug where the Queen sat with her maids and young men. The French lords had taken their leave, the pageants and dancings were stayed for a time. In a diminished Court, which held neither the superb Princes of Guise nor the hardy-tongued Lord of Bothwell—in a domesticated, needleworking, chattering, hearth-haunting Court—there was a great adventure for the coy excellences of Monsieur de Châtelard. Discussing his prospects freely with Des-Essars, he told him that he had two serious rivals only. ‘Monsieur de Boduel,’ he said, ‘forces my Princess to think of him by insulting her. He appears to succeed; but so would the man who should twist your arm, my little Jean-Marie, and make cuts with the hand at the fleshy part. He would compel you to think of him, but with fear. Now, fear, look you, is not the lady’s part in love, but the man’s, the perfect

lover’s part. For it may be doubted whether a woman can ever be a perfect lover—if only for this reason, that she is designed for the love of a man. The Lord Gordon, eldest son and heir of that savage greybeard, Monsieur de Huntly, is my other adversary in the sweet warfare. She looks at him as you must needs observe a church tower in your Brabant. It is the tallest thing there; you cannot avoid it. But what fine long legs can prevail against the silken tongue? Not his, at least. Therefore I sing my best, I dance, I stand prayerful at corners of the corridor. And one day, when I see her pensive, or hear her sigh as she goes past me, do you know what I shall do? I shall run forward and clasp her knees, and cry aloud, “We bleed, we bleed, Princess, we bleed! Come, my divine balm, let us stanch mutually these wounds of ours. For I too have balsam for thee!” Do you not think the plan admirable?’

‘It is very poetical,’ said Des-Essars, ‘and has this merit, usually denied to poetry, that it is uncommonly explicit. I think I know better than you what are the designs of Monsieur de Boduel, since he was once my master. He does not seek to insult or to terrify my mistress, as you seem to suppose—but to induce her to trust him. He would wish to appear to her in the character of the one man in Scotland who does not seek some advantage from her. My Lord Gordon’s designs—to use the word for convenience, though, in fact, he has no designs—are as simple as yours. He is infatuated; the Queen has turned his head; and it is no wonder, seeing that she troubled herself to do it.’

‘If he has no designs, boy,’ cried Monsieur de Châtelard, ‘how can you compare him with me, who have many?’

Des-Essars clasped his hands behind his head. ‘I suppose you are the same in this, at least,’ he said, ‘that both of you seek to get pleasure out of my mistress. Let me tell you that your most serious rival of all is one of whom you know nothing—one who seeks neither pleasure nor profit from her; to whom, therefore, she will almost certainly offer the utmost of her store.’

‘Who is this remarkable man, pray?’

‘It is Master Knox, the Genevan preacher,’ said Des-Essars. ‘I think there is more danger to the Queen’s heart in this man’s keeping than in that of the whole Privy Council of this kingdom.’

Monsieur de Châtelard was profoundly surprised. ‘I had never considered him at all,’ he admitted. ‘In my country, Jean-Marie, and I suppose in yours also, we do not consider the gentry of religion until our case is become extreme. Of what kindred is this man?’

‘He is of the sons of Adam, I suppose, and a tall one. I have seen him.’

‘You mistake me, my boy. Hath he blood, for example?’

‘Sir, I will warrant it very red. In fine, sir, this man is King of Scotland; and, though it may surprise you to hear me say so, I will be so bold as to add in your private ear, that no true lover of the Queen my mistress could wish her to give up her heart into any other keeping which this country can furnish.’

Monsieur de Châtelard, after a short, quick turn about the room, came back to Des-Essars vivacious and angry. ‘You speak absurdly, like the pert valet you are likely to become. What can you know of love—you, who dare to dispose of your mistress’s heart in this fashion?’

Des-Essars looked grave. ‘It is open to me, young as I am, to love the Queen my mistress, and to desire her welfare. I love her devotedly; but I swear that I desire nothing else. Nor does my partner and sworn ally, Monsieur Adam de Gordon.’

‘Love,’ said Monsieur de Châtelard, tapping his bosom, ‘severs brotherhoods and dissolves every oath. It is a perfectly selfish passion: even the beloved must suffer for the lover’s need. Do you and your partner suppose that you can stay my advance? The thought is laughable.’

‘We neither suppose it nor propose it,’ replied the youth. ‘We are considering the

case of Mr. Knox, and are agreed that, detestable as his opinions may be, there is great force in them because of the great force in himself. We think he may draw the Queen's favour by the very neglect he hath of it; and although our natures would lead us to advance the suit of my Lord Gordon, who is my colleague's blood-brother, as you know—for all that, it is our deliberate intention to throw no obstacle in the way of any pretensions this Master Knox may chance to exhibit.'

'And, pray,' cried Monsieur de Châtelard, drawing himself up, 'and, pray, how do you look upon my pretensions, which, I need not tell you, do not embrace marriage?'

'To tell you the truth, sir,' Des-Essars replied, 'we do not look upon them at all.'

Monsieur de Châtelard was satisfied. 'I think you are very wise,' he said. 'No eye should look upon the deed which I meditate. Fare you well, Jean-Marie. I speak as a man forewarned.'

Jean-Marie returned to his problems.

Standing at the Queen's door, he had his plan cut and dried. When the preacher should be brought in by the usher, he would require a word with him before he pulled back the curtain. He does not confess to it in his memoirs; but I have no doubt what that word was to have been. Remember that there was this much sound sense on the boy's side: he knew very well that the Queen had thought more of Mr. Knox than she had cared to allow. His inferences may have been ridiculous; it is one thing to read into the hearts of kings, another to dispose them. However that may be, the Captain of the Guard had received his orders. He himself introduced the great man into the antechamber, and led him directly to the entry of the Queen's closet. Mr. Erskine, who held this office, was also Master of the Pages, and no mere gentleman-usher. He brushed aside his subaltern with no more ceremony than consists in a flack of the ear, and, 'Back, thou French pullet—the Queen's command.' Immediately afterwards he announced at the door, 'Madam, Mr. Knox,

to serve your Majesty.'

'Enter boldly, Mr. Knox,' he bade his convoy then, and departed, leaving him in the doorway face to face with the Queen of Scots.

She sat in a low chair, tapestry on her knees, her needle flying fast; in her white mourning, as always when she had her own way, she looked a sweet and wholesome young woman. Mary Livingstone, self-possessed and busy, was on a higher chair behind her, watching the work; Mary Fleming in the bay of the window, Lord Lindsay near by her, leaning against the wall. Mary Beaton and Mary Seton were on cushions on the floor, each holding an end of the long frame. Mr. Secretary regardful by the door, and a lady who sat at a little table reading out of Perceforest or Amadis, or some such, completed as quiet an interior as you could wish to see. While Mr. Knox stood primed for his duty, scrutinised by half a dozen pair of eyes, the Queen alone did not lift hers up, but picked at a knot with her needle.

The tangle out, 'Let Mr. Knox take heart,' she said, with the needle's eye to the light and the wool made sharp by her tongue: 'here he shall find a few busy girls putting to shame some idle men.' Seeing that Mr. Knox made no sign—as how should he, who needed not take what he had never lost?—she presently turned her head and looked cheerfully at him, her first sight of a redoubtable critic. Singly her thoughts came, one on the heels of the other: her first, This man is very tall; the second, He looks kind; the third, He loves a jest; the fourth, which stayed long by her, The deep wise eyes he hath! In a long head of great bones and little flesh those far-set, far-seeing, large, considering eyes shone like lamps in the daylight—full of power at command, kept in control, content to wait. They told her nothing, yet she saw that they had a store behind. No doubt but the flame was there. If the day made it mild, in the dark it would beacon men. She saw that he had a strong nose, like a raven's beak, a fleshy mouth, the beard of a prophet, the shoulders and height of a mountaineer. In one large hand he held his black bonnet, the other was across his

breast, hidden in the folds of his cloak. There was no man present of his height, save Lethington, and he looked a weed. There was no man (within her knowledge) of his patience, save the Lord James; and she knew him at heart a coward. Peering through her narrowed eyes for those few seconds, she had the fancy that this Knox was like a ragged granite cross, full of runes, wounded, weather-fretted, twisted awry. Yet her four thoughts persisted: He is very tall, he looks kind, he loves a jest—and oh! the deep wise eyes he hath! Nothing that he did or spoke against her afterwards moved the roots of those opinions. She may have feared, but she never shrank from the man.

Now she took up her words where she had left them. ‘You, who love not idleness, Mr. Knox, are here to help me, I hope?’

He blinked before he answered. ‘Madam,’ then said he, ‘I am here upon your summons, since subjects are bound to obey, that I may know your pleasure of me.’ ‘A sweet, dangerous woman,’ he thought her still; but he added now, ‘And of all these dainty ladies the daintiest, and the shrewdest reader of men.’

‘Come then, Mr. Knox, and be idle or busy as likes you best,’ she said, and resumed her needle. ‘I am glad to know,’ she added, ‘that you consider yourself bound anyways to me.’

He, not moving from his doorway—making it serve him rather for a pulpit—when he had thought for awhile, with quickly blinking eyes, began: ‘I think that you seek to put me to some question, madam, but without naming it. I think that you would have me justify myself without cause cited. But this I shall not do, lest afterwards come in your Clerk of Arraigns and I find myself prejudged upon my plea before I am accused at all. Why, in this matter of service of subjects, we are all in a manner bound upon it. Many masters must we obey: as God and His stewards, who are girded angels; and Death and his officers, who are famines, diseases, fires, and the swords of violent men, suffered by God for primordial reasons; and next the prince

and his ministers, among whom I reckon——’

‘Oh, sir; oh, sir,’ she cried out, ‘you go too fast for me!’

‘Madam,’ said he, ‘I speak with respect, but I do think you go as fast as I.’

She laughed. ‘I am young, Mr. Knox, and go as fast as I can. Do you blame me for that?’

‘I may not, madam,’ said he steadily, ‘unless to remember that you sit in an old seat be to blame you.’

‘I sit at my needlework now, sir.’

He saw her fine head bent over the web, a gesture beautifully meek, but said he: ‘I suspect the seat is beneath your Majesty. It is hard to win, yet harder to leave when the time comes.’

‘But,’ said she, ‘if I put aside my seat, if I waive my authority, how would you consider me then?’

He turned his head from one to another, and then gazed calmly at the Queen. ‘Madam,’ he said, ‘if you waive your authority and put aside your seat, the which (you say) you have from God, why then should I consider you at all?’

When the room stirred, she laughed, but it was to conceal her vexation. She pricked her lip with her needle.

‘I see how it is with you and your friends, sir,’ she said drily. ‘You love not poor women in any wise. When we are upon thrones you call us monsters, and when we come off them you think us nothing at all. It is hard to please you. And yet—you have known women.’

‘A many,’ said he.

‘And of these some were good women?’

‘There was one, madam, the best of women.’

Her eyes sparkled. ‘Ah! You speak kindly at last! You loved my mother! Then you

will love me. Is it not so?'

He was silent. This was perilous work.

'I have sent for you, Mr. Knox,' she continued, 'not for dialectic, in which I can see I am no match for you; but to ask counsel of you, and require a benevolence, if you are ready to bestow it. We will talk alone of these things, if you will. Adieu, mes enfants; gentlemen, adieu. I must speak privately with Mr. Knox.'

What had she to say to him? Not he alone wondered; there was Master Des-Essars at the door—Master Des-Essars, who, with the generosity of calf-love, was prepared to surrender his rights for the good of the State. Mary Livingstone, to whom one man, lover of the Queen, was as pitiable as another, swept through the anteroom without a word for anybody. The others clustered in the bay, whispering and wondering.

But as to Mr. Knox, when those two were alone, she baffled him altogether by asking him to intervene in the quarrel between the Lords Bothwell and Arran: baffled him, that is, because he had braced himself for tears, reproaches, and what he called 'yowling' against his 'Stinking Pride' sermon, which of late had made some stir. In that matter he was ready to take his stand upon the holy hill of Sion; he had his countermines laid against her mines. Yea, if she had cried out upon the book of the Monstrous Regiment itself, he had his pithy retorts, his citations from Scripture, his Aristotle, his Saint Paul, and Aquinas—for he did not disdain that serviceable papist—his heavy cavalry from Geneva and his light horsemen from Ayrshire greens. But she took no notice of this entrenched position of his: she drew him into open country, then swept out and caught him in the flank. Choosing to assume, against all evidence, that he had loved her mother, assuming that he loved her too, she pleaded with him to serve her well, and used the subtlest flattery of all, which was to take for granted that he would refuse what she begged. This was an incense so heady that the flinty-edged brain was drugged by it, declined ratiocination. As she pleaded, in low urgent tones, which cried sometimes as if she was hurt, and thrilled

sometimes as though she exulted in her pure desire, he listened, sitting motionless above her, more moved than he cared afterwards to own. ‘For peace’s sake I came hither, young as I am, and because I desire to dwell among my own folk. I hoped for peace, and do think that I ensued it. Have I vexed any of you in anything? Have I oppressed any?’ At such a time, against such pleading, he had it not in his heart to cry out, ‘Ay, daily, hourly, you vex, thwart, and offend the Lord’s people.’

Seeing him silent, pondering above her, she stretched out her arms for a minute, and bewitched him utterly with her slow, sad smile. ‘If a girl of my years can be tyrant over grave councillors, if that be possible, and I have done it, I shall not be too stiff to ask pardon for my fault, or to come to you and your friends, Mr. Knox, to learn a wiser way. But you cannot accuse me. I see you answer nothing.’ Whether he could or not, he did not at that time.

She came back to her first proposition. ‘Of my Lord of Bothwell I know only this,’—she seemed to weigh her words,—‘that in France he approved himself the very honest gentleman whom I looked to find him here. He is not of my faith; he favours England more than I am as yet prepared to do; he is stern upon the border. What his quarrel may be with my Lord of Arran I do not care to inquire. I pray it may be soon ended, for the peace’s sake which I promised myself. Why should I be unhappy? You cannot wish it.’

‘Madam,’ he said, in his deep slow voice, ‘God knoweth I do not.’

She looked down; she whispered, ‘You are kind to me. You will help me?’

‘Madam,’ he said, ‘God being with me, I will.’ She looked up at him like a child, held out her hand. He took it in his own; and there it lay for a while contented.

Upon this fluttering moment the Lord James, walking familiarly in king’s houses, entered with a grave inclination of the head. The Queen was vexed, but she was ready, and resumed her hand. Mr. Knox was not ready. He stiffened himself, and opened his mouth to speak: no words came. The Lord James went solemnly to his

side and put a hand on his shoulder. The Queen's eyes flashed.

'Madam,' he said, 'I am glad that my friend Mr. Knox should be here.'

'Upon my word, my lord,' cried the Queen in a rage, 'why should you be glad, or what has your gladness to do with the matter?' Mr. Knox, before she spoke, had gently disengaged himself; now he made her a deep obeisance and took his leave—not walking backwards. 'That is a true man,' was her judgment of him, and never substantially altered. What he may have thought of her, if he afterwards discovered how she had used him here, is another question. He set about doing her behests, at any rate. There was a probability that my Lord Bothwell would show himself at Court again before many days, and without direct invitation of hers.

CHAPTER VI THE FOOL'S WHIP

After a progress about the kingdom, which she thought it well to make for many reasons—room for the pacifying arm of Mr. Knox being one—it befell as she had hoped. Speedily and well had the preacher gone to work: the Earl of Arran walked abroad without a bodyguard, the Earl of Bothwell showed himself at Court and was received upon his former footing. The Queen had looked sharply at him, on his first appearance, for any sign of a shameful face; there was not to be seen the shadow of a shade. It is not too much to say that she would have been greatly disappointed if there had been any; for to take away hardihood from this man would be to make his raillery a ridiculous offence, his gay humour a mere symptom of the tavern. No, but he laughed at her as slyly as ever before; he reassumed his old pretensions, he gave back no inch of ground—and, remember, in an affair of the sort, if the man holds his place the maid must yield something of hers. It is bound to be a case of give or take. She felt herself in the act to give, was glad of it, and concealed it from Mary Livingstone. When this girl, her bosom friend and bedfellow, made the outcry you might expect of her, the Queen pretended extreme surprise.

'Do you suppose this country the Garden of Eden, my dear? Are all the Scots lords

wise virgins, careful over lamp-wicks? Am I Queen of a Court of Love by chance, and is my Lord of Bothwell a postulant? You tell me news. I assure you he is nothing to me.'

Now these words were spoken on a day when he had declared himself something as plainly as was convenient. Exactly what had happened was this:—

On the anniversary-day of the death of little King Francis of France, the Queen kept the house with her maids, and professed to see nobody. A requiem had been sung, the faithful few attending in black mourning. She, upon a faldstool, solitary before the altar at the pall, looked a very emblem of pure sorrow—exquisitely dressed in long nun-like weeds; no relief of white; her face very pale, hands thin and fragile, only one ring to the whole eight fingers. Motionless, not observed to open her lips, wink her eyes, scarcely seen to breathe, there she stayed when mass was done and the chapel empty, save for women and a page or two.

At noon, just before dinner, she walked in the garden, kept empty by her directions—a few turns with Beaton and Fleming, and Des-Essars for escort—then, bidding them leave her, sat alone in a yew-tree bower in full sun. It was warm dry weather for the season.

Presently, as she sat pensive, toying perhaps with grief, trying to recall it or maintain it—who knows?—she heard footsteps not far off, voices in debate; and looked sidelong up to see who could be coming. It was the Earl of Bothwell who showed himself first round the angle of the terrace, arm-in-arm of that Lord Arran whom she had procured to be his friend; behind these two were Ormiston, some Hamilton or another, and Paris, Lord Bothwell's valet. They were in high spirits and free talk, those two lords, unconscious or careless of her privacy; Bothwell was gesticulating in that French way he had; the other, with his head inclined, listened closely, and sniggered in spite of himself. Both were in cheerful colours; notably, Bothwell wore crimson cloth with a cloak of the same, a purpoint of lace, a white feather in his cap.

Arran first saw the Queen, stopped instantly, uncovered, and said something hasty to his companion; he stared with his light fish-eyes and kept his mouth open. Bothwell looked up in his good time and bared his head as he did so. It seems that he muttered some order or advice, for when Lord Arran slipped by on the tips of his toes, all the rest followed him; but Lord Bothwell walked leisurely over the grass towards the Queen, as who should say, 'I am in the wrong—in truth I am a careless devil. Well, give me my due; admit I am not a timorous devil.'

As he stood before her, attentive and respectful in his easy way, she watched him nearly, and he waited for her words. It is a sign of how they stood to one another at this time that she began her speech in the middle—as if her thoughts, in spite of herself, became at a point articulate.

'You also, my lord!'

'Plaît-il?'

'Oh, you understand me very well.'

'Madam, upon my honour! I am a dull dog that can see but one thing at a time.'

She forced herself to speak. 'I ask you, then, if this is the day of all days when you choose to pass by me in your festival gear? I ask if you also are with the rest of them?'

He made as if he would spread his hands out—the motion was enough. It said—though he was silent—'Madam, I am no better than other men.'

'Oh, I believe it, I believe it! You are no better indeed; but I had thought you wiser.'

He caught at the word, and rubbed his chin over it. 'Hey, my faith, madam—wiser!'

The Queen tapped her foot. 'If I had said kinder, I might have betrayed myself for a fool. Kindness, wisdom, generosity, pity! In all these things I must believe you to be as other men. Is it not so?'

Seeing her clouded eyes, he did not affect to laugh any more. He was either a bad

courtier or one supremely expert; for he spoke as irritably as he felt.

‘Madam, I know few men save men of spirit, therefore I cannot advise you. But you know the saw, Come asino sape così minuzza rape: “The donkey bites his carrot as well as he knows.” Wisdom is becoming to a servant; kindness, generosity, and the rest of these high virtues are the ornament of a master, or mistress. Why, madam, if I desire the warmth of the sun, shall I ever get it by shivering? Is that a wise reflection?’

She clasped her hands over her knee, and looked at her foot as she swung it slowly; but if the action was idle the words were not. ‘If I asked you, my lord, to wear the dule with me upon this one day of the year, should you refuse me? If I grieve, will you not grieve with me?’

He never faltered, but spoke as gaily as a sailor to his lass. ‘Faith of a gentleman, madam, why should I grieve—except for that you should grieve still? For your grieving there may be a remedy; and as for me, far from grieving with you, I thank the kindly gods.’

She bit her lip as she shivered. ‘You are cruel,’ she said: ‘you are cruel. I knew it before. Your heart is cruel. This is the very subtlety of the vice.’

‘Not so, madam,’ he answered quietly; ‘but it is dangerous simplicity. Do you not know why I give thanks?—I think you do, indeed.’

Very certainly she thought so too.

She sat on after he was gone, twisting her fingers about as she spun her busy fancies; and was so found by her maids. Little King Francis and the purple pall which signified him were buried for that day; and after dinner she changed her black gown for a white. It was at going to bed that night that she had rallied Mary Livingstone about Scots lords and wise virgins, and declared that Lord Bothwell was nothing to her. And the maid believed her just as far as you or I may do.

Not that the thing was grown serious by any means: the maid of honour made too

much of one possible lover, and the Queen, very likely, too little. The difference between these two was this: Mary Livingstone looked upon her Majesty's lovers with a match-maker's eye, but Queen Mary with a shepherding eye. The flock was everything to her. Just now, for example, she was anxious about certain other strays; and, as time wore on to the dark of the year, she began to be impatient. The Gordons, said her brother James, were playing her false; but it was incredible to her—not that they should be at fault, but that her instinct should be so. She could have sworn to the truth of that fine Lord Gordon, and been certain that she had won over old Huntly at the last. The mistake—if she was mistaken—is common to queens and pretty children, who, finding themselves in the centre of their world, give that a circumference beyond the line of sight. Because all eyes are upon them they think that there is nothing else to be seen. She was to learn that Huntly at Court and Huntly in Badenoch were two separate persons; so said the Lord James.

'Sister, alas! I fear a treacherous and stiff-necked generation'; and he had more to go upon than he chose her to guess as yet.

So far, at least, she had to admit that old Huntly was a liar: John of Findlater was never brought back. Her messengers returned again and again, saying, 'The Earl was in the hills,' or 'The Earl was hunting the deer,' or 'The Earl was punishing the Forbeses.' And where was her fine Lord Gordon, with his sea-blue, hawk's eyes? She was driven at last to send after him—a peremptory summons to meet her at Dundee; but he never came—could not be found or served with the letter—was believed to be with the Earl, his father, but had been heard of in the west with the Hamiltons, etc. etc. The face of Lord James—his eyes ever upon the Earldom of Moray—was sufficient answer to her doubts; and when she turned to Lord Bothwell for comfort, he laughed and said, reminding her of a former conversation, 'Prick the old bladder, madam, scatter the pease; then watch warily who come to the feast.'

Then a certain Lord Ruthven entered her field, sent for out of Gowrie—a dour,

pallid man, with fatality pressing heavily on his forehead. It seemed to weigh his brows over his eyes, and to goad him at certain stressful times to outbursts of savagery—snarling, tooth-baring—terrible to behold. He hated Huntly as one Scots lord could hate another, for no known reason.

‘You ask me what you shall do with Huntly, madam? I say, hang him on a tree, and poison crows with him. It will be the best service he can ever do you.’

He said this at the council board, and dismayed her sorely. It seemed to her that he churned his spleen between his teeth till it foamed at his loose lips.

She flew to the comfort of her maids: here was her cabinet of last resource! They throned her among them, put their heads near together, and considered the case of Scotland. Mary Livingstone could see but one remedy for the one deep-set disease. Bothwell’s broad chest shadowed all the realm as with a cloud: chase that away, you might get a glimpse of poor Scotland; but while the dreadful gloom endured the Gordons seemed to her a swarm of gnats, harmless at a distance. ‘Let them starve in their own quags, my dear heart,’ she said; ‘you will have them humble when they are hungry. Theirs is the sin of pride—but, O Mother of Heaven, keep us clean from the sin that laughs at sinning!’

Mary Fleming put in a word for the advice of Mr. Secretary Lethington, but blushed when the others nudged each other. The Secretary was known to be her servant. Mary Beaton said, ‘I thought we were to speak of Huntly? Ma belle dame, touch his heart with your finger-tips.’

‘So I would if I knew the way,’ said the Queen, frowning.

‘Send him back his bonny boy Adam,’ says Beaton; ‘I undertake that he will plead your cause. You have given him good reason.’

The Queen thought well of this; so presently Adam Gordon was sent north as legate a latere.

Christmas went out, Lent drew on, the months passed. The Ark of State tossed in

unrestful waters, but young Adam of Gordon came not again with a slip of olive. ‘If that child should prove untrue,’ said the Queen, ‘then his father is the lying traitor you report him.’ This to Mr. Secretary Lethington, very much with her just now, at work for Mr. Secretary Cecil of England, trying his hardest to bring about a meeting between his mistress and the mistress of his friend. Lethington, knowing what he did know, had little consolation for her; but he bore word to his master, the Lord James, that the Queen was angering fast with the Gordons; a very little more and the fire would leap.

‘In my poor judgment,’ he said, ‘the kindling-spark will be struck when she sees the scribbling of her love-image. She hath fashioned a very Eros out of George Gordon.’

‘I conceive, Mr. Secretary,’ said the Lord James, making no sign that he had heard him, ‘that the times are ripe for our budget of news.’

‘I think with your lordship,’ the Secretary replied, ‘but will you be your own post-boy?’

‘Ah! I am a dullard, Mr. Secretary,’ said my lord. ‘Your mind forges in front of mine.’

He was fond of penning his agents in close corners. Let them be explicit since he would never be. Lethington gulped his chagrin.

‘My meaning was, my lord, that it will advantage you more to confirm than to spread your news concerning the Lord Gordon. Whoso tells her Majesty a thing to anger her, I have observed that he will surely receive some part of her wrath. Not so the man who is forced to admit the truth of a report. He, on the contrary, gains trust; for delicacy in a courtier outweighs integrity with our mistress. Therefore let the Duke bring the news, and do you wait until you can bow your head over it. Perhaps I speak more plainly than I ought.’

‘I think you do, sir, indeed,’ says the Lord James, and lacerates his Lethington.

There was a masque upon Shrove Tuesday, the last day of Carnival, and much folly

done, which ended, like a child's romp, in a sobbing fit. Amid the lights, music, laughter of the throng, the Queen and her maids braved it as saucy young men, trunked, puffed, pointed, trussed and doubleted; short French cloaks over one shoulder, flat French caps over one ear. Mary Livingstone was the properest, being so tall, Mary Fleming the least at ease, Mary Beaton the pertest, and Mary Seton the prettiest boy. But Mary the Queen was the most provoking, the trimmest, most assured little gallant that ever you saw; and yet, by that art she had, that extraordinary tact, never more a queen than when now so much a youth. Her trunks were green and her doublet white velvet; her cloak was violet threaded with gold. Her cap was as scarlet as her lips; but there was no jewel in her ear or her girdle to match her glancing eyes. By a perverse French courtesy, which became them very ill, such men as dared to do it, or had chins to show, were habited like women. Queen Mary led out Monsieur de Châtelard in a ruff and hooped gown; Des-Essars made a nun of himself, most demure and most uncomfortable; Mary Fleming chose the Earl of Arran—the only Scot in the mummery—a shepherdess with a crook. Mary Livingstone would not dance. 'Never, never, never!' cried she. 'Let women ape men, as I am doing: the thing is natural; we would all be men if we could. But a man in a petticoat, a man that can blush—ah, bah! pourriture de France!'

That night, rotten or not, Monsieur de Châtelard played the French game. Queen Mary held him, led him about, bowed where he curtsied, stood while he sat. He grew bolder as the din grew wilder; he said he was the Queen's wife. She thought him a fool, but owned to a kind of sneaking tenderness for folly of the sort. He called her his dear lord, his sweet lord, said he was faint and must lean upon her arm. He promised to make her jealous—went very far in his part. He swore that it was all a lie—he loved his husband only: 'Kiss me, dear hub, I am sick of love!' he languished, and she did kiss his cheek. More she would not; indeed, when she saw the old Duke of Châtelherault struggling through the crowd about the doors, she felt that here was a chance of getting out of a tangle. She flung the sick monkey off and

went directly towards the Duke. He had come to town that day, she knew, directly from his lands in the west: perhaps he would know something of the Gordons. He was a frail, pink-cheeked old man, with a pointed white beard and delicate hands; so simple as to be nearly a fool, and yet not so nearly but that he had been able to beget Lord Arran, a real fool. When he understood that this swaggering young prince was indeed his queen, he gave up bowing and waving his hands, and dropped upon his knee, having very courtly old ways with him.

‘Dear madam, dear my cousin, the Lothians show the greener for your abiding. ’Tis shrewish weather yet in the hills; but you make a summer here.’

‘Rise up, my cousin,’ says the Queen, ‘and come talk with me.’ She drew him to a settle by the wall. ‘What news of your house and country have you for me?’

‘I hope I shall content your Majesty,’ he said, rubbing his fine hands. ‘We of the west have been junketing. We have killed fatlings for a marriage.’

She was interested, suspecting nothing. ‘Ah, you have made a marriage! and I was not told! You used me ill, cousin.’

‘Madam,’ he pleaded somewhat confusedly, ‘it was done in haste: there were many reasons for that. Take one—my poor health and hastening years. Nor did time serve to make Hamilton a house. It was a fortalice, and must remain a fortalice for my lifetime. But for your Grace——’ He stopped, seeing that she did not listen.

She made haste to turn him on again. ‘Whom did you marry? Not my Lord of Arran, for he is pranking here. And you design him for me, if I remember.’

‘Oh, madam!’ He was greatly upset by such plain talk. ‘No, no. It was my daughter Margaret. My son Arran! Ah, that’s a greater thing. My daughter Margaret, madam——’

‘Yes, yes. But the man—the man!’

‘Madam, the Lord of Gordon took her.’ He beamed with pride and contentment.

‘Yes, yes, the Lord of Gordon—a pact of amity between two houses not always too happily engaged.’

There is no doubt she blenched at the name—momentarily, as one may at a sudden flash of lightning. She got up at once. ‘I think you have mistook his name, cousin. His name is Beelzebub. He is called after his father.’ She left him holding his head, and went swiftly towards the door.

The dreary Châtelard crept after her. ‘My prince—my lord!’

‘No, no; I cannot hear you now.’ She waved him off.

Bowing, he shivered at his plight; but ‘Courage, my child,’ he bade himself: ‘“Not now,” she saith.’

All dancing stopped, all secret talk, all laughing, teasing, and love-making. They opened her a broad way. The Earl of Bothwell swept the floor with his thyrsus: he was disguised as the Theban god. But she cried out the more vehemently, ‘No, no! I am pressed; I cannot hear you now. You cannot avail me any more,’ and flashed through the doorway. ‘Send me Livingstone to my closet,’ she called over her shoulder, ‘and send me Lethington.’ She ran up her privy stair, and waited for her servants, tapping her foot, irresolute, in the middle of the floor.

Mary Livingstone flew in breathless. ‘What is it? What is it, my lamb?’

‘Get me a great cloak, child, and hide up all this foolery; and let Mr. Secretary wait until I call him.’

Mary Livingstone covered her from neck to foot, took off the scarlet cap, coifed her head seemly, brought a stool for her feet: hid the boy in the lady, you see, and all done without a word, admirable girl!

The Queen had been in a hard stare the while. ‘Now let me see M. de Lethington. But stay you with me.’

‘Ay, till they cut me down,’ says Livingstone, and fetched in the Secretary.

She began at once. ‘I find, Mr. Secretary, that there is room for more knaves yet in Scotland.’

‘Alack, madam,’ says he, ‘yes, truly. They can lie close, do you see, like mushrooms, and thrive the richlier. Knaves breed knavishly, and Scotland is a kindly nurse.’

‘There are likely to be more. Here hath the Duke married his daughter, and the Lord of Huntly that brave son of his whom of late he offered to me. Is this knavery or the ecstasy of a fool? What! Do they think to win from me by insult what they have not won by open dealing?’

Mr. Secretary, who had known this piece of news for a month or more, did not think it well to overact surprise. He contented himself with, ‘Upon my word!’ but added, after a pause, ‘This seems to me rash folly rather than a reasoned affront.’

The Queen fumed, and in so doing betrayed what had really angered her. ‘Knave or fool, what is it to me? A false fine rogue! All rogues together. Ah, he professed my good service, declared himself worthy of trust—declared himself my lover! Heavens and earth, are lovers here of this sort?’

Mary Livingstone stooped towards her. ‘Think no more of him—ah me, think of none of them! They seek not your honour, nor love, nor service, but just the sweet profit they can suck from you.’

The Queen put her chin upon her two clasped hands. ‘I have heard my aunt, Madame de Ferrara, declare,’ she said, with a metallic ring in her voice which was new to it, ‘that in the marshes about that town the peasant women, and girls also, do trade their legs by standing in the lagoon and gathering the leeches that fasten upon them to suck blood. These they sell for a few pence and give their lovers food. But my lovers in Scotland are the leeches; so here stand I, trading myself, with all men draining me of profit to fatten themselves.’

‘Madam——’ said Lethington quickly, then stopped.

‘Well?’ says the Queen.

‘I would say, madam, the fable is a good one. Gather your leeches and sell them for pence. Afterwards, if it please you, trade no more in the swamps, but royally, in a royal territory. Ah, trade you with princes, madam! I hope to set up a booth for your Majesty’s commerce, and to find a chafferer of your own degree.’

She understood very well that he spoke of an English alliance for her, and that this was not to be had without a husband of English providing. ‘I think you are right,’ she replied. ‘If the Queen of England, my good sister, come half-way towards me, I will go the other half. This you may tell to Mr. Randolph if you choose.’

‘Be sure that I tell him, madam.’

‘Good dreams to you, Mr. Secretary.’

‘And no dreams at all to your Majesty—but sweet, careless sleep!’

The Queen, turning for consolation to her Livingstone, won the relief of tears. They talked in low tones to each other for a little while, the mistress’s head on the maid’s shoulder, and her two hands held. The Queen was out of heart with Scotland, with love, with all this skirting of perils. She was for prudence just now—prudence and the English road. Then came in the tirewoman for the unrobing, and then a final argument for England.

Monsieur de Châtelard, who truly (as he had told Des-Essars) was a foredoomed man, lay hidden at this moment where no man should have lain unsanctified. I shall not deal with him and his whereabouts further than to say that, just as Frenchmen are slow to see a joke, so they are loath to let it go. He had proposed on this, of all nights of the year, to push his joke of the ballroom into chamber-practice. Some further silly babble about ‘wifely duty’ was to extenuate his great essay. If jokes had been his common food, I suppose he would have known the smell of a musty one. As it was, he had to suffer in the fire which old Huntly and his Hamilton-marriage had lit: his joke was burnt up as it left his lips. For the Queen’s words, when she

found him, clung about him like flames about an oil-cask, scorched him, blistered him, shrivelled him up. He fell before them, literally, and lay, dry with fear, at her discretion. She spurned him with her heel. ‘Oh, you weed,’ she said, ‘not worthy to be burned, go, or I send for the maids with besoms to wash you into the kennel.’ He crept away to the shipping next day, pressing only the hand of Des-Essars, who could hardly refuse him. ‘His only success on this miserable occasion,’ the young man wrote afterwards, ‘was to divert the Queen’s rage from Monsieur de Gordon, and to turn her thoughts, by ever so little more, in the direction of the English marriage. He was one of those fools whose follies serve to show every man more or less ridiculous, just as a false sonnet makes sonneteering jejune.’

Lent opened, therefore, with omens; and with more came Lady Day and the new year. The Gordons, being summoned, did not answer; the Gordons, then, were put to the horn. The Queen was bitter as winter against them, with no desire but to have them at her knees. As for lovers and their loves, after George Gordon, after the crowning shame of Monsieur de Châtelard, ice-girdled Artemis was not chaster than she. My Lord of Bothwell, after an essay or two, shrugged and sought the border; the Queen was all for high alliances just now, and Mr. Secretary, their apostle, was in favour. He was hopeful, as he told Mary Fleming, to see two Queens at York; and who could say what might not come of that? And while fair Fleming wondered he was most hopeful, for like a delicate tree he needed genial air to make him bud. You saw him at such seasons at his best—a shrewd, nervous man, with a dash of poetry in him. The Queen of England always inspired him; he was frequently eloquent upon the theme. His own Queen talked freely about her ‘good sister,’ wrote her many civil letters, and treasured a few stately replies. One wonders, reading them now, that they should have found warmer quarters than a pigeon-hole, that they could ever have lain upon Queen Mary’s bosom and been beat upon by her ardent heart. Yet so it was. They know nothing of Queen Mary who know her not as the Huntress, never to be thrown out by a cold scent. Mr. Secretary, knowing her well,

harped as long as she would dance. ‘Ah, madam, there is a golden trader! Thence you may win an argosy indeed. What a bargain to be struck there! Sister kingdoms, sister queens—oh, if the Majesty of England were but lodged in a man’s heart! But so in essence it is. Her royal heart is like a strong fire, leaping within a frame of steel. And your Grace’s should be the jewel which that fire would guard, the Cor Cordis, the Secret of the Rose, the Sweetness in the Strong!’

Mary Fleming, glowing to hear such periods, saw her mistress catch light from them.

‘You speak well and truly,’ said Queen Mary. ‘I would I had the Queen of England for my husband; I would love her well.’ She spoke softly, blushing like a maiden.

‘Sister and spouse!’ cries Lethington with ardour. ‘Sister and spouse!’

For the sake of some such miraculous consummation she gave up all thoughts of Don Carlos, put away the Archduke, King Charles, the Swedish prince. Her sister of England should marry her how she would. Lethington, on the day it was decided that Sir James Melvill should go to London upon the business, knelt before his sovereign in a really honest transport, transfigured in the glory of his own fancy. ‘I salute on my knees the Empress of the Isles! I touch the sacred stem of the Tree of the New World!’

Very serious, very subdued, very modest, the Queen cast virginal eyes to her lap.

‘God willing, Mr. Secretary, I will do His pleasure in all things,’ she said.

The Lord James, observing her melting mood, made a stroke for the Earldom of Moray. Were the Gordons to defy the Majesty of Scotland? With these great hopes new born, with old shames dead and buried—never, never! The Queen said she would go to the North and hound the Gordons out.

CHAPTER VII GORDON’S BANE

On the morning of Lammas Day the Queen heard mass in the Chapel Royal with a

special intention, known only to herself. Red mass it should have been, since she felt sore need of the Holy Ghost; but she had given up the solemn ornament of music for the sake of peace. So Father Lesley read the office before the very few faithful: her maids, Erskine, Herries, the esquires, the pages, the French Ambassador, the Ambassador of Savoy—with him a certain large, full-blooded Italian, of whom there will be something to say anon. Mr. Knox had been scaring off the waverers of late: the Catholic religion was languid in the realm.

She knelt before the altar on her faldstool very stiffly, and looked more solitary than she felt. Her high mood and high endeavour still holding, there was but one man in Scotland who could make her feel her isolation, make her pity herself so nearly that the tears filled her eyes. Her brother James and his party, ostentatiously aloof, she could reckon with. All was said of them long ago by that old friend of hers now facing God in the mass: 'Your brother stands on the left of your throne; but he looks for ever to the right.' With this key to the cipher of my Lord James, what mystery in his sayings or doings? Then the grim Mr. Knox, who had worked her secret desires, and since then railed at her, scolded her, made her cry—she had his measure too. He liked her through all, and she trusted him in spite of all: at a pinch she could win him over. Whom, then, need she consider? The Earl of Bothwell—ah, the Earl of Bothwell, who laughed at everything, and had looked drolly on at her efforts to be a queen, and chosen to do nothing to help or hinder: there was a man to be feared indeed! She never knew herself less a queen or more a girl than when he was before her. Laughed he or frowned, was he eloquent or dumb as a fish, he intimidated her, diminished her, drove her cowering into herself to queen it alone. Christ was not so near, God not so far off, as this confident, free-living, shameless lord. Therefore now, because she dared not falter in what she was about to do, or see herself less than she desired to be, she had sent him into Liddesdale to hold the Justice-Court, and had not cared even to receive him when he came to take his leave. Lady Argyll, who had stood in her place, reported that he had gone out gaily, humming a French

air. With him safely away, she had faced her duty—duty of a Prince, as she conceived it. And here she knelt in prayer, prone before the Holy Ghost—solitary (but that is the safeguard of the King!)—and searched the altar for a sign of assurance.

Over that altar hung Christ, enigmatic upon His cross. The red priest bent his head down to his book, and made God apace.

The Queen's lips moved. 'My Saviour Christ, I offer Thee the intention of my heart, a clean oblation. If I do amiss in error, O Bread of Heaven, visit it not upon me. I have been offended, I have been disobeyed; they call upon me to claim my just requital. But be not Thou offended with me, my Lord, and pardon Thou my disobedience. As for my punishment, I suffer it in seeking to punish.'

It is not often that women pray in words: an urgency, a subjection, a passionate reception is the most they do—and the best. But she prayed so now, because she felt the need of justifying herself before Heaven, and the ability to do it. For Bothwell was in far Liddesdale, and she on her throne.

In three days' time she was to go to the North; and, though the country knew it not, she would go in force to punish the Gordons. You may judge by her prayers whether she was satisfied with the work. Plainly she was not. Her anger had had time to cool; she might have forgotten the very name of the clan, except that their men had had honest faces, and that two of them had certainly loved her once. But she had not been allowed to forget: the record remained, held up ever before her eyes in the white hand of Lord James. Contumacy! Contumacy! Old Huntly had been traitor before, when he trafficked with the enemies of her mother, and tried to sell herself to the English king. The Gordons would not surrender; they had mated with the Hamiltons, a stock next to hers for the throne. Was there not a shameful plot here? Would she not be stifled between these two houses? Yes, yes, she knew all that. But they were Catholics, they had shown her honest faces, two of them had loved her.

She was not satisfied; she must have a sign from heaven.

God was made, the bell proclaimed Him enthroned, Queen Mary bowed her head. Now, now, if the Gordons were true men, let God make a sign! The tale was told that once, when a priest lifted up the Host above his head, the thin film dissolved, and took flesh in the shape of a naked child, who stood, burning white, upon the man's two hands. Let some such marvel fall now! Intimacies between God and the Prince had been known. She hid her face, laid down her soul; the vague swam over her, the dark—a swooning, drowning sense. In that, for a moment, as vivid clouds chased each other across her field, she saw a face, a shape—mocking red mouth, vivacious, satirical hands, the gleam of two twinkling eyes: Bothwell, hued like a fiend, shadowing the world. She shuddered; God passed over, as the bell called up the people. With them she lifted her head, stiffened herself. The spell was broken. Without being more superstitious than her brethren, she may be pardoned for finding in this experience an ominous beginning of adventure.

Nevertheless, she so faced the heights of her task that, on the day appointed, she set out as bravely as to a hunting of stags. Jeddart pikes, bowmen from the Forest, her Lothian bodyguard—she had some five hundred men about her; too many for a progress, too few to make war. She herself rode in hunting trim, with two maids, two pages, two esquires; her brother, of course, in command; with him, of course, the Secretary. At fixed points along the road certain lords joined her: Atholl at Stirling, Glencairn and Ruthven at Perth, these with their companies. Lying at Coupar-Angus, at Glamis, at Edzell, her spirits rose as she breasted the rising country, saw the cloud-shadowed hills, the swollen rivers, the wind-swept trees, the sullen moors, the rocks. She grew happy even, for motion, newness, and physical exertion always excited her, and she was never happy unless she was excited. No fatigue daunted her. She sat out the driving days of rain, bent neither to the heat nor to the cold fog. She was always in front, always looking forward, seemed like the keen breath of war, driven before it as the wind by a rain-storm. Lethington likened

her to Diana on Taygetus shrilling havoc; but the Lord James said: ‘Such similitudes are distasteful. We are serious men upon a serious business.’ She rode astraddle like a young man, longed for a breastplate and steel bonnet. She made Ruthven exercise her with the broadsword, teach her to stamp her foot and cry, ‘Ha! a touch!’ and cajoled her brother into letting her sleep one night afield. Folded in a military plaid, so indeed she did; and watched with thrills the stars shoot their autumn flights, and listened to the owls calling each other as they coursed the shrew-mice over the moor. She pillowed her head on Mary Livingstone’s knee at last, and fell asleep at about three o’clock in the morning.

In the grey mirk—sharply cold, and a fine mist drizzling—Lethington and his master came to rouse her. Mary Livingstone lifted a finger of warning. The Queen was soundly asleep, smiling a little, with parted lips and the hasty breathing of a child. Mary Seton, too, was deep, her face buried in her arm. The two men looked down at the group.

‘Come away, my lord: give them time,’ said the Secretary.

But my Lord James did not hear him. He stood broodingly, muttering to himself: ‘A girl’s frolic—this romping, fond girl! And Scotland’s neck for her footstool—and earnest men for her pastime. O King eternal, is it just? Man!’ he said aloud, ‘there’s no reason in this.’

Mr. Secretary misunderstood him, not observing his wild looks. ‘Give them a short half-hour, my lord. There are two of them sleeping; and this poor watcher hath the need of it.’

The Lord James turned upon him. ‘Who sought to have women sleeping here? Are men to wait for the like of this? Are men to wait for ever? She should have counted the cost. I shall waken her. Ay! let her have the truth.’

‘She will wake soon enough,’ says Lethington, ‘and have the truth soon enough.’

The Lord James gave him one keen glance. ‘I command here, Mr. Secretary, under

the Queen’s authority. Bid them sound.’

The trumpet rang; the Queen stretched herself, moved her head, yawned, and sat up. She was wide awake directly, laughed at Livingstone for looking so glum, at Seton’s tumbled hair. She kissed them both, said her prayers with Father Roche, and was ready when the order to march was given.

When she came to Aberdeen she was told that a messenger from the Earl of Huntly was waiting for her with his chief’s humble duty, and a prayer that she would lodge in his castle of Strathbogie. This was very insolent or very foolish: she declined to receive the man. Let the Earl and his son Findlater render themselves up at Stirling Castle forthwith, she would receive them there. No more tidings came directly; but she learned from her brother news of the country which made her cheeks tingle. It was the confident belief of all the Gordon kindred, she was given to know, that her Majesty had come into the North to marry Sir John Gordon of Findlater. He was to be created Earl of Moray and Duke of Rothesay to that end. True news or false, she was in the mood to believe it, and cried out, with hot tears in her eyes, that she could have no peace until that rogue’s head was off. Needing no prompter at her side, she took instant action, marched on Inverness and summoned the keys of the castle. They told her that the Lord of Findlater was keeper; none could come in but by his leave. Findlater! But the man was out of his mind! She grew very quiet when, after many repetitions of it, she could bring herself to believe this report; then she sent for Lethington and bade him raise the country. The counsel was her brother’s, and meant that the clans—Forbeses, Grants, MacIntoshes—were to be supported and turned against the Gordons. The Lord James considered that his work was as good as done. So did the captain of the castle of Inverness; and rightly, for when his charge was surrendered he was hanged. The town did its best to appease the Queen with humble addresses and crocks full of gold pieces; but she concealed from nobody now that she had come up with war in her hands. Captains and their levies were sent for from the south; roads marked out for Kirkcaldy of Grange, Lord John

Stuart, Hay of Ormiston; rendezvous given at Aberdeen. And presently she went down to meet them, full of the purpose she had.

Old Huntly came out to watch. They saw his men, some hundred or more, in loose order at the ford of Spey. Queen Mary's heart leapt for battle, real crossing of swords to crown all this feigning and waiting; but the enemy drew off to the woods, and nobody barred her road to Aberdeen. Uncomfortably for herself, she lodged at Spynie on the way, where Bishop Patrick of Moray made her very welcome. He was Lord Bothwell's uncle, true Hepburn, a scapegrace old Catholic, anathema to the good Lord James, and proud of it. Something of Bothwell's gleam was in his cushioned eyes, something of Bothwell's infectious gaiety in his rich laugh. Like Bothwell, too, he was a mocker, who saw things sacred and profane a uniform, ridiculous drab, shrugged at the ruin of the faith in Scotland, and supposed Huntly had been paid to be a traitor. The Queen's fine temper made her sensitive to depreciation of the things she strove at; under such rough fingers she was bruised. She felt cheapened by her intercourse with this bishop; and not only so, but her business sickened her. The old pagan made light of it.

''Tis but a day in the hedgerows for ye, madam. Send your terriers—Lethington and siclike—into the bury, you shall see the Gordons bolt to your nets like rabbits, and old Huntly squealing loudest of all.'

Now, the Gordons had been fair in her sight, noble friends and hardy foes. But if George Gordon was to squeal like a rabbit, then war was playing at soldiers, and she a tomboy out for a romp. She left Spynie feeling that she hated the Gordons, hated their fault, hated their chastisement, and hated above all men under the tent-roof of heaven the whole race of Hepburn.

'Vile, vile scoffers at God and His vicars! They make a toy of me, these Hepburns. Uncle and nephew—I am a plaything for them.'

'Just a Honeypot, madam,' said Livingstone, and was snapped at for her respect.

‘Am I “Madam” to you now? What have I done to make you so petulant?’

‘I wish you would be more “Madam” to the Hepburns,’ replied the maid. ‘I could curse the whole brood of them.’

John Gordon defended two good castles, Findlater and Auchindoune. He expected, and was prepared for, a siege; but when the reinforcements came up from the Lowlands, somewhat to his consternation the Queen joined them at Aberdeen and hung about that region indefinitely, as if the autumn were but begun. Perhaps the suspense, the menace, told on old Huntly’s nerves; at any rate, something brought him to his knees. He sent petition after petition, promise upon promise; was reported by Ormiston to be very much aged, tremulous, given to sobbing, and when not so engaged, incoherent. This worthy went to Strathbogie, hoping to surprise him; failed to find him at home, but saw the Countess and a young girl, strangely beautiful, the Lady Jean, sole unmarried daughter of the house. The Countess took him into the chapel.

‘Do you see that, Captain Hay?’ says she.

‘What in particular, ma’am?’

There were lighted candles on the altar, a cross, the priest’s vestments of cloth of gold laid ready. She pointed to these adornments.

‘There is why they hunt us down, Captain Hay, because my lord is a faithful Christian gentleman. And woe,’ cried she, ‘woe upon her who, following wicked counsels, persecutes her own holy religion! It had been better for her that she had never been born. Tell your mistress that. Tell her that Gordon’s bane is her own bane. Ah, tell her that.’

He repeated the piece to the Queen in council, and she received it in a cold silence, looking furtively round about her at the lords present, for all the world (says Hay of Ormiston) as if she would see whether they believed the words or not. Her brother sat on her left, Morton the Chancellor on her right; Argyll was there, Ruthven,

Atholl, Cassilis, Eglinton. Not one of them looked up from the table, or saw her anxious peering. Atholl whispered Cassilis without moving his head, and Cassilis nodded and stared on. What did she think during that constrained silence? Gordon's bane her own bane! Could it be true? Perhaps the gibe of old Bishop Hepburn came to her timely help: 'Rabbits in a bury, and old Huntly squealing first and loudest.'

She threw up her head, like a fretful horse. 'My lords,' she said in her ringing, boyish voice, 'you have heard the message sent me by the Countess of Huntly. I am not of her mind. Gordon has tried to be my bane, but is not so now. I think Gordon's bane is Gordon's self, and fear not what he can do against me. And if not I, why need you fear? Take order now, how best to make an end of it all.' Order was taken.

Huntly was summoned before the council, and sent his wife. The Queen would not see her. The royal forces moved out of Aberdeen; John Gordon cut to pieces an outlying party; then the Earl joined hands with his son, and the pair marched on Aberdeen. The fight was on the rolling hills of Corrichie, down in the swampy valley between, over and up a burn. Their cry of 'Aboyne! Aboyne!' bore the Gordons into battle; their pride made them heroic; their pride caused them to fall. It was a case, one of the first, of the ordnance against the pipes. No gallantry—and they were gallant; no screaming of music, no slogan nor sword-work, nor locking of arms, could hold out against Kirkcaldy's cannon or Lord James's horse. They huddled about their standard and so died; some few fled into the lonely hills; but Huntly was taken, and two of his tall sons, and all three brought to the Queen. John of Findlater and Adam were in chains; the old man needed none, for he was dead. They say that when he was taken he was frantic, struggled with his captors to the last, induced so an apoplexy, stiffened and died in their arms. They guessed by the weight of him that he was dead. All this they told her. She neither looked at the body nor chose to see the two prisoners; received the news in dull silence. 'Where is the Lord Gordon?' She did ask that; and was told that he had not been engaged.

‘Coward as well as traitor,’ she gloomed; ‘what else is left him to adorn?’

‘Madam, tumbril and gallows,’ croaked Ruthven, like a hoody crow.

Next morning she awoke utterly disenchanted of the whole affair. Nothing would content her but to be quit of it. ‘I seem to smell of blood and filthy reek,’ she said to her brother James. ‘Take what measures you choose. Ruin the ruins to your heart’s content. The house was Catholic, and I suppose the stones and mortar are abominable in your eyes. Pull them down; do as you choose—but let me go.’

He asked her desire concerning the prisoners. This caught villain Findlater, for instance.

‘You seek more blood?’ she asked bitterly. ‘Take his, then. He has had his fill of it in his day; now let him afford you a share.’

Adam Gordon? She took fire at his name. ‘You shall not touch a hair of his head. I do not choose—I will not suffer it. He is for me to deal with.’

He swore that she should be obeyed; but she called in Lethington, and put the lad in his personal charge, to be brought after her to Stirling. At this time Lethington was the only man she could trust.

Lastly, her brother hinted at the reward of his humble services to her realm.

‘Oh, yes, yes, brother, you shall have your bonny earldom. God knows how you have wrought for it. But if you keep me here one more hour, I declare I shall bestow it on Mr. Secretary.’

He thanked her, saying that he hoped to deserve such condescension by ever closer attention to her business. She chafed and fidgeted till he was gone, then set about her escape. With a very small escort, she pushed them to the last extreme in her anxiety to be south.

There should have been something of the pathetic in this struggle of a girl to get out of throne-room and council-chamber; one might almost hear the shrilling of wings;

but Scots gentlemen fearful of their treadings must be excused for disregarding it. They told her at Dundee that the Duke of Châtelherault lay there, awaiting her censures. Hateful reminder!

‘What can he want with me at such an hour, in such a place as this?’

‘Madam, it is for his son-in-law’s sake he hath come so far.’

She flamed forth in her royalest rage. ‘Is the Lord Gordon so poor in heart? Can he not beg for himself? Can he not lie? Can he not run? He can hide himself, I know, while his kinsmen take the field. Let him learn to whine also, and then he will be armed cap-à-pie.’ The old Duke was refused: let the Lord Gordon surrender himself at Stirling Castle.

Thither went she, shivering in the cold which followed her late fires; and sat in the kingly seat to make an end of the Gordons. Thither then came the young lord whom she had once chosen to bewitch, walking upright, without his sword. He could not take his eyes from her face when he stood before her; nor could she restrain her fury, though many were present; no, but she leaned forward, holding by the balls of the chair, and drove in her hateful words fiercely and quick.

‘Ah, false heart, you dare to meet me at last!’

He said, ‘I have offended you, and am here at your mercy.’

‘What mercy for a liar?’

‘There should be none.’

‘For a disobedient servant?’

‘None, madam, none.’

‘For a craven that hides when war is adoing?’

He answered her steadily. ‘Whether is that man the greater coward who fears such taunts as these, and for fear of them does hardily; or he that refuses to draw sword upon his sovereign, though she throw in his face his refusal? If I was able to dare

your enmity, it is a small thing to me that now I must have your scorn. There is no man in this place shall call me craven; but from your Majesty I care not to receive the name, because I am proud to have deserved it.'

This was well spoken, had she not been too fretful to know it.

'Do you think, sir,' cried she, 'to scold me? Do you think me so light as to forget? I am of longer memory than you. Trust Gordon, said you! Trust Gordon? I would as lief trust Judas that sold his master, or Zimri that slew his.'

Young Gordon held his peace, not knowing how to wrangle with a woman. At the door there was some commotion—hackbutters looking about for orders, the captain of the guard forbidding the entry, his hand uplifted to shut men out. They told her that Lady Huntly was there.

'Let her in,' says the Queen. 'I will show her this son of hers.'

The widow came, feeling her way down the hall; distracted with grief, using her hands like a blind man. Beside her, really leading her, was a tall girl, exceedingly handsome, dark-haired, pale, with proud, shut lips. She looked before her, at nothing in particular—neither at the young Queen stormy on her throne, nor at the circle of watchful men about her, nor at her brother's bowed head, nor at the full doorways. She saw nothing, seemed to take no part, to feel no shame. Except the Queen only, she seemed the youngest there; with the Queen, whose eyes she held from the beginning, she was the only girl among these grim-regarding men.

'Who is that? Who is that girl?' the Queen asked Lethington, without ceasing to look.

'Madam, it is the Lady Jean Gordon.'

'She has a frozen look, then. Why does she not see me? Is she blind?'

'They say she is proud, madam.'

'Proud? What, to be a Gordon?'

She watched her the whole time of the process, finding her a cold copy of her brother, admitting freely her great beauty, admiring (while she grudged) her impassivity. She herself was all on edge, quivering and intense as a blown flame, her face hued like the dawn, her eyes frosty bright. The other was so still! But the Queen was never quiet. Her eyelids fluttered, the wings of her nose; her foot tapped the stool; she saw everything, heard every breath. Jean Gordon had no colour, and might have been carved in stone—a sightless, patient and dumb goddess, staring forward out of a temple porch. Huddling in her great chair, resting her chin on her hand, her elbow on her knee, Queen Mary watched her closely, sensing an enemy; and all this while Lady Huntly called upon God and man to testify to Gordon's bane.

'Malice,'—thus she ended her wailing,—'Malice hath wrought this woe; far-reaching, insatiable malice! There was one that craved a fair earldom, and another the fair trappings of a house: there was one must have the land, and another the good blood. Foul fare they all—they have their desires in this world! Where is Huntly? He is dead. Where is my fine son John? Dead! dead! Where is Adam, my pretty boy? Fetters on his ankles, madam, the rats at his young knees. Come, come, come: you shall have all the Gordons. There you have the heir, and here the widow, and here the fatherless lass. Let them plead for your mercy if they care. I have no voice left but a cry, and no tears but bloody tears. What should I weep but blood?'

The Queen still looked at Jean Gordon. 'Do you plead, mistress?' she asked her.

'I do not, madam.'

She turned unwillingly to Gordon. 'What do you plead, sir?'

'Nothing, madam.'

She flew out at them all. 'Insolence! This is not to be borne. You think to save your faces by this latter pride. You should have been proud before—proud enough not to promise and to lie. You expect me to be humble, to sue you to plead! If my mercy is not worth your asking, it is not worth your receiving. My Lord Gordon, surrender

yourself to the law's discretion. Madam, you gain nothing by your reproaches; and you, young mistress, nothing by your silence. The council is dissolved.'

Lord Gordon walked into ward. The Queen told Lethington that all the forms of law must be observed; by which Lord Gordon's execution was to be understood.

When she reached Holyrood she sent for Adam Gordon: this shows you that a thaw had set in. She received him in private, alone. This proves that she wanted something yet from the Gordons.

The lad stood shamefully by the door, red with shame, and by shame made sullen. But the Queen had melted before he came; the tears stood waiting in her eyes. 'Oh, Adam, Adam Gordon, they have hurt you! And you have hurt me!' She held out her arms.

He looked at her askance, he fired up, he gulped a sob; and then he jumped forward into the shelter of her and cried his heart out upon her bosom. After a time of mothering and such-like, he sat by her knee and told her everything.

His father's exorbitant pride, Findlater's ambitions, the clamours of the clan and want of ready pence, had undone the house of Huntly. Findlater was restless. He knew that the country would have him chief; he knew that he was a better man than his father or the heir; and old Huntly knew it too, and would never lag behind. His brother Gordon, said Adam, was an honest man. For why? He had refused to bear arms against her Majesty, when it came to that or ruin. That hurt him so much with the kindred that he had gone away. If he was a coward, Adam held, such cowardice was very noble courage. 'And be you sure, madam, from what I am telling you, that he loves you over-well.'

'He should love his wife, my child.'

'His wife, indeed! Not he!' cried Adam. 'Why, he loved your Majesty from the very first, and begged you to trust him. And should he go back upon his word?'

'Well,' said the Queen, smiling, 'maybe I will try him again.'

‘So please your Majesty, think of this,’ Adam said. ‘A man, they say, weds with his hand. But he loves not with the hand.’

‘Would you wed with the hand, boy?’

He blushed. ‘I would, madam, if I must. But I would cut it off first.’

The Queen was delighted with him. She asked about his sister—was very curious. How old was his sister Jean? She was told. Nineteen years! Younger than herself, then—and looking so much older. Was she affianced? Not yet? What made the men such laggards in the North? She looked proud and cold: was she so indeed?

‘She is cold,’ says Adam, ‘until you warm her.’

‘A still girl,’ says the Queen.

And Adam, ‘Ay, deep and still.’

The Queen became pensive.

‘I think I might be pleased with her in time.’

Adam knew better. ‘No, no, madam. She is not one for your Majesty.’

‘How so?’

‘Madam, so please your Majesty, when you love it is easy seen, and when you hate also. All your heart beats in your face. But Jean hides her heart. If she loves, you will never see it. If she hates, you will never know it, until the time comes.’

‘And when should that be, Adam?’

‘Eh,’ says he, ‘when she has you fast and sure.’

This singular character attracted the Queen. She thought much of Lady Jean Gordon, and for many days.

Hateful ceremonies were enacted over the ruins of the house of Huntly. The old Earl in his coffin was set up in the Parliament-house and indicted of his life’s offence: a brawling indeed in the quiet garden of death. They flung shame upon the witless old

head; they stripped the heedless old body of the insignia it wore. The Queen made a wry face when she heard of it.

‘Whose is the vulture-mind in this?’ she asked, but received no reply from her stony brother. She bade them stop their nasty play and deliver up the corpse to Lady Huntly to be buried. Then she learned that the widow and her daughter and the condemned lord had been present. She turned pale: ‘I had no hand in this—I had no hand!’ she cried out breathlessly, and was for telling the mourners. Adam Gordon told her that they would be very sure of it.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘I will trust them to be as true-minded as thou.’

She shortly refused to allow Gordon’s execution, and told her brother so.

‘You and your friends,’ said she, ‘have paddled your hands long enough. Go you to your homes and wash. The Lord Gordon shall go to Dunbar to await my pleasure.’

‘Tell him,’ she said to Adam, ‘that because he asked not his life I give it him; and say also that I trust him to make no escape from Dunbar. Remind him of his words to me aforetime. If I trust him again he must not prove me a fool.’

They say that, at this pungent instance of royal clemency, Lady Huntly broke down, fell before her, and would have kissed her feet. The Queen whipped them under her gown.

‘Get up, madam. But get up! That is no place for the afflicted. You do not see your daughter there.’

It was very true. Lady Jean stood, composed and serious.

‘How shall I find the way into that fenced heart?’ thinks the Queen.

But now she turned her face eagerly towards England, whither, Mr. Secretary Lethington assured her, ran an open, smiling road.

CHAPTER VIII THE DIVORCE OF MARY LIVINGSTONE (To an

Italian Air)

The ranging eye of the Muse, sweeping up the little with the big, rediscerns Monsieur de Châtelard, like a derelict ladybird, tide-swept into Scotland once more. It is true, unfortunately, that you have not yet done with this poet, though the time is at hand.

He came warily pricking back in October; and, nosing here and there, found a friend in a certain portly Italian gentleman, by name Signior David, who professed to be deeply attached to him on very short notice, and whose further employment was, discoverably, that of foreign secretary to her Majesty. Needing alliances—for his venture was most perilous—Monsieur de Châtelard had sought him out; and found him writing in a garret, wrapped in ample fur. A cup of spiced wine stood by him, a sword and toothpick lay to hand: no Italian needs more. He was a fine, pink, fleshy man, with a red beard, fluff of red hair in his ears, light eyelashes, blue eyes. His hair, darker than his beard, was strenuous and tossed.

He was not very clean, but his teeth were admirable. Monsieur de Châtelard, coming in with great ceremony, credentials in hand, hoped that he might have the satisfaction of making Signior David a present.

The Italian was franchise itself. ‘Per la Madonna, my lord, you may make me many presents. I will tire you out at that pastime.’ He ran his eye over the Marquis D’Elbœuf’s letter. ‘Aha, we have here Monsieur de Châtelard, poet, and companion of princes! Sir,’ said he, ‘let two adventurous explorers salute each other. If I were not a brave man I should not be here; still less would your honour. A salute seems little testimony between two such champions. You are Amadis, I am Splandian. We should embrace, Monsieur de Châtelard.’

They did; the poet was much affected. ‘I come with my life in my hands, Signior David.’

‘Say, rather, on the tips of your fingers, dear sir!’

‘You see in me,’ continued the Frenchman, ‘a brave man. You said as much, and I thank you. But you see more. You see a poet.’

‘Aha!’ cries the other, tapping his chest with one finger; ‘and here is the little fellow who will sing your verses as merrily as you make them.’

‘Allow me to perorate,’ says Monsieur de Châtelard. ‘You see also, signore, a disgraced lover of the Queen, who nevertheless returns to kiss the hand that smote him.’

‘Sanguinaccio! my good friend,’ Signior David replied: ‘I hope I don’t see a fool.’

Monsieur de Châtelard considered this aspiration with that gravity it deserved. He hesitated before he made answer. ‘I hope not, Signior David,’ he said wistfully; ‘but, as a lover, I am in some doubt. For a lover, as you very well know, is not (by the nature of his case) many removes from a fool. He may be—he is—a divine fool. Fire has touched his lips, to make him mad. He speaks—but what? Noble folly! He does—but what? Glorious rashness!’

‘Undoubtedly,’ said the Italian. ‘But does he not know—when a Queen is in the case—that he has a neck to be wrung?’

‘He knows nothing of such things. This is the sum of his knowledge—I love! I love! I love!’

The Italian looked at him with calmness. ‘I speak for my nation,’ he said, ‘when I assure you that an Italian lover knows more than that. He considers means, and ends too. Hungry he may be; but how shall he be filled if you slit open his belly? He may be thirsty; but if you cut his throat? However, I am speaking into the air. Let us be reasonable. How can I serve you, dear sir?’

‘Signior David,’ says the poet, ‘I shall speak openly to you. Howsoever brave a man may be, howsoever dedicated to impossible adventure, there is one wind which, blowing through the forest, must chill him to the heart. It is the wind of Indifference. By heaven, sir, can you sing before mutes, or men maimed of their hands? And how

are you and I to do admirable things, if no one admires, or cares whether we do them or not? The thought is absurd. Here, in this grey Scotland, which is Broceliande, the enchanted forest hiding my princess, I suffer acutely from my solitude. Formerly I had friends; now I have none. Sir, I offer you my friendship, and ask yours again. Be my friend. Thus you may serve me, if you will.'

The Italian took up the fringe of his beard and brushed his nose with it. 'I must know one little thing first. What do you want with your enchanted princess in the middle of your forest? Everything?'

Monsieur de Châtelard opened wide his arms, strained them forward, clasped them over his bosom, and hugged himself with them.

'Everything,' he said; and the Italian nodded, and sank into thought.

'If I assist you to that, good sir,' says he presently, looking at his client, 'it will be a very friendly act on my part.'

'Sir,' replied the Frenchman, 'I require a friendly act.'

Signior David looked down, ever so lightly, at the jewel in his hand, which the poet had put there. 'But!' and he raised his eyebrows over it, 'it will be impossible for future rhapsodists to devise an act more friendly than this! It might be—I do not say that it will be, for I am a simple scribe, as you see—it might be a partaking which Achilles would never have allowed to Patroclus.'

'But you, signore, are not Achilles,' urged Monsieur de Châtelard.

The Italian shrugged. 'I have not yet found Achilles in this country; but many have offered themselves to be Patroclus. 'Come,' he added, with a pleasant grin, 'Come, I will serve you. We will be friends. For the moment I recommend discretion. Her Majesty returned but two days ago, and is already in the midst of affairs. This annoys her extremely. She thought she had done with business and might begin her dancing. But I cannot think that she will dance very long, the way matters are tending.'

Monsieur de Châtelard went away, to brace himself for the opening scene of a new act. He came often back again to see his friend, to submit to his judgment such and such a theory. How should the lover encounter his mistress, against whose person he had dared, but not dared enough, the storming of the sweet citadel? Here was the gist of all his inquiry.

‘Show yourself, dear sir, show yourself!’ was his friend’s advice, whose own tactics consisted in never showing himself and in making his absence felt.

The Frenchman, finally, did show himself, with very little result one way or the other. The Queen, occupied as she had been with Huntly’s ruin, and now with the patching up of a comfortable fragment out of it, hardly knew that he was there. This was the way of it. A lightly-built young man with a bush of crimped hair sprang out of the press in hall at the hour of the coucher, and fell upon his knees. ‘Ha, Monsieur de Châtelard, you return?’ If she smiled upon him, it was because she smiled on all the world when the world allowed it.

‘Sovereign, the poor minstrel returns!’

‘I hope he will sing more tunefully. I hope he will follow the notes.’

‘All the notes of the gamut, Princess; faithfully and to the utterance.’

She nods and goes her way, to think no more about him.

From this unsubstantial colloquy, the infatuated gentleman drew the highest significance. Why, what are the notes of the chant which a lover must follow? There is but one note; the air is a wailing monotone: Hardiesse, Hardiesse, Hardiesse! O Queen, potent in Cyprus, give your vassal effrontery!

Amantium iræ! She had hopes that the piping times were come, with an air cleaner for the late storms. She had won back young Adam Gordon, as you know, and sealed him to her by kisses and tears. She had hopes of his elder brother, now a faithful prisoner at Dunbar. James Earl of Moray proved a kinder brother than Lord James Stuart had ever been; Ruthven was gorged, somnolent now, like a sated eagle,

above the picked bones of Huntly. Morton was at Dalkeith, out of sight, out of mind; Mr. Secretary wrote daily to England, where Sir James Melvill haggled with bridegrooms; Mr. Knox reported his commission faithfully done. He had laboured, he said, and not in vain. Her Majesty knew that the two lords, Bothwell and Arran, had been reconciled. He took leave to say that, since her expedition to the North, he had rarely seen a closer band of friendship between two men, seeming dissimilar, than had been declared to every eye between the Earls Arran and Bothwell.

The news was good, as far as it went; it made for the peace which every sovereign lady must desire. So much she could tell Mr. Knox, with truth and without trouble. But—but—the Earl of Bothwell came not to the Court. He had been seen in town, in September, when she was fast in the hills; he was now supposed to be at Hailes; had been at Hamilton, at Dumbarton, at Bothwell in Clydesdale. Why should he absent himself? If by staying away he hoped to be the more present, he had his desire. The Queen grew very restless, and complained of pains in the back. What he could have had to do with these is not clear; but the day came very soon when she had a pain in the side—his work.

That was a day when there was clamour in the quadrangle, sudden rumour: the raving of a man, confused comment, starting of horses, grounding of arms; the guard turned out. The Queen was at prayers—which is more than can be said for the priest who should have lifted up her suffrages; for if she prayed the mass through, he did not. The poor wretch thought the Genevans were after him, and his last office a-saying. Whatever she thought, Queen Mary never moved, even though (as the fact was) she heard quick voices at the chapel doors, and the shout, ‘Hold back those men!’

She found Lethington waiting in the antechapel when she entered it. He was perturbed.

‘Well, Mr. Secretary, what have my loving subjects now on hand?’

He laughed his dismay. ‘Madam, here is come, with foam on his lips, my Lord of Arran, the Duke’s son.’

‘Doth he foam so early?’ says she. ‘Give him a napkin, and I will see him clean.’

Presently they admitted the disordered man, frowning and muttering, much out of breath, and his hair all over his face. Kirkcaldy of Grange held his arm; the Secretary and Lord Lindsay hovered about him; through the half-open door there spied the anxious face of Des-Essars.

‘Speak, my Lord Arran,’ says the Queen.

‘God save us all, I must, I must!’ spluttered Arran, and plunged afresh upon his nightmare.

If that can be called speech which comes in gouts of words, like tin gobbling of water from a neck too narrow, then Lord Arran spoke. He wept also and slapped his head, he raved, he adjured high God—all this from his two knees. Mystery! He had wicked lips to unlock. He must reveal horrid fact, devilish machination, misprision of treason! God knew the secret of his heart; God knew he would meet that bloody man half-way. In that he was a sinner, let him die the death. Oh, robber, curious robber! To dare that sacred person, to encompass it with greedy hands—robbery! God is not to be robbed—and who shall dare rob the King, anointed of God? Such a man would steal the Host from the altar. Sorcery! sorcery! sorcery!

When he stopped to gasp and roll his eyeballs in their sockets, the Queen had her opportunity. She was already fatigued, and hated noises at any time. ‘Hold your words, my lord, I beg of you. Who is your bloody man? Who steals from a king, and from what king steals he? Who is your sorcerer, and whom has he bewitched? Yourself, by chance?’

Arran turned her the whites of his eyes—a dreadful apparition. ‘The Earl of Bothwell’—he spoke it in a whisper—‘the Earl of Bothwell did beguile me.’

‘Then I think he did very idly,’ said the Queen. ‘He has been profuse of his sorcery.

Tell your tale to the Lord of Lethington, and spare me.'

And away she went in a pet. Let the Earl of Bothwell come to her or not, she did not choose to get news of him through a fool.

Yet the fool had had seed for his folly. He was examined, produced witnesses; and his story bore so black a look that the council confined him on their own discretion until the Queen's pleasure could be known. Then her brother, Mr. Secretary and others came stately into her cabinet with their facts. Mr. Knox, said they, had waited upon the Earl of Bothwell to urge a reconciliation with Lord Arran. The Hepburn had been very willing, had laughed a good deal over the cause of enmity—a kiss to a pretty woman, etc.—in a friendly manner. The two lords had met, certain overtures were made and accepted. Very well; her Majesty had observed with what success Mr. Knox had done his part. But wait a little! Friendship grew apace, until at last it seemed that the one Earl cared not to lose sight of the other. Incongruous partnership! but there were reasons. A few weeks later my Lord of Bothwell invites his friend to supper, and then and there proposes the ravishment of the Queen's person—no less a thing!

At this point of the recital her hand, which had been very fidgety, went up to her lip, pinched and held it.

'Continue, my lord,' she said, 'but—continue!'

'I am slow to name what I have been slow to believe,' says my lord of Moray, conscious of his new earldom, 'and yet I can show your Majesty the witness.'

The plan had been to surprise her on her way from Perth to the South, take her to Hamilton, and marry her there by force to the Earl of Arran. Bothwell was to have been made Chancellor for his share. He had asked no greater reward. The Queen looked down to her lap when she heard this. What more? My lord of Arran concealed his alarms for the moment, and told no one; but the secrecy, the weight of the burden, worked upon him until he could not bear himself. Before the plot was

ripe he had confessed it to half-a-dozen persons. Bothwell threatened him ravenously; his mind gave way—hence his frantic penance. Here was a budget of treason for the Queen to take in her hands, and ponder, wildly and alone. Alone she pondered it, in spite of all the shocked elders about her.

If he had done it! If he had—if he had! Ah, the adventure of it, the rush of air, the pounding horse, and the safe, fierce arms! Marry her to Arran, forsooth, and possess her at his magnificent leisure: for of course that was the meaning of it. Arran and his Hamiltons were dust in the eyes of Scotland, but necessary dust. He could not have moved without them. Thus, then, it was planned—and oh! if he had done it! So well had she learned to school her face that not a man of them, watching for it, expecting it, could be sure for what it was that her heart beat the tattoo, and that the royal colours ran up the staff on the citadel, and flew there, straining to the gale. Was it maiden alarm, was it queenly rage, that made her cheeks so flamy-hot? It was neither: she knew perfectly well what it was. And what was she going to do in requital of this scandalous scheme? None of them knew that either; but she again knew perfectly well what she was about. She was about to give herself the most exquisite pleasure in life—to deal freely, openly, and as of right, with her secret joy; to handle in the face of all men the forbidden thing, and to read into every stroke she dealt her darling desire. None would understand her pleasure, none could forbid it her; for none could under-read her masked words. And her face, as glacial-keen as Athena’s, like Antigone’s rapt for sacrifice; her thoughtful, reluctant eyes, her patient smile, clasped hands, considered words—a mask, a mask! Hear the sentences as they fell, like slow, soft rain, and listen beneath for the exulting burthen: ‘If he had! Oh, if he had!’

‘My lords, this is a fond and foolish adventure, proceeding from a glorious heart to a distempered head. My dignity may suffer by too serious care for it. But as I may not permit any subject of mine to handle my person, to deal familiarly with my person, even in thought, I must take as much notice of it as the fact deserves. Let the Lords

Arran and Bothwell be committed to ward during pleasure. Prepare such writs as are needful. They shall see my sign-manual upon them.'

She rose, they with her, and went across to the curtain of the private rooms; she held the curtain as she stayed to look back.

'Be secret, Mr. Secretary, and swift.'

'I shall obey your Majesty in all things.'

Sitting alone and very still, she wrought her hardest to be offended at this tale, as became a sovereign lady. She bit her red lip over it, frowned, covered her eyes—acting a horror which she could not feel. Resolutely then she uncovered them again, to look it in the face and see it at its worst. But what she saw, and exulted to see, was a Man. And the face of the man was broad-jowled, flushed, and had a jutting under-jaw; its mouth snarled as it laughed, its eyes were bloodshot and hardily wicked, it was bearded from the throat. Wicked, daring, laughing Bothwell—hey, yes, but a Man!

His plot—how could she but admire it as a plot? It was a chain of fine links. Arran was heir-presumptive, and would hold the South; Arran's sister married to Huntly's son—there's for the North. In the midst, Bothwell with the wittold's wife—herself. Now, if that were the plan, then Bothwell was her lover. Observe the plain word: her lover, not her adoring slave. Also, if that were the plan, and Arran a catspaw, then Bothwell would be her master. Another plain word for a plain proposal, with which no woman, be she chaste or frail, is altogether offended.

Certainly this young woman was not offended, as she dallied with each thought in turn—weighing, affecting to choose. Lover! Master! This saucy, merry robber. How should she be offended? It was only a thought. Lancelot had loved his queen, and Tristram his. Let the plot be put before these two to judge, Lancelot would have laughed and Tristram grieved. Arran had been like Tristram, and she curled her lip to think of him, and laughed aloud as she chose for Lancelot. Ah, how can you be

offended with Love and his masterful ways? Or with the blithe lover, who laughs while he spoils you? It is son naturel; and must we not follow our nature? Love, which made George Gordon glum, made Bothwell merry. He would go, humming the same southern air, to battle or to bride-bed, to midnight robbery or the strife of love. He was a man, do you see? They had such in France, a plenty; but in Scotland what had they but pedlars, hagglers, cattle-drovers, field-preachers? What other in Scotland would have shaped such a plan as this, and gaily opened it to a fool? The Earl of Morton, do you suppose—that thick schemer? Her brother Moray, the new Earl, sour, careful merchant of his store? Dead old Huntly, John of Findlater, wordy, bickering hillmen? Or George Gordon, chastened and contrite at Dunbar? Not one of them, not one. Gordon was her lover—accorded. But Gordon made eyes,—and this other, plans to carry her off. Oh, here is the difference between a boy's kisses and a man's. The one sort implies itself, the other all the furious empery of love.

The slim, pale, wise young witch that she looked—sitting here alone, spelling out her schemes, glancing sidelong from her hazel eyes! Tenez, she was playing with thoughts, like a girl hot upon a girl's affair. Not thus meditates a prince upon his policy! She began to walk about, looked out of window, fingered the arras; and all the while was urging herself to princely courses. As a prince, she would certainly make a high alliance; as a prince, she must show disorderly subjects that she was not to be touched too familiarly. The man must be reminded; prison walls would cool his fevers. Let him think of her in confinement. When he came out she would be affianced, perhaps wedded—safe in either case. Then it would be lawful to see him again, and—and—oh, what a laughing Lancelot went there!

She kept her own counsel, having made up her own mind, and contrived to seem severe without being so. The Earl of Arran was sent to Dumbarton, a nominal confinement; but Bothwell was warded in Edinburgh Castle, the length of a street away. 'He is more dangerous, it seems, the farther off he is lodged,' she gave as her reason. It was easy to learn that he made good cheer, kept a generous table, saw his

friends and had all the Court news; not quite so easy to pretend not to learn it. Yet, I suppose, she knew by the next day everything that he had said or done overnight. Des-Essars was go-between, not officially, of course, but as by accident. Few beside Mary Livingstone remarked that this discreet and demure youth was off duty for half the day at a time. Then Bishop Hepburn, my lord's reprobate, chuckling uncle, came to Edinburgh, and sauntered up and down the hill as he chose; an old hand at a game as old as Troy town. Playing a round at cards with the Queen, he treated the late escapade as a family failing. But this was a false step of his: the Queen was not to be caught.

'When you say that the thing was folly, you are more cruel than I have been. I have punished your nephew for presumption and crime, but have never accused him of being a fool. However, since you are in a position to judge, I am willing to take it from you.'

He stood corrected, but did not cease to observe. The Queen's circumspection filled him with wonder, and at the same time taught him, by its accuracy, all he wanted to know. His lesson pat, he went up to the Castle again.

'Nephew,' he said, 'the cage-door is not set open, but I believe you have only to turn the handle when you please.'

'I shall not turn it just yet awhile, my good lord bishop,' said the Earl, playing a tune upon his knee; 'I find this a fine post of observation.'

It was Mary Livingstone who first found out the truth of matters, and by plunging into the fire to save her mistress succeeded in nothing but burning herself. When, after a sharp examination, she learned where Des-Essars had spent his free days, she could not contain herself. 'Fine use for pages! Fine use!'

This provoked a quarrel. The Queen stamped her foot, flung up and down, shed tears. 'You are too masterful, my girl, too much the husband. You mistake a game and play for a bout-at-issue. I do not choose to be mistressed by a maid of honour.

There must be an end of this.'

Livingstone listened gravely. 'Do with me as you will, madam. Put me in my place. What is your pleasure?'

'To rule my people, child.'

'Rule, madam, rule. Command me in anything. Forbid me everything, but one thing.'

'I shall forbid you what is unwholesome for you, and for me also.'

'You shall not forbid me to love you,' said the maid, very white.

'Nay, that I cannot do!' cried the Queen, laughing and weeping at once. So they kissed.

But, for all that, she removed Livingstone from her side, and chose Fleming. Mr. Secretary, acceptable widower in that lady's sight, rubbed his hands over the choice; and Fleming herself was so sweetly gratified that nobody could grudge her her promotion. She was a gentle-natured, low-voiced, modest girl, with the meek beauty of an angel in a Milanese picture. Older than the Queen, she looked younger; whereas Livingstone was younger and looked older. No doubt this one felt her fall; but, being as good as gold and as proud as iron, she held her head the higher for her lower degree, and smiled benevolently at the raptures of the new favourite.

'My dear,' she said to Fleming, 'do not think that I grudge thee. In truth, I do not. What I said was done advisedly. I knew what must come of it; I sought it, and shall put up with it. I have a deal to think on, these days, and my thoughts will be my night-company.'

'She will never love me as she loves thee,' says Fleming; and was answered:

'I care not greatly if she do or no; nor will I measure loves with any one. Our affair the now is to get her fast wedded.'

'So saith Mr. Secretary at all hours,' said Fleming.

But Livingstone tossed her head. ‘Fine he knows the heart of a lass, your Lethington body!’

Fleming looked serious. ‘He hath spoken to me of my Lord of Lennox,’ she said, in a lower tone. ‘This lord is near akin to our mistress; nearer, if the truth were known, than the Duke. He hath a likely son in England, a noble young man—my Lord of Darnley. The Queen of England holds him dear, and (they say) looketh to him to be her heir.’

Livingstone made an outcry. ‘Then she looketh askew! It is well known to her and hers who the heir of England is. Who should it be but our own lady?’

But Fleming persisted in her quiet way. ‘Mr. Secretary speaks of him as a hopeful prince—having seen and had speech with him. I do but use his own words. Sir James Melvill writes of him. Mr. Randolph owns him to be something, though unwillingly. And, says Mr. Secretary, we may depend upon it that when Mr. Randolph admits some grace in a Scots lord, there is much grace.’

Livingstone’s open eyes showed that the thing had to be considered. ‘There may be some promise in all of this,’ says she. ‘What you tell me of Mr. Randolph gives me thoughts. Had he nothing more to own? Has Mary Beaton got nothing from him?’ English Mr. Randolph, you must know, was apt to open his heart to Mary Beaton when that brown siren called for it.

‘He told Mary Beaton,’ Fleming replied, ‘that the Queen of England valued one lord no more than other, until—until—I know not how to put it. In fine, he said, that if any lord of her court was sought after by another, then his Queen would need that lord more than any other. Do you follow?’

‘Ay,’ says Livingstone, ‘I follow thee now. My lord of Darnley, he is called? Why, let him come up then: we can but look at him.’

‘Oh, my dear chuck,’ Fleming protested, ‘princes are not wed by the eyes’ favour.’

‘They have the right to be,’ said her mate; ‘and it is only thus, let me tell you, that

our Queen will be well wedded.' She grew exceedingly serious. 'Look you, Fleming, she is in danger, she is dangerous. I know very well what is passing up and down between this and the Castle rock. Ask me not—seek not to learn. It is not enough for her that she contract with this man or that. I tell you, she must want him.'

Fleming blushed painfully, but there was no gainsaying the truth. 'It is true, she hath a great spirit.'

'Ay,' muttered Livingstone grimly, 'and needeth a greater.'

'They say,' Fleming continued, 'that the Lord Darnley's is a royal soul.'

And Livingstone ended the council. 'Let the young man come up. We can but look at him.'

Mary Livingstone, the divorced, had a secret of her own, but made very light of it. The Master of Sempill demanded her person; said he could not be denied. Her father was willing, and his father more than willing; yet she laughed it all away. 'I am husband of the Queen of Scots,' she said, 'or was so yesterday. What should I do with the Master?'

The old lord, her father, tapped his teeth. 'You speak pleasantly, daughter, of a pleasant privilege of yours. But the Master is a proper man, who must have a better answer.'

'Let him bide till I am ready,' says the good Livingstone.

'I doubt he will do it, my lass. He may spoil.'

'Then he is not worth the having, my lord,' replied the maid. 'What use have I for perishable goods?'

The Master chose to wait; and when the Court moved to Saint Andrews he waited in Fife.

The Court went thither with various great affairs in train, whose conduct throve in that shrill air. The Queen would work all the forenoon with Lethington and her

useful Italian, play all the rest of the day, and to bed early. She played at housewifery: bib and tucker, gown pinned back, all her hair close in a clean coif. The life was simple, the air of homely keenness, the weather wintry; but the great fire was kind. All about her made for healthy tastes; inspired the hale beauty of a life within the allotted fence, a taskwork smoothly done, and God well pleased in His heaven. Lethington, a pliant man, lent himself to the Queen's humour; Signior David was never known to be moody; there were Adam Gordon and Des-Essars to give their tinge of harmless romance—a thin wash, as it were, of water-colour over the grey walls. Sir James Melvill, too, who had been to England upon the high marriage question, and returned, and was now to go again, arrived, full of importance, for last words. It had come to this, that the Queen was now to choose a husband.

Sir James was struck by her modest air, that of a tutored maid who knows that she is called to matronhood. 'Ecce ancilla Domini!' In truth she was listening to those very words.

'I shall strive in all things, Sir James Melvill, to please my good sister. Whether it be my Lord Robert[1] or my cousin Darnley, I trust I shall satisfy my well-wishers.'

Soft voice, lowly eyes, timid fingers! 'Who has been pouring oil upon this beading wine?' asked himself Sir James. Who indeed, but Saint Andrew, with his frosty sea-salt breath?

It was just at this time, as things fell out, that the Earl of Lennox, father to that 'hopeful prince' of Mary Fleming's report, came to Scotland, as he said, upon a lawsuit concerning his western lands. But some suspected another kind of suit altogether; among whom, for the best of reasons, were the Queen's brother James, and the Lord of Lethington the Secretary. Another was Signior David, dæmonic familiar of Monsieur de Châtelard.

[1] Lord Robert Dudley, later the too-famous Lord of Leicester.

CHAPTER IX AIR OF ST. ANDREW: ADONIS AND THE SCAPEGOAT

At Saint Andrews the Queen lodged in a plain house, where simplicity was the rule, and she kept no state. The ladies wore short kirtles and hoods for their heads; gossiped with fishwives on the shore, shot at butts, rode out with hawks over the dunes, coursed hares, walked the sands of the bay when the sea was down. The long evenings were spent in needlework and books; or one sang, or told a tale of France—of Garin de Montglane or the Enfances Vivien. Looking back each upon his life in after years, Adam Gordon was sure that he had loved her best in her bodice of snow and grey petticoat; Des-Essars when, with hair blown back and eyes alight, she had led the chase over the marsh and looked behind her, laughing, to call him nearer. She was never mistress of herself on horseback, but stung always by some divine tenant to be—or to seem—the most beautiful, most baleful, most merciless of women. And although her hues varied in the house, so did not her powers. She was tender there to a fault, sensitive to change as a filmy wing, with quick little touches, little sighs, lowering of eyelids, smiles half-seen, provoking cool lips, long searching looks. She meant no harm—but consider Monsieur de Châtelard, drawn in as a pigeon to the lure!—she must always bewitch something, girl or boy, poet or little dog; and indeed, there was not one of these youths now about her who was not crazy with love. She chose at this time to be more with them than with the maids; a boy at heart herself, she was just now as blowsed as a boy. She used to sit whispering with them; told them much, and promised more than she told.

Monsieur de Châtelard—having ventured to present himself—expanded in the sun of that Peace of Saint Andrew until he resembled some gay prismatic bubble, which may be puffed up to the ceiling and bob there until it bursts. The Queen had forgiven him his trespass and forgotten it. She resumed him on the old footing, sang with him, let him whisper in her ear, dared greatly, and supposed all danger averted by laughter. Having high spirits and high health, she was in the mood to romp. So they

played country games by the light of the fire: blind man's buff, hot codlings, Queen o' the Bean. You come to close quarters at such times. You venture: it's in the bargain. If a Queen runs to hide she shall not blame a poet who runs to seek—or she should not. When, in the early spring, Mr. Secretary was gone to Edinburgh to see the Earl of Lennox about that suit of his—lawsuit or other—the Queen went further in her frolics. In the garden one day she found a dry peascod intact, nine peas in it. There is a country augury in this. Nothing would content her but she must put it on the lintel like a dairymaid, and sit conscious in the dusk until her fate crossed the threshold. Anon there stepped in Monsieur de Châtelard with a song. When the joke was made clear to him he took it gravely. An omen, an omen!

The sense of freedom which you have when you have made your election took her fancies a-romping as well as her humours. They strayed with Lord Bothwell on the Castle rock, they visited Lord Gordon at Dunbar. Allez, all's safe now! Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die; let us take pity on our lovers, since to-morrow we are to wed. And—so we juggle with ourselves!—she wrote an unnecessary letter to the one in order that she might write an imprudent letter to the other.

'Monsieur de Gordon,' ran the first—and Adam carried it to Dunbar in his bosom—'I am content to believe that your constancy in affliction proceedeth from a heart well-affected towards me at this last. You will find me always mindful of my friends, among whom I look to reckon yourself in time to come. Attachment to the prince floweth only from good faith towards God. Holding to the one, needs must it follow that you find the other. Your brother Adam will tell you the same.—Your good mistress, Marie R.'

Then she wrote this—for Des-Essars to deliver or perish; and you may catch the throb of the pulse in the lines of the pen:—

'Monsieur de Bothwell, they tell me you deal more temperately in these days, having more space for a little thought the less your person is enlarged. They report

you to me as well in body, the which I must not grieve for; but repining in mind. Can I be sorry, or wonder at it, seeing to what gusty airs your phrenzy drove you? This glove, which I send, is for one plain purpose. You see, my lord, that the fingers are stiff where water hath wetted them of late. You offended your Queen, who had always wished you very well: the tears were for sorrow that a heart so bold should prompt a deed so outrageous.'

Lord Bothwell, when he had this letter, sat looking at it and its guest for a long while, in a stare. His mouth smiled, but his eyes did not; and he sang softly to himself, La-la-la, and a la-la-laido! A night or two later, by means of the seal upon it and his uncle's influence, he walked out of the Castle, and was presently in the Hermitage with Des-Essars. Hence he wrote to the Queen: 'O Lady, O Sovereign! I shall carry a token upon my helm, and break lances under its whisper until I die,'—but neither signed nor dated the letter.

'Say to your mistress, boy, that I gave you this; but breathe not a word of whence I wrote it. Disobey me, you who know me of old, and when I come again I will make of your skin but a leaky bottle of blood.'

Des-Essars gave his pledge, and kept it for some time.

If the Queen said nothing about all this to her maids, it is no wonder. She had done foolishly, and knew it in part, and took secret glory in it. At certain still hours of the day, when she could afford herself the luxury of lonely thought, she would go over what she had done, phrase after phrase of her letter; recover the trembling with which she had put in the glove; picture its receipt, read and re-read his words. And then, as she thought, the heat of her cheeks burnt up all thought; and, as she stayed to feel her heart beat, it drummed in her ears like nuptial music. But they frightened her, these signs and wonders; she ran away from herself—into the maids' closet, into the hall among the lounging men, into the windy weather—and cooled her cheeks with the salt sea-spray, and drowned the clamour of her heart in the rude

welcome of March.

Monsieur de Châtelard, with the lover's keen eye, saw that she was fluttered, watched her everywhere. About this time also he consulted his friend.

'Monsieur de Riccio,' he said, 'there are signs of the rising of sap. The birds pair, the festival of Saint Valentine the Bishop is come and gone. Why do I linger?'

'Peste!' said the Italian, who had other things to think of: 'how should I know?'

'By sympathy,' his friend reproached him: 'by the stricken heart. For you also have loved.'

'Dear sir,' replied the other, stretching his long legs to the full, 'I have love and to spare at this time. Or put it, I am beloved. Monsieur de Moray, her Majesty's brother, loves me dearly, or so he says; Monsieur de Lennox is his rival for my favours. Ha, they kiss my hands! I am touched; I have to decide—like a girl. To you, then, I must briefly say, The times are ripe. Go you and anoint for the bridal. I tell you that this very night—if you so choose it—you may be the happiest of men.'

Monsieur de Châtelard lifted high his head. 'Be sure of my friendship for ever, Signior David.'

He threw his cloak over one shoulder and went out.

'Pig and pig's son!' said Signior David, returning to his love-letters.

He had two letters under his hand. One told him that he might consider himself fortunate to have been chosen an instrument to further the designs of Providence in this kingdom. The Lord of Lethington (it said) was possessed of the writer's full mind upon a momentous step taken of late towards the highest seat, under God, of any in the land. 'I cannot answer,' it continued, 'for what Mr. Secretary may discover to you upon your approaching him with the words "Kirk and Realm" upon your lips, saving that, whatever it be, it will be coloured with my friendship, which hopes for yours again.' There was no name at the foot.

‘Aut Moray aut diabolus!’ however, said the Italian to himself; ‘and why the devil my Lord of Moray desires his sister to wed the heir of Lennox, I have no particle of understanding. Maybe that he hopes to ruin her with the English; maybe with the Scots. Certainly he hopes to ruin her somewhere.’

The other letter was signed ‘freely by its author—‘Matho Levenaxe’—and besought Signior David’s furtherance of his son’s, the Lord Darnley’s, interests; who had come post into Scotland upon affairs connected with his lands, and was prompted by duty and conscience ‘to lay homage at the feet of her who is, and ever must be, the Cynosure of his obedient eyes.’ There was much about merit, the Phœnix, the surcharged heart of a father, ties of blood—common properties of such letters; and the unequivocal suggestion that favour would meet favour half-way.

These documents were vastly agreeable to the Italian. They invited him to be benevolent and lose nothing by it.

One of these honourable persons desired to ruin the bride, the other to prosper the bridegroom. Well and good. And he, Signior David? What was his desire? To prosper alike with bride, bridegroom, and the exalted pair, his correspondents. Va bene, va bene. His business was therefore simple. He must engage the bride to contract herself—but with enthusiasm; for without that she would never budge. And how should that be done? Plainly, by the way of disgust. She must be disgusted with amours before she could be enamoured of marriage. And how? And how? Ha! there was Monsieur de Châtelard.

In some such chop-logic fashion his mind went to work: I do not pretend to report his words.

He lost no time in accosting Mr. Secretary, on an early day after his return to Saint Andrews, with his master-word of ‘Kirk and Realm.’ The Secretary had not much taste for Signior David. ‘I see that you have a key to my lips,’ he said. ‘You may rifle by leave, if you will let the householder know just what you are taking out of

his cupboard.'

'Eh, dear sir,' cried the other, 'how you reprove me beforehand! Your cupboard is safe for me. I wish to know how I can serve Milord of Moray; no more.'

The Secretary narrowed his eyes and whistled a little tune. 'You can serve him very simply. You write our mistress's letters? Now, the pen is in touch with the heart. There flows a tide through the pen; but after a flowing tide comes the ebb. The ebb, the ebb, Signior Davy!'

'True, dear sir——'

'Why, then, consider the wonders of the pen! It forms loving words, maybe, to the Queen our good sister, to the Most Christian King our brother-in-law, to our uncle the Cardinal, to our cousin Guise, to our loving cousin Henry Darnley; and by the very love it imparts, by tender stroke upon stroke, the ebb, Signior Davy, carries tenderness back; in smaller waves,'tis true, but oh, Signior Davy, they reach the heart! And how widely they spread out! To suffuse the great sea! Is it not so?'

'The image is ingenious and poetical,' said the Italian. 'I confess that I have a feeling for poetry. I am a musician.'

The Secretary put a hand upon his shoulder. 'Set my words to music, my man. You shall hear them sung at a marriage door. All Scotland shall sing them.'

'Do you think Monsieur de Moray will sing them?'

The Secretary touched his mouth. 'Our present music,' he said, 'should be chamber-music, not brayed from the housetops out of brass. But I am no musician. Let us talk of other things. I have May in my mood, do you know. This day, Signior David, May hath shone upon December. Do you see a chaplet on my silver pow?'

'Ah! La Fiamminga has been kind?' asked the Italian, knowing with whom he had to deal.

'You are pleased to say so,' said the Secretary. 'Know then, my dear sir, since there

are to be no secrets to keep us apart, that I am a happy man. For, sitting with our mistress upon that great needlework of theirs, I found a certain fair lady very busy over a skewered heart. “Come hither, Mr. Secretary,” saith our mistress, with that look aslant which you know as well as I do, “Come hither,” saith she, “and judge whether Fleming hath well tinct this heart.” I overlooked the piece. “Oh, madam,” say I, “the organ should be more gules: this tincture is false heraldry. And the wound goes deeper.” My fair one, in a flutter, curtsied and left the presence. Then saith our Queen, with one pretty finger admonishing, “Fie, Mr. Secretary, if you read so well now, before the letter is in your hand, what will you do when you have it in your bosom to con at your leisure?” I had no answer for her but the true one, which was and shall ever be, “Why, then, madam, I shall have it by heart, and your Majesty two lovers in the room of one.” I put it fairly, I think; at least, she thanked me. Now, am I a happy man, Master David, think you? With the kindness of my prince and the heart of my dear! Sir, sir, serve the Queen in this matter of the young Lord of Darnley. He is in Scotland now; I believe at Glasgow. But we expect him here, and——Oh, sir, serve the Queen!’

The Italian, who was fatigued by a rhapsody which did not at all interest him, wagged his hands about, up and down, like a rope-dancer that paddles the air for his balance.

‘Va bene, va bene, va bene!’ he cried fretfully. ‘Understood, my good sir. But will this serve the Queen?’

‘If I did not think so,’ returned the Secretary—and really believed this was the answer—‘if I did not think so, would my Lord of Moray, should I, press it upon you?’

Signior David shrugged—but you could not have seen it. ‘What is this young man?’ he asked.

‘It is impossible that you know so little. He is of the blood royal by the mother’s

side. He is next in title to this throne, and to the other after my mistress.'

The Italian waved all this away. 'Understood! Understood already! Do you think I am a dunce? Why am I here, or why are you here, if I am dunce? I ask you again, What is he? Is he a man? or is he a minion—a half, a quarter man? Do you know, Mr. Secretary, that he has got to serve Dame Venus? Do you know that he may drown in the Honeypot? Pooh, sir! I ask you, can he swim? He will need the faculty. I could tell you, for example, of one lord——But no! I will not.' He hushed his voice to an awed whisper, seeming to reason with himself: 'Here, upon my conscience, is a woman all clear flame, who has never yet—never yet—met with a man. Here is a Cup of the spirit of honey and wine. Who is going to set the match to kindle this quick essence! Who is about to dare? Why, why, why,—all your drabbled Scotland may go roaring out in such a blaze! Corpo di sangue e sanguinaccio!' His excitement carried him far; but soon he was beaming upon Lethington, reasonable again. 'Let us change the figure, and come down. Dame Venus is asleep as yet, but uneasy in her sleep, stirring to the dawn. She dreams—ha! And maids belated can dream, I assure you. Is this young man a Man? Lo, now! There is my question of you.'

Mr. Secretary was alarmed. His teeth showed, and his eyes did not.

'You go too near, you go too near.'

But the Italian was now calm.

'My friend,' he said, 'I am not of your race—sniffing about, nosing for ever, wondering if you dare venture. I am at least a man in this, that I dare anything with my mind.'

Mr. Secretary agreed with him. 'I assure you, Signior Davy,' he said, 'that my Lord of Darnley is a fine young man.'

The Italian threw up his hands. 'Eh—allora! All is said, and I go to work. Sir, I salute you. Addio.'

And to work he went, in the manner already indicated:—‘To draw the Queen into the net of this fine young man but one thing is needful: she must run there for shelter. She is a quail at this hour, grouting at ease in the dusty furrow. If we are to help this favoured fowler we must send over her a kite.’

Alas for friendship! His kite of election was Monsieur de Châtelard. It will not be denied that the poet did his share; but there were two kites sent up. Sir James Melvill came back from England.

Meantime it should be said that there was truth in the report. The young Lord Darnley was actually in Scotland. Some held that he was in Lord Seton’s house in the Canongate, others that Glasgow had him. There was some doubt; but all the Court knew of his presence, and talked of little else. The Queen maintained her air of tutored virgin, while Mary Livingstone openly thanked God that Scotland owned a man in it at last. This honest girl had worked herself into a fevered suspicion of everything breeched at Court.

Sir James Melvill, when he sent up his name for an audience, had to run the cross-fire of the maids’ anteroom first. Few could bear the brunt better than he.

‘H’m, h’m, fair ladies, what am I to tell you? He’s a likely lad enough for a valentine; for a kiss-and-blush, jog-o’-my-knee, nobody’s-coming, pert jessamy. Oh, ay! He can lead a dance more than a little—Pavane, Galliard, what you will of the kind: advance a leg, turn a maid about, require a little favour, and ken what to do wi’t. He hath a seat for a horse, and a rough tongue for a groom. Ay, ay! young Adonis ardent for the chase, he is; and as smooth on the chin as a mistress.’

They laughed at him, while Master Adam of Gordon, page at the door, rubbed his own sharp chin, and could have sworn there was a hair. The usher came for Sir James, and cut pretty Seton short in her clamour for more.

He found his mistress and the Italian in the cabinet, their heads together over a chapter of Machiavel. He knew the book well, and could have sworn to the look of

the close page. They sprang apart; at least Riccio sprang; the Queen looked up at the wall and did not face about for a while, but sat pondering the book, over which she had clasped her two hands. She was turning a ring about and about, round and round; and it seemed to Sir James, who saw most things, that this had been upon the book while the two heads were bent over it. They had been trying the Sortes, then!—the Sors Machiavelliana, eh?

When, after a time of suspense, she turned, to lift him a careless hand, limp to the touch and cold to kiss, he knew that she had been schooling herself. She was extremely composed—too much so, he judged; he had no belief in her languid manner. She asked him a few questions about her ‘good sister’; nothing of anybody else. What did her sister think of the marriage? Sir James lurked in the fastnesses of platitude. Her English Majesty had deeply at heart this Queen’s welfare; he turned it many ways, but always came back to that. As he had been sure she would, after a little of it, Queen Mary grew irritable, and drew out into the open. ‘Peace to your empty professions, Master Melvill. They are little to my liking. Did my sister send the Lord Darnley into Scotland?’

Here he had it. ‘Madam,’ quoth Sir James, ‘I will not affirm it. And yet I believe that she was glad for him to go.’

‘Why so? why so?’

‘I nail my judgment, madam, to this solid beam of truth, that my lord got his congé after but two refusals of it.’

‘Why should he be refused?’

‘Madam, for your Grace’s sake; because her English Majesty thinks meanly of him beside yourself.’

‘He is of royal blood—but let that be as it may. If he was first refused upon that account, why then was he afterwards allowed?’

Sir James twinkled. I have said that he, as well as the Italian, had a kite to send up,

to drive this quail into the net of marriage. He now had his opportunity to fly it. ‘Oh, madam,’ he replied, ‘this young Lord of Darnley was not the only courtier anxious to travel the North road: there was another, as your Majesty knows. And if the English Queen let one go at the last it was in regard for the other. It was for fear lest you should win my Lord Robert Dudley.’

The Queen grew red. ‘Win? Win? This is a strange word to use, Mr. Legate. Am I hunting husbands, then?’

‘It is not my word, madam. I can assure your Majesty that both the word and the suspicion are the English Queen’s. It is thus she herself thinks of my Lord Robert—as of a prize to be sought. But my Lord Darnley she calls “that long lad.”’

‘He is my cousin, and her own. He shall be welcome here when he comes—if he comes. But it mislikes me greatly to suppose him sent out from England, a scapegoat into the wilderness.’ She frowned, and bit her lip; she looked haggard, rather cruel. ‘A scapegoat into the wilderness! Robert Dudley’s scapegoat!’

You may cheapen a man by a phrase; but sometimes the same phrase will cheapen you. Hateful thought to her, that she was casting a net for Robert Dudley! And not she only; there were two panting Queens after him; and this high-descended Harry Stuart—a decoy to call one off! Sir James, greatly tickled, was about to speak again; his mouth was open already when he caught the Italian’s wary eye. That said, ‘For Jesu’s sake no more, or you spoil a fine shot.’ So Sir James held his peace. She sent away the pair of them, and sat alone.

Something bitter had been stirred, which staled all her hopes and made sour all her dreams. To ‘win’ Robert Dudley! Oh, abhorred hunt, abhorred huntress! Quick as thought came the counter query: Was it worse to hunt one man than seek to be hunted by another—to seek it, do you mind? to love the pursuit, ah, and to entreat it? There came up a vision to flood her with shame—the old vision of the laughing red mouth, the jutting beard, the two ribald eyes. These were not a hunter’s, O God;

these cared not to move unless they were enticed! These belonged to a man who waited, sure of himself and sure of his comforts, while she (like a hen-sparrow) trailed her wing to call him on. Panic seized her—her heart stood still. What had she done, wanton decoy that she was? And what had he done—with her glove? Where had he put it? Anywhere! Let it lie! Oh, but she must have it again at all costs. She must send for it. Oh, unworthy huntress, abhorred hunt!

She must have a new messenger. Adam Gordon must ride into Edinburgh, show a ring to the Earl of Bothwell, and ask for a packet of hers. He was not to speak of his journey to a soul about the Court—on his life, not a word to Des-Essars: he was not to return without the packet. 'Go now, Adam, and haste, haste, haste!' She lashed herself ill over this melancholy business, and went to bed early.

This was the night—when she had congealed herself by remorse into the semblance of a nun—this was the night of all in the year chosen by Monsieur de Châtelard for his great second essay. Rather, the Italian sought him out and urged him to it. 'Hail, sublime adventurer!' the kite-flyer had cried, the moment he met with him.

'I accept the title,' replied Monsieur de Châtelard, 'but deprecate it as prematurely bestowed.'

'Not so, my friend,' says the Italian; 'but if I know anything of women, there may be this night a very pretty mating—as of turtles in March. A word in your ear. Her Majesty has retired. So early! cry you? Even so. And why? Ah, but you shall ask me nothing more. To-morrow I shall not even inquire how you do. Your face will proclaim you.'

Monsieur de Châtelard embraced his friend. 'Be sure of my remembrance, immortal Italian.'

'I am perfectly sure of it,' answered Signior Davy; and the moment after shrugged him out of his mind. This is what your politician should always do: remember a friend just so long as he is like to be useful.

He never had speech with him again. The miserable young man, detected in a moment in filthy intention, perhaps washed out the stain by a certain dignity of carriage, whose difficulty alone may have made it noble. This fool's Queen—his peascod, melting beauty of a few weeks since—was certainly a splendour to behold, though the eyes that looked on her were dying eyes. A white splendour of chastity, moon-chilled, sharp as a sleet-storm on a frozen moor,—she had burned him before—now she struck ice into his very marrow. The caught thief, knowing his fate, admired while he dared this Queen of Snow and the North. For dare her he did.

'What have you to say, twice a dog?'

'Nothing, madam.'

'Judge yourself. Lay your soiled hands upon yourself.'

'Kill me, madam.'

'Never! But you shall die.'

He died at the Market Cross after a fortnight's preparation, as he had not lived, a gentleman at last. For, by some late access of grace which is hard to understand, she accorded him the axe instead of the rope. He sent many times for his friend the Italian, and at his latest hour, when he knew he would not come, asked the headsman to present him with his rosary. The headsman would not touch the accursed idol.

'If you touch me, you touch a thing far more accursed,' said the condemned man, 'to whom a death resembling that of his Saviour's companions in torment would be infinite honour.' He made his preparations, and said his prayers. There were people at every window.

It had happened that my Lord of Darnley, with a fine train of horsemen, having sent in his humble suit to the Queen and received an answer, witnessed the ceremony: or so they say. He divided attention with the departing guest. All observed him, that he sat his horse well—easily, with a light hand ever ready at the rein to get back the fretful head. He watched every detail of the execution, looking on as at a match of

football among sweating apprentices, with half-shut, sulky eyes. He spoke a few words to his attendants.

‘Who is our man?’

‘They say a Frenchman, my lord. Chatler by name.’

‘To whom is he speaking, then? Watch his hand at his heart. Now ’tis at his lips! He makes a bow,—will they never finish with him? How are we to break through! They should truss him.’

A young man behind him laughed; but my lord continued: ‘But—now look, look! Will he never have done? There are women at all the windows. See that French hood up there.’

‘’Tis a woman’s business, my lord. They say that this fellow——’ The young man whispered in his ear.

My lord made no sign, except to say, ‘My cousin is hard upon a forward lover.’

‘Nay, sir. Say, rather, on a lover too backward.’

He got no answer from his prince. All looked, as there fell on all a dead hush. The crowd thrilled and surged: utter silence—then a heavy stroke—all the voices began again together, swelling to one shrill cry. Châtelard, poor kite, flew a loftier course.

The cavalcade began to drive through the maze of people, pikemen going before with pikes not idle. ‘Room for the prince! Room, rogues, room!’

CHAPTER X THEY LOOK AND LIKE

He was rather stiff in the garden; rather too tall for the raftered rooms of the burgess’ house. He did not lend himself readily to the snug cheer which was the rule at Saint Andrews. Des-Essars has recorded the fancy that he was like that boy who comes home from school, and straightens himself in his mother’s embrace; ‘not because he loves her the less, but that he knows himself to be more than when, six months ago, he parted from her with tears.’ This lordly youth cropped his English words, and

stammered and blushed when he tried the French. He laughed gaily to hear the Italian staccato run its flight—like a finch that dips and rises as he wings across the meadow. ‘Monkey-speech,’ my young lord called it.

In all respects he was on the threshold. None of the deeper, inner speech of their daily commerce came near him; he ignored, because he did not see, the little tricks and chances, the colour, significance, allusiveness of it. What was the poor youth to do? He had never journeyed with the stored gallants of the Heptameron, nor whispered to the ladies of Boccaccio’s glades. He thought Bradamante a good name for a horse, and Margutte something to eat. The Queen rallied him, the maids looked out of window; Mr. Secretary exchanged glances with his Fleming, Signior David bowed and bowed. But this Italian was comfortable, seeing his ships homeward bound. In rapid vernacular, as he lay late in his bed, he told himself that the French poet could not have chosen a better night for his extinguishing.

‘That was a night, one sees, when she suddenly sickened of low company, having suddenly viewed it and been shocked: of me, and the fat Bothwell, and all these cuddling nymphs and boys. Our Châtelard was the last loathly morsel, the surfeit after the Ambassador’s bolus. Certainly, certainly! I saw her go white at his “winning” of the English favourite: how a word may stick in a gizzard! Then comes my late friend, hiding for favours under the bed. “Dio mio,” she cries, “do I live in a lupanar? O Santo Padre, let me henceforward mate only with eagles!”’

He expressed himself coarsely, being what he was; but no doubt he was perfectly right.

My Lord of Darnley, then—this eagle—was a very handsome youth, clean, buxom, and vividly prosperous. He had the most beautiful slim body you ever saw on a young man; and long legs, in whose shape he evidently—and reasonably—took delight. He had that trick of standing with his feet apart—grooms induce their horses to it with the tickling of a whip—and arms akimbo, which, with its blended savour

of the Colossus of Rhodes and a French dancer, gives a man the air of jaunty readiness for all comers, and always a hint of gallantry. His head was small and well set-on, his colour fresh; his eyes were bright and roving. Yet no one could look more profoundly stupid than he when he chose to be displeased with what was saying. His lips were red, and like a woman's; he had a strong, straight nose, and strong hair, short and curling, in colour a hot yellow. Good-natured he looked, and vain, and courageous. Mary Seton considered him a dunce, but Mary Beaton denied it. She said he was English.

The day of his coming, the Queen received him in the Long Parlour, dressed mostly in white, with a little black here and there. She stood about mid-floor, with her women, pages, and gentlemen of the household, and tried in vain to control her excitement. Those who knew her best, either by opportunity or keen study, considered that she had made up her mind already. This was a marriage, this meeting of cousins: here in her white and faint rose, shivering like the dawn on the brink of new day, with fixed eyes and quick breath—here among her maidens stood the bride. Appearances favoured the guess—which yet remained a guess. She had travelled far and awfully; but had told no one, spoken no whispers of her journeyings since that day of shame and a burning face, when she had sent Adam Gordon to Edinburgh Castle, heard Melvill's message, and scared away Châtelard to his dog's death. Not a soul knew where her soul had been, or whither it had now flown for refuge: but two guessed, and one other had an inkling—the judging Italian.

They used very little ceremony at Saint Andrews. The Queen hated it. An usher at the stair's foot called up the Prince's style, and could be heard plainly in the parlour; yet Mr. Erskine, Captain of the Guard, repeated it at the door. There followed the clatter of a few men-at-arms, a trampling, one or two hasty voices—Lethington's whisper among them (he always shrilled his s's); then the anxious face of the Secretary showed itself. The young lord, dressed in white satin, with a white velvet

cloak on one shoulder, and the collar of SS round his neck, stooped his head at the door, and went down stiffly on one knee. Behind him, in the entry, you could count heads and shoulders, see the hues of red, crimson, claret—feathers, a beam of light on a steel breastplate. He had come well squired. 'Welcome, cousin,' said the Queen shyly, in a low and calling tone. My young lord rose; two steps brought him before her. He knelt again, and would have received her hand upon his own; but she looked down brightly at his bent and golden head—looked down like a considering bird; and then (it was a pretty act)—'Welcome, cousin Henry,' she said again, and gave him both her hands. He was afoot in a moment, and above her. To meet his look downwards she must lift hers up. 'Welcome, cousin,' once more; and then she offered him her cheek. He kissed her, grew hot as fire, looked very foolish, and dropped her hands as if they burnt him.

But he led her—she not unwilling—to her chair, and sat beside her the moment she invited him. She was bashful at first, blushed freely and talked fast; he was stiff, soldierly, blunt: when she was beyond him he made no attempt to catch her up. Those bold eyes of his were as blank as the windows of an empty house. They did not at all disconcert her: on the contrary, she seemed to see in his inertia the princely phlegm, and to take delight in lowering the key of her speech to the droning formalities of an audience. The difficulty of it, to her quick, well-charged mind, was a spur to her whole being. You could see her activities at drill; the more stupid she strove to be, the more spiritual she showed. She took enormous pains to set him at his ease, and so far succeeded that (though she could not clarify his brains) she loosened his tongue and eye-strings. He was soon at his favourite trick of looking about him; passed all the maids in review, and preferred Livingstone to any: next to her Seton—'a pretty, soft rogue.' He saw and knew, but did not choose to recognise, Lady Argyll.

Certain presentations followed. Englishmen were brought up to kiss hands—tall, well-set-up, flaxen young men: a Standen, a Curzon of Derbyshire, a Throckmorton,

nephew of an old acquaintance in France, a Gresham, etc., etc. After these came one Scot. ‘Madam, my kinsman Douglas.’

There came stooping before her a certain Archie Douglas of Whittinghame, remotely of the prince’s blood, but more nearly of the red Chancellor Morton’s. He was a young man, exceedingly thin, with a burnt red face, shifty eyes, a smile, and grey hair which did not make him look old. Black was his wear, with a plain white ruff.

‘I have heard of you, Master Douglas,’ says the Queen, measuring her words. ‘You are a priest in Israel after the order of Mr. Knox.’

‘An humble minister, madam, so please your Majesty.’

‘Ah, my pleasure, sir!’ She would not look at him any more, either then or ever after. She used to call him the Little Grey Wolf. Now, whether is it better for a man to be spoken by his sovereign in discomfortable riddles, than not at all? This was the question which Archie Douglas put to himself many times the day.

The Queen would have honours nearly royal paid to the young prince. The officers of the household, the ladies, were all presented; and all must kiss his hand. But all did not. Lord Lindsay did not; Mr. Erskine did not, but saluted him stiffly and withdrew behind the throne. Mr. Secretary did it; Lord Ruthven did it elaborately; Lady Argyll changed her mind midway, and did it. The Italian secretary, last of all, went down on both his knees, and, looking him straight in the face, cried out, ‘Salut, O mon prince!’ which, under the circumstances, was too much. But the Queen was to be pleased with everything that day, it seemed, for it delighted her.

As he went home to his lodging Signior David talked to himself. ‘As well expect to weld butter and a knife, or Madonna and a fish-headed god of Egypt as the Queen with this absorbed self-lover. If she wed him not in a month she will kill him sooner than take him.’

And Des-Essars records in his Memoirs: ‘The prince pleased on horseback, whence

he should never have descended. I suspect that he knew that himself; for he straddled his legs in the house as if to keep up the illusion and strengthen himself by it. He was a fine rider. But women are not mares.'

Nevertheless, Mary Livingstone had guessed, Des-Essars had guessed, the truth or near it. This ceremony of meeting was as good as a betrothal; though why it was so, was not for them to understand. The explanation is to be sought in the chasing, flying, starting life of the soul, hunting (or being hunted) apart in its secret, shadowy world. There come moments in that wild life when the ardours of the chase slacken and tire; when, falling down to rest, the soul catches sight of itself, as mirrored in still water. That is the time when enchantment may go to work to disenchant, and show the horrible reality. 'What!' might cry this girl's soul: 'this rumpled baggage a maid royal! This highway-huntress, panting after one man or the other, thrilling like a cook-wench because that man or this has cast an eye on you! Oh, whither are fled the ensigns of the great blood? Where hides the Right Divine? Where are the emblems of Scotland, England, and France? Not in these scratched hands, not behind these filmy eyes: these are the signs of Myrrha and Pasiphaë, and sick Phædra.' Melvill had held up the glass, and she had seen herself toiling after Robert Dudley; Châtelard had wiped it, and behold her, trapped and netted, the game of any saucy master. So, in a passion of amendment, she lent to Harry Darnley all that she feared to have lost. He shared the blood she had made common: let him re-endow her. He was the prince she ought to have been. He came a-courting with the rest; but as royal suitors come—solemnly, with embassies, with treaties to be signed, and trumpets to proclaim the high alliance. To think of Bothwell's beside this courtly wooing was an impossibility. Hardy mercenary, to what had she dared stoop? To a man—God forgive her!—who would hug a burgess-wife one day, and her—'the French widow,' as he would call her—the next. Ah, horrible! So horrible, so nearly her fate, she could speak to no one of it. Simply, she dared not think of it. She must hide it, bury it, and go about her business by day. But at night, when Fleming was

asleep, she would lie staring into the dusk, her two hands at grip in her bosom, and see shadows grow monstrous on the wall: Bothwell and the wife of the High Street, and herself—Dowager of France, Queen of Scots, heiress of England—at play. She could have shrieked aloud, and whined for mercy: she seemed to be padding, like a fox in a cage, up and down, up and down, to find an issue. Harry Darnley was the issue—O Ark of Salvation! Why, she had known that the very night that Melvill came back. Afterwards, as night succeeded night, and her eyes ached with staring at the wall—she knew it was all the hope she had.

Then from her window, watching the shivering-out of Châtelard, she had seen the prince, before his credentials were presented—his beauty and strength and calm manège of his horse. Had he been pock-marked, like Francis of Alençon, his lineage would have enamelled him for her eyes. But he was a most proper man, tall and slim, high-coloured, disdainful of his company. He seemed not to know that there was a world about him to be seen. Securus judicat: Jesu-Maria! here was a tower of defence to a smitten princess who saw all the world like a fever-dream! Her own blood, her own name, age for age with her.

You see that she had her own vein of romantic poetry, that she could make heroic scenes in her head, and play in them, too, wonderful parts. She sat up in her bed one night, and shook her loose hair back, and lifted up her bare arms to the rafters. ‘My lord, I am not worthy. Yet come, brother and spouse! We two upon the throne—Scotland at our feet!’ Then, in the scene, he came to her, stooping his stiff golden head. Jove himself came not more royally into the Tower. She lay all Danaë to the gold. Trickery here. Thus body lords it over soul, and soul—the wretch—takes his hire. She knew pure ecstasy that night; for this was a mating of eagles, you must recollect. She bathed in fire, but it was clean flame. Bothwell, at any rate, seemed burnt out—him and his fierce arm, only one to spare for ‘the little French widow.’

So much explanation seems necessary of how she stood, in virginal tremor and flying cloudy blushes, white and red among her maids—to be chosen by her prince. She intended him to choose: for she had chosen already.

The prince sat at supper, late in the evening of his reception, with his light-haired Englishmen and grey-haired Archie Douglas. Forrest, his chamber-boy, with burning cheeks and eyes glassy with sleep, leaned at the door. His little round head kept nodding even as he stood. The young lord laughed and fed his greyhounds, which sat up high on their lean haunches and intently watched his fingers.

‘I shall take those horses of the Earl’s,’ he said. ‘I shall need them now. I shall have a stud, and breed great horses for my sons. See to it, Archie.’

‘By God, sir,’ said an Englishman, with hiccoughs, ‘your word may be the law and the prophets in this country, and yet no bond in England. They will ask you for sureties. Well! I say, Get your sureties first.’

My lord was not listening. He pulled a hound’s ear, screwed it, and smiled as he screwed. Presently he resumed. ‘Did you mark the greeting of Argyll’s wife, Archie Douglas? How she tried “Sir and my cousin,” and thought better of it? I made her dip, hey? A black-browed, saucy quean! What kindred to me are her father’s misfortunes?’

Archie Douglas drained his glass. ‘You hold them, Harry Darnley—the women. Yet remember you of what I told you concerning the men. Steer wide of this’—he caressed the jug—‘and fee the Italian.’

But my Lord Darnley got on to his feet, and remained there by the aid of his fists on the board. Very red in the face, and scowling, he talked with his eyes shut. ‘I shall fee the Italian with the flat blade, you’ll see. Greasy cushion of lard! A capon, a capon! And there’s your red cousin Morton for you!’

‘He is your cousin too, sir,’ says Archie, blinking.

‘What of that, man, what of that? Let him beware how he cozens me, I say. Boy, I

go to bed. Good-night to you, gentlemen.'

They all rose as he went solemnly away with the boy; then looked at one another to see who had marked him reach out for the door-jamb and pull himself through by it. Archie Douglas crowed like a cock and flapped his arms; but when the rest began to laugh he slammed the table. 'Pass the jug, you fools. There shall be japes in Scotland before long—but, by God, we'll not laugh until we're through the wood!'

News of the Court for the rest of the month was this. The Master of Sempill pled his own cause with the Queen, and was to have Mary Livingstone. He had chosen his time well; her Majesty was not for refusals just now.

'My dear, my dear, I shall need women soon, not maids,' she had said, stroking the honest face. 'You shall come back to me when you are a wife, and as like as not find me one too. Your Master is a brave gentleman. He spoke up for you finely.'

'Ay, madam, he hath a tongue of his own,' says Livingstone.

The Queen threw herself into her friend's arms. 'No Madams to me, child, while we are in the pretty bonds together, fellow cage-birds, you and I. Come now, shall I tell you a secret? Shall I?'

Livingstone, caught in those dear arms, would not look into the witching eyes. 'Your secret, my dear? What can you tell me? Finely I know your secret.'

The Queen sat, and drew the great girl down to her lap. 'Listen—but listen! Last night the prince ...': and then some wonderful tale of 'he' and 'him.' 'Ruthven says that his ring of runes hath magic in it. Some old wife, that hides at Duddingstone, and can only be seen under the three-quarter moon by the Crags, she hath charmed it. With that ring, rightly worn, she saith, a man would swim the Solway at the flood after the boat that held you. Ruthven knows the truth of it, and swears that no man can resist the power it hath. There was a case, which I will tell you some day. There is one stronger yet—most infallible: a spell which you weave at dawn. But for that there are certain things to be done—strange, strange.'

‘No more of them,’ says Livingstone; ‘you have too much charm of your own. What need of old bedeswomen have you and your likes? Ah, yes, too much charm! Tell me now, Marie; tell me the truth. Have you your glove back?’

The Queen started violently, winced as if whipped in the face and turned flame-red. Livingstone was off her lap: both stood.

‘What do you speak of? How do you dare. Who has betrayed——?’

‘Nobody. I saw that it was gone. And lately you sent Adam to the Castle.’

The Queen walked away to the window, but presently came back. ‘I think it right that you should understand the very truth. That lord has angered me. Monstrous presumption! for which, most rightly, he suffered. Believe me, I saw to it. But—but—he has a conscience, I think. Something was told me—made me suppose it. I considered—I gave long thought to the case. A queen, in my judgment, should not be harsh, for she needs friends. I took a temperate method, therefore; considering that, if he knew of my pain, perchance he would repent. So I sent Adam Gordon to Edinburgh, and believe that I did well.’ She paused there, but getting no answer, asked impatiently, ‘Am I clear to you, Livingstone?’

‘You will never clear yourself that way,’ says Livingstone. ‘You could as well expect the Rock to thaw into tears as get Bothwell to repent. That is a vile thief, that man.’

The Queen ran forward and fell upon her bosom. ‘Oh, I have been ashamed—ashamed—ashamed! The devil was within me—touching, moving, stirring me. I thought of him night and day. Wicked! I am very wicked. But I have paid the price. It is all done with long ago. I told Father Roche everything—everything, I promise you. He absolved me the day before my prince came, or I should never have received him as I did. And can you, Mary, withhold from me what the Church allows?’

Livingstone was crying freely. ‘God knows, God knows, I am none to deny thee,

sweetheart!’ she murmured as she kissed her.

Second absolution for Queen Mary.

The Court was to go to Callander House for the wedding of this fond Livingstone; but before that there was a bad moment to be endured—when Adam Gordon came back, without the glove. They had told him in Edinburgh that the Earl of Bothwell had broken bars and was away. He had gone to his country, they said, and had been heard of there, hunting with the Black Laird and others of his friends—hunting men mostly, and Englishmen too, over the border. He had sent word to George Gordon that, if he was willing, he would ‘raise his lambs, and pull him out of Dunbar for a bout with Hell’; but, said the boy, ‘Madam, my brother refused him.’

Adam had ridden into Liddesdale to find Bothwell, into the Lammermuirs, into Clydesdale: but the Earl was in none of his castles. Then he went the English road towards Berwick: got news at Eyemouth. The Earl was away. Two yawls had shipped him and his servants; had stood for the south—for France, it was thought. The glove was in his bosom, no doubt.

The Queen sent Adam away rewarded, and had in Des-Essars. ‘Jean-Marie,’ she said, ‘my Lord Bothwell hath gone oversea. Do you suppose, to France?’

‘No, madam; I suppose to Flanders.’

He seemed troubled to reply—evaded her looks.

‘Why there?’

‘Madam, there was a woman at Dunkirk——’

‘Enough, enough! Go, boy.’

She had appointed to ride that day to the hawking. The prince was to be there, with new peregrines from Zealand. Now—she would not go. Instead, she crept into her oratory alone, and, having locked the doors, went through secret rites. She stripped herself to the shift, unbound her hair, took off shoes and stockings. With two lit

candles, one in either hand, she stood stock-still before the crucifix for an hour. Chilled to the bones, with teeth chattering and fingers too stiff to find the hooks for the eyes, she dressed herself then in some fashion, and slipped quietly out. This was her third absolution. Thus she froze out of her heart the last filament of tainted flesh; and then, bright-eyed and wholesome, set her face towards the future.

CHAPTER XI PROTHALAMIUM: VENUS WINS FAIR ADONIS

Mr. Thomas Randolph, Ambassador of England to the Scottish Queen, told himself more than once that in seeking the lady of his heart he did not swerve the breadth of a hair from loyalty to the sovereign of his destinies. Yet he found it necessary to protest his wisdom in the letters he wrote to his patron, the Earl of Leicester. Mary Beaton was the Nut-brown Maid of his ballatry. ‘I do assure your lordship, better friend hath no man than this worthy Mistress Beaton, who vows herself to me, by what sweet rites you shall not ask me, the humble servant of your lordship.’

All this as it might be: Mary Beaton used to smile when twitted by her mates about the Englishman’s formalised passion, and ask to be let alone.

‘He’s not for ever at the sonnets,’ she said; ‘we discourse of England between bouts; and it may be I shall learn something worth a rhyme or two.’

They played piquet, the new game, together, and each used it as a vantage-ground. He could not keep his desires, nor she her curiosity, out of the hands.

‘Is four cards good?’ he would ask her; and when she looked (or he thought she looked) quizzingly at his frosted hair: ‘Is one-and-forty good?’

Then she must laugh and shake her head: ‘One-and-forty’s too many for me, sir.’

‘I’ve a terce to my Queen, mistress.’

But she crowed over that. ‘And I’ve a quint to a knave, Mr. Randolph; and three kings I have in my hand!’

She found out that they were not best pleased in England at the turn of affairs in

Fife.

‘My Queen, Mistress Beaton,’ said the enamoured Randolph, ‘cannot view with comfort the unqueening of a sister. Nay, but it is so. Your mistress courts the young lord with too open a face. To sit like one forsworn when he is away; or when he is present, to crouch at his feet! To beg his gauntlet for a plaything—to fondle his hunter’s whip! To be meek, to cast down the eyes; to falter and breathe low, “At your will, my lord”! Thus does not my Queen go to work.’

Mary Beaton looked wise. ‘Sir James Melvill hath reported her manner of working, sir. We are well advertised how she disports.’

‘I take your leave to say,’ replied the ambassador, ‘her plan is at once more queenly and more satisfying. For why? She charges men upon their obedience to love her. And they do—and they do! No, no, I am troubled: I own to it. If you find me backward, sweet Beaton, you shall not be harsh. How or whence I am to get temper to bear much longer with this toss-pot boy, I know not. He is the subject of my Queen; he is—I say it stoutly—my own subject in this realm. But what does he? How comports himself? “Ha, Randolph, you are here yet?” This, as he parades my Lord Ruthven before me, with a hand on his shoulder, my faith! I tell you, a dangerous friend for the young man. And one day it was thus, when we passed in the tennis-court. “Stay, Randolph, my man”—his man! “I had something for your ear; but it’s gone.” It’s gone, saith he! Oh, mistress, this is unhappy work. He doth not use the like at Greenwich, I promise you.’

‘He is not now at Greenwich,’ says Beaton. ‘He is come back to his own.’

Mr. Randolph jumped about. ‘His own? Have at you on that! How if his own receive him not? He may prove a very fish-bone in some fine throats here. Well, we shall see, we shall see. To-day or to-morrow comes my Lord of Moray into the lists. The Black Knight, we may call him. Then let the Green Knight look to himself—ho, ho! We shall see some jousting then.’

Mary Beaton shuffled the cards.

These joustings occurred, not at Callander, where Livingstone had been wedded to her Sempill and the Queen had danced all the night after, but at Wemyss, in the midst of a full court, kept and made splendid in the prince's honour. The place pleased its mistress in its young spring dress, attuned itself with her thoughts and desires. Blue, white, and green was all this world: a gentle, April sky; not far off, the sea; white lambs in the pastures, and the trees in the forest studded with golden buds. Wemyss had for her an air of France, with its great winged house of stone, its tourelles, balustrades, ordered avenues raying out from the terrace, each tapering to a sunny point; its marble nymphs and sea-gods with shells; its bowers, and the music of lutes in hidden grass-walks, not too loud to quell the music in her heart. It was a pity that the prince knew so little of the tongue, or it had been pleasant to read with him—

Filz de Venus, voz deux yeux despendez,

Et mes ecrits lisez et entendez,

Pour voir comment

D'un desloyal service me rendez:

Las, punissez-le, ou bien luy commandez

Vivre autrement—

and see his fine blushes over the words. But although he had never heard of Maître Clément, he was in love without him, and could take an Englishman's reasonable pleasure in hearing himself called 'Venus' boy,' or Rose-cheekt Adonis.'

Certainly he must have been in love. He told Antony Standen so every night over their cups; and little Forrest, a pert child who slept (like a little dog) at the foot of his great bed—he knew it too; for it had thrust a new duty upon him and many stripes. All the Court knew that when Forrest had red eyes the prince had overslept himself.

It was the Queen’s romantic device: she was full of them at this time. From her wing of the house you could see the prince’s; her bedchamber windows gave right across the grass-plat to his. Now, at an early hour, she—who woke still earlier, and lay long, thinking—stirred Mary Fleming from her side by biting her shoulder, not hard. Sleepy Fleming, when she had learned the rules, slipped out of bed and pulled aside the curtains to let in the day; then robed the Queen in a bedgown of blue, with white fur, her furred slippers, and a hood. Armed thus for the amorous fray, as Mr. Randolph put it—at any rate, with shining eyes and auroral hues, Queen Mary went to watch at the window; and so intent did she stand there, looking out over the wet grass, that she heeded neither the rooks drifting in the high wind, nor the guards of the door who were spying at her, nor the guard by the privy-postern, who beckoned to his fellow to come out of the guard-house and witness what he saw. Not only was she heedless, but she would have been indifferent had she heeded.

After a time of motionless attention, this always occurred. She raised her hand with a handkerchief in it, and signalled once—then twice—then three times—then four times. Then she dropped her hand and stood stone-still again; and then Fleming came to take her away, if she would go. The guards, greatly diverted, were some time before they found out that the appearance of the prince at his window was the thing signalised, and that he duly answered every dip of the handkerchief. It was, in fact, a flag-language, planned by the Queen soon after she came to Wemyss. One meant, ‘Oh, happy day!’ two, ‘I am well.—And you?’ three, ‘I love you’; four, ‘I would kiss you if I were near’; and five, which was a later addition, and not always given, ‘I am kissing you in my heart.’ To this one was generally added a gesture of the knuckles to the lips. Now, it was the business of young Forrest to awaken his lord in time for this ceremony: obviously, her Majesty could not be left to a solitary vigil for long. The prince was a heavy sleeper, to bed late, and lamentably unsober. Forrest, then, must needs suffer; for my lord was furious when disturbed in his morning sleep. But the lad found that he suffered more when, by a dire mischance,

one day he did not wake him at all. For that he was beaten with a great stick; nor is it wonderful. There had been wild work in the corridors the morn: maids half-dressed with messages for men half-tipsy; and the Queen in her chamber, sobbing in Mary Fleming's arms.

I think that the young man is to be excused for believing himself overweeningly loved. I think he was at first flattered by the attention, and believed that he returned ardour for ardour. But either he was cold by nature, or (as the Italian held) assotted of himself: there is little doubt but he soon tired of the lovers' food. Clearer facts are these: that he was not touched by the Queen's generous surrender, and did not see that it was generous. 'You may say, if you choose,' writes he of Le Secret des Secrets, 'that a vain man is a gross feeder, to whom flattery is but a snack; but the old half-truth takes me nearer, which says that every man is dog or cat. If you stroke your dog, he adores the stooping godhead in you. The cat sees you a fool for your pains. So for every testimony of the submiss heart given him by my lady, my lord added one cubit to his stature. I myself, Jean-Marie Des-Essars, heard him speak of her to my Lord Ruthven, and other friends of his, as "the fond Queen." Encouraged by their applause, he was tardy to respond. He danced with her at her desire, and might not, of course, ask her in return: that is, by strict custom. But my mistress was no stickler for Court rules; and if he had asked her I know she would have been moved. However, he never did. He danced with Mary Seton when he could; and as for Madame de Sempill, when she returned after her marriage, if ever a young lord was at the mercy of a young woman, that was his case. Handsome, black-eyed lady! his knees were running water before her; but she chose not to look at him. Failing her, therefore, he sought lower for his pleasures; how much lower, it is not convenient to declare.'

Mary Sempill resumed her duties in mid-April, having been wedded at the end of March, and came to Wemyss but a few days in advance of two great men—my Lord of Moray, to wit, the Queen's base-brother, and my Lord of Morton, Chancellor and

cousin of the prince. Before she saw her mistress, she was put into the state of affairs by Mary Seton.

‘Ma mye,’ said that shrewd little beauty to her comrade, ‘in a good hour you come back, but a week syne had been a better. She is fond, fond, fond! She is all melted with love—just a phial of sweet liquor for his broth. I blame Fleming; I’ve been at her night and morning—but a fine work! The lass is as bad as the Queen, being handmaid to her withered Lethington, so much clay for that dry-fingered potter. But our mistress—oh, she goes too fast! She is eating love up: there’ll be satiety, you shall see. Our young princekin is so set up that he’ll lie back in his chair and whistle for her before long—you’ll see, you’ll see! If he were to whistle to-day she’d come running like a spaniel dog, holding out her hands to him, saying, “Dear my heart, pity me, not blame, that I am so slow!” Oh, Livingstone, I am sore to see it! So high a head, lowered to this flushing loon! Presumptuous, glorious boy! Now, do you hear this. He raised his hand against Ruthven the other Tuesday, a loose glove in it, to flack him on the mouth. And so he handles all alike. ’Twas at the butts they had words: there was our lady and Lindsay shot against Beaton and him. Lindsay scored the main—every man knew it; but the other makes an outcry, red in the face, puffed like a cock-sparrow. Ruthven stands by scowling, chattering to himself, “The Queen’s main, the Queen’s main.” “You lie, Ruthven,” says the Young Fool (so we all call him); and Ruthven, “That’s an ill word, my Lord Darnley.” “You make it a worse when you say it in my face,” cries he; “and I have a mind——” He has his glove in his hand, swinging. “Have you a mind indeed?” says black Ruthven; “’tis the first time I have heard it.” Lindsay was listening, but not caring to look. I was by Beaton—you never saw Lethington so scared: his eyebrows in his hair! But we were all affrighted, save one: ’twas the Queen stepped lightly between them. “Dear cousin,” she says, “we two will shoot a main, and win it.” And to Ruthven, “My Lord Ruthven,” says she, “you have done too much for me to call down a cloud on this my spring-time.” He melted, the bitten man, he melted, and bent over her hand.

My young gentleman shot with her and lost her the match—in such a rage that he had not a word to say. Now I must tell you ...'; and then she gave the history of the love-signals at the window.

Mary Sempill listened with sombre cheer. 'I see that it's done. The bird's in the net. Jesu Christ, why was I not here—or Thyself?'

She did what she could that very night: divorced the Master of Sempill and shared her mistress's chamber. In the morning there was a great to-do—a love-sick lady coaxing her Livingstone, stroking her cheeks; but no flagwork could be allowed.

'No, no, my bonny queen, that is no sport for thee. That is a wench's trick.'

The truth was not to be denied; yet not Dido on her pyre anguished more sharply than this burning queen. And little good was done, more's the pity: measures had been taken too late. For she made humble access to her prince afterwards and sued out a forgiveness, which to have got easily would have distressed her. You may compare wenches and queens as much as you will—it's not a surface affair: but the fact is, the heavier a crown weighs upon a girl in love, the more thankfully will she cast it to ground. Are you to be reminded that Queen Mary was not the first generous lover in history? There was Queen Venus before her.

My Lord of Moray, most respectable of men, rode orderly from Edinburgh to Wemyss, with a train of some thirty persons, six of whom were ministers of the Word. He had not asked Mr. Knox to come along with him, for the reason that the uncompromising prophet had lately married a cousin of the Queen's, a Stuart and very young girl—fifteen years old, they say. Whether this was done, as the light-minded averred, out of pique that her Majesty would not be kind to him, or on some motion even less agreeable to imagine—my Lord of Moray was hurt at the levity of the deed, and suspected that the Queen would be more than hurt. But I believe that she knew Mr. Knox better than her base-brother did. However, failing Mr. Knox, he had six divines behind him, men of great acceptance. The Earl of

Morton was waiting for him at Burntisland: side by side the two weighty lords traversed the woods of Fife. It might have been astonishing how little they had to say to each other.

‘Likely we shall have wet before morn.’

‘Ay, belike,’ said the Earl of Moray.

‘These lands will be none the worse of it.’

‘So I believe.’

‘There was a French pink in the basin. Did your lordship see her?’

‘Ay, I saw her.’

‘Ha! And they say there shall come a new ambassador from the Pope.’

‘Is that so?’

‘By way of France, he must travel.’

‘Ay?’

‘Bothwell will be in France the now, I doubt.’

‘I’m thinking so, my lord, indeed,’ says the Earl of Moray.

There was more, but not much more. A man tires of picking at granite with a needle.

They reached Wemyss before nightfall; but already torches were flaming here and there, and men running made smoky comets of them, low-flying over the park. The Queen was at supper in her closet; there would be no dancing to-night, because her Majesty was tired with hunting. ‘No doubt,’ said Lethington, ‘my Lord of Moray would be received.’ Chambers were prepared for both their lordships. Mr. Archibald Douglas would have charge of his noble kinsman’s comfort, while by the Queen’s desire he, Lethington, would wait upon my lord. Bowing, and quickly turning about, the Secretary bent his learned head as he announced these news.

Something, one knows not what, had invited urbanity into the dark Earl of Moray.

He was all for abnegation in favour of the Chancellor.

‘See, Mr. Secretar,’ he said, ‘see to the Chancellor’s bestowing, I beg of you. Lead my lord the Chancellor to his lodging; trust me to myself the while. My lord will be weary from his journey—nay, my good lord, but I know what a long road must bring upon a charged statesman: grievous burden indeed! Pray, Mr. Secretar, my lord the Chancellor!’ and the like.

‘Now, the devil fly away with black Jamie if I can bottom him,’ muttered the Chancellor to himself as—burly man—he stamped up the house. Mr. Archie Douglas, his kinsman, at the top of the staircase, bowed his grey head till his nose was pointing between his knees.

‘Man, Archie, ye’ll split yoursel’,’ says the Chancellor. ‘You may leave me, Mr. Secretar, to my wicked cousin,’ says he.

Lethington sped back to his master, and found him still obstinately gracious.

‘Hurry not, Mr. Secretar, hurry not for me!’

‘Nay, my good lord, but my devotion is a jealous god.’

The Earl waved his hand about. ‘Ill work to pervert the Scriptures and serve a quip,’ he said ruefully,—‘but in this house!’

Mr. Secretary, knowing his Earl of Moray, said no more, but led him in silence to the chambers, and silently served him—that is, he stood by, alert and watchful, while his people served him. The Earl’s condescension increased; he was determined to please and be pleased. He talked freely of Edinburgh, of the Assembly, of Mr. Knox’s unhappy backsliding and of Mr. Wood’s stirring reminders. Incidents of travel, too: he was concerned for some poor foreign-looking thief whom he had seen on the gibbet at Aberdour.

‘Justice, Mr. Secretar, Justice wears a woful face on a blithe spring morning. And you may well think, as I did, that upon yonder twisting wretch had once dropped the

waters of baptism. Man, there had been a hoping soul in him once! Sad work on the bonny braeside; woful work in the realm of a glad young queen!'

'Woful indeed, my lord,' said Mr. Secretary, 'and woe would she be to hear of it. But in these days—in these days especially—we keep such miserable knowledge from her. She strays, my lord, at this present, in a garden of enchantment.'

'And you do well, Mr. Secretar, you do well—if the Queen my sister does well. There is the hinge of the argument. What says my young friend Mr. Bonnar to that?'

Mr. Bonnar, my lord's chaplain, a lean, solemn young man, was not immediately ready. The Earl replied for him.

'Mr. Bonnar will allow for the season, and Mr. Bonnar will be wise. What saith the old poet?—

Ac neque jam stabulis gaudet pecus, aut aratror igni:

Nec prata canis albicant pruinis——

Eh, man, how does he pursue? Eh, Mr. Bonnar, what saith he next?

Jam Cytherea choros ducit Venus, imminente luna!'

'The moon is overhead, indeed, my lord,' says the Secretary, 'and her glamour all about us.'

But his master jumped away, and was soon sighing.

'There is always a grain of sadness in the cup for us elders, Mr. Secretar; amari aliquid, alas! But I am served.' He was supping in his room. 'Master Bonnar will call down a blessing from on high.' Master Bonnar was now ready.

The game went on through the meal. Lethington seemed to be standing on razors, the Earl not disapproving. The great man ate sparingly, and drank cold water; but his talk was incessant—of nothing at all—ever skirting realities, leading his hearers on, then skipping away. Not until the table was cleared and young Mr. Bonnar released from his blinking duties was the Secretary also delivered from torments. The scene

shifted, the Earl suddenly chilled, and Lethington knew his ground. They got to work over letters from England, a new tone in which had troubled the Secretary's dreams. He expounded them—some being in cypher—then summed up his difficulties.

'It stands thus, my lord, as I take it. Here came over to us this young prince from England, with a free hand. We took what seemed fairly proffered; and why indeed should we be backward? We were as free to take him as her English Majesty was free to send him. Oh, there have been freedoms! I will not say we could have done no better, in all ways. No matter! We opened our arms to what came, as we thought, sped lovingly towards us. Mr. Randolph himself could not deny that we had reason; and I shall make bold to say that never did lady show such kindness to a match, not of her own providing, as our mistress showed to this. But now, my lord, now, when the sun hath swelled the buds, there is a change in the wind from England—a nip, a hint of malice. These letters exhibit it, to my sense. I think Mr. Randolph may be recalled: I am not sure, but I do think it. I know that he desires it; I know that he suffers discomfort, that he does not see his way. "Is this young man our subject or yours?" he asketh. "Is he subject at all, or Regent rather? And if Regent, whom is he to rule?" No, my lord, Mr. Randolph, whether instructed or not, is itching to be off. And that is pity, because he is bond-slave of the Beaton, and would lavish all his counsel at her feet if she desired him. Briefly, my lord, I jalouse the despatch of Throckmorton to our Court, not upon a friendly mission.'

The Earl listened, but moved not a muscle. He looked like an image of old wax, when the pigment is all faded out, and the wan smooth stuff presents no lines to be read.

'You are right,' he said presently: 'Mr. Throckmorton comes, but Mr. Randolph remains. The Queen of England——' He stopped.

'She is against us, my lord? She grudges us the heir of both crowns!'

‘I say not. She thinks him unworthy: but I must not believe it, nor must you. Mr. Secretar, you shall go to England. Presently—presently—we must be very patient. Now of my sister, how doth she?’

‘The Queen dotes, my lord,’ said Lethington, and angered the Earl, it seemed.

‘Shame, sir! Shame, Mr. Secretar! Fie! Queens must not dote.’

It was characteristic of the relation between this pair that the master was always leading the man into admissions and professing to be cut to the soul by them. But Mr. Secretary had the habit of allowing for it. ‘I withdraw the word, my lord. Maybe I know nothing. Who am I, when all’s said, to judge?’

The Earl lowered his eyelids until they fluttered over his eyes like two white moths. ‘How stand you with the Fleming, Lethington? How stand you there? Can she make no judge of you?’

It was the stroke too much. The stricken creature flinched; and then something real came out of him. ‘Ah, my good lord,’ he said, with dignity in arms for his secret honour, ‘you shall please to consider me there as the suitor of an honest lady, and very sensible of the privilege.’

Lord Moray opened his eyes, stood up and held out his hands. ‘I ask your pardon, Mr. Secretar—freely I ask it of you. Come—enough of weary business. Crave an audience for me. I will go to the Queen.’

Mr. Secretary kissed his patron’s hand. ‘My prince shall forgive his servant——’

‘Oh, man, say no more!’

‘——and accept his humble duty. I will carry your lordship to the Queen. Will you first see the Italian?’

Quickly his lordship changed his face. ‘Why should I see the Italian? What have I to do with him? Mr. Secretar, Mr. Secretar, let every man do cheerfully his own office, so shall the state thrive.’

He had the air of quoting Scripture.

The Queen saw her brother for a few moments, and he in her what he desired to be sure of: eyes like dancing water, and about her a glow such as the sun casts early on a dewy glade. He had never known her so gentle, or so without wit; nor had she ever before kissed him of her own accord. Lady Argyll, his own sister, was with her, the swarthy, handsome, large woman.

‘You are welcome, brother James,’ Queen Mary said; ‘and now we’ll all be happy together.’

‘I shall believe it, having it from your Majesty’s lips,’ said he.

She touched her lips, as if she were caressing what had been blessed to her. ‘I think my lips will never dare be false.’

He said warmly, ‘There speaketh a queen in her own right!’ What need had he to see the Italian?

Now, for the sake of contrast, look for one moment upon that other great man, the Chancellor Morton, in his privacy. Booted and spurred, he plumped himself down in a chair, clapped his big hands to his thighs and stuck out his elbows. He stared up open-mouthed at his kinsman Archie, twinkling his eyes, all prepared to guffaw. Humour was working through the heavy face. ‘Well, man? Well, man? How is it with Cousin Adonis?’

Archie Douglas, scared at first, peered about him into all corners of the room before he could meet the naughty eyes. Catching them at last expectant, he made a grimace and flipped finger and thumb in the air. ‘Adonis! Hoots! a prancing pie!’

The Earl of Morton rubbed his hands together. ‘Plenty of rope, man, Archie! Plenty of rope for the likes of him!’

Des-Essars has a long piece concerning the official presentation of the two earls to the prince, which seems to have been done with as much state as the Scottish Court

could achieve.

‘My Lord of Darnley’s mistake,’ he says, ‘was to be stiff with the wrong man. He was civil to the Chancellor, his cousin—where a certain insolence would have been salutary; he made him a French bow, and gave him his hand afterwards, English fashion. But to my Lord of Moray, a cruelly proud man, he chose to show the true blood’s consciousness of the base; and in so doing, the hurt he may have inflicted at the moment was as nothing to what he laid up for himself. It was late in the day to insist upon the Lord James’s bastardy. Yet——“Ah, my Lord of Moray! Servant of your lordship, I protest.” And then: “Standen, my gloves. I have the headache.” He used scented gloves as a febrifuge. “A prancing pie!” said Monsieur de Douglas in my hearing. Nevertheless, my Lord of Moray spoke his oration; very fine, but marred by a too level, monotonous delivery—a blank wall of sound—to which, for all that, one must needs listen. He was not a personable man; for his jaw was too spare and his mouth too tight. His flat brows, also, had that air of strain which makes intercourse uncomfortable. But he was a great man, and a deliberate man, and the most patient man I ever knew or heard of, except Job the Patriarch. So he spoke his oration, and left everybody as wise as they were before.’

I myself suspect that the good Lord James was gaining time to look round and consider what he should do. And although he had scouted the notion that he could have anything to say to the Italian, the fact is noteworthy that to seek him out privately was one of the first things he did with his time. Signior David told him frankly two things: first, that if the Queen did not marry her prince soon she would come to loathing the sight of him; secondly, he said that if she did marry him the lords would get him murdered. ‘These two considerations,’ said Davy in effect, ‘really hang together. The lords, your lordship’s colleagues, are not in love with the young man, and so are quite ready to be at him. But she at present is so, and in full cry. When she slackens, and has time to open her eyes and see him as he is——Hoo! let him then say his Confiteor!’

It is not to be supposed that such perilous topics were discussed with this brevity and point—certainly not where the Earl of Moray was one of the discutants; this, however, is the sum, confirmed to the Earl by what he observed of the Court. There was no doubt but that the two things did indeed hang together.

The Queen, his sister, as he saw very soon, did not go half-heartedly to work in this marriage project. And the louder grew the murmurs of Mr. Randolph, handing on English threats, the more loyally she clung—not to her prince, perhaps, but to what she had convinced herself her prince was. He studied that young man minutely upon every occasion, spent smiles and civilities upon him, received rebuffs in return, and (with an air of saying 'I like your spirit') came next day for more. He saw him hector Signior Davy, tempt Lord Ruthven to rabies, run after Mary Sempill, allow the Queen to run after him, get drunk. He saw him ride with his hounds, break in a colt, thrash a gentleman, kiss two women, lose money at a tennis match, and draw his dagger on the Master of Lindsay who had won it. A very little conversation with the Court circle, and two words with his sister of Argyll, sufficed him.

'Ill blood,' said that stern lady. 'The little bloat frog will swell till he burst unless we prick him beforehand. Not all Scots lords have your fortitude, brother James.'

'Hush, sister, hush! I think better of poor Scotland than you do. Who are we—unhappy pensioners—to judge her Majesty's choice?'

He walked away, being a most respectable man, lest his fierce sister should lead him farther than it was convenient to go; and after a week's reflection sent Mr. Secretary Lethington into England, with sealed letters for Mr. Cecil and open letters for the Queen. In these he echoed English sentiments, that the marriage was deplorable from every view, to be opposed by every lover of peace and true religion. He should do what could be done to serve her English Majesty, being convinced that no better way of serving his own Queen was open to him. The bearer was in possession of his full mind; the Lord of Lethington would convince his friends by lively testimonies,

etc. etc. This done, even then (so slow-dealing was he) he took another week to deliberate before he selected his plan of action and his hour. He could afford so much time, but not much more.

It was an hour of a night when there was dancing and mumchance: torches, musicians in the gallery, a mask of satyrs, an ode of Mr. Buchanan's declaimed, and some French singing, in which Des-Essars eclipsed his former self and won the spleen of Adam Gordon. For if her Majesty had sent Adam into the Lothians and rewarded him for it with a pat of the cheek, now she called the other up to the daïs, publicly kissed him, and gave him a little purse worked in roses by herself. There were broad pieces in it too.

'I shall pay you for that, Baptist my man; see you to it,' says Adam.

But Jean-Marie flourished his purse before he put it into his bosom and hooked his doublet upon it. 'Draw upon me, Monsieur de Gordon, and let it be for blood if you choose. I can well afford it.'

For the first time since her entry into Scotland the Queen wore colours. She appeared in a broad-skirted, much-quilted, tagged and spangled gown of yellow satin; netted over with lace-work done in pearls. The bodice was long and pointed, low in the neck; but a ruff edged with pearls ran up from either shoulder, like two great petals, within which her neck and feathered head were as the stamen of the flower. It did not suit her to be so sumptuous, because that involved stiffness; and she was too slim to carry the gear, and too active, too supple and humoursome to be anything but miserable in it. But she chose to shine that night, so that she might honour her prince in her brother's cold eyes.

After supper, when there was general dancing, the Earl of Moray surprised everybody by walking across the hall to where Lord Darnley stood. A dozen or more heard his exact words: 'Come, my lord,' he said, 'I am spokesman for us all; and here is my humble suit, that you will lead the Queen in a measure. It would be her

own choice, so you cannot deny me. Come, I will lead you to her Majesty.'

He spoke more loudly but no less deliberately than usual; there was quite a little commotion. Even the young prince himself knew that this was an extraordinary civility. One may add, perhaps, that even he received it graciously. Bowing, blushing a little, he said: 'My lord, I shall always serve the Queen's grace, and, I hope, content her. I take it thankfully from your lordship that in this yours is the common voice.'

The Earl took him by the hand up the hall. The Queen had starry eyes when she saw them coming.

'Madam,' said her half-brother, 'here I bring a partner for your Majesty whom I am persuaded you will not refuse. If you think him more backward than he should be and myself more forward, you shall reflect, madam, that by these means my zeal is enabled to join hands with his modesty.'

'We thank you, brother,' replied the Queen, in a voice scarcely audible. She was certainly touched, as she looked up at her prince with quivering lips. But he laughed a brave answer back, and held out his hand to take hers. The musicians in the gallery, who had been primed beforehand, struck into a galliard.

This dance is really a formal comedy, what we call a ballet, with grave, high-handed turns to left and right, curtseyings, bowings, retreats and pursuits. It quickens or dies according to the air. You make your first stately steps, you bow and separate; you dance apart, upon signal you return. The theme of every galliard is Difference and Reconciliation. It is a Roman thing, and has five airs to it. The air chosen here was, 'Baisons-nous, ma belle.'

The prince was a stilted dancer, Queen Mary the best of her day—the exercise was a passion of hers. As for him, he could never be any better, for, doubting his own dignity, he was extremely jealous of it. It seemed to him that to be limber would be to exhibit weakness. The result of this disparity between the partners was, to the

spectators, that the Queen had the air of drawing him on, of enticing him, of inspiring all this parade of tiffs and sweet accord. It was she who, at the curtsey, showed herself saucy and maline—she who, like a rustic beauty, glanced and shook her head, hunched her white shoulder and tossed his presence away. So it was she who came tripping back, held off, invited pursuit, suffered capture, melted suddenly to kindness. He regained her hand, as it appeared, by right and without effort; she let it rest, they thought, in thankful duty. It was make-believe, of course; but she lived her part, and he did not. So blockish was he that, Mary Seton said, the Queen seemed like a girl hanging garlands round a garden god. All watched and all passed judgment, but were prejudiced by the knowledge that, as she danced, so she would choose to be. In the midst, and unperceived, the Earl of Moray went out of the hall, and sought the Italian in his writing cabinet.

Signior Davy was at work there by the light of a tallow candle. His hair was disordered, his bonnet awry; he had unfastened his doublet, and his shirt had overflowed his breeches. He wrote fast, but like an artist, with his head well away from his hand. It went now to one side, now to another, as he estimated the shapes of his thin lettering. ‘Eh! probiamo! Ma sì, ma sì—così va meglio.’ So he chattered to himself at his happy craft.

The Earl of Moray stepped quietly into the room and closed the door behind him. The scribe lifted up his head without ceasing to write. ‘Ah, Monsieur de Moray! Qu’il soit le bienvenu!’ He finished the foliation of a word, jumped up, snatched at his patron’s hand, briskly kissed it, and said, ‘Commandi!’

They talked in French, in which the Earl was an exact, if formal, practitioner. There was no fencing between them. My lord did not affect to be shocked at hearing what he desired to know, nor the Italian to mean what he did not say.

‘I have been witness of great doings this night, Signior David.’

‘The night is the time for doings, I consider,’ replied the Italian.

This general reflection the Earl passed over for the moment. ‘They dance the galliard in hall—the Queen and the Prince. You can hear the rebecks from here.’

‘I know the tune, sir!’ cried Davy. ‘I set it. I scored it for her long ago. It is Baisons-nous, ma belle. But they murder it by clinging to the fall. It needs passion if it is to breed passion. That music should hurt you.’

‘Passion is not wanting, Signior David,’ said my lord, with narrowed, ever narrowing eyes. ‘And passion is much. But opportunity is more.’

The Italian started. ‘You think it is a good hour?’

‘Judge you of the hour,’ said the Earl of Moray.

The Italian frowned, as he drummed with his fingers on the table. He sang a little air: Belle, qui tiens ma vie! My lord took a ring from his finger and laid it down: a thin ring with a flat-cut single diamond in it, of great size and water. Singing still, the Italian picked it up, looked lazily at it. He embodied his criticism in his song—‘Non c’è male, Signore! No-o-o-o-on c’è-è male!’ All at once he clapped it down upon the desk and jumped round—fire-fraught, quivering, a changed man.

‘You wish your opportunity—you think the hour is struck! You observe—you judge—you make your plans—you wait—you watch—and—ah! You come to me—you say, Passion is not wanting, but opportunity is all. And my music lends it: Baisons-nous, ma belle, hey? Good, sir! good, sir! I thank you, and I meet you half-way. In a little moment—ha! here is the moment. Listen.’ A bell in the tower began to toll.

‘Midnight, sir!’ cried the Italian, leaping about and waving his arms. ‘That is the midnight bell!’ He struck a great pose—head thrown back, one hand in his breast. ‘Era già l’ ora che volge il disio! Come, come, my lord, we will put the point to the pyramid. Wait for me.’

He ran out, cloaking head and shoulders as he went; the Earl awaited him massively. In a little while he was back again, cheerful, almost riotously cheerful, accompanied

by a blue-chinned young man, a priest of the old religion, whose eyes looked beady with fright to see the grim Protestant lord.

‘No, no, my reverend, have no fears at all,’ said the Italian; ‘see nobody, hear nothing; but go to the chapel and vest yourself for midnight mass. Quick, my dear, quick!—off with you!’

My lord had contrived to freeze himself out of sight or conscience of this part of the business. It was droll to see how abstractedly he looked at the wall. The priest had disappeared before the Italian touched his arm, beckoning him to follow.

They descended from the turret upon the long corridor which connected the two wings of the house; they went down a little stair, and came to the Queen’s door, which led from the hall to her own side. This door was closed, but not locked. Pushing it gently open, Signior Davy saw young Gordon looking at the crowd in the dusty hall, his elbows on his knees. The hum and buzz of talk came eddying up the stair—little cries, manly assurance, protestations, and so on. ‘Hist, Monsieur de Gordon, hist!’ Adam looked up, Des-Essars peeped round the corner: those two were never far apart.

The Italian whispered, ‘I must have a word with the Queen as she comes up. It is serious. Warn her of it.’ Adam coloured up; he was flustered. It was Des-Essars who, looking sharply at the incisive man, nodded his head. Signior David drew back, and drew his companion back. They waited at the head of the stair in the shadow, listening to the rumours of the hall.

There came presently a lull in the talk, a hushing-down; some sort of preparation, expectancy; they heard the Queen say, quite clearly, ‘To-morrow, to-morrow I will consider it. I cannot hear you now.’ A voice pleaded, ‘Ah, madam, in pity——!’ and hers again: ‘No, no, no! Come, ladies.’

‘Room there, sirs! Give room there, my ladies!’ cried the usher. Good-nights followed, laughing and confused speech, shuffling of feet, and some

rustling—kissing of hands, no doubt. Then, as one knows what one cannot see, they felt her coming.

Arthur Erskine, Captain of the Guard, marched up first, solemnly, with two great torches; Bastien the valet, some more servants. Margaret Carwood, bedchamber-woman, appeared at the stair-head. Some of the maids of honour passed up—Mary Beaton and a young French girl, hand-in-hand, Mary Sempill, and others. Des-Essars stepped from his place at the foot of the stairs and was no more seen.

He was the next to reach the upper floor: Des-Essars himself, white and tense. ‘She will speak to you here,’ he told the Italian. ‘Show yourself to her.’

‘Altro!’ said Davy. Immediately after, they heard the Queen coming.

She paused on the landing and looked about her. Then she saw the Italian. ‘You wait for me, David? Go in, mes belles,’ she said to Fleming and Seton, who were with her; ‘and you too, Carwood. I am coming.’

They left her, and she stood alone, waiting, but not beckoning. She looked very tired.

The Italian approached her on tiptoe, and began to talk. He talked in whispers, with his hasty voice, with his darting, inspired hands, with every nerve of his body. She was startled at first—but he flooded her with words: she had turned her face quickly towards him, with an ‘Oh! Oh!’ and then had looked as if she would run. But he held out his imploring hands; he talked faster and faster; he pointed to heaven, extended his arms, patted his breast, jerked his head, sobbed, dashed away real tears. She was trembling; he saw her trembling. He folded arms over breast, flung them desperately apart, clasped his hands, seemed to be praying. Godlike clemency seemed to sit in him as he talked on; he looked at her with calm, pitying, far-searching eyes. His words came more slowly, as if he was now announcing the inevitable sum of his frenzy. She considered, hanging her head; but when he named her brother she started violently, could not control her shaking-fit, nor bring herself

to look into the shadow. The Italian beckoned to his patron, who then came softly forward out of the dark.

‘Dear madam, dear sister——’ he began; but she stopped him by a look.

‘Brother, are you leading me?’

He denied it with an oath.

‘Brother,’ she said again, ‘I do think it.’

Then he changed, saying: ‘Why, then, sister, if I am, it is whither your heart has cried to go.’

‘I believe that is the very truth,’ she owned, and looked wistfully into his face. Signior Davy went downstairs.

She pleaded for a little time. She had not confessed for five days—she was not ready—there should be more form observed in the mating of princes—what was the English use? In France—but this was not France.

He admitted everything. And yet, he said, the heart was an instant lover, happiest in simplicity. A prince was a prince from birth, before the solemn anointing. So a bride might be a wife before the Queen had a Consort.

‘True,’ she said, ‘but a sovereign should consult his subjects.’

‘Ah, sister,’ says he, ‘what woman could be denied her heart’s choice?’

She hid her face. ‘God knoweth, God knoweth I do well!’

‘Why, then, courage!’ said he. ‘Content your God, madam, and follow conscience. It lies not in woman born to do better.’

At this point the Italian came back, leading my lord. The prince was flushed, as always at night, but sober, and undoubtedly moved. He knelt before her Majesty unaffectedly, bowing his head. ‘Oh, madam, my sovereign——’ he began to say; but then she gave a little sharp cry, and took him up. Tenderly she looked at him, searching his face.

‘Oh, I am here, my lord. Do you seek me?’

In return, after a moment’s regard of her beauty, he choked a sob in his breath, shook his head and lifted it.

‘Now God judge me, if I seek thee not, my Mary!’

‘Come then,’ said the Queen—yet stood timorously still.

The Earl of Moray stepped forward with his arms uplifted. His face was deadly white, but his eyes were fires. ‘Go in—go in——!’ he said with fierce breath, and seemed to beat them before him into the open doorway.

When he had his royal pair safe in the chapel, the candles lit and the priest at his secret prayers before the altar[2]—then, and not before, did Signior Davy call in the maids, Arthur Erskine, and Des-Essars. They came trooping in together—nine, of them, all told—saw the lit altar, the priest in yellow and white, the server, and those two who knelt at the rail in their tumbled finery. Mary Sempill gasped and would have cried out, Mary Seton blinked her eyes, as if to give herself courage; but Davy pointed awfully to the priest, who had made his introit and opened the missal, and now stood rapt, with his hands stuck out. If Arthur Erskine had moved, if Des-Essars had started for the door, these fluttered women might have——But Erskine stood like a stone Crusader, and little Jean-Marie was saying his prayers. The Earl of Moray was without the door, having refused to come in.

Thus the deed was done. The Italian himself shut the chamber door upon them and warned off the scared maids.

Outside that door, Adam Gordon and Des-Essars whispered their quarrel out.

‘She gave me a ring when I came back from Liddesdale and hunting Bothwell,’ says Adam.

‘Pooh, man: that she would have thrown to a groom. Bastien has had the like. And what matters it now whether she gave thee anything, or me anything? Ah!’

‘Let me hold that purse, Baptist, or I’ll scrag ye. ’Tis my right.’

‘How your right, my fine sir?’

‘You swore that we should share her. The plan was yours. You swore it on the cross. And you’ve held my ring twice in your hands, and had it on your finger the length of the Sentinel’s Walk. You disgrace yourself by this avarice.’

‘You shall not hold my purse, Adam; but you may feel it.’

‘Let me feel it, then. For how long?’

‘Till the bell goes the hour.’

‘That is only a minute or two.’

‘It will be ten minutes, I tell you. Now then, if you care.’

Master Gordon put his hand into the bosom of Master Des-Essars and solemnly pinched the purse.

‘She’ll be sleeping now,’ said Adam.

‘I doubt it,’ said Jean-Marie.

[2] She had asked for Father Roche the moment she saw the celebrant come in; but was told that he was not at Wemyss. This we learn from Des-Essars.

CHAPTER XII EPITHALAMIUM: END OF ALL MAIDS’ ADVENTURE

He fell ill of measles, the young prince, before they could leave Wemyss—measles followed by much weakness, sweating, and ague; and though all her whispering world—but the few—might wonder, nothing could keep her from the proud uses of wifehood. She took her place by his bed early—pale with care, yet composed—and kept it till past midnight. It was beautiful to see her, with rank and kingship cast aside, more dignified by her little private fortune, more a queen for her enclosed realm. For now she swayed a sick-room, and was absolute there: let seditious murmurings and alarms toss their pikes beyond the border.

And indeed they did. Her secret marriage had been so well kept, the Court fairly hummed with scandal; and the simple truth was given a dog's death that romantic tales might thrive. It was commonly said that if she married him now it would only be because shame would drive her. The Earl of Morton went about with this clacking on his tongue; plain men like Atholl and Herries looked all ways for a pardon upon the doting Queen. In their company the Earl of Moray lifted up deprecating hands; he agreed with the Earl of Morton, advised Atholl and Herries to pray without ceasing. The winds were blowing as he required them; but this sickness was vexatious, with the delays it brought. Time is of the essence of the contract, even if that be only between a vainglorious youth and a rope. Mr. Secretary wrote from England that the Queen of that country was implacably against the marriage; it was possible even now that it might be stopped. But it must on no account be stopped.

This was, in early May, the plain view of the Earl of Moray: that the thing must be publicly done, and soon done, in order that his schemes should bear fruit. It is an odd, almost inexplicable fact that he was to change his whole mind in the course of a few weeks, and for no deeper reason than a word lightly let fall by the Queen, his half-sister. But what a word that was to the bastard of a king! It was the word King.

There came to Wemyss, in the midst of these measles and scandalous whisperings, a certain Murray of Tullibardine, a friend of Bothwell's—him and one Pringle. They came together, and yet separately: Pringle with griefs to be healed—that he, being a servant of my Lord Bothwell's, had been summarily dismissed with kicks on a sensitive part; Tullibardine as a friend, frankly to sue his friend's pardon. My Lord Moray refused to help him, having neither love nor use for a Bothwell, but he got to the Queen by the back stairs and put his client's case. However, she scarcely listened to him. Busy as she was, it was strange to see how far away from her ken the dread Hepburn had drifted.

‘From the Earl of Bothwell—you? What has he to report of himself—and by you?’

Tullibardine spoke of duty, forgiveness, the clemency of the prince, while the Queen stirred the broth in her hand.

‘I never sent him to France,’ she said, ‘but to the Castle of Edinburgh rather. He set me at nought when he fled this country. Let him return to the place I put him in, and we will think about duty, forgiveness, and the prince’s clemency. I bear him no more ill-will than he has put in me, and he can take it out when he pleases.’

‘I thank your Majesty,’ said Tullibardine, ‘and my noble friend will thank you.’

‘He has only himself to thank, so far as I see,’ she replied, and dismissed him before the broth could get cold.

Meantime the Earl of Moray had held a godly conversation with afflicted Pringle. Pringle had much to say: as that, of all men living, the Lord Bothwell hated two—his good lordship of Moray and Mr. Secretary. He had sworn to be the death of each when he returned.

The Earl of Moray compressed his lips, straightened himself, and cleared his throat.

‘I fear for him, Pringle,’ he said, ‘the wild, misgoverned, glorious young man. I cannot charge myself with any offence against him, and yet I remember that when I was in France he girded at me more than once. But I am accustomed in such variancy to hold my plain course. Pringle, that was a desperate gentleman. He had to be forbid the Court.’

‘True, my lord,’ says Pringle, ‘and your lordship knows to what abominable usages he hath——’

‘Pray, Pringle, pray, no more!’

Pringle was now in the painful position of having staked out a short road and finding it denied him. ‘I must whisper in your lordship’s ear. I must make so bold.’

‘Man, I refuse you. Heinous living be far from me!’

‘My lord, I have heard the Lord Bothwell speak of the Queen’s grace in a manner——’

‘Ay, it is like enough, poor Pringle. The wicked man seeth wickedness all over.’

‘He spake of the Queen, my lord—in your ear——’

He breathed it low, a vile accusation concerning the Cardinal of Lorraine and the Queen—his niece, and then a girl of eighteen.

The Earl cowed him with a look. ‘Go, Pringle, go! This talk should never have been held between us. You have misused my charity. Go, I say.’

Pringle shivered out.

In his time the Earl of Moray saw the Queen, and, after due preparation, chose to tarnish her ears with the tale.

But she was not at all tarnished. From her safe seat, with but a party-wall between her husband and her, she received it brightly.

‘Why, what a ragged tongue he hath! The poor, proud Cardinal! Did he not love me? I believe he always did.’

‘Madam,’ said her brother, ‘you interpret gently. This makes the slanderer’s damnation the deeper.’

She laughed. ‘It is plain, brother, that you know little of France. In France the truth goes for nothing, but the jest is all. My Lord Bothwell has been much in France.’

‘A jest, madam? This a jest?’

‘It is quite in their manner. I remember the old King——’ She broke off suddenly. ‘Oh, brother, my King is more at ease! This morning his fever left him, and there broke a great sweat.’

‘I rejoice,’ said he—‘I rejoice. But touching this horrible railer—if he should crave leave to return——’

‘He has craved it already,’ replied the Queen. ‘I answered that if he choose to come

back to his prison he may do it. But not otherwise. Brother, I must go to the King.'

The King! We were there, then; and it galled him like a rowel. Although she used it warily, and only with the nine persons who were privy, he could not bear the word; for every time he heard it he was stung into remembering that he ought to have foreseen it and had not. It is to be admitted that it had never once crossed his mind—neither the word nor the thing; astute, large-minded, wide-ranging as he was, he was also that unimaginative, prim-thinking man who has pigeon-holes for the categories, knows nothing of passion that breaks all rules, nor can conceive how loyalty is like meat to women in love, and humility like wine. Lethington could have told him these things, the Italian could have told him, any of the maids; and he never to have guessed at them! Dangerously mortified at the discovery, his disgust with himself and the fact worked together into one great distemper. This it was which threw him out of his balance, and led him presently to the greatest length he ever went; but at present it was only gathering in him. It made him doubtful, distrustful of himself and all; and when he looked about for supports he could find none to his taste. One folly after another! How he had cut away his friends! There was Lethington in England. There was the Italian, who knew so much. He sickened at the thought of that capable ruffian who had helped him hasten the crowning of 'the King.' Very possibly—very certainly, it seemed to him now, brooding over it in stillness and the dark—very possibly the ruin of his life had been laid that night when he had sought out the creature in his den and bought him with a diamond. Argyll was here, Rothes, Glencairn, and their like, and Morton the Chancellor, whom he only half trusted. Besides, Morton was cousin of this flagrant 'King,' and would rise as he rose. On the whole, and for want of better, he consorted with Argyll and his friends, and dared go so far as this, to tell them that he had fears of the marriage.

'I could have wished,' he said to Argyll, 'a livelier sense of favours done in so young a man; also that my sister might have judged more soberly how far to meet

him. If men of age and known probity had been consulted!'

Glencairn, a passably honest man, and undoubtedly a pious man, said tentatively here, that no lord of the Council could be found to support the Prince. As for the Queen's grace——

'She has been unhappily rash,' says Moray; 'I cannot think more. Maidenly lengths would have become her, a queenly regard, but surely no more.' He turned to Argyll. 'Frankly, brother-in-law, Mr. Knox should not hear of these late doings—of these bedside ministrations, these transports, these fits of self-communing, this paltering with the tempter, this doffing of regalities. I pray, I pray for Scotland!'

'The gowk's a papist,' says Argyll, a plain man.

'He is young, brother-in-law; that we remember always.'

'He stinks of pride,' says Argyll,—'sinful, lusty pride of blood. If this marriage be made we shall all rue it.'

The Earl of Moray clapped a hand to each of his shoulders.

'Brother-in-law, pray for Scotland!'

'Oh, ay,' says Argyll, 'and put an edge to my Andrew Ferrara.'

How she lingered over him, prayed over him, watched every petulant twitching of his limbs, no one could know altogether save Mary Sempill, and she had affairs of her own to consider—a wife who knew she was going to be a mother. But for this proud preoccupation, she might have seen how touchingly the Queen made the most of her treasure, and how all the ardour which had hurried her into wedlock was now whipped up again to prove it bliss. Was he fretful—and was he not? It was the fever in his dear bones. Was he gross-mannered? Nay, but one must be tender of young blood. Did he choose to have his Englishmen about him, his Archie Douglas to tell him salt tales, while she sat with her maids and waited? Well, well, a man must have men with him now and again, and is never the better husband for cosseting. When

they urged her to be a queen, she lowered her eyes and said she was a wife. This raised an outcry.

‘He is, he can only be, your consort, madam.’

‘I am his, you mean,’ said she. ‘The man chooses the woman. There are no crowns in the bridal bed, and none in heaven. Naked go we to both.’

Mary Sempill wrung her hands over talk of the sort. ‘Out, alas! My foolish, fond, sweet lass!’

But Mary Fleming considered, nursing her cheek in the way she had. ‘The strength of a man overrides all your politics, my dear,’ she said gently. ‘The Salic Law is the law of nature, I have heard men say.’

‘God smite this youth if he try it!’ said Sempill fiercely. ‘He’ll set the heather afire and burn us all in our beds. And you, Fleming, will have need of mercy in your turn, if you hearken to your grey-faced Lethington.’

‘Mr. Secretary has a very noble heart, Mary. I hope I may say the same of your Master.’

Mary Sempill sniffed. ‘My Master, as you call him, has a head for figures. He can cipher you two and two. And he says of your Lethington that he is working mischief in England.’

Mary Fleming rose with spirit to this challenge. ‘I cannot believe it. You are angry with me because you are vexed with the King.’

Then it was Mary Sempill to bounce away. ‘The King! Never use that word to me, woman. There shall be no King in Scotland till my mistress bears him.’

But she was talking without her book.

They moved to Stirling as soon as the young lord was mended; and thither came the Earl of Lennox, in a high taking—foxy, close-eyed, crop-bearded, fussy and foolish—to pay his respects to the Prince his son. Never was a more disastrous

combination made: they cut the Court in half, as shears a length of cloth. The garrulity of the old man set everybody on edge; then came the insolent son, to prove the truth even worse than they had feared. His father egged him on to preposterous lengths, intolerable behaviour; so the ‘pretty cockerel,’ as they called him in France, made wild work in the hill-town. He quarrelled so fiercely with my Lord Rothes that Davy had to pull him off by main force, and then he drew his dagger on the Lord Justice Clerk, who came to his lodging with a message from the Queen.

‘Tell your mistress,’ he had cried out to that astonished officer, ‘that I pay honour to none but the honourable. You have come here with lies in your throat. She sent me no such message. You are a very dirty fellow.’

Archie Douglas put in his oar. ‘No, no, sir. You jest with the Lord Justice Clerk—but your jest is too broad.’

‘By God, man,’ says the Prince, ‘this jest of mine is narrow at the point. Let him come on and taste the forky tongue of it.’

The Lord Justice Clerk was too flustered to be offended at the moment; but when he had gained the calm of the street he shuddered to recall the scene. Her Majesty must be informed of every circumstance: flesh and blood could not endure such affronts. It needed all her Majesty’s cajolery to salve the wounded man, and more than she had over to comfort herself when he had gone away mollified.

Lord Ruthven was one of the Prince’s intimates at this time, a malign influence; and the everlasting Italian was another. Signior Davy, at home in all the chambers of the house, used to sit on the edge of the young man’s bed and pare his nails while he talked philosophy and statecraft. It was he who tempered the storm which had nearly maddened the Lord Justice Clerk.

‘Your lordship is in a fair way to the haven,’ he said. ‘I tell you honestly you will get on no quicker for this choler. You must needs be aware that her Majesty will have no rest until you and she are publicly wedded. She is fretting herself to strings under

that desire. What then is my advice to your lordship? Why, to sit very still, and to insist with your respectable father that he hold his tongue. I speak plainly; but it is to my friend and patron.'

The Prince was not offended—but he was obstinate.

'Speak as plain as you please, Davy, and deal for me as warily as you can. The patent should be sealed.'

That was the root of the quarrel—his patent of creation to be Duke of Rothesay. The Queen had promised it to him, but there had been vexed debate over it in the Council. It was a title for kings' sons, and had always been so. The Earl of Moray vehemently opposed; the Argylls, Glencairns, and others of his friends followed him; they had hopes also of the Chancellor. At the minute, therefore, although the Queen had insisted even unto tears, she had not been able to get her way. So she pretended to give over the effort, meaning, of course, to work round about for it. She had seen the Chancellor's wavering: if she could gain him she would have much. All she wanted for herself was time, all from the Prince was patience. But the furious fool had none to lend her.

When the Italian had done his work upon his nails—the rough with the knife, the rounding-off with his teeth—he resumed his spoken thoughts.

'Your patent,' he said, 'is as good as sealed. The Queen is at work upon it in ways which are past your lordship's finding out. For the love of mercy, be patient: you little know what you are risking by this intemperance. Why, with patience you will gain what no patent of her Majesty's can give you: that little matter of kingship, which, in such a case as yours, goes only by proclamation and——'

My lord pricked up his ears to this royal word. 'Ha! In a good hour, Master David!'

'Good enough, when it comes,' says Davy; 'but you did not allow me to finish. Proclamation—and acclamation, I was about to add; for one is as needed as the other.'

This was a fidgety addition.

‘Pooh!’ cried the Prince, ‘the pack follows the horn.’

He set the Italian’s shoulders to work. ‘I advise you not to count upon it, my lord. In this country there is no pack of hounds, but a flock—many flocks—of sheep. And they follow the shepherd, you must know. Therefore you must be prudent; let me say, more prudent. The Queen comes to you too much; you go to her too little. It is she that pays the court, where it should be you. Dio mio! It is not decent. It is madness.’

‘She is fond of me, Davy. The truth is, she is over-fond of me.’

Signior Davy stopped himself just in time. He buried his exclamation in a prodigious shrug.

The doings of the Lennoxes, father and son, which scared the Court so finely, were the Earl of Moray’s only hope. He, in truth, was very near finding himself in the position of a man who should have lit a fire to keep wolves from his door. The flames catch the eaves and burn his house down: behold him without shelter, and the wolves coming on! This is exactly his own case. Kingship for the young man, by whose entangling he had hoped to entangle his sister, was a noose round his own neck—the mere threat of it was a noose. If he furthered it he was ruined; if he opposed it—at this hour of the day—he might equally be ruined. All his hope lay in England. Let the Queen of England send for her runaway subjects, and then—why, he could begin again. As day succeeded to day, and favour to favour—the dukedom conferred, the match in every one’s mouth, the Court at Edinburgh, the Chapel Royal in fair view—he worked incessantly. He dared not try the Italian again, lest the impudent dog should grin in his face; but he secured Argyll and his friends, the Duke of Châtelherault and his; he wrote to Lethington, to Mr. Cecil, to the Earl of Leicester, to Queen Elizabeth. And so it befel that, one certain morning, English Mr. Randolph faced the Lennoxes with his mistress’s clear commands. Father and son

were to return to England, or——

Quos ego—in fact; much too late for the fair. They took the uncompromising message each after his kind: Lennox, white-haired, ape-faced and fussy, sitting in his deep leather chair, rolling his palms over the knobs of it, swinging his feet free of the ground; the Prince his son stiff as a rod, standing, with one hand to his padded hip—blockish and surly as a rogue mule.

Lennox spoke first. 'Hey, Master Randolph!'—his little naked eyes were like pin-pricks—'Hey, Master Randolph, I dare not do it. No, no. It's not in the power of man living to do the like of it.'

Randolph shifted his scrutiny. The Prince was angry, therefore bold; assured, therefore haughty.

'And I, Randolph,' he said, 'tell you fairly that go I will not.'

Randolph became dry. 'I hope my lord, for a better answer to the Queen your sovereign. Will and Shall are bad travelling companions for a legate. I urge once more your duty upon you.'

'Duty!' cried the flushed youth: 'I own to no duty but Queen Mary's, and I never will. As to the other Queen, your mistress, who grudges me my fortune, it is no wonder that she needs me. You will understand wherefore in a few days' time. I do not intend to return: there is your answer. I am very well where I am, and likely to be better yet anon. So I purpose to remain. There is your answer, which seems to me a good one.'

Randolph turned his back and left them. When he saw the Earl of Moray he said that he had done his best to serve him; and that, although he had no hope of staying the marriage, his lordship might count upon the friendship of England in all enterprises he might think well to engage in 'for the welfare of both realms.' This was cold comfort.

Shortly after this disappointment the careworn lord got into a wrangle with the

Prince in a public place—not a difficult thing to do. It began with the young man's loud rebuke of Mr. Knox, who (said he) had called him 'a covetous clawback,' and whose ears he threatened to crop with a pair of shears. Beginning in the vestibule of the Council-chamber, it was continued on the open cawsey in everybody's hearing. There was heat; the younger may have raised his hand against the elder, or he may not. The Earl, at any rate, declared that he went in fear of his life. Then came the hour, most memorable, when he saw the Queen alone.

He was sent for, and he came, as he told her at once, 'with his life in his hand.'

She asked him who would touch his hand, except to take it and shake it?

'One, madam,' he replied darkly, 'who is too near your Majesty for my honour or——' and there he stopped.

'Or mine, would you say?' she flashed back at him—one of her penetrative flashes, following a quick turn of the head. Remember, she knew nothing of his brawl with the Prince.

He disregarded her riposte, and pursued his suspicions. 'Madam, madam, I very well know—for I still have friends in Scotland—in what danger I stand. I very well know who talked together against me behind the back-gallery at Perth, and can guess at what was said, and how this late discreditable scene was laid——'

'Oh, you guess this, brother! you guess that!' the Queen snapped at him; 'I am weary of your guesses against my friends. There was the Earl of Bothwell, whom you guessed your mortal enemy; now I suppose it is the Prince, my husband. Do you think all Scotland finds you in the way? It is easy for you to remove the suspicion.'

His looks reproached her. 'Did you send for me, madam, to wound me?'

'No, no. You have served me well. I am not unmindful.' Her eyes grew gentle as she remembered Wemyss and the hasty mysteries of the night—the hurry, the whispered urgings, the wild-beating heart. She held out her hand, shyly, as befitted recognition of a blushful service. 'I can never quarrel with you, brother, knowing what you

know, remembering what you have seen.'

Whither was fled the finer sense of the man? He misunderstood her grossly, believing that she feared his knowledge. He did not take her proffered hand—she drew it back after a while, slowly.

'You say well, sister,' he answered, with cold reserve. 'There should be no quarrel, nor need there be, while you remember me—and yourself.'

'It was not at all in my mind, I assure you,' she told him, with an air of dismissing the foolish thing; and went on, in the same breath, to speak of the vexatious news from England—as if he and she were of the same opinion about that! Her 'good sister,' she said, was holding strange language, requiring the return of 'subjects in contumacy,' showing herself offended at unfriendly dealing, and what not—letters, said Queen Mary, which required speedy answer, and could have but one answer. The Contract of Matrimony, in short, had been prepared by my Lord Morton, was ready to be signed; the high parties were more than ready. Should she send for the treaty? She wished her brother to see it. That was why she had summoned him.

He was seldom at a loss, for when direction failed him he had a store of phrases ready to eke out the time. But now that he was plumply face to face with what he had come both to hate and to fear, he stammered and looked all about.

She rang her hand-bell, and bade the page call Signior Davy 'and the parchment-writing'; then, while she waited in matronly calm, sedately seated, hands in lap, he wrestled with his alarms, suspicions, grievances, disgusts; saw them flare before him like shapes—lewd, satyr shapes with their tongues out; lost control of himself, and broke out.

'The marriage-band, you speak of? Ah—ah—but there is much to say anent such a thing—a tedious inquiry! Madam—madam—I should have exhibited to you before—the fault is in me that I did not——There is a common sense abroad—no man can fight a nation—it is thought that the case is altered. Yes, yes!

Monarchs—you that be set in authority over men—are to be warned by them that stand about your thrones, monished and exhorted. 'Tis your duty to listen, theirs to impart: duty to God and the conscience. I am sore at a loss for words——'

Probably she had not been listening very closely, or heeding his agitation. She stopped him with a little short laugh.

'Nay, 'tis not words you lack. Find courage, brother.'

'Why, madam,' said he, 'and so I must. "It is expedient," saith the Book, "that one man die——"! What a whole nation dreads, there must be some one to declare—even though, in so doing, he should seem to stultify himself. Oh, madam, is not the case altered from what it promised at first? Alas, what hope can we now have—seeing what we have seen—that this young man will prove a setter-forth of Christ's religion? Or how can we suppose that he will ensue what we most desire—I mean the peace of God upon true believers? Do they know him in England and suppose that of him? Then how can we suppose it? Why, what token hath he showed towards the faithful but that of rancour? What professions hath he made, save them of mass-mongering, false prophecy, idolatry, loving darkness, shunning the light? Oh, madam, I am sore to say these things——'

The Italian entered with his parchments before he could hurry to a close or she stop him with an outcry.

It needed not so quick an eye to sense the brewing of a storm. The Queen sat back in her chair, cowering in the depths of it. Her eyes were fastened upon a little glass bowl which stood on the table—in a broody stare which saw nothing but midnight. The Earl, white to the edge of his lips, was waving his hands in the air. Bright and confident, the Italian stood at the door; but my lord, in his agitation, turned upon him. 'Man, you're a trespasser. Off with you! The Queen is in council—off!'

'Scusì,' says Davy, 'I am summoned. Eccomi.'

He was dramatically quiet; he woke the Queen.

She started from her chair and ran to him. ‘Oh, David, David, he denies me! Perjury! Perjury!’

‘Sovereign lady,’ said the Italian, ‘here is one who will never deny you anything.’

As he knelt my lord recovered his dignity. ‘It is not convenient, madam——’

Ah, but she faced about. ‘Convenient! convenient! To end what you have begun? You! that led me to him! You that drove us in with your breath like a sheet of flame!’

He put up his hand, driven to defend himself. ‘Nay, madam, nay! It cannot be said. My design was never adopted—it was misunderstood. I bowed to no idols—that be far from me. I was outside the door. I neither know what was done within your chapel, nor afterwards within any chambers of the house. My only office was——’

She held herself by the throat—all gathered together, as if she would spring at him.

Signior Davy looked mildly from one to the other. ‘Scusì,’ he said, his voice soft as milk, ‘but your lordship was not outside all doors. I know to a point how much your lordship knows.’

The Earl gasped for breath.

At this point the Queen seemed to have got strength through the hands. She let them down from her neck, as if the spasm had passed. Her heart spoke—a lyric cry. ‘He brought me to the chamber door, and kissed my cheek, and wished me joy!’ She spoke like one enrapt, a disembodied sprite, as if the soul could have seen the body in act, and now rehearse the tale. ‘He led me to the chamber door, and kissed my cheek! “Sweet night,” says he, “sweet sister! See how your dreams come true.” And “Burning cheek!” says he; and “Fie, fie, the wild blood of a lass!” I think my cheek did prophesy, and burn for the shame to come.’ She turned them a tragic shape—drawn mouth, great eyes, expository hands. ‘Why, sirs, if a groom trick a poor wench and deny her her lines, you put her up in a sheet, and freeze the vice out of her with your prying eyes! Get you a white sheet for Queen Mary and stare the

devil out of her! Go you: why do you wait? Ah, pardon, I had forgot!' She exhibited one to the other. 'This man has no time to spare that he may chastise the naughty. The throned is made shameful that the throne may be emptied. Give him a leg, David; he will stand your friend for it.'

'Dear madam! sweet madam!' murmured the Italian.

But she had left him now for the white skulker by the door. 'Oh you, you, you, in your hurry!' she mocked him, 'deny me not my shroud and candle. For if you are to sit in my seat I will stand at the kirk gate and cry into all hearts that go by, "See me here as I stand in my shroud. I am the threshold he trod upon. He reached his degree o'er the spoils of a girl."' She came closer to him, peering and whispering. 'And I will be nearer, my lord, whenas you are dead. I will flit over the graves of the kings my ancestors till I find the greenest, and there shall I sit o' nights, chattering your tale to the men that be there with their true-born about them. "Ho, you that were lawful kings of Scotland, listen now to me!" I shall say. And they will lift their heads in their vaults and lean upon their bony elbows at ease and hear of your shameful birth and life of lies and treasons, and most miserable death. And you in your cerements will lie close, I think, my brother, lest the very dead turn their backs on you.'

She stopped, struggling for breath. The dangerous ecstasy held her still, like a rigor; but he, who with shut eyes and fending arms had been avoiding, now lifted his head.

'You misjudge me—you are too hasty——'

As a woman remote from him and his affairs she answered him, 'Not so. But I have been too slow.'

'Your Majesty should see——'

She sprang into vehemence, transfigured once more by fierce and terrible beauty.

'I do see. You are a liar. I see you through and through, and the lies, like snakes, in your heart. I will never willingly see you again.'

Still he tried to reason with her. ‘If accommodation of joint griefs——’

‘None! There can be none. Where do we join, sir? Tell me, and I will burn the part.’

‘Dear sir,’ said the Italian, as she paced the room, gathering more eloquence—‘dear sir, I advise you to depart.’

The Earl was stung by the familiarity. ‘Be silent, fellow. Madam, suffer me one more word.’

‘You drown in your words. Therefore, yes.’

He gathered his wits together for this poor opportunity. ‘I have been misjudged,’ he said, ‘and know very well to whom I stand debtor for that. Nevertheless, I would still serve your Grace in chamber and in hall, so far as my conscience will suffer me. I say, that is my desire. But if you drive me from you; if I am turned from my father’s birthright——I beseech you to consider with what painful knowledge I depart. If I have witnessed unprincely dealing in high places——’

She openly scorned him. ‘Drown, sir, drown! No, stay. I will throw you a plank.’

She rang the bell. Des-Essars answered. ‘If my lord the Chancellor is in hall, or in the precincts in any part, I desire his presence here. If he is abroad, send Mr. Erskine—and with speed.’

The boy withdrew. She sat, staring at nothing. The two men stood. Absolute silence.

The Chancellor happened to be by. He was found in the tennis-court, calling the game. Much he pondered the summons, and scratched in his red beard.

‘Who is with the Queen, laddie?’

He was told, the Italian and my Lord of Moray. Making nothing of it, he whistled for his servant, who lounged with others at the door.

‘Hurry, Jock Scott! my cloak, sword, and bonnet. At what hour is the Council?’

‘My lord, at noon.’

He went off, muttering, ‘What’s in the wind just now?’ and as he went by the great

entry saw the guard running, and heard a shout: ‘Room for the Prince’s grace!’ He could see the plumes of the riders and the press about them. ‘It’ll be a new cry before long, I’m thinking,’ he said to himself, and went upstairs.

Entering that silent room, he bent his knee to the Queen. She did not notice his reverence, but said at once: ‘My Lord Chancellor, I shall not sit at the Council to-day. You will direct the clerk to add a postill[3] to the name of my Lord of Moray here.’

‘Madam, with good will. What shall his postill be?’

‘You shall write against his name, Last time he sits. I know that your business is heavy. Farewell, my lords.’

Morton and Moray went out together. At the end of the corridor and head of the stair, Morton stopped.

‘Man, my Lord of Moray, what is this?’

For answer, the Earl of Moray looked steadily at him for a moment: then, ‘Come, come,’ he said, ‘we must go to our work, you and I.’

They said no more; but went through the hall, and heard the Prince’s ringing voice, high above all the others, calling for ‘that black thief Ruthven.’ They saluted a few and received many salutations. Lord John Stuart passed them, his arm round the neck of his Spanish page, and stared at his brother without greeting. These two hated each other, as all the world knew. That same night the Earl of Moray left Edinburgh, and went into Argyll, where all his friends were. It was to be nine months before he could lay his head down in his own house again.

Very little passed between the Queen and her Secretary. She sat quite still, staring and glooming; he moved about, touching a thing here and there, like a house-servant who, by habit, dusts the clean furniture. This brought him by degrees close to her chair. Then he said quickly, ‘Madam, let me speak.’

‘Ay, speak, David.’

‘Madam,’ he said, ‘this is not likely to be work for fair ladies, though they be brave as they are fair. I have seen it growing—this disturbance—a many days. He is not alone by any means, my lord your brother. Madam, send a messenger into France. Send your little Jean-Marie.’

She looked up. ‘Into France?’

‘Madam, yes. Send a messenger into France. Let him fetch home the Earl of Bothwell.’

She started. ‘Him?’

Riccio nodded his head quickly.

Whereupon she said, ‘He is not in France.’

‘Send for him, madam,’ said Riccio, ‘wheresoever he may be—him and no other. Remember also—but no hurry for that—that you have my Lord Gordon under your hand. At need, remember him. A fine young man! But the other! Oh, send quickly for him! Eh, eh, what a captain against rebels!’ He could not see her face; her hand covered it.

‘I will think of this,’ she said. ‘Go now. Send me Carwood: I am mortally tired.’ Carwood was her bedchamber-woman.

There was a riot on the night following the proclamation of King Henry, begun by some foaming fool in the Luckenbooths. Men caught him with a candle in his hand, burning straw against a shop door. ‘What are ye for? What are ye for?’ they cried at him, and up he jumped with the fired wisp in his hand, and laughed, calling out, ‘I am the muckle devil! Come for the popish King!’ The words fired more than the brand, for people ran hither and thither carrying their fierce relish, feeding each other. The howling and tussling of men and women alike raged in and out of the wynds. It was noticed that nearly all the women took the Queen’s part, and fought

against the men—a thing seldom seen in Edinburgh. In a desultory way, with one or two bad outbreaks, of which the worst was in the Grassmarket, where they stoned a man and a girl to death, it lasted all night. The Lord Lyon had his windows broken. Mr. Knox quelled the infuriates of the High Street.

This was on the night of July 28th, very hot weather. On the morning of the 30th she was married in her black weeds—for so she chose it, saying that she had been married already in colour, and as her lord was possessed of the living, so now he should own the dead part of her. She heard mass alone, for the Prince would not go to that again; but the Earl of Atholl stood by her, while Lennox waited in the antechapel with his son. Mass over, the words were spoken, rings put on. He had one and she three. They knelt side by side and heard the prayers; she bowed herself to the pavement, but he was very stiff. They rose; he gave her a kiss. When her women came about her he went away to her cabinet and waited for her there, quiet and self-possessed, not answering any of his father's speeches.

Presently they bring him in the Queen, with coaxings and entreaties.

'Now, madam, now! Do off your blacks. Come, never refuse us!'

She laughed and shook her head, looking sidelong at her husband.

'Yes, yes,' they cry, 'we will ask the King, madam, since you are so perverse. Sir, give us leave.'

'Ay, ay, ladies, unpin her,' he says.

Mary Sempill cried, 'Come, my ladies! Come, sirs! Help her shed her weeds.' She took out a shoulder-pin, and the black shroud fell away from her bosom. Mary Fleming let loose her arms; Mary Seton, kneeling, was busy about her waist; Mary Beaton flacked off the great hood. Atholl, Livingstone, Lennox, all came about her, spoiling her of her old defences. When the black was all slipped off, she stood displayed in figured ivory damask, with a bashful, rosy, hopeful face. Atholl took a hand, Lennox the other.

‘By your leave, sweet madam.’ They led her to the young man.

‘She is yours, sir, by her own free will. God bless the mating!’

Then, when they had all gone tumbling out of the room, and you could have heard their laughter in the passages, she stood before him with her hands clasped. ‘Yes, my lord, I am here. Use me well.’

He gave a toss of the head; laughed aloud as he took her.

‘Ay, my Mary, I have thee now!’

He held her close, looking keenly into her hazel eyes. He kissed her mouth and neck, held up his head, and cheered like a hunter. ‘The mort o’ the deer! The mort o’ the deer! ‘Ware hounds, ‘ware! Let the chief take assay.’

The head of the Hamiltons, the head of the Campbells, the head of the Leslies, were all in Argyll with the Earl of Moray. Mr. Knox was with his young wife; Mr. Randolph kept his lodging; the Earl of Bothwell was at sea, beating up north; and my Lord Gordon, new released from prison, was with his mother and handsome sister Jean. None of these were at the marriage, nor bidden to the marriage supper. But there came a decent man, Mr. George Buchanan, affording himself an epithalamy, and received in recompense the Queen’s and King’s picture set in brilliants. This did not prevent him from casting up his hands in private before Mr. Knox. The great elder watched him grimly.

‘So the wilful lass has got her master! And a pranking rider for a bitter jade! Man, George,’ he said, looking critically through him, ‘in my opinion you are a thin, truckling body.’

[3] Postill, a marginal note.

END OF MAIDS’ ADVENTURE

BOOK THE SECOND MEN’S BUSINESS

CHAPTER I OPINIONS OF FRENCH PARIS UPON SOME LATE EVENTS

Nicholas the lacquey, whom they call ‘French Paris,’ can neither read nor write, nor cipher save with notches in a wand; but he has travelled much, and in shrewd company; and has seen things—whatever men may do—of interest moral and otherwise. And whether he work his sum by aid of his not over-orderly notches, or upon his not over-scrupulous fingers, the dog can infer; he will get the quotient just, and present it you in divers tongues, with divers analogies drawn from his knowledge of affairs: France, England, the Low Countries, Upper Italy, the Debateable Land—from one, any, or all, French Paris can pick his case in point. Therefore, his thoughts upon events in Scotland, both those which led to his coming thither in the train of my Lord Bothwell, his master, and those which followed hard upon it, should be worth having, if by means of a joke and a crown-piece one could get at them.

You may see the man, if you will, lounging any afternoon away with his fellows on the cawsey—by the Market Cross, in the parvise of Saint Giles’s, by the big house at the head of Peebles Wynd (‘late my Lord of Moray’s,’ he will tell you with a wink), or, best of all, in the forecourt of Holyrood—holding his master’s cloak upon his arm. He is to be known at once by the clove carnation or sprig of rosemary in his mouth, and by his way of looking Scotchwomen in their faces with that mixture of impudence and naïveté which his nation lends her sons. Being whose son he is, he will be a smooth-chinned, lithe young man, passably vicious, and pale with it; grey in the eye, dressed finely in a good shirt, good jacket and breeches. But for certain these two last will not meet; the snowy lawn will force itself between, and, like a vow of continence, sunder two loves. Paris will be tender of his waist. He will look at all women as they pass, not with reverence (as if they were a holier kind of flesh), but rather, like his namesake, as if he held the apple weighing in his hand. Seems to

have no eye for men—will tell you, if you ask him of them, that there are none in Scotland but his master and Mr. Knox; and yet can judge them quicker than any one. It was he who said of the King, having seen him but once, after supper, at Stirling: 'This young man fuddles himself to brave out his failure. He is frigid—wants a sex.' And of the Queen, on the same short acquaintance, but helped by hearsay: 'She had been so long the pet of women that she thought herself safe with any man. But now she knows that it takes more than a cod-piece to make a man. Trust Paris.' Trust Paris! A crown will purchase the rogue, and yet he has a kind of faithfulness. He will endure enormously for his master's sake, shun no fatigues, wince at no pain, consider no shame—to be sure, he has none—blink at few perils. Talk to him, having slipped in your crown, he will be frank. He will tell you of his master.

A quick word of thanks, whistled off into the air, will introduce him to the broad piece. He will give it a flick in the air, catch it as it comes down, rattle it in his hollowed palm, with a grin into your face. 'This is the upright servant, this pretty knave,' he will say of his coin. 'For, look you, sir, this white-faced, thin courtier is the one in all the world whom you need not buy for more than his value. God of Gods, if my master thought fully of it he would be just such another. Because it is as plain as a monk's lullaby that, if you need not give more for him than he is worth, you cannot give less!'

His master, you have been told, is the great Earl of Bothwell, now Lord Admiral of Scotland, Lieutenant-General of the East, West, and Middle Marches, and right hand of the Queen's Majesty. How is the story of so high a man involved in your crown-piece? Why, thus.

French Paris displays the coin. 'Do you see these two children's faces, these sharp and tender chins, these slim necks, these perching crowns? What says the circumscription? Maria et Henricus D. G. Scotorum Regina et Rex. How! the mare before the sire? You have touched, sir!' For observe, Paris' master came into

Scotland, a pardoned rebel, because this legend at first had run Henricus et Maria Rex et Regina, and there was outcry raised, flat rebellion. And so surely, says Paris, as he had come, and been received, him with his friends, and had given that quick shake of the head (which so well becomes him), and lifted his war-shout of 'Hoo! hoo! A Hepburn, hoo!'—so surely they struck a new coinage, at this very Christmas past—and here we are over Candlemas—with Maria et Henricus, and the mare before the sire. 'That is how my master came back to Scotland, sir, and here upon the face of your bounty you see the prémices. But there will be a more abundant harvest, if I mistake not the husbandman.'

'That is a droll reflection for me,' he will add, 'who have been with my master as near beggary as a swan in the winter, and nearer to death than the Devil can have understood. I have served him here and there for many years—Flanders, Brabant, Gueldres, Picardy, Savoy, England. Do you happen to know the port of Yarmouth? They can drink in Yarmouth. I have hidden with him in the hills of this country: that was when he had broken out of prison in this town, and before he hanged Pringle with his own hands. I have skulked there, I say, until the fog rotted my bones. I have sailed the seas in roaring weather, and upon my word, sir, have had experiences enough to make the fortune of a preacher. There was a pirate of Brill in our company, Oudekirk by name, who denied the existence of God in a tempest, and perished by a thunderbolt. Pam! It clove him. "There is no God!" cried he, and with the last word there was a blare of white light, a crackling, hissing, tearing noise, a crash; and when we looked at Oudekirk one side of him was coal-black from the hair to the midriff, and his jaws clamped together! But I could not tell you all—some is not very convenient, I must allow.

'We were at Lille when the Queen's messenger—the little smutty-eyed Brabanter—found us. He brought two letters: the Queen's very short, a stiff letter of recall, promising pardon "as you behave yourself towards us." The other was from that large Italian, who sprawls where he ought not, in his own tongue; as much as

may be, like this:—

‘“Most serene, cultivable lord, it is very certain that if you come to this country you will be well received; the more so, seeing that certain of your unfriends (he meant Monsieur de Moray) have been treated lately as they well deserve. The Queen weds Prince Henry Stuart, of whom I will only write that I wish he were older and more resembled your magnificence.”

‘All Italians lie, sir; yet so it is that their lies always please you. You may be sure my master needed no more encouragement to make his preparation of travel. It was soon after this that he showed me a glove he had, and an old letter of the Queen’s. We were in his bedchamber, he in his bed. He has many such pledges, many and many, but he was sure of this glove because it was stiff in two fingers. When he told me that he intended for Scotland and must take the glove with him, I said, “Master, be careful what you are about. It is certain that the Queen will know her own glove again, and should this prove the wrong one it will be worse for you than not to show it at all.”

‘“Pooh, man,” says he, “the glove is right enough. There are no others stiff from a wetting. But look and see. Let’s be sure.”

‘It was true there were no others quite so stiff in the fingers. Tears had done it, the letter said: but who knows, with women?’ French Paris, here, would give a hoist to his breeches.

‘In September last we made land, after a chase in furious weather. An English ship sighted us off Holy Island: we ran near to be aground on that pious territory, but our Lady or Saint Denis, or a holy partnership between them, saved us. They sent out a long boat to head us into shoal water; we slipped in between. My master had the helm and rammed it down with his heel; we came about to the wind, we flew, with the water hissing along the gunwale. We saw them in the breakers as we gained the deeps. “There goes some beef into the pickle-tub!” cried he, and stood up and hailed

them with mockery. “Sooner you than me, ye drowning swine!” he roars against the tempest. Such a man is my master.

‘We found anchorage at Eyemouth, and pricked up the coast-road to this place. The war—if you can call it war, which was a chasing of rats in a rickyard—was as good as over, but by no means the cause of war. The Queen was home from the field, where they tell me she had shown the most intrepid front of any of her company. Not much to say, perhaps. Yet remember that she had Monsieur de Huntly with her, that had been Gordon—a fine stark man, like a hawk, whom she had set free from prison and restored to his Earldom before the rebellion broke out; and he is passably courageous. But it was a valet of his, Forbes, “red Sandy Forbes,” they call him, who told me that he had never in his life seen anything like the Queen of Scots upon that hunting of outlaws. Think of this, dear sir! The King in a gilt corslet, casque of feathers, red cloak and all, greatly attended by his Englishmen—his pavilion, his bed, his cooks and scullions; his pampered, prying boys, his little Forrest, his little Ross, his Jack and his Dick; with that greyhead, bowing, soft-handed cousin of his, Monsieur Archibald, for secretary—hey? Very good: you picture the young man And she!’ French Paris threatens you with one finger, presented like a pistol at your eyes. ‘She had one lady of company, upon my soul, one only, the fair Seton; that one and no other with her in a camp full of half-naked, cannibal men—for what else are they, these Scots? She wore breastplate and gorget of leather, a leather cap for her head, a short red petticoat, the boots of a man. As for her hair, it streamed behind her like a pennon in the wind. It was hell’s weather, said Sandy Forbes; rain and gusty wind, freshening now and again to tempest; there were quags to be crossed, torrents to be forded; the rain drove like sleet across the hills. Well, she throve upon it, her eyes like stars. There was no tarrying because of her; she raced like a coursing dog, and nearly caught the Bastard of Scotland. He was the root of all mischance, as always in a kingdom; for a bastard, do you see? means fire somewhere. Have you ever heard tell of my Lord Don John of Austria? Ah, if we are to talk of fire, look

out for him.

‘It was in the flats below Stirling that she felt the scent hot in her face. The Bastard had had six hours’ start; but if spurring could have brought horses to face that weather, she had had him in jail at this hour, or in Purgatory. “Half my kingdom,” cries she, “sooner than lose him now!” But he got clear away, he and Monsieur le Duc, and the old Earl of Argyll, and Milord Rothes and the rest of them. They crossed the March into England, and she dared not follow them against advice. My master, when he came, confirmed it: he would not have her venture, knowing England as well as he did; and I need not tell you, sir, that—for that once—he had the support of the King. He was out of breath, that King! But, of course! If you drink to get courage you must pay for it. Your wind goes, and then where is your courage? In the bottle, in the bottle! You drink again—and so you go the vicious round.’ French Paris flips his finger and thumb, extinguishing the King of Scots. ‘The King, sir? Pouf! Perished, gone out, snuffered out, finished, done with—adieu!’ He kisses his hand to the sky. This is treason: let us shift our ground.

‘I did not see my master’s reception, down there in the palace: that was not for a lacquey. Very fine, very curious, knowing what I know. They met him in the hall, a number of the lords—none too friendly as yet, but each waiting on the other to get a line: my Lord of Atholl, a grave, honest man, my Lord of Ruthven, pallid, mad and struggling with his madness, my Lord of Lindsay, who ought to be a hackbutter, or a drawer in a tavern; there were many others, men of no account. My master entered on the arm of the new Earl of Huntly, just restored, the fine young man, to the honours of his late father. In this country, you must know, a certain number of the lords are always in rebellion against the King. He imprisons, not executes, them; for he knows very well that before long another faction will be out against him; and then it is very convenient to release the doers in the former. For by that act of grace you convert them into friends, who will beat your new foes for you. They in their turn go to prison. You know the fate of M. de Huntly’s father, for instance—how he

rebelled and died, and was dug out of the grave that they might spit upon his old body? The Bastard's doing, but the Queen allowed it. And now, here is the Bastard hiding in the rocks, and old Huntly's son hunting him high and low. Drôle de pays! But, I was about to tell you, rebels though we have been, they received us well—crowded about us—clapped our shoulders—cheered, laughed, talked all at once. My master was nearly off his feet as they bore him down the hall towards the fire. Now, there by the fire, warming himself, stood a nobleman, very broad in the back, very pursy, with short-fingered, fat hands, and well-cushioned little eyes in his face. So soon as he saw us coming he grew red and walked away.

'"Ho, ho, my Lord of Morton, whither away so fast?" cried out my master.

'And my Lord of Livingstone said: "To sit on the Great Seal, lest Davy get it from him"; and they all burst out laughing like a pack of boys. I suppose he is still sitting close, for he has not been seen this long time.

'We sent up our names and waited—but we waited an hour! Then came my Lord of Traquair and took up my master alone. He had his glove and letter with him, I knew. He was determined to risk them.

'The Queen had nobody with her; and he told me that the first thing she said to him was this:—"My lord, you have things of mine which I need. Will you not give them to me?"

'He took them out of his bosom—if you know him you will see his twinkling eyes, never off her—and held them up. "They have been well cared for, madam. I trust that your Majesty will be as gentle with them."

'"They are safe with me," says the Queen. So then, after a fine reverence, he gave them up, and she thanked him, and put them in her bosom; and I would give forty crowns to know where they are now. I know where they will be before long.

'Now what do you think of that? It shows you, first, that he was right and I wrong; for she never looked at the thing, and any woman's glove would have done, with a

little sea-water on the fingers. My master, let me tell you, is a wise man, even at his wildest. He did more good to himself by that little act than by any foolish play of the constant lover. He showed her that she might trust him. True. But much more than that, he showed her that he did not need her tokens; and that was the master-stroke.

‘The same line he has followed ever since—he alone, like the singling hound in a pack. He has held her at arm’s length. She has trusted him, and shown it; he has served her well, but at arm’s length. That Italian fiddler, rolling about in her chamber, too much aware of his value, takes another way. Lord forgive him! he is beginning to play the patron. That can only lead him to one place, in my opinion. Hated! that is a thin word to use in his respect. He makes the lords sick with fear and loathing. They see a toad in the Queen’s lap, as in the nursery tale, and no one dare touch the warty thing, to dash it to the wall. My master would dare, for sure; but he does not choose. For all that, he says that Monsieur David is a fool.

‘It is when I am trussing him in the mornings, kneeling before him, that he speaks his mind most freely. He is like that—you must be beneath his notice to get his familiarity. Do you know the course he takes here in this world of rats and women? To laugh, and laugh, and laugh again: voilà! He varies his derision, of course. He will not rally the King or put him to shame, but listens, rather, and watches, and nods his head at his prancings, and says, “Ha, a fine bold game, now!”; or, if he is appealed to directly, will ask, “Sir, what am I to say to you? the same as Brutus said to Cæsar?” “And what said Brutus?” cries the King. “Why, sir,” replies my master, “he said, Sooner you than me, Cæsar.” That is his favourite adage. And so he plays with the King, his eyes twinkling and his mouth broad, but no teeth showing. He shows neither his teeth nor his hand. He is a good card-player; and so he should be, who has been at the table with the Queen-Mother Catherine, daughter of Mischief and the Apothecary.

‘The King hates my master without understanding; the Queen leans on him to gain

understanding; but she has not gained it yet. You may trust my lord for that. Did you hear of the mass on Candlemas Day, a week past to-day? How she thought this a fine occasion to restore the ancient use: her enemies beaten over the border, all her friends should carry tapers, so that the Queen of Heaven might be purified again of her spotless act? She required it personally of all the lords, one by one, herself beseeching them with soft eyes and motions of the hands hard to be denied. Moreover, she is to have need of purification herself if all goes well. For she is ... but you can judge for yourself. Many promised her on whom she had not counted; my master, on whom she did count, refused her point-blank. The strangest part of the business is, however, that his credit is higher now than it was before. So much so that she has made him a fine marriage. Monsieur de Huntly's sister is the lady; I have seen her, but reserve my judgment. I think that she will not like me—I feel it in the ridges of my ears, a very sensitive part with me. She was in the Queen's circle one day—the day on which I saw her—a statue of a woman, upon whom the Queen cast the eyes of that lover who goes to church to view his mistress afar off, and has no regard for any but her, and waits and hopes, and counts every little turn of her head—as patient as a watching dog. Curious! curious government of women! Hey—pardon! The Council is up. I must be forward. Sir, I thank you, and humbly salute you.'

French Paris pushes through the huddle of servants, the rosemary sprig in his mouth.

My Lord Admiral the Earl of Bothwell comes out one of the first, between the Lords Seton and Caithness. He talks fast, you notice, with a good deal of wrist and finger-work, acknowledges no salutations though he is offered many. My Lord Seton takes them all upon himself, misses not one. The Earl of Caithness is an oldish man, rather hard of hearing. Heeding nobody, speaking as he feels, laughing at his own jokes, capping one with another, the burly admiral stands barehead in the raw drizzle, swinging his feathered hat in his hand. There seems much to say, if he could only remember it, and no hurry. Horses are brought up, gentlemen mount by the post

and spur away. Three ushers come running, waving their wands. ‘Sirs, the King!’ The crowd gathers; the Lord Admiral continues his conversation.

The King comes out, taller by a head than most, exceedingly magnificent, light-haired, hot in the face. Hats and bonnets are doffed, but in silence. The great grey stallion with red trappings is his; and he can hold it though two grooms cannot well. He stands for a while, pulling on his gauntlet, scowling and screwing his mouth as he tussles with it. But the scowls, you gather, are less for the glove than for a calm-eyed, fleshy, pink man with a light red beard, who has emerged but just now; whose furred cloak is over-fringed, whose bonnet sags too much over one eye, the jewel in it too broad. This is Signior Davy, too cool and too much master to please one who is hot and not master of himself. You can see the King’s mood grow furious to the point of unreason, while my Lord Bothwell continues his tales, and the Italian, secure in a crowd, seems to be daring an attack.

The King is mounted, the King is away. The crowd drives back to right and left. He goes swinging down the steep street, his gentlemen after him. The Earl of Bothwell calls out, ‘Paris, my cloak.’

Paris turns the rosemary sprig. ‘Le voici, monseigneur.’

He walks away to his lodging like any plain burgess of the town, and Paris trips jauntily after him, looking Scotchwomen in the face.

CHAPTER II GRIEFS AND CONSOLATIONS OF ADONIS

In these dark February days the King was prone to regard his troubles as the consequence, and not the verification, of certain words spoken by Archie Douglas on the braeside by Falkirk—that being a trick of the unreasonable, to date their misfortunes from the time when they first find them out. And yet it was an odd thing that Archie should have spoken in his private ear shortly after Michaelmas, and that here was Candlemas come and gone, with everything turning to prove Archie right.

Now, which of the three was the grey-polled youth—prophet, philosopher, or bird of boding?

Consider his Majesty's affairs in order. The Queen, before marriage and at the time of it, had been as meek as a girl newly parted from her mother, newly launched from that familiar shore to be seethed in the deep, secret waters of matrimony. Something of that exquisite docility he had discerned when he experienced, for instance, the prerogatives of a man. One name before another is a very small matter; but it had given him a magnanimous thrill to read Henricus et Maria upon the white money, and to feel the confidence that Henricus et Maria, in very fact, it was now and was to be. Little things of the sort swelled his comfort up: the style royal, the chief seat, the gravity of the Council (attendant upon his), the awe of the mob, the Italian's punctilio, his father's unfeigned reverence. Even Mr. Randolph's remarked abstention was flattering, for it must have cost the ambassador more to ignore the King than the King could ever have to pay for the slight. Now, a man needs time to get the flavours of such toothsome tribute; he must roll it on his tongue, dally over it with his intimates. Little Forrest, the chamber-child, could have told a thing or two: how the King used to wear his gold circlet in private, and walk the room in his crimson mantle. Antony Standen knew something. Yes, yes, a man needs time; and such time was denied him—and (by Heaven!) denied him by the Queen herself.

By the Queen! From the hour when she heard the news from Argyll, that the rebels, her brother at their head, had called out the clans of the west—Campbells, Leslies, Hamiltons—against her authority, she was a creature whom her King had never conceived of. He was told by Archie Douglas then, and partly believed, that she was slighting him; but the plain truth is, of course, that all her keen love for him was running now in a narrow channel—that of strenuous loyalty to the young man she had chosen to set beside her. These hounds to deny his kingly right! Let them learn then what a King he was, for what a King she held him! She strained every nerve, put edge to every wit in his vindication. While he lay abed, stretching,

dreaming—sometimes of her, more often of her love for him, most often of what he should do when he was fairly roused: ‘Let them not try me too far, little Forrest! I say, they had best not!’ etc.—at these times she was in her cabinet with the Italian, writing to her brother of France, her father of Rome, her uncles and cousins of Lorraine, promising, wheedling, threatening, imploring. Or she was in audience, say, with George Gordon, winning back his devotion with smiles and tender looks, with a hand to the chin, or two clasping her knee—with all the girlish wiles she knew so well and so divinely used. For his sake—that slug-abed—she dared see Bothwell again; and greater pride hath no woman than this, to brave the old love for the sake of the new. Finally, when cajolery and bravado had done their best for her, she sprang starry-eyed into battle, headed her ragged musters in a short petticoat, and dragged him after her in gilded armour. That is what a man—by the mass, a King!—may fairly call being docked of his time to get the flavours.

He went out unwillingly to war, with sulky English eyes for all the petty detriments. He sniffed at her array, her redshanks armed with bills, her Jeddart bowmen, haggard hillmen from Badenoch and Gowrie. Where were the broad pavilions, the camp-furniture, the pennons and pensels, the siege-train, the led horses, the Prince’s cloth of estate? Was he to huddle with reivers under a pent of green boughs, and with packed cowdung keep the wind from his anointed person? King of kings, Ruler of princes! was she to do the like? How she laughed, tossed back her hair, to hear him!

‘Hey, dear heart, you are in wild Scotland, where all fare alike. O King of Scots, forget your smug England, and teach me, the Queen, to laugh at stately France! Battle, my prince, battle! The great game!’

She galloped down the line, looking back for him to follow. Line! it was no line, but a jostling horde of market-drovers clumped upon a knowe. There were no formation, no livery, no standard—unless that scarecrow scarf were one. Why should he follow

her to review a pack of thieves?

Hark, hark, how the rascals cheered her! They ran all about her, tossing up their bonnets on pikes. They were insulting her.

‘By God!’ he cried out, ‘who was to teach them behaviour? Was this the King’s office?’

‘It is the Queen’s, my good lord; she will teach them,’ said the Italian at his elbow. ‘And what her Majesty omits the enemy will teach them, at his own charges. I know your countrymen by now. Manners? Out of place in the field. Courage? They have never wanted for that.’

The King grew red, as he tried in vain to stare down this confident knave; then turned to his Archie Douglas. ‘A company of my Lord Essex’s horse,’ he said, ‘would drill these rabble like a maggoty cheese.’

Archie excused his nation. ‘They will trot the haggs all day, sir, on a crust of rye-bread, and engage at the close for a skirl of the pipes. Hearken! they are at it now. ’Tis the Gordons coming in.’ The thin youth drew himself up. ‘Eh, sirs, my heart warms to it!’ he said, honestly moved by an honest pride.

But the King sulked. ‘Filthy work! Where are my people? Ho, you! my cloak!’

‘Ay, there comes a spit o’ rain,’ said Archie Douglas, nosing the weather. This was no way for a man to get the flavours of kingship.

In the chase that followed—forced marches on Glasgow after old Châtelherault, the scouring of the Forth valley, the view-halloo at Falkirk, and much more—the Queen had to leave him alone, for so he chose it; and there was no time to humour him, had there been inclination. But truly there was none. She had the sting of weather and the scurry in her blood; she was in perfect health, great spirits, loving the work. Hunter’s work! the happy oblivion of the short night’s rest, the privations, the relish of simple fare, the spying and hoping, the searching of hillsides and descents into sombre valleys, your heart in your mouth; all the trick and veer of mountain warfare,

the freedoms, the easy talk, the laughing, the horseplay; she found nothing amiss, kept no state, and never felt the lack of it. The Italian and his letter-case, Lethington and his dockets, were behind. Atholl watched Edinburgh Castle for her, Bothwell was coming home; she had none with her but Mary Seton for countenance, Carwood for use, one page (Adam Gordon), one esquire (Erskine), and Father Roche. For the rest, her cousin and councillor and open-air comrade was George Gordon, late in bonds. So sometimes a whole day would pass without word to the King; later, as at Falkirk, where the scent had been so hot, three or four days; and she never missed him!

This was the occasion when Archie Douglas, riding with his kinsman, had pointed to the head of the valley, saying, ‘There goes a man in good company, who lately was glad of any.’ The King scowled, which encouraged him. ‘Ay,’ he went on—‘ay, the favour of the prince can lift up and cast down. Who’d ha’ thought, sirs, that yon Geordie Gordon should be son of a disgraced old body, that must be dug free from the worms before he could be punished enough? And now Geordie’s in a fair way for favours, and hath his bonny earldom almost under his hand. Eh, sirs, that put your trust in princes, go warily your ways!’

Ruthven, by his side, nudged him to be done with it.

‘No, no, my lord,’ cries Archie, ‘I’ll not be silenced when I see my kinsman slighted; him and his high rights passed over for an outlaw!’

These words were used, ‘slighted,’ ‘passed over.’ The words rankled, the things signified came to pass, as surprisingly they will when once you begin to look for them.

First sign:—Early in the winter, so soon as the war was over and Scotland ridded for a time of declared enemies, the Earl of Bothwell came home whilst the King was at Linlithgow, was received by her Majesty, and (it seems) made welcome. No doubt but he made use of her kindness to line his own nest; at any rate, one of the first

things asked of the returning monarch was to appoint this Bothwell Lieutenant-General of the South and Lord Admiral of Scotland. The parchments came before him for the sign-manual. O prophet Archibald! he found the Queen's name already upon them.

He raised an outcry. 'The Earl of Bothwell! The Earl of Bothwell! How much more grace for this outlaw? Is it not enough that he return with his head on his shoulders?'

She replied that he had deserved well of both of them. He had scared her shameful brother out of Scotland, who would have gone for no other body. He had a stout heart, had promised her that Moray should die an alien or a felon, and would keep his word.

'But this office is a promise to my father, madam,' says the King. 'I promised him that Lieutenancy six months since, and may no more go back upon my word than my Lord Bothwell upon his.'

Rather red in the face, she urged her reasons. 'That is not convenient, dear friend. They do not love my Lord of Lennox in the West. There are other reasons—good reasons. Had you been here you would have heard them all. You must not vex me in this, now—of all times in my life.'

He looked her up and down curiously, without manners, without enthusiasm. Perhaps he did not understand her—he had a thick head. Then he signed the dockets and went out, not having seen that she had shut her eyes and was blushing.

Dreadfully jealous of his 'prerogatives,' he interposed in everything after this, had all state correspondence before him and saw all the replies, whether they were of home or abroad. Here the Italian angered him, whose habit had always been to converse with her Majesty in French: no frowns nor furious pacing of the closet could break him off it. The Queen, very gentle towards him, insisted that the secretary should paraphrase his letters into a kind of Scots; but the King, who was stupid at business, boggled over the halting translation, did not understand any more

than at first, and suspected the Italian of deliberate mystification. He told the Queen that she should speak the vernacular with this hireling. She said, and truly, that she thought in French and spoke it better; when, nevertheless, she tried to gratify him, even he saw that it was absurd. Absurd or not, he loved David none the better for that.

He suspected everybody about her person, but chiefly this fat Italian; to whose score he laid his next rebuff, the very palpable hit that it was. The old Duke of Châtelherault, exiled for the late rebellion, was pining in England, it seems, and beginning to ail. Shallow old trickster as he might be, he loved his country and his kindred, and was (as the Queen could never forget) head of the Hamiltons, of the blood royal. He crept back in December over the Solway, and from one of his coast-castles sent humble messengers forward to her for pardon and remission of forfeiture. To these she inclined, on more grounds than one. She had some pity for the old hag-ridden man, haunted ever with the shadow of madness as he was; she remembered his white hair and flushing, delicate face. Then her new Earl of Huntly had married into that family; and she wished to keep a hold on the Gordons. And then, again, the blood royal! She forgot that if she could comfortably admit Châtelherault his share in that, her husband could never admit it without impeaching his own rights. So she inclined to the piteous letters, and allowed herself to be pitiful.

The King, on the first hint of this clemency, was moved beyond her experience. No sulking, brooding, knitting of brows; he fairly stormed at her before her circle. ‘What am I, madam? What silly tavern-sign do you make of me? You exalt my chief enemy, my hereditary enemy, enemy of my title to be here—and ask me to record it! King Henry is to declare his esteem for the Hamiltons, who desire to unking him! This is paltry work, the design too gross. I see foreign fingers at work in this. But I will never consent, never! Ask me no more.’

The Italian surveyed his august company at large, lifted his eyebrows, and blandly, patently, deliberately shrugged. My Lord of Bothwell himself had little stomach for this; but the King strangled a cry and turned upon his insolent critic. ‘White-blooded, creeping, fingering dog!’ He drew his dagger on the man, and for the moment scared the life out of him.

Lord Bothwell stepped in between, a broad-shouldered easy gentleman; the next step was the Queen’s, flame-hued now, and at her fiercest. ‘Put up your weapon, my lord, and learn to be the companion of your prince. Until this may be, the Council is dissolved. Farewell, sirs. David, stay you here. I have need of you.’

Bothwell and Huntly, they say, fairly led him out of the presence. Good lack, here was Proof the Second! The companion of his prince! He would certainly have killed the Italian had not the Queen taken care that he should not.

Once more he went away, and stayed away. He would wait until she felt the need of him, he said to his friends Archie Douglas and Ruthven, who never left him now. On this occasion the Master of Lindsay was of the party, which rode into the Carse of Gowrie, hunting the fox. Hacked son of a fighting father, worse companion he could not have had—saving the presence of the other two—than Lindsay of the burnt face and bloodshot eye. ‘The King with many friends!’ said Bothwell when he heard how they set out. ‘Smarthering Archie to stroke him tender, Ruthven to scrape him raw, and now Lindsay with his fire-hot breath to inflame the part! Geordie, we must fend for the Queen.’ Huntly, sublimely in love, conscious of his growth in grace, said that he was ready.

With the aid of these two advancing noblemen her Majesty’s government went on. She gave the Hamiltons hard terms, which they took abjectly enough; she pardoned Argyll, because he must be separated from his former friends; the rest of the rebels were summoned to surrender to her mercy at the Market Cross; failing that, forfeiture of lands and goods for my Lord of Moray. The day fixed for him was the

12th March. Huntly was sure he would not come, but Bothwell shook his head. ‘Keep your eye on Mr. Secretary’s letter-bag, madam, and let him know that you do it. I shall feel more restful o’ nights when we are over the 12th March. Another thing you may do: throw him into the company of your brown-eyed Fleming. Does your Majesty know that property of a dish of clear water—to take up the smell of the room you set it in? Your Lethington has that property, therefore let him absorb your little Fleming; you will have him as dovelike as herself.’ The advice was taken, and Mr. Secretary rendered harmless for the present.

Then came news of the King’s return; but not the King. He was certainly at Inchkeith, said gossip—Inchkeith, an island in the Firth; but when she asked what he did there, she got confused replies. Bothwell said that he was learning to govern. ‘He has been told, madam, do you see? that if he can rule Lindsay and Ruthven in three roods of land he will have no trouble with Scotland afterwards.’

The Queen, although she suffered this light-hearted kind of criticism without rebuke, did not reply to it, nor did she let Bothwell see that she was anxious. The Italian saw it, however, whether she would or no, and took care to give her every scrap of news. She learned from him that the King was drinking there, fuddling himself. He was holding a Court, where (as Bothwell had guessed) he was easily King, throned on a table, with a ‘lovely Joy’ on either hand. She had the names of his intimates, with exact particulars of their comings and goings. The Earl of Morton was not above suspicion; he went there by night always, cloaked and in a mask. The Queen, more conscious of her power since the rebellion, conscious now of her matronly estate, grew sick to have such nasty news about her—it was as if the air was stuck with flies. Presently she fell sick in good truth, with faintings, pains in her side, back-soreness, breast-soreness, heart-soreness. It did not help her to remember that she must be at Linlithgow at Christmas, and meet the King there.

Lying in her bed, smothered in furs, shivering, tossing herself about—for she never

could bear the least physical discomfort—she chewed a bitter cud in these dark days, and her thoughts took a morbid habit. She fretted over the Court at Inchkeith, imagined treasons festering there and spreading out like fungus to meet the rebels in England; distrusted Bothwell because he did not choose to come to her, Huntly because he did not dare; she distrusted, in fact, every Scot in Scotland, and found herself thereby clinging solely to the Italian; and of him—since she must speak to somebody—she consequently saw too much. The man was very dextrous, very cheerful, very willing; but he had a gross mind, and she had spoiled him. To be kind to a servant, nine times in ten, means that you make him rich at your own charges, and then he holds cheap what his own welfare has diminished. So it was here: Davy was not the tenth case. She had been bountiful in friendship, confidence, familiarity—of the sort which friends may use and get no harm of. He had always amused her, and now he soothed and strengthened her at once by sousing her hot fancies in the cold water of his common-sense. She had learned to fear the workings of her own mind, informed as it was by a passionate heart; she would lean upon this honest fellow, who never looked for noonday at eleven o'clock, and considered that a purge or a cupping was the infallible remedy for all ailments, including broken hearts. It is not for you or me, perhaps, to complain where she did not. Queen Mary was no precisian, to expect more than she asked. If she loved she must be loved back; if she commanded she must be obeyed; if she was hipped she must be amused. I believe Signior Davy gave himself airs and made himself comfortable. She found the first ridiculous and the second racial. She knew that chivalry was not a virtue of that land where bargaining is at its best, and that where her Italian saw a gate open he would reasonably go in. The odds are that he presumed insufferably; certain it is that, though she never saw it, others saw nothing else, and, gross-minded themselves, misread it grossly. The tale was all about the town that Signior Davy was the Queen's favourite, and where he was always to be found, and what one might look for, and who was to be pitied, etc. etc. The revellers at Inchkeith advised

each other to mark the end, and some were for telling the King. But Archie Douglas was against that. ‘Tell him now,’ he said, ‘and see your salmon slip through the net. Wait till Davy’s in the boat, man, and club him then.’

Nevertheless, the deft Italian, by his cold douches, his playing the fool, his graceless reminiscences and unending novels, cured the Queen. Late in December she astonished the Court by holding a council in person—in a person, moreover, as sharp and salient as a snow-peak glittering through the haze of frost, and as incisive to the touch. There were proclamations to be approved: ‘The King’s and Queen’s Majesties considering,’ etc., the common form. These must be altered, she said. ‘The Queen’s Majesty by the advice of her dearest husband’: she would have it thus for the future. Tonic wit of the Italian! for to whom else, pray, could you ascribe it? The word went flying about that the style was changed, and was not long in coming to Inchkeith. ‘The Queen’s husband!’ Ill news for Inchkeith here.

Yet, the night he had it, he gloomed over it—being in his cups—with a kind of slumberous gaiety stirring under his rage.

‘The Queen’s husband! By the Lord, and I am the Queen’s husband. Who denies it is a liar. Archie Douglas, Archie Douglas, if you say I am not the Queen’s husband you lie, man.’

‘I, sir?’ says Archie, very brisk. ‘No, sir, I am very sure of it. By my head, sir, and her Majesty knows it.’

‘She ought to know it. She shall know it. I’m a rider, my lords; I ride with the spur.’

‘’Tis the curb you lack,’ says Ruthven, with a harsh laugh.

The blinking youth pondered him and his words. ‘I’m for the spur and a loose rein, Ruthven. I get the paces out of my nags. I have the seat.’

‘Half of it, say, my lord!’

Everybody heard that except the King, who went grumbling on. ‘You shall not teach

me how to sit a horse. I say you shall not, man.'

'My lord,' cried Lindsay, who never would call him 'sir,' 'the talk is not of horse-riding. If we use that similitude for the Queen's government, I tell your lordship it is unhappy. For on that horse of government there be two riders, I think; and of what advantage is the loose rein of your lordship when your fellow uses the curb?'

'Ay my good lord, you hit the mark. Two riders, two riders, by God's fay!'

The same voice as before—heard this time by the King. No one knew who had spoken, nor were the words more explicitly offensive than Lindsay's; but the pothouse tone of them caught the muzzy ear, hit some quick spot in the cloudy brain, and stung like fire. The King lifted up his head to listen; he opened his mouth and stared, as if he saw something revealed beyond the window, some warning or leering face. Then he rose and held by his chair. 'Two riders? Two riders? Two! Who said that? By heaven and hell, bring me that man!'

The pain, the horror he had, the helpless rage, made a dead hush all over; nobody stirred. Ridiculous he may have been, as he raised his voice yet higher and mouthed his words—worthless he was known to be—and yet he was tragic for the moment. 'I say it is damnable lying,' he said, swaying about. 'I say that man shall go to deep hell.' He stared round the hall, at his wits' end. His wits made a pounce. 'Archie, thou black thief, 'twas thou!'

'No, sir; no, upon my soul.'

'Ruthven, if you have dared—Lindsay—Fleming! Oh, mercy and truth!'

The rest was hideous.

They got him to bed between them, while little Forrest cried and made a fuss, praying them to kill him sooner than leave him with his master in the raving dark. No one took any notice of the anguish of a boy.

With time came counsel, and friends very free with it. Even prudence made herself heard in that brawling house. The King should meet his consort at Linlithgow, do his duty by her, observe the Christmas feast.

‘You will do well, sir—though I am sore to say it—to hear the popish mass,’ he was advised: ‘with reservation of conscience, the stroke would be politic.’

He agreed with all such advice; he intended to be wise. But the grand stroke of all was the Earl of Morton’s, to devise a way by which the injured husband could point the King’s demands with that undoubted right of his. The Crown-Matrimonial, resounding phrase! let him ask her to give him that. Nobody was prepared to say what was or was not this Crown-Matrimonial, or whether there was such a crown. The term was unknown to the law, that must be owned; and yet it had a flavour of law. It was double-armed, yet it was hyphenated; you could not deny part of it in any event. Why, no, indeed! cried Inchkeith at large, highly approving.

Archie Douglas cheered his noble kinsman: ‘Hail, King-Matrimonial of Scotland!’

Ruthven grinned, it was thought, approvingly; but Lord Morton, remembering that he was still the Queen’s Chancellor and should not go too far, made haste to advise the utmost delicacy. Above all things, let no breath of his dealings be heard.

‘I need not affirm my earnest hope,’ he said, ‘that peace and good accord may come out of this. The wish must find acceptance in every Christian heart. As such I utter it. I am not in place to do more. I cannot admonish; I serve the State.’

The King nodded sagely.

‘Good, cousin, good. I take your meaning. It is a fair intent, for which I am much beholden to you.’ Adonis, the proud rider, was chastened just now.

They met, therefore, at Linlithgow, heard mass together, made their offerings, and to all the world were friends again. The Crown-Matrimonial lay hidden until the spring of the year. Not even the new coinage—Maria et Henricus, ‘the dam before the sire’—tempted it out; but there were reasons for that. A week after the Epiphany, as

they were in the Queen's closet with a small company, she took his hand and said: 'My lord, you shall hereafter give me what worship you can; for now I know of a certainty that I have deserved well of you and Scotland.' Her pride in the fact and something of pity for herself made her voice quiver.

He started and flushed quickly. 'Is it true, madam? Is that the case? Oh, I thank God for it!'

He would not let go of her hand, but waited impatiently until those present took the hint and retired; then took her, kissed her, and called her his Mary again.

She cried contentedly enough, her cheek against his heart; and he, at once triumphant and generous, father and lover, stayed by her for a whole day and night.

There was much talk, as you may suppose. The maids went about with their heads in the air, as if they had achieved something. But apart from them, all the talk was not of this complacent kind. Mr. Randolph, for instance, wrote to his patron, Mr. Cecil, of England: 'The Queen is with child beyond a doubt. She informed the King in my hearing. Now, woe is me for you when David's son shall be King in England!' And there is no doubt that what Mr. Randolph took leave to report was no news to the late revellers of Inchkeith.

CHAPTER III DIVERS USES OF A HARDY MAN

In all her late perplexities of disordered mind, unsteady hand, chagrin, disenchantment, and what not, it is strange to observe with what tenacity the Queen kept a daily glance of her eyes for one private affair. It was an affair of the heart, however.

Those who know her best explain that she suffered from a malady of the affections. 'The Queen my mistress,' says Des-Essars in Le Secret des Secrets, 'when she had once seen—even for a few moments only—man, woman, or child in whom lay, somewhere, some little attractive quality or action, could never rest until she had

him subject utterly to her will. Subject, do I say? The word is weak. The devotion which she must have was so absolute that she never got it, could hardly ever deceive herself that she had got it; and would have spurned it at once if she had, as a grovelling thing not worth a thought. But, just because she never could get it, she never tired of the pursuit of it. To get it she would humble herself, lower herself, make herself ridiculous, cheapen herself; to hold what she had (or thought she had) she would play any part, tell most fibs, do much injustice to herself and the unfortunate capture; to lose after all was to suffer torments of baffled hope and endeavour; and then—to begin again upon some similar panting quest. Sometimes she sickened, but of possession, never of pursuit; and if she did, it was an infallible sign that the thing she had had been too easily caught. Thus she sickened of "Adonis," not because he had been restive at first, but because he had not been restive until after he was won. She had longed for him, wooed him, wed him in secret. All was going well. If ever her cup of joy had brimmed over, it had been on that night of sudden consummation at Wemyss. That golden, beaded cup! there had seemed a well-spring in it, a feast to be enjoyed for ever in secret, by delicious, hasty snatches. But when they ordered the affair in public, it was stale after the event; and when he—the fool—cried over her the mort o' the deer (as I know he did, for Sir Adam Gordon heard him), it had been his own death, not hers, that he proclaimed. Sated too soon, she had time to see herself and to shudder at the wry image she made.

'I know very well,' he adds, in an afterthought, 'that, in saying this, I may be taken as an example to point my own thesis; but even if I were, the reflections are just. And the fact is that, although she knew that I loved her, and might, indeed, have loved me, she learned of my manhood too late. I can add also, with a hand on my heart, that she would never have had to pursue me. For I was always at her feet.'

But to return to my matter—this affair of the heart. It most curiously bears out Des-Essars' analysis to remember that when she released George Gordon from his

bonds, and had him once more spilling love at her feet, she was by no means touched. The sanguine young man loved her, she knew it well; but she always felt a little leap of scorn for a man who could own to loving her. It made him seem womanish in her eyes, like Châtelard. And in the very act—when he was below her footstool, ready to kiss her foot—she remembered that there was one Gordon whom she had not yet won. She remembered Jean Gordon, who, on that day of Gordon's Bane, had looked at her fixedly, with grave dislike—had had the nerve to survey her Queen and judge and pick out what parts to despise. She had rarely seen her since, but had never forgotten her. Deep in her burning heart she had cherished the hope of winning that frozen heart; and here—with George Gordon kissing her foot—sat she, curiously pondering how far she could use the brother to lure the sister into the net.

There was nothing unholy about this desire of hers to subdue a girl's heart. It was coloured by impulses which were warm and rich and chivalrous. Had it been that of a youth there would not be a word to say; there was much of the quality of a youth about Queen Mary. She certainly had his chivalry—for chivalry is really pity, with a relish—a noble emotion which reacts by exalting the percipient. She saw herself protector of this friendless girl, felt kindly the very kindly kiss which she would bestow: it should fall like dew upon the upturned, stony face. At its fall the cold and dread would thaw, tears would well in those judging eyes, the hardened lips would quiver, the congealed bosom would surge; sobbing, grieving, murmuring her thankful love, Jeannie Gordon would hasten into forgiving arms. O mercy of the forgiven! O grace of the forgiving! The picture was pure, the desire (I repeat) honest—but there was glory to be gained too, a vision to be made good of the Queen playing the lover's part, worth every shift of the quick head, and all the cajolery of the sidelong eyes. Ah me! Here was a chase-royal.

Giving George Gordon kind words, and hope of kinder, she had his mother and sister to Court, and to them was sincerity, princely magnanimity itself. The old Countess was soon won over: there came a day when she would not hear a word

against her Majesty, and would judge her dead husband's actions sooner than allow her patroness to be condemned in their defence. Her two sons stood by her—both lovers of this divine huntress; so that the house of Huntly was in ascension, and Des-Essars, feeling that his nose was (as they say) out of joint, showed that he felt it by patronising his comrade Adam.

But Adam disarmed him. 'My brother is to be Earl again, Baptist, and therefore I am Sir Adam. You do wrong to refuse me the salute. But let be. To you I shall always be plain Adam Gordon, because we share the same adventure. Now let me tell you. She kissed me yestere'en—here.' He touched his forehead. 'I owe you nothing for civility, yet I'll not go back upon my bond. You shall take your joy of the place: it is your right.' Then they made it up; Adam pursued his family up the hill of fame. 'It is all in a fair way; look now, I'll tell you a secret. The Bastard is out in arms; but if we win he will lose his head, and then Moray shall be ours again! Who knows what may come of that? Be sure, however, that I shall not forget you, Baptist. No, no. What I win of you know what shall be yours to the full half.' He owned that he was vexed with his sister. 'What! she sulks in the presence—she holds back—like a child fighting a blown fire! 'Tis unmaidenly of Jeannie; I doubt her a true Gordon. And talks of the Béguines of Bruges, doth she? Let her go, say I.' All this judgment of Jeannie's case, as the reader perceives, was before the chasing of the Earl of Moray, and before the Earl of Bothwell came home with French Paris, his candid valet. A word now of him.

He arrived in Scotland, you will remember, when her war with rebels was as good as over. She was keen; flushed with one triumph, and sanguine of another. Scotland at her feet, and all the Gordons hers but one: how was stubborn Jeannie to hold out against her? She was wedded, she was safe, she was victorious, she was happy: everything combined to make the redoubtable Bothwell welcome to her. It was possible, she found, to meet him without quickening of the breath; it was possible to look coolly at him, and (O marvel!) to ask herself what under heaven she had once

dreaded in him. His eyes? Had they seemed audacious? They were small and twinkling. His throat, jaw, and snarling mouth—had they seemed purposeful and cruel? The one was forward and the other curved, just ready to laugh. Well, is a laughing man dangerous to women? When she considered that, less than a year ago, she had written secretly to the man, sent him a glove, and with that a fib, she could contemplate herself in the act, as one may a pale old picture of oneself (in curls and a pinafore) at some childish game—with humorous self-pity, and with some anxious regrets too. The thing was well done with—over and done with; but heigho! the world had been more ventureful then. He gave her back her faded tokens; they came from his bosom and went into hers—no thrills! They were quite cold when she laid them by.

He joined the field with her, or what was left of it, and brought with him the Border clans—Elliots, Armstrongs, Turnbulls, and his own Hepburns—ragged and shoeless, less breeched than the Highlanders, if that were possible; but men of dignity and worth, as she saw them, square-bearded, broad-headed men, tawny as foxes, blunt, unmannerly, inspecting her and her two women without awe or curiosity. They were like their chief, she thought, and, with him to lead them, never lagged in the chase. Huntly had his Gordons; and there were Forbeses, Grants, Ogilvies. Breechless were they—some at least—but of great manners; they had poets among them, and her beauty was the theme of harp-strings as well as eye-strings. The pipes swelled and screamed in her daily praise; fine music, great air! But those glum, ruminating Borderers, to whom she was just a ‘long bit lassock’! She turned to them again directly the piping was stopped—to them and their chief, who was of them, blood and bone. Twice she traversed Scotland in their midst, watching them by day, dreaming of them by night. Just as little could she do without this bracing, railing Bothwell as without proud Jeannie Gordon, whom she loved in vain.

And thus the combination came, as in a flash, the old beloved scheme of unity—north and south to awe the middle parts of Scotland. Old Huntly had

proposed it and failed—it had been the death of him; but now she would try it and succeed. Into the north she would put a new Huntly; out of the south she would call a new Bothwell. A match, a match! The thought came to her with a ringing sound of hopeful music, 'Now I have thee mine, proud Jeannie Gordon!' Strange, ardent, wilful creature—half perverse, half unsexed! Because a man did not love her she would trust him, because a girl would have nothing to say to her she could never let her alone! But Master Des-Essars was right. She was a born huntress.

The preliminaries of the hopeful match were easily made: Huntly was grateful, the dowager profuse; Bothwell chuckled when he was sounded about it, but declined to discuss so simple a matter.

'You'll never find me backward, my friend,' he told Huntly (as George Gordon now was called); 'many indeed have complained that I am not backward enough. I'm a bull in a pasture—I'm an invading host—I devastate, I come burning. But there! have it as you will.'

Nobody else was consulted, for nobody else was worth it in the Queen's eyes. When time had been given for all to sink in, she sent for Jean Gordon; who was brought by her mother to the door of the cabinet, put through it, and left there face to face with her careful Majesty. The time of year was mid-January.

The Queen sat upon a heap of cushions by the fire, leaning back a little to ease herself. Her chin was in her hand—a sign that she was considering. She wore a rich gown of murrey-coloured satin, showed her red stockings and long, narrow slippers. Her condition was not hid, and her face would have told it in any case—pinched, peaked, and pettish. Her eyes were like a cat's, shifty and ranging, now golden-red, now a mask of green, now all black, according as she glanced them to the light; her thin, amorous lips looked like a scarlet wound in her pale face. By her side stood Mary Fleming, a gentle creature in pale rose, as if set there that by her very humanity she might enhance the elfin spell of the other. This Queen was like a

young witch, rather new to the dangerous delight, but much in earnest.

She looked up sideways at the girl by the door—a girl to the full as tall as she, and much more sumptuous: deep-breasted, beautiful, composed, a figure of a nun in her black and ivory. For her hair was perfect black and her face without a tinge; and all her gown was black, with a crucifix of silver hung from her waist. She clasped her hands over it as she stood waiting.

‘Come, my girl,’ said the Queen.

Jean took a few steps forward and knelt down. It seems that she might have pleased if she had done it sooner.

‘Very well: it’s very well,’ the Queen began; and then, ‘No! it is not at all well! You seek my hand to kiss it. You shall not have it!’

She put one hand below the other, and watched for the effect. There was none. Provoking!

‘Why should I give my hand to a little rebel,’ she went on again, ‘who says in her heart, “My mother is beguiled, my brothers are beguiled, but I will never be”? who says again, “If she gives me her hand, and I kiss it, ’twill be because I dare not bite it”? Why then should I give my hand to you?’

‘You should not, madam,’ says Jean.

The Queen bit her lip.

‘Oh, the guarded, darkened heart of you, Jean! Why, if I bore a grudge as hardly as you, whom should I not drive out of Scotland?’

As Jean made no answer, Fleming was brought into play.

‘Answer for her, Fleming. Tell her I should drive them all out. Should my brother have stayed? He is too happy in England, I think. Shall I keep your Lethington at home?’

Poor Fleming coloured with pain.

‘Nay, child, nay—I am teasing thee. I know that if he will not kiss my hand ’tis because he hopes for thine. And belike he can have it for the asking! Alack, this Lethington with his two wicked hands! One he will hold out to England, and my false brother Moray will take it; one to Scotland, and pretty Fleming hath it. A chain, a chain! to pen the naughty Queen, who will not let traitors kiss her hands, and must be taught better respect for liars, lick-spittles, and time-servers!’

She was working herself to be dangerous. Good Fleming’s whisper in her ear, ‘Dear, sweet madam, deal not too harshly!’ might have been heard, had not Jean Gordon been kneeling there, stinging her to worse.

‘Harshly, harshly, my girl?’ the Queen snapped at Fleming. ‘I am water heaving against that rock—torn ragged by its fret, and scattered to the wind—to drop down as tears—as salt tears, Mary Fleming! Ah, the sea will drink up my tears, and the sea have me at last, and lap me to soft sleep, and soothe me that I forget!’ She changed her mood, looked proudly at the kneeling girl. ‘You, that will not kiss my hand—nor shall not—you are to forget what you choose and remember what you choose; but of me you expect—what, O heaven! My memory is to lie in your lap and obey you. Oh, it is very well! I am to forget that your father was a traitor——’

The girl’s eyes met hers directly.

‘He was none, madam.’

‘I say I am to forget that, and remember that I dealt sternly with an old man.’

Jean grew fiercely white. ‘Barbarously, madam!’ she said; ‘when you dragged a dead old man from the grave and spat upon his winding-sheet.’

‘Hush, hush!’ said Mary Fleming; and Jean looked at her, but said no more. The Queen was very pale, lying on her side, crouched among the cushions.

‘He defied me,’ she said, ‘but I forgave him that. He tampered with my enemies, he boasted and lied and cheated. He died in arms against his prince, and I shed tears in pity of myself. For then I was new in Scotland, and thought that the love of a man

was something worth, and shivered when I lost it, as one left bare to the gales. Now I know wiselier concerning mannish love; and I know how to draw it since I hold it cheap. I would as soon draw that of dogs and apes, I think.' She looked over her shoulder, then quickly pillowed her cheek again, but held up her hand. Mary Fleming took it. 'Dogs, and apes, and tigers are men, Mary Fleming!' the complaining voice resumed; 'and I Dame Circe at her spells! And here before me, look you, poor faithful, chaste Penelope, that will not touch my hand!'

She gave a little moan, and sat up, shaking her head. 'No, no, no, my girl, you have the wrong of me. I weave no spells, I want no dogs and apes—no man's desire. Love!' she clasped her hands at the stretch of her arms, 'Love! I want love—and have it from all women but you. I am the queen of women's hearts, and you are my only rebel. Love me, Jean! Forgiveness, ma mie!'

There was no answer. The Queen started forward, almost frenzied, and threw herself upon the girl—encircled her, clung, and began to kiss her. She kissed her lips, cheeks, eyes, and hair; she stroked her face, she begged and prayed. 'Love me, Jeannie: I have done you no wrong. I had no hand in it—I could not move alone. I cried, but could not move. They would have it so. Oh, love me, my dear, for the sake of what I have bought and paid for!'

A flint-stone would have thawed under such a lava-stream. Jean Gordon took a softer tinge, but tried to free herself.

'I thank your Majesty—I would not seem too hard. Maybe I have been stiff, maybe I have brooded. There has been too much thinking time, sitting at work for ever in our dark house. I thank your Majesty—I thank your Grace.'

The Queen lay back again, smiling through her tears. Mary Fleming, deeply moved, took her hand and lifted it, holding it out—by look and gesture commanding the other to do it reverence. So it was done at last.

The Queen said softly: 'I thank you, child; I thank you, Jeannie. You make me

happier. Trust me now, and sit beside me. I have a matter for your ears, and for your heart too, as I hope.'

So Jean sat staidly by her on the cushions and heard the marriage-plan. All she could find to say was that she hoped it would give satisfaction to her Majesty.

The Earl of Bothwell, then, was married upon the Lady Jean Gordon on 24th February, at Holyrood, by the Protestant rite. The Queen and Court were there, she very scornful and full of mockery of what was done. She said, and loudly, 'If the bride is content with this munchance, why should I be discontent?' meaning, of course, that there was every reason in the world why she should be. But the truth was that the bride, who professed the old religion, had no choice; for the Earl had insisted upon the minister and his sermon at the price of marriage whatsoever, and the lady's brother Huntly shared his opinion. Whereupon the bride had shrugged her shoulders.

'I am bought and sold already,' she said; 'therefore what matter to me whether the market is out of the statute?'

The Queen laughed. 'Tu as rayson, ma belle,' she said. 'Le vray mariage s'est faict ailleurs.'

And Lady Jeannie replied in a low voice, 'Nous verrons, madame.'

All things accomplished, and the Queen gone out by her private door, the Earl handed his Countess through the press to the great entry. Many people came surging about them; the courtyard seemed chockablock, with vexed cries tossed here and there, both 'God bless the Queen!' and 'God damn the Paip!' In the midst of all the Countess makes as if to falter, cries out, 'Oh, my foot hurts me!' gets free her hand and stoops. What was she about?

The Earl, who was quickly put out when he was playing a part (as he surely was just now), stood by for a little, twitching his cheek-bones. Anything would have vexed him at such a time, and at any time he scorned a mob. So he pushed forward to clear

more space, crying roughly, with his arms abroad, ‘Out, out, ye tups!’ He made himself an open way to the doors, and stood on the threshold of the chapel, very fierce, plucking at his beard, his hat over his brows. There was room behind and before him: in front were the grooms and servants with their masters’ swords. ‘I dare ye to move, ye babbling thieves,’ he seemed to be threatening them, and kept them mute by the power of the eye.

Meantime the Countess rises from her foot, puts her hand on a young man’s shoulder near by, and says, ‘Take you me.’ This young man, grave and personable, is Mr. Alexander Ogilvy of Boyne, whom I hope you remember to have seen last fighting with her brother, John of Findlater, in the Luckenbooths, that day when the Gordons came swelling into Edinburgh to see the new Queen. He was an old sweetheart of hers, and might have had her but for that unlucky encounter. And since he was here—was it for his sake that the Countess Jeannie had hurt her foot? It is uncertain.

However—‘Fear not, lady, but I’ll take you where you please,’ he assures her; and walks out of church, her hand upon his shoulder.

Thus they come level with the Earl, and pass him.

‘How now, wife?’ he cries: ‘so soon!’

‘Even so, my lord, since you are so tardy,’ says she, without a look his way.

This Mr. Ogilvy walks directly into the crowd, which makes a way for him, hugely tickled by his spirit, and closes in upon him after. The Earl lets fly a sounding oath, and starts after them. ‘By——and——, but I’m for you!’

They let him through; they cry, ‘Earl Bothwell is after his lady! The hunt is up—toho!’ There was much laughter, driving, flacking of hands; and the women were the worst.

After dinner, dancing: the Queen in wild spirits, handed about from man to man, and (not content with that) dancing with the women when men flagged. Her zest carried

her far out of politics; wary in the chamber, she was like one drunk at a feast. So she saw nothing of the comedy enacting under her very eyelids: how, while she was led out by my lord, Mr. Ogilvy made play with my lady; and my lord, very much aware of it, fumed. The minute he was dismissed, down he strode through the thick of the frolic, maddening at the courtiers bowing about him, and quarrelled and talked loud, and drank and talked louder; but yet could not get near his handsome new wife. He roundly told his brother-in-law at last that if her ladyship would not come, he should go alone.

'Whither, my lord?' asks Huntly.

'Why, to bed,' says he.

'It is yet early,' says Huntly.

'It is none so early for the bed I intend for,' he was told. 'My bed is at Hermitage. I am master there, I'd let you know, and shall be here some day, God damn me.' He was in a high rage at the way things were going, and always impatient of the least restraint. One or two bystanders, however, shrewd men, suspected that he had met his match.

Lord Huntly did not believe him—could not believe that he would ride, and ask his young Countess to ride, fifty miles through the marriage night. Nevertheless, towards six o'clock, the Earl came into the lower hall with his great boots on and riding-cloak over his shoulder, and confronted his lady standing with Mr. Ogilvy, my Lord Livingstone, Mary Sempill, her Master, and some more.

'My lady,' he said with a reverence, 'I am a bird of the bough. 'Tis after my hour—I'm for my bed.'

Lady Bothwell gave him a short look. 'If that is your night-gear, my lord, you sleep alone.'

Harshly he laughed. 'It seems I am to do that. But, mistress, when you want me you will find me at Hermitage, whither I now go. And the same direction I give to you,

Mr. Ogilvy,' says he with meaning. 'If you come into my country, or any country but this cursed town, you shall find me ready for you, Mr. Ogilvy of Boyne.'

Ogilvy wagged his head. 'La la la! We shall meet again, never fear, my Lord Bothwell,' says he.

The Countess gave him her hand to kiss. 'I wish you good-night, Boyne,' she said: 'I am going to my bed': then, looking her Earl in the face, 'Pray you send your page for my women, my lord. I lack my riding-gear.'

Lord Huntly, who was up with them by now, cries out: 'What wild folly is this? Do you rave? You will never go to Liddesdale this hell-black night! Are you mad, Lord Bothwell, or a villain?'

'I'm a bird of the bough, brother-in-law, a bird of the bough.'

The Countess turned to her brother. 'Should I be afraid of the dark, Huntly, with this nobleman by my side?'

'God's death, my child,' says Bothwell, admiring her cool blood, 'I would be more at your side if you suffered me.'

Lord Huntly turned on his heel.

She went to take leave of the Queen, and found her on an unworthy arm. 'My leave, madam. I crave liberty to follow my lord.'

'It should be the other way, child,' said the Queen, 'for a little while, at least. But we will come and put you to bed—and he shall come after.'

'Your Majesty's pardon, but this may hardly be. My lord chooses for Hermitage, and I must follow him—as my duty is.'

It made the Queen grow red; but she did not let go the arm she had. 'As you will, mistress,' she said stiffly, and added something in Italian to her companion, who raised his eyebrows and gave a little jerk of the head.

'You ride a long way for your joy,' she resumed, with a hard ring in her voice. 'It's

to be hoped you are well accompanied. Yonder is a wild country: Turnbulls in the Lammermuirs, Elliots in Liddesdale. But you have a wild mate.'

The Countess then looked her full in the face. 'Your Majesty forgets,' she said. 'It is not men that I and mine have reason to fear.'

After a short and quick recoil the Queen went straight up to her and took her face in her two hands. Speaking between clenched teeth, she said: 'You shall not quarrel with me, Jeannie Bothwell. Or I will not quarrel with you. I wish you well wherever you go. Remember that: and now give me a kiss.'

She had to take it, for it was not offered her; and then she pushed the girl away with a little angry sob. 'Ah, how you hate me! You are the only woman in Scotland that hates me.' She felt the prick of tears, and shook her head to be so fretted. 'If I were to tell you of your Earl—as I could if I cared——' The Italian touched her arm, and brought her sharply round. 'Well? Why should I not? Am I such a happy wife that my wedding-ring is a gag? Shall she have of me the bravest man in Scotland, and not know the price?' Gulping down her anger, she put her hand on her bosom to keep it quiet. 'No, no, I am not so base. Let her have what comfort she can. All wives need that. God be with you, Jeannie Bothwell.'

'And with your Majesty, at all times.'

The Countess curtsied, kissed hands, and went away backwards. She had not taken the smallest notice of the Italian.

'If I could hate like that, David,' said the Mistress, 'I should be Queen of France at this hour.'

'Oh, oh! And so you can, madam, and so you shall,' replied the man.

The Queen sent for more lights, and drink for the fiddlers. She did more. To please the French Ambassador and his suite, she and her maids put on men's clothes, and flashed golden hangers from their belts before the courtly circle. The dancing grew the looser as the lights flared to their end. Many a man and many a maid slept by the

wall; but there was high revelry in the midst.

Very late, the tumble and rioting at its top, in came the King, with Lord Ruthven, Archie Douglas, and some more of his friends. He stared, brushed his hot eyes. ‘What a witches’ Sabbath! Where’s my——? Where’s the Queen?’

‘Yonder, sir. Masked, and talking with my Lady Argyll—and——’

‘God help us, I see.’ He pushed squarely through the crowd, and stood before her, not steadily.

‘Good-morrow to your Majesty,’ he said. ‘The hour is late—or early, as you take it. But I am here—ready for bed.’

She held her head up, looking away from him, and spoke as if she were talking to her people.

‘I’ll not come,’ she said. ‘I am going to cards. Come, ladies. Come, sirs.’ Turning, she left him.

He looked after her owlishly, blinking as if he was about to cry. He caught Ruthven by the arm. ‘Oh, man,’ he said, ‘oh, Ruthven, do you see that? Do you see whom she has there?’

‘Hush, sir,’ says Ruthven. ‘’Tis the same as yesterday, and all the yesterdays, and as many morrows as you choose to stomach. Come you to your bed. You cannot mend it this way.’

The King still blinked and looked after his wife. He began to tremble. ‘Oh, man,’ he said, ‘when shall I do it?’

Ruthven, after a flashing look at him, ran after the Queen’s party. She was a little in front, cloaked now and walking with her ladies. Ruthven caught up the Italian and said some words. The man stopped, and looked at him guardedly. Ruthven came closer, and put his hand on his shoulder, talking copiously. As he talked, and went on talking, his hand slipped gently down the Italian’s back to his middle, opened

itself wide, and stayed there open.

They parted with laughter on both sides, and a bow from David. Ruthven came back.

‘You may do it when you please, sir,’ he said to the King.

CHAPTER IV MANY DOGS

When, on 6th March, the expected stroke fell upon my Lord Chancellor Morton, and he was required to hand over the seals of his high office to the Queen’s messengers, he did so with a certain heavy dignity. As I imply, he had had time for preparation. He had not seen his sovereign for some weeks, knew that Lethington had not, knew also that his alliance (even his kinship) with the King had worked against him, and suspected finally, that what that had not done for his prospects had been managed by the Italian. So he bowed his head to Erskine and Traquair when they waited upon him, and, pointing to the Great Seal on the table, said simply, ‘Let her Majesty take back what her Majesty gave. Gentlemen, good night.’ Truly, we may say that nothing in his life became him like the leaving it: but that is the rule.

The same evening—nine o’clock and a snowy night—Archie Douglas came to his house in the Cowgate and found him writing letters—not easily, but with grunts, his tongue curling about his upper lip. The disgraced Chancellor looked up, saw his cousin, and went on writing. Archie waited. So presently, ‘Moriturus te salutat,’ says the Earl, without ceasing to labour.

‘Pshaw, cousin,’ says Archie, ‘I have come to you with a better cry nor that.’

‘Have you indeed?’ scoffed my lord. ‘Man, I would be fain to know it.’

‘’Tis Habet,’ says Archie, ‘and down with your thumb.’

Lord Morton leaned back in his chair and raked his beard with the pen’s end. The quip struck his fancy as a pleasant one.

‘I take your meaning,’ he said. ‘I had thought of it myself. But, to say nothing of his

place by her side, I doubt he wears a steel shirt.'

Archie said shortly: 'He does not. The King felt him last night as he sat at the cards. And Ruthven felt him well on Bothwell's marriage night.'

'The King! He did that!'

'He did just that.'

Morton gazed at him for a minute. 'Why,' he marvelled, 'why, then he stands in wi' the rest? Archie, are ye very sure?'

Archie the wise snapped his fingers at such elementary knowledge. 'A month gone, come Friday, he began to open to Ruthven about it.'

The Earl rapped the table smartly with his fingers. 'And I am the last to know it! I thank you, cousin, for your good conceit of me. By the mass, man, you treat me like a boy.'

'It's no doing of mine,' says Archie. 'I was for making you privy to it a week syne; but Ruthven, he said, "No." You were still Chancellor, d'ye see? And, says Ruthven, your lordship was a tappit hen, that would sit till they took the last egg from under ye.'

'Damn his black tongue!' growled my lord, and looked at his letters. 'But he's in the right of it,' he added. 'Cold, cold is my nest the now.'

Archie moistened his lips. 'They took the seals from you this morn, cousin?'

'It is not three hours since they had them.'

'Do you guess what did it?'

Morton laughed shortly. 'Ay! It was my Crown-Matrimonial, I doubt.'

'And do you guess who did it?'

He did not laugh now. 'Have done with your idle questioning. Who should do it but the fiddler?'

‘One more question,’ says Archie, ‘by your leave. Do you guess who sits in your seat?’

‘Ay, I think it, I think it. She will give it to one of her familiars—her Huntly, or her fine Bothwell.’

Archie once more snapped his fingers. ‘Nor one, nor t’other. There’s a man more familiar than the pair. Cousin, the fiddler seals the briefs! The Italian is to be Chancellor. Now what d’ye say?’

Lord Morton said nothing at all. He looked up, he looked down; he screwed his hands together, rolled one softly over the other.

Archie watched his heavy face grow darker as the tide of rage crept up. Presently he tried to move him.

‘Are you for England, cousin?’ he asked.

‘Ay,’ said Morton, ‘that is my road.’

Archie then touched him on the shoulder. ‘Bide a while, my lord. We shall all be friends here before many days. Argyll is here.’

‘Argyll? The fine man!’

‘A finer follows him hard.’

‘Who then? Your sage Lethington?’

‘Lethington! Hoots! no; but the black Earl of Moray, my good lord.’

The Earl of Morton stopped in the act of whistling.

‘Moray comes home?’

‘Ay. His forfeiture is set for the 12th. He is coming home to meet it. All’s ready.’

Morton was greatly interested. To gain time he asked an idle question. ‘Who has written him to come? Lethington?’

‘Ay, Michael Wylie.’

This was the name they gave him. Machiavelli may be intended—if so, an injustice to each.

‘Who returns with my lord?’ Morton asked him next; and Archie held up his fingers.

‘All of them that are now in England. Rothes, Pitarrow, Grange—all of them. Stout men, cousin.’

Stout indeed! One of them had been enough for Master Davy. My Lord Morton, his head sunk into his portly chest, considered this news. Moray was an assurance—for how did Moray strike? In the dark—quickly—when no one was by. Well, then, if Moray were coming to strike one’s enemy, why should one meddle? He was never at his ease in that great man’s company, because he could never be sure of his own aims while he doubted those of his colleague. You could not tell—you never could tell—what James Stuart intended. He would cut at one for the sake of hitting another at a distance. If he were coming back to cut at the Italian, for instance—at what other did he hope to reach? Morton drove his slow wits to work as he sat staring at his papers, trying vainly to bottom the designs of a man whom he admired and distrusted profoundly. Why so much force to scrag a wretched Italian? The King, Archie, Moray, Grange, Pitarrow, Argyll! And now himself, Morton! At whom was Moray aiming? Was he entangling the King, whom he hated? Could he be working against the Queen, his sister? They used to say he coveted the throne. Could this be his intent?

Such possibilities disturbed him. Let me do Lord Morton the justice to say that his very grossness saved him from any more curious villainy than a quick blow at an enemy. The Italian had galled his dignity: damn the dog! he would kill him for it. But to intend otherwise than loyalty to the King, his kinsman—no, no! And as for the Queen’s Majesty—why, she was a lass, and a pretty lass too, though a wilful. She would never have stood in his way but for that beastly foreign whisperer. Yet—if the King had been dishonoured by the fiddler, and Moray (knowing that)

meant honestly ... Eh, sirs! So he pondered in his dull, muddled way—his poor wits, like yoked oxen, heavily plodding the fields of speculation, turning furrow after furrow! Guess how he vexed the nimble Archie.

‘Well, cousin, well?’ cries that youth at last: ‘I must be going where my friends await me.’

‘Man,’ said Morton, and stopped him, ‘where are ye for?’

Archie replied: ‘Mum’s the word. But if you are the man I believe you, you shall come along with me this night.’

Morton had made up his mind. ‘I am with you—for good or ill,’ he said.

Cloaked and booted, the two kinsmen went out into the dark. The wind had got up, bringing a scurry of dry snow: they had to pull the door hard to get it home.

‘Rough work at sea the night,’ said Archie.

‘You’ll be brewing it rougher on land, I doubt,’ was Lord Morton’s commentary.

In a little crow-stepped house by the shore of the Nor’ Loch the Earl of Morton was required to set his hand to certain papers, upon which they showed him the names of Argyll, Rothes, Ruthven, Archie Douglas, Lethington, and others. He asked at once to see Lord Moray’s name: they told him Lethington had it to a letter, which bound him as fast as any bond.

‘It should be here,’ he said seriously.

But Ruthven cried out, How could it be there when his lordship was over the Border?

Morton shook his head. ‘It should be here, gentlemen. ’Twere better to wait for it. What hurry is there?’

Ruthven said that the game was begun and ought to go on now. ‘Judge you, my lord,’ he appealed, ‘if I should put my head into a noose unless I held the cord in my own hand.’

In his private mind Morton believed Ruthven a madman. But he did not see how he could draw out now.

He read through the two papers—bands, they called them. It was required of those who signed that they should assist the King their sovereign lord to get the Crown-Matrimonial—no harm in that!—and that they should stand enemies to his enemies, friends to his friends. On his side the King engaged to remove the forfeiture from the exiled lords, to put back the Earl of Morton into his office, and to establish the Protestant religion. Not a word of the Italian, not a word of the Queen. The things were well worded, evidently by Lethington.

‘When are we to be at it?’ he asked.

Ruthven told him, ‘Saturday coming, at night.’ It was now Thursday.

‘How shall you deal?’ This was Morton again.

He was told, In the small hours of the night——and there he stopped them at once. ‘Oh, Ruthven! Oh, Lindsay! Never on the Sabbath morn! Sirs, ye should not——’

But Ruthven waved him off. The exact hour, he said, must depend upon events. This, however, was the plan proposed. When the Queen was set down to cards or a late supper, Lord Morton with his men was to hold the entry, doors, stairheads, passages, forecourt of the palace. Traquair would be off duty, Erskine could be dealt with. Bothwell, Huntly, Atholl, and all the rest of the Queen’s friends would be abed; and Lindsay was to answer for keeping them there. The King was to go into the Queen’s closet and look over her shoulder at the game. At a moment agreed upon he would lift up her chin, say certain words, kiss her, and repeat the words. That was to be the signal: then Ruthven, Archie Douglas, and Fawdonsyde—Ker of Fawdonsyde, a notorious ruffian—would do their work.

Morton listened to all this intently, with slow-travelling eyes which followed the rafters from their spring in one wall to their cobwebbed end in the other. He could find no flaw at first, nor put his finger upon the damnable blot there must be in it;

but after a time, as he figured it over and over, he missed somebody. ‘Stop there! stop there, you Ruthven!’ he thundered. ‘Tell me this: Where will Lethington be the while?’

He was told, ‘Gone to meet the Earl of Moray.’ Moray!—his jaw fell.

‘What! will Moray no be with me?’

They said, it was much hoped. But the roads were heavy; there was a possibility——

He jeered at them. Did they not know Moray yet? ‘Man,’ he said, turning to Archie, ‘it’s not a possibility, it’s as certain as the Day of Doom.’

Then they all talked at once. Moray’s name was fast to a letter; the letter was fast in Lethington’s poke; Lethington was fast to the band. What more could be done? Would Lethington endanger his neck? His safety was Moray’s, and theirs was Lethington’s. And the King? What of the King?

‘You talk of Doomsday, my lord!’ shouts Ruthven, with the slaver of his rage upon his mouth: ‘there’s but one doom impending, and we’ll see to it.’

Perorations had no effect upon Morton, who was still bothered. He went over the whole again, clawing down his fingers as he numbered the points. There was himself to keep the palace, there was Lindsay to hold back Bothwell; the King to go into the closet—the kiss—the words of signal—then Ruthven and——Here he stopped, and his eyes grew small.

‘Oh, sirs,’ he said, ‘the poor lassie! Sold with a kiss! She’s big, sirs; you’ll likely kill mother and bairn.’

Ruthven, squinting fearfully, slammed the table. ‘Whose bairn, by the Lord? Tell me whose?’

Morton shook his head. ‘Yon’s hell-work,’ he said. ‘I’ll have nothing to do wi’t. I guess who’s had the devising of it. ’Tis Lethington—a grey-faced thief.’

Here Archie Douglas, after looking to Ruthven, intervened, and talked for nearly half an hour to his cousin. Morton, very gloomy, heard him out; then made his own proposition. He would stand by the King, he said; he would hold the palace. No man should come in or out without the password. But he would not go upstairs, nor know who went up or what went on. This also he would have them all promise before he touched the band with a pen:—Whatever was done to the Italian should be done in the passage. There should be no filthy butchery of a girl and her child, either directly or by implication, where he had a hand at a job. Such was his firm stipulation. Archie swore to observe it; Fawdonsyde, Lindsay, swore; Ruthven said nothing.

‘Archie,’ said his cousin, ‘go you and fetch me the Scriptures. I shall fasten down Ruthven with the keys of God.’ Ruthven put his hand upon the book and swore. Then the Earl of Morton signed the band.

CHAPTER V MIDNIGHT EXPERIENCES OF JEAN-MARIE-BAPTISTE DES-ESSARS

On that appointed night of Saturday, the 9th of March—a blowy, snowy night, harrowing for men at sea, with a mort of vessels pitching at their cables in Leith Roads—Des-Essars was late for his service. He should have come on to the door at ten o’clock, and it wanted but two minutes to that when he was beating down the Castle hill in the teeth of the wind.

Never mind his errand, and expect fibs if you ask what had kept him. Remember that he was older at this time than when you first saw him, a French boy ‘with smut-rimmed eyes,’ crop-headed, pale, shrewd, and reticent. That was a matter of three years ago: the Queen was but nineteen and he four years younger. He was eighteen now, and may have had evening affairs like other people, no concern of yours or mine. Whatever they may have been, they had kept him unduly; he had two minutes and wanted seven. He drew his bonnet close, his short cape about him, and went scudding down the hill as fast as the snow would let him in shoes dangerously

thin for the weather, but useful for tiptoe purposes. The snow had been heaped upon the cawsey, but in the street trodden, thawed, and then frozen again to a surface of ice. From it came enough light to show that few people were abroad, and none lawfully, and that otherwise it was infernally dark. A strangely diffused, essential light it was, that of the snow. It put to shame three dying candles left in the Luckenbooths and the sick flame of an oil lamp above the Netherbow Port. After passing that, there was no sign of man or man's comforts until you were in the Abbey precincts.

Des-Essars knew—being as sharp as a needle—that something was changed the moment he reached those precincts; knew by the pricking of his skin, as they say. A double guard set; knots of men-at-arms; some horses led about; low voices talking in strange accents,—something was altered. Worse than all this, he found the word of the night unavailing: no manner of entry for him.

'My service is the Queen's, honourable sir,' he pleaded to an unknown sentry, who wore (he observed) a steel cap of unusual shape.

The square hackbutter shook his head. 'No way in this night, Frenchman.'

'By whose orders, if you please?'

'By mine, Frenchman.'

Here was misfortune! No help for it, but he must brave what he had hoped to avoid—his superior officer, to wit.

'If it please you, sir,' he said, 'I will speak with Mr. Erskine in the guardroom.'

'Mr. Airrskin!' was the shocking answer—and how the man spoke it!—'Mr. Airrskin! He's no here. He's awa'. So now off with ye, Johnny Frenchman.' The man obviously had orders: but whose orders?

Des-Essars shrugged. He shivered also, as he always did when refused anything—as if the world had proved suddenly a chill place. But really the affair was serious.

Inside the house he must be, and that early. Driven to his last resource, he walked back far enough for the dark to swallow him up, returned upon his tracks a little way so soon as the hackbutter had resumed his stamping up and down; branched off to the right, slipping through a ruinous stable, blown to pieces in former days by the English; crossed a frozen cabbage garden which, having been flooded, was now a sheet of cat-ice; and so came hard upon the Abbey wall. In this wall, as he very well knew, there were certain cavities, used as steps by the household when the gateways were either not convenient or likely to be denied: indeed, he would not, perhaps, have cared to reckon how many times he had used them himself. Having chipped the ice out of them with his hanger, he was triumphantly within the pale, hopping over the Queen's privy garden with high-lifted feet, like a dog in turnips. To win the palace itself was easy. It was mighty little use having friends in the kitchen if they could not do you services of that kind.

He had to find the Queen, though, and face what she might give him, but of that he had little fear. He knew that she would be at cards, and too full of her troubles and pains to seek for a new one. It is a queer reflection that he makes in his Memoirs—that although he romantically loved the Queen, he had no scruples about deceiving her and few fears of being found out, so only that she did not take the scrape to heart. 'She was a goddess to me,' he says, 'in those days, a remote point of my adoration. A young man, however, is compact of two parts, an earthly and a spiritual. If I had exhibited to her the frailties of my earthly part it would have been by a very natural impulse. However, I never did.' This is a digression: he knew that she would not fret herself about him and his affairs just now, because she was ill, and miserable about the King. Throwing a kiss of his hand, then, to the yawning scullery-wench, who had had to get out of her bed to open the window for him, he skimmed down the corridors on a light foot, and reached the great hall. He hoped to go tiptoe up the privy stair and gain the door of the cabinet without being heard. When she came out she would find him there, and all would be well. This was his

plan.

It was almost dark in the hall, but not quite. A tree-bole on the hearth was in the article of death; a few thin flames about the shell of it showed him a company of men in the corner by the privy stair. Vexatious! They were leaning to the wall, some sitting against it; some were on the steps asleep, their heads nodding to their knees. He was cut off his sure access, and must go by the main staircase—if he could. He tried it, sidling along by the farther wall; but they spied him, two of them, and one went to cut him off. A tall enemy this, for the little Frenchman; but luckily for him it was a case of boots against no boots where silence was of the essence of the contract. Des-Essars, his shoes in his hand, darted out into the open and raced straight for the stair. The enemy began his pursuit—in riding-boots. Heavens! the crash and clatter on the flags, the echo from the roof! It would never do: hushed voices called the man back; he went tender-footed, finally stopped. By that time the page was up the stair, pausing at the top to wipe his brows and neck of cold sweat, and to wonder as he wiped what all this might mean. Double guard in the court—strange voices—the word changed—Mr. Erskine away! No sentry in the hall, but, instead, a cluster of waiting, whispering men—in riding-boots—by the privy stair! The vivacious young man was imaginative to a fault; he could construct a whole tragedy of life and death out of a change in the weather. And here was a fateful climax to the tragedy of a stormy night! First, the stress of the driving snow—whirling, solitary, forlorn stuff!—the apprehension of wild work by every dark entry. Passing the Tolbooth, a shriek out of the blackness had sent his heart into his mouth. There had been fighting, too, in Sim's Close. He had seen a torch flare and dip, men and women huddled about two on the ground; one grunting, 'Tak' it! Tak' it!' and the other, with a strangled wail, 'Oh, Jesus!' Bad hearing all this—evil preparation. Atop of these apparitions, lo! their fulfilment: stroke after stroke of doom. Cloaked men by the privy stair—Dieu de Dieu! His heart was thumping at his ribs when he peeped through the curtain of the Queen's cabinet and saw his mistress

there with Lady Argyll and the Italian. ‘Blessed Mother!’ he thought, ‘here’s an escape for me. I had no notion the hour was so late.’ What he meant was, that the rest of the company had gone. He had heard that Lord Robert Stuart and the Laird of Criech were to sup that night. Well, they had supped and were gone! It must be on the stroke of midnight.

The Queen, as he could see, lay back in her elbow-chair, obviously suffering, picking at some food before her, but not eating any. Her lips were chapped and dry; she moistened them continually, then bit them. Lady Argyll, handsome, strong-featured, and swarthy, sat bolt upright and stared at the sconce on the wall; and as for the Italian, he did as he always did, lounged opposite his Queen, his head against the wainscot. Reflective after food, he used his toothpick, but no other ceremony whatsoever. He wore his cap on his head, ignored Lady Argyll—half-sister to the throne—and when he looked at her Majesty, as he often did, it was as a man might look at his wife. She, although she seemed too weary or too indifferent to lift her heavy eyelids, knew perfectly well that both her companions were watching her: Des-Essars was sure of that. He watched her himself intensely, and only once saw her meet Davy’s eye, when she passed her cup to him to be filled with drink, and he, as if thankful to be active, poured the wine with a flourish and smiled in her face as he served her. She observed both act and actor, and made no sign, neither drank from the cup now she had it; but sank back to her wretchedness and the contemplation of it, being in that pettish, brooding habit of mind which would rather run on in a groove of pain than brace itself to some new shift. As he watched what was a familiar scene to him, Des-Essars was wondering whether he should dare go in and report what he had observed in the hall. No! on the whole he would not do that. Signior Davy, who was a weasel in such a field as a young man’s mind, would assuredly fasten upon him at some false turn or other, never let go, and show no mercy. Like all the underlings of Holyrood he went in mortal fear of the Italian, though, unlike any of them, he admired him.

The little cabinet was very dim. There were candles on the table, but none alight in the sconces. From beyond, through a half-open door, came the drowsy voices of the Queen's women, murmuring their way through two more hours' vigil. Interminable nights! Cards would follow supper, you must know, and Signior Davy would try to outsit Lady Argyll. He always tried, and generally succeeded.

The Queen shifted, sighed, and played hasty tunes with her fingers on the table: she was never still. It was evident that she was at once very wretched and very irritable. Her dark-red gown was cut low and square, Venetian mode: Des-Essars could see quite well how short her breath was, and how quick. Yet she said nothing. Once she and Lady Argyll exchanged glances; the Mistress of the Robes inquired with her eyebrows, the Queen fretfully shook the question away. It was an unhappy supper for all but the graceless Italian, who was much at his ease now that he had unfastened some of the hooks of his jacket. The French lad, who had always been in love with his mistress and yet able to criticise her—as a Protestant may adore the Virgin Mary—admits that at this moment of her life, in this bitter mood, he found her extremely piquant. 'This pale, helpless, angry, pretty woman!' he exclaims upon his page. He would seldom allow that she was more than just a pretty woman; and now she was a good deal less. Her charms for him had never been of the face—she had an allure of her own. 'Mistress Seton was lovely, I consider, my Lady Bothwell most beautiful, and Mistress Fleming not far short of that: but the Queen's Majesty—ah! the coin from Mr. Knox's mint rang true. Honeypot! Honeypot! There you had her essence: sleepy, slow, soft sweetness—with a sharp aftertaste, for all that, to prick the tongue and set it longing.'

More than nice considerations, these, which the stealthy opening of a door and a step in the passage disturbed. Des-Essars would have straightened himself on that signal, to stand as a page should stand in the view of any one entering. Then he saw, out of the corner of his eye, the King go down the little stair. It must be the King, because—to say nothing of the tall figure, small-headed as it was,—he had seen the

long white gown. The King wore a white quilted-silk bedgown, lined with ermine. At the turning of the stair Des-Essars saw him just glance backwards over his shoulder towards the cabinet, but, being stiff within the shadow of the curtain, was not himself seen. After that furtive look he saw him go down the privy stair, his hand on the rope. Obviously he had an assignation with some woman below.

Before he had time to correct this conclusion by the memory of the cloaked men in the hall, he heard returning steps—somebody, this time, coming up the steps; no! there were more than one—two or three at least. He was sure of this—his ears had never deceived him—and yet it was the King alone who appeared at the stair-head with a lighted taper in his hand, which he must have got from the hall. He stood there for a moment, his face showing white and strained in the light, his mouth open, too; then, blowing out his taper, he came directly to the curtain of the Queen's cabinet, pulled it aside and went in. He had actually covered Des-Essars with the curtain without a notion that he was there; but the youth had had time to observe that he was fully dressed beneath his gown, and to get a hot whiff of the strong waters in his breath as he passed in. Urgent to see what all this might mean, he peeped through the hangings.

Lady Argyll rose up slowly when she saw the King, but made no reverence. Very few did in these days. The Italian followed her example, perfectly composed. The Queen took no notice of him. She rested as she had been, her head on the droop, eyebrows raised, eyes fixed on the disordered platter. The King, whose colour was very high, came behind her chair, stooped, and put his arm round her. His hand covered her bosom. She did not avoid, though she did not relish this.

'Madam, it is very late,' he said, and spoke breathlessly.

'It is not I who detain you,' said she.

'No, madam, no. But you do detain these good servants of yours. Here is your sister of Argyll; next door are your women. And so it is night after night. I think not of

myself.'

She lifted her head a little to look up sideways—but not at him. 'You think of very little else, to my understanding. Having brought me to the state where now I am, you are inclined to leave me alone. Rather, you were inclined; for this is a new humour, little to my taste.'

'I should be oftener here, believe me,' says the King, still embracing her, 'if I could feel more sure of a welcome—if all might be again as it was once between you and me.'

She laughed, without mirth; then asked, 'And how was it—once?'

The King stooped down and kissed her forehead, by the same act gently pushing back her head till it rested on his shoulder.

'Thus it was once, my Mary,' he said; and as she looked up into his face, wondering over it, searching it, he kissed her again. 'Thus it was once,' he repeated in a louder voice; and then, louder yet, 'Thus, O Queen of Scots!'

Once more he kissed her, and once more cried out, 'O Queen of Scots!' Then Des-Essars heard the footsteps begin again on the privy stair, and saw men come into the passage—many men.

Three of them, in cloaks and steel bonnets, came quickly to the door, and passed him. They went through the curtain. These three were Lord Ruthven, Ker of Fawdonsyde, and Mr. Archibald Douglas. Rigid in his shadow, Des-Essars watched all.

Seeing events in the Italian's eyes, rather than with her own—for Signior Davy had narrowed his to two threads of blue—the Queen lifted her head from her husband's arm and looked curiously round. The three stood hesitant within the door; Ruthven had his cap on his head, Fawdonsyde his, but Archie showed his grey poll. Little things like these angered her quickly; she shook free from the King and sat upright.

‘What is this, my Lord Ruthven? You forget yourself.’

‘Madam——’ he began; but Douglas nudged him furiously.

‘Your bonnet, man, your bonnet!’

The Queen had risen, and the fixed direction of her eyes gave him understanding.

‘Ah, my knapscall! I do as others do, madam,’ he said, with a meaning look at the Italian. ‘What is pleasant to your Majesty in yonder servant should not be an offence in a councillor.’

‘No, no, ma’am, nor it should not,’ muttered Fawdonsyde, who, nevertheless, doffed his bonnet.

The King was holding her again, she staring still at the scowling man in steel. ‘What do you want with me, Ruthven?’ she said. She had very dry lips.

He made a clumsy bow. ‘May it please your Majesty,’ he said, ‘we are come to rid you of this fellow Davy, who has been overlong familiar here, and overmuch—for your Majesty’s honour.’

She turned her face to the King, whose arm still held her—a white, strong face.

‘You,’ she said fiercely, ‘what have you to do in this? What have you to say?’

‘I think with Ruthven—with all of them—my friends and well-wishers. ’Tis the common voice: they say I am betrayed, upon my soul! I cannot endure—I entreat you to trust me——’ He was incoherent.

She broke away from his arm, took a step forward and put herself between him and the three. She was so angry that she could not find words. She stammered, began to speak, rejected what words came. The Italian took off his cap and watched Ruthven intently. The moment of pause that ensued was broken by Ruthven’s raising his hand, for the Queen flashed out, ‘Put down your hand, sir!’ and seemed as if she would have struck him. Fawdonsyde here cocked his pistol and deliberately raised it against the Queen’s person. ‘Treason! treason!’ shrieked Des-Essars from the

curtain, and blundered forward to the villain.

But the Queen had been before him; at last she had found words, and deeds. She drew herself up, quivering, went directly towards Fawdonsyde, and beat down the point of the pistol with her flat hand. ‘Do you dare so much? Then I dare more. What shameless thing do you here? If I had a sword in my hand——’ Here she stopped, tongue-tied at what was done to her.

For Ruthven, regardless of majesty, had got her round the middle. He pushed her back into the King’s arms; and, ‘Take your wife, my lord,’ says he; ‘take your good-wife in your arms and cherish her, while we do what must be done.’

The King held her fast in spite of her struggles. At that moment the Italian made a rattling sound in his throat and backed from the table. Archie Douglas stepped behind the King, to get round the little room; Ruthven approached his victim from the other side; the Italian pulled at the table, got it between himself and the enemy, and overset it: then Lady Argyll screamed, and snatched at a candlestick as all went down. It was the only light left in the room, held up in her hand like a beacon above a tossing sea. Where was Des-Essars? Cuffed aside to the wall, like a rag doll. The maids were packed in the door of the bedchamber, and one of them had pulled him into safety among them.

All that followed he marked: how the frenzied Italian, hedged in between Douglas and Ruthven, vaulted the table, knocked over Fawdonsyde, and then, whimpering like a woman, crouched by the Queen, his fingers in the pleats of her gown. He saw the King’s light eyelashes blink, and heard his breath come whistling through his nose; and that pale, disfigured girl, held up closely against her husband, moaning and hiding her face in his breast. And now Ruthven, grinning horribly, swearing to himself, and Douglas, whining like a dog at a rat-hole, were at their man’s hands, trying to drag him off. Fawdonsyde hovered about, hopeful to help. Lady Argyll held up the candle.

Douglas wrenched open one hand, Ruthven got his head down and bit the other till it parted.

‘O Dio! O Dio!’ long shuddering cries went up from the Italian as they dragged him out into the passage, where the others waited.

It was dark there, and one knew not how full of men; but Des-Essars heard them snarling and mauling like a pack of wolves; heard the scuffling, the panting, the short oaths—and then a piercing scream. At that there was silence; then some one said, as he struck, ‘There! there! Hog of Turin!’ and another (Lindsay), ‘He’s done.’

The King put the Queen among her maids in a hurry, and went running out into the passage as they were shuffling the body down the stair. Des-Essars just noticed, and remembered afterwards, his naked dagger in his hand as he went out helter-skelter after his friends. Upon some instinct or other, he followed him as far as the head of the stair. From the bottom came up a great clamour—howls of execration, one or two cries for the King, a round of welcome when he appeared. The page ran back to the cabinet, and found it dark.

It was bad to hear the Queen’s laughter in the bedchamber—worse when that shuddered out into moaning, and she began to wail as if she were keening her dead. He could not bear it, so crept out again to spy about the passages and listen to the shouting from the hall. ‘A Douglas! a Douglas!’ was the most common cry. Peeping through a window which gave on to the front, he saw the snowy court ablaze with torches, alive with men, and against the glare the snowflakes whirling by, like smuts from a burning chimney. It was clear enough now that the palace was held, all its inmates prisoners. But what seemed more terrifying than that was the emptiness of the upper corridors, the sudden hush after so much riot—and the Queen’s moan, haunting all the dark like a lost soul.

It was so bad up there that the lad, his brain on fire, felt the need of any company—even that of gaolers. No one hindering, he crept down the privy

stair,—horribly slippery it was, and he knew why,—hoping to spy into the hall; and this also he was free to do, since the stair-foot was now unguarded. He found the hall crowded with men; great torches smoking to the rafters; a glow of light on shields and blazonry, the banners and achievements of dead kings. In the stir of business the arras surged like the waves of the sea. A furious draught blew in from the open doors, to which all faces were turned. Men craned over each others' backs to look there. Des-Essars could not see the King; but there at the entry was the Earl of Morton in his armour, two linkmen by him. He was reading from a bill: in front of him was a clear way; across it stood the Masters of Lindsay and Ruthven, and men in their liveries, halberds in their hands.

'Pass out, Earl of Atholl,' he heard Lord Morton say; 'Pass out, Lord of Tullibardine': and then, after a while of looking and pointing, he saw the grizzled head and square shoulders of my Lord Atholl moving down the lane of men, young Tullibardine uncovered beside him.

'Pass out, Pitcur; pass out, Mr. James Balfour; pass out, the Lord Herries.' The same elbowing in the crowd: three men file out into the scurrying snow—all the Queen's friends, observe.

Near to Des-Essars a man asked of his neighbour, 'Will they let by my Lord Huntly, think you?'

The other shook his head. 'Never! He'll keep company with the Reiver of Liddesdale, be sure.'

The Reiver was Lord Bothwell, of course, whom Des-Essars knew to be in the house. 'Good fellow-prisoners for us,' he thought.

'Pass out, Mr. Secretary, on a fair errand.'

There was some murmuring at this; but the man went out unmolested, with a sweep of the bonnet to my Lord Morton as he passed. Des-Essars saw him stop at the first taste of the weather and cover his mouth with his cloak—but he waited for no more.

A thought had struck him. He slipped back up the puddled stair, gained the first corridor, and, knowing his way by heart, went in and out of the passages until he came to a barred door. Here he put his ear to the crack and listened intently.

For a long time he could hear nothing on either side the door; but by and by somebody with a light—a man—came to the farther end of the passage and looked about, raising and dipping his lantern. That was an ugly moment! Crouched against the wall, he saw the lamp now high now low, and marked with a leaping heart how nearly the beams reached to where he lay. He heard a movement behind the door, too, but had to let it go. Not for full three minutes after the disappearance of the watchman did he dare put his knuckles to the door, and tap, very softly, at the panel. He tapped and tapped. A board creaked; there was breathing at the door. A voice, shamming boldness, cried, 'Qui est?'

Des-Essars smiled. 'C'est toi, Paris?'

His question was answered by another. 'Tiens, qui est ce drôle?'

Paris, for a thousand pound! Knocking again, he declared himself. 'It is I, Paris—M. Des-Essars.'

'Monsieur Baptiste, your servant,' then said Paris through the door.

'My lord is a prisoner, Paris?'

'Not for the first time, my dear sir.'

'How many are you there?'

'Four. My lord, and Monsieur de Huntly, myself, Jock Gordon.'

'Well, you should get out—but quickly, before they have finished in the hall. They are passing men out. Be quick, Paris—tell my lord.'

'Bravo!' says Paris. 'We should get out—and quickly! By the chimney, sir? There is no chimney. By the window? There is but one death for every man, and one neck to be broke.'

‘You will break no necks at all, you fool. Below these windows is the lions’ house.’

Paris thought. ‘Are you sure of that?’

‘Sure! Oh, Paris, make haste!’

Again Paris appeared to reflect; and then he said, ‘If you are betraying a countryman of yours, M. Des-Essars, and your old patron also, you shall never see God.’

Des-Essars wrung his hands. ‘You fool! you fool! Are you mad? Call my lord.’

‘Wait,’ said Paris. In a short time, the sound of heavy steps. Ah, here was my lord!

‘’Tis yourself, Baptist?’

‘Yes, yes, my lord.’

‘Have they finished with Davy?’

‘My God, sir!’

‘What of the Queen?’

‘Her women have her.’

‘Now, Baptist. You say the lion-house is below these windows. Which windows? There are four.’

‘The two in the midst, my lord. My lord, across the Little Garden—in a straight line—there are holes in the wall.’

‘Oho! You are a brave lad. Go to your bed.’

Jean-Marie-Baptiste Des-Essars went back to the Queen’s side. At the door of the cabinet he found Adam Gordon in a fit of sobs. ‘Oh, my fine man,’ says the French lad, stirring him with his foot, ‘leave tears to the women. This is men’s business.’

Adam lifted up his stricken face. ‘Where have you been cowering, traitor?’

Jean-Marie laughed grimly. ‘I have been saving Scotland,’ he said, ‘whilst you were blubbering here.’

Adam Gordon, being up by now, knocked Jean-Marie down.

‘I excused him readily, however,’ he writes in his Memoirs, ‘considering the agitation we all suffered at the time. And where he felled me there I lay, and slept like a child.’

CHAPTER VI VENUS IN THE TOILS

Sir James Melvill, whom readers must remember at Saint Andrews as a shrewd, elderly courtier, expert in diplomacy and not otherwise without humours of a dry sort, plumed himself upon habit—‘Dear Mother Use-and-Wont,’ as he used to say. A man is sane at thirty, rich at forty, wise at fifty, or never; and what health exacts, wealth secures, and wisdom requires, is the orderly, punctual performance of the customary. You may have him now putting his theory into severest practice: for though he had seen what was to be seen during that night of murder and alarm, though he had lain down to sleep in his cloak no earlier than five o’clock in the small hours, by seven, which was his Sunday time, he was up and about, stamping his booted feet to get the blood down, flacking his arms, and talking encouragement to himself—as, ‘Hey, my bonny man, how’s a’ with you the morn?’ Very soon after you might have seen him over the ashes of the fire, raking for red embers and blowing some life into them with his frosted breath. All about lay his snoring fellows, though it was too dark to see them. Every man lay that night where he could find his length, and slept like the dead in their graves. There seemed no soul left in a body but in his own.

He went presently to the doors, thinking to open them unhindered. But no! a sitting sentry barred the way with a halberd. ‘May one not look at the weather, my fine young man?’ says Sir James.

‘’Tis as foul as the grave, master, and a black black frost. No way out the now.’

Sir James, who intended to get out, threw his cloak over his shoulder and gravely paced the hall until the chances should mend. One has not warred with the Margrave, held a hand at cards with the Emperor Charles at Innspruck, loitered at

Greenwich in attendance upon Queen Elizabeth, or endured the King of France in one of his foaming rages, without learning patience. He proposed to walk steadily up and down the hall until nine o'clock. Then he would get out.

The women said afterwards that the Queen had quieted down very soon, dried her eyes, gone to bed, and slept almost immediately 'as calm as a babe new-born.' However that may be, she awoke as early as Sir James, and, finding herself in Mary Fleming's arms, awoke her too in her ordinary manner by biting her shoulder, not hard. 'My lamb, my lamb!' cooed the maid; but the Queen in a brisk voice said, 'What's o'clock?' The lamp showed it to be gone seven.

The Queen said: 'Get up, child, and find me the page who was in the cabinet last night. I saw him try the entry, and he ran in when—when.... It was Baptist, I think.'

She spoke in an even voice, as if the occasion had been a card party. This frightened Mary Fleming, who began to quiver, and to say, 'Oh, ma'am, did Baptist see all? 'Twill have scared away his wits.' And then she tried coaxing. 'Nay, ma Reinette, but you must rest awhile. Come, let me stroke your cheek'—a common way with them of inviting sleep to her.

But the Queen said, 'I have had too much stroking—too much. Now do as I bid you.' So the maid clothed herself in haste and went out with a lamp.

Outside the door she found the two youths asleep—Des-Essars on the floor, Gordon by the table—and awoke them both. 'Which of you was on the door last night?'

'It was I, Mistress Fleming,' said the foreigner. 'All the time I was there.'

'Come with me, then. You are sent for.'

He followed her in high excitement into the Queen's bedchamber. There he saw Margaret Carwood asleep on her back, lying on the floor; and the Queen propped up with pillows, a white silk shift upon her—or half upon her, for one shoulder was out of it. She looked sharper, more like Circe, than she had done since her discomforts began: very intense, very pale, very black in the eyes. And she smiled at him in a

curiously secret way—a beckoning, fluttering of the lips, as if she shared intelligence with him, and told him so by signs. ‘She was as sharp and hard and bright as a cut diamond,’ he writes of this appearance; ‘nor do I suppose that any lady in the storied world could have turned her face away from a night of terror and blood, towards a day-to-come of insult, chains and degradation, as she turned hers now before my very eyes.’

She did not say anything for a while, but considered him absorbingly, with those fever-bright eyes and that cautious smile, until she had made up her mind. He, of course, was down on his knee; Mary Fleming, beside him, stood—her hand just touching his shoulder.

‘Come hither, Jean-Marie.’

Approaching, he knelt by the bed.

‘No,’ said she, ‘stand up—closer. Now give me your hand.’

He held it out, and she took it in her own, and put it against her side. He simply gazed at her in wonder.

‘Tell me now if you feel my heart beating.’

He waited. ‘No, madam,’ said he then, whispering.

‘Think again.’

He did. ‘No, madam. Ah! pardon. Yes, I feel it.’

‘That will do.’

He whipped back his hand and put it behind him. It had been the right hand. The Queen watched all, still smiling in that wise new way of hers.

‘Now,’ she said, ‘I think you will serve me, since you have assured yourself that I am not so disturbed as you are. I wish you to find out where they have put him.’

He felt Mary Fleming start and catch at her breath; but to him the question seemed very natural.

‘I will go now, madam.’

‘Yes. Go now. Be secret and speedy, and come back to me.’

He bowed, rose up, and went tiptoe out of that chamber of mystery and sharp sweetness. Just beyond the door Adam Gordon pounced on him and caught him by the neck. He struggled fiercely, tried to bite.

‘Let me go, let me go, you silly fool, and worse! I’m on service. Oh, my God, let me go!’

‘How does she? Speak it, you French thief.’

‘Dieu de Dieu!’ he panted, ‘I shall stab you.’

At once his hands were pinned to the wall, and he crucified. He told his errand—since time was all in all—with tears of rage.

‘I shall go with you,’ says Adam. ‘We will go together.’

In the entry of the Chapel Royal, near the kings’ tombs, they found what seemed to be a new grave. A loose flagstone—scatter of gravel all about—the stone not level: one end, in fact, projected its whole thickness above the floor.

‘There he lies,’ says Adam. ‘What more do you want?’

Des-Essars was tugging at the stone. ‘It moves, it moves!’ He was crimson in the face.

They both tussled together: it gave to this extent, that they got the lower edge clear of the floor.

‘Hold on! Keep it so!’ snapped Des-Essars suddenly.

He dropped on to his stomach and thrust his arm into the crack, up to the elbow.

‘What are you at? Be sharp, man, or I shall drop it!’ cried Adam in distress.

He was sharp. In a moment he had withdrawn his hand, jumped up and away, and was pelting to the stairs. Adam let the great stone down with a thud and was after

him. He was stopped at the Queen's door by a maid—Seton.

'Less haste, Mr. Adam. You cannot enter. Her Majesty is busy.'

Des-Essars had found the Queen waiting for him—nobody else in the room.

'Well? You saw it?'

'I have seen a grave, madam.'

'Well?'

'It is a new grave.'

'There's nothing in that, boy.'

'Monsieur David is in there, ma'am.'

Her quick eyes narrowed. How she peered at him! 'How do you know?'

'Madam, I lifted up the stone. No one was about.'

'Well?'

'I found something under it. I have it. I am therefore quite sure.'

'What did you find? Let me see it.'

He plucked out of his breast a glittering thing and laid it on the bed.

'Behold it, madam!' Folding his arms, he watched it where it lay.

The Queen stared down at a naked dagger. A longish, lean, fluted blade; and upon the bevelled edge a thick smear, half its length.

She did not touch it, but moved her lips as if she were talking to it. 'Do I know you, dagger? Have we been friends, dagger, old friends—and now you play me a trick?' She turned to Des-Essars. 'You know that dagger?'

'Yes, ma'am.' He had seen it often, and no later than last night, and then in hand.

'That will do,' said she. 'Leave me now. Send Fleming and Seton—and Carwood also. I shall rise.'

When he was gone her face changed—grew softer, more thoughtful. Now she held

out her hand daintily, the little finger high above the others, and with the tips of two daintily touched the dagger. She was rather horrible—like a creature of the woods at night, an elf or a young witch, playing with a corpse. She laughed quietly to herself as she fingered the stained witness of so much terror; but then, when she heard them at the door, picked it up by the handle and put it under the bedclothes. No one was to know what she meant to do.

The women came in. ‘Dress me, Carwood, and quickly. Dolet, have you my bath ready?’ ‘Mais, c’est sûr, Majesté.’ They poured out for her a bath of hot red wine. No day of her life passed but she dipped herself in that.

At nine o’clock, braced into fine fettle by his exercise, Sir James Melvill went again to the hall doors. A few shiverers were about by this time, for sluggard dawn was gaping at the windows; some knelt by the fire which his forethought had saved for them, some hugged themselves in corners; one man was praying aloud in an outlandish tongue, praying deeply and striking his forehead with his palm. Sir James, not to be deterred by prayers or spies, stepped up to the sentry, a new man, and tapped him on the breast. ‘Now, my honest friend,’ he said pleasantly, ‘I have waited my two hours, and am prepared to wait other two. But he to whom my pressing errand is must wait no longer. I speak of my lord of Morton—your master and mine, as things have turned out.’

‘My lord will be here by the ten o’clock, sir,’ says the man.

‘I had promised him exact tidings by eight,’ replied Sir James; and spoke so serenely that he was allowed to pass the doors, which were shut upon him. Nobody could have regretted more than himself that he had lied: he had no mortal errand to the Earl of Morton. But seeing that he had not failed of Sabbath sermon for a matter of fifteen years, it was not to be expected that the murder of an Italian was to stay him now. Sermon in Saint Giles’s was at nine. He was late.

The fates were adverse: there was to be no sermon for him that Sabbath. As he

walked gingerly across the Outer Close—a staid, respectable, Sunday gentleman—he heard a casement open behind him, and turning sharply saw the Queen at her chamber window, dressed in grey with a white ruff, and holding a kerchief against her neck. After a hasty glance about, which revealed no prying eyes, he made a low reverence to her Majesty.

Sparkling and eager as she looked, she nodded her head and leaned far out of the window. ‘Sir James Melvill,’ she called down, in a clear, carrying voice, ‘you shall do me a service if you please.’

‘God save your Majesty, and I do please,’ says Sir James.

‘Then help me from this prison where now I am,’ she said. ‘Go presently to the Provost, bid him convene the town and come to my rescue. Go presently, I say; but run fast, good sir, for they will stay you if they can.’

‘Madam, with my best will and legs.’ He saluted, and walked briskly on over the frozen snow.

Out of doors after him came a long-legged man in black, a chain about his neck, a staff in hand; following him, three or four lacqueys in a dark livery.

‘Ho, Sir James Melvill! Ho, Sir James!’

He was by this time at the Outer Bailey, which stood open for him—three paces more and he had done it. But there were a few archers lounging about the door of the Guard House, and two who crossed and recrossed each other before the gates. ‘Gently doth it,’ quoth he, and stayed to answer his name to the long-legged Chamberlain.

‘What would you, Mr. Wishart, sir?’

‘Sir James, my lord of Ruthven hath required me——’ But he got no further.

‘Your lord of Ruthven?’ cried Sir James. ‘Hath he required you to require of me, Mr. Wishart?’

‘Why, yes, sir. My lord would be pleased to know whither you are bound so fast. He is, sir, in a manner of speaking, deputy to the King’s Majesty at this time.’

Sir James blinked. He could see the Queen behind her window, watching him. ‘I am bound, sir,’ he said deliberately, ‘whither I shall hope to see my lord of Ruthven tending anon. The sermon, Mr. Wishart, the sermon calls me; the which I have not foregone these fifteen years, nor will not to-day unless you and your requirements keep me unduly.’

‘I told my lord you would be for the preaching, Sir James. I was sure o’t. But he’s a canny nobleman, ye ken; and the King’s business is before a’.’

‘I have never heard, Mr. Wishart, that it was before that of the King of kings,’ said Sir James.

‘Ou, fie, Sir James! To think that I should say so!’—Mr. Wishart was really concerned—‘Nor my lord neither, whose acceptance of the rock of doctrine is well known. I shall just pop in and inform my lord.’

‘Do so. And I wish you a good day, Mr. Wishart,’ says Sir James in a stately manner, and struck out of the gates and up the hill.

He went directly to the Provost’s house, and what he learned there seemed to him so serious, that he overstepped his commission by a little way. ‘Mr. Provost,’ he said, ‘you tell me that you have orders from the King. I counsel you to disregard them. I counsel you to serve and obey your sanctified anointed Queen. The King, Mr. Provost, is her Majesty’s right hand, not a doubt of it; but when the right hand knoweth not what the left hand is about, it is safer to wait until the pair are in agreement again. What the King may have done yesterday he may not do to-day—he may not wish it, or he may not be capable of it. I am a simple gentleman, Mr. Provost, and you are a high officer, steward of this good town. I counsel not the officer in you, but the sober burgess, when I repeat that what may have been open to the King yesterday may be shut against him to-day.’

‘Good guide us, Sir James, this is dangerous work!’ cried the Provost. ‘Who’s your informant in the matter?’

‘I have told you that I am a simple gentleman,’ said Sir James, ‘but I lied to you. I am a Queen’s messenger: I go from you to meet her Majesty’s dearest brother, the good Earl of Moray, who should be home to-day.’

It must be owned that, if he was an unwilling liar, he was a good one. He lied like truth, and the stroke was masterly. The Provost set about convening the town; and when Sir James Melvill walked back to Holyrood—after sermon—all the gates were held in the Queen’s name.

He did not see her, for the King was with her at the time; but Mary Beaton received him, heard his news and reported it. She returned shortly with a message: ‘The Queen’s thanks to Sir James Melvill. Let him ride the English road and meet the Earl of Moray by her Majesty’s desire.’ He was pleased with the errand, proud to serve the Queen. His greatest satisfaction, however, was to reflect that he had not, after all, lied to the Provost of Edinburgh.

Now we go back to Queen Mary. Bathed and powdered, dressed and coifed, her head full of schemes and heart high in courage, she waited for the King, being very sure in her own mind that he would come if she made no sign. Certainly, certainly he would come: she had reasoned it all out as she lay half in bed, smiling and whispering to the dagger. ‘He has been talked into this, by whom I am not sure, but I think by Ruthven and his friends. They will never stop where now they are, but will urge him further than he cares to go. I believe he will wait to see what I do. He is not bold by nature, but by surges of heat which drive him. Fast they drive him—yet they leave him soon! When he held me last night he was trembling—I felt him shake. And yet—he has strong arms, and the savour of a man is upon him!’

She sat up, with her hands to clasp her knee, and let her thought go galloping through the wild business. ‘I felt the child leap as I lay on his breast! Did he urge

towards the King his father, glad of his manhood? So, once upon a day, urged I towards the King my lord!'

She began to blush, but would be honest with herself. 'And if he came again to me now, and took me so again in his arms—and again I sensed the man in him—what should I do?'

She looked wise, as she smiled to feel her eyes grow dim. But then she shook her head. 'He will come, he will come—but not so. I know him: oh, I know him like a thumbed old book! And when I bring out that which I have here'—her hand caressed the dagger—'I know what he will do. Yes, yes, like an old book! He will rail against his betrayer, and in turn betray him. Ah, my King, my King, do I read you aright? We shall see very soon.'

She looked out upon the snowy close, the black walls and dun pall of air; she saw Sir James Melvill set forward upon his pious errand, and changed it, as you know. Then she resumed her judging and weighing of men.

Odd! She gave no thought to the wretched Italian, her mind was upon the quick, and not the dead. Ruthven, a black, dangerous man—scolding-tongued, impious in mind, thinking in oaths—yes: but a man! Archie Douglas, supple as a snake, Fawdonsyde and his foolish pistols, she considered not at all; but her mind harped upon Ruthven and the King, who had each laid rough hands upon her—and thus, it seems, earned her approbation. Ruthven had taken her about the middle and pushed her back, helpless, into the other's arms; and she had felt those taut arms, and not struggled; but leaned there, her face in his doublet. Pardieu, each had played the man that night! And Ruthven would play it again, and the King would not. No, no; not he!

Ruthven, by rights, should be won over. Should she try him? No, he would refuse her; she was sure of it. He was as bluff, as flinty-cored as——Ranging here and there, searching Scotland for his parallel, her heart jumped as she found him. Bothwell, Bothwell! Ha, if he had been there! It all began to re-enact itself—the

scuffling, grunting, squealing business, with Bothwell's broad shoulders steady in the midst of it. Man against man: Bothwell and Ruthven face to face, and the daggers agleam in the candle-light:—hey, how she saw it all doing! Ruthven would stoop and glide by the wall: his bent knees, his mad, twitching brows! Bothwell would stand his ground in mid-floor, and his little eyes would twinkle. 'Play fairly with the candle, my Lady Argyll!' and he would laugh—yes, she could hear his 'Ho, ho, ho!' But she jumped up as she came to that, she panted and felt her cheeks burn. She held her fine throat with both hands until she had calmed herself. So doing, a thought struck her. She rang her hand-bell and sent for Des-Essars once more.

When he came to her she made a fuss over him, stroked his hair, put her hand on his shoulder, said he was her young knight who should ride out to her rescue. He was to take a message from her to the Earl of Bothwell—that he was on no account to stir out of town until he heard from her again. He should rather get in touch with all of her friends and be ready for instant affairs. Des-Essars went eagerly but discreetly to work. She then had just time to leave a direction for Melvill, that he should be first with her brother Moray, when they told her that the King was coming in.

'Of course he is coming,' she said. 'What else can he do?'

Her courage rose to meet him more than half-way. If Des-Essars had been allowed to feel her heart again he would have found it as steady as a man's.

'I will see the King in the red closet,' she said. 'Seton, Fleming, come you with me.'

When he was announced he found her thus in company, sitting at her needlework on a low coffer by the window.

The young man had thickened rims to his eyes, but else looked pinched and drawn. He kept a napkin in his hand, with which he was for ever dabbing his mouth: seeming to search for signs of blood upon it, he inspected it curiously whenever it had touched him. As he entered the Queen glanced up, bowed her head to him and resumed her stitch-work. The two maids, after their curtseys, remained standing—to

his visible perturbation. It was plain that he had expected to find her alone; also that he had strung himself up for a momentous interview—and that she had not. He grew more and more nervous, the napkin hovered incessantly near his mouth; half-turning to call his man Standen into the room, he thought better of it, and came on a little way, saying, ‘Madam, how does your Majesty?’

She looked amused at the question, as she went on sewing.

‘As well, my lord,’ she told him, ‘as I can look to be these many months more. But women must learn such lessons, which men have only to teach.’

He knew that he was outmatched. ‘I am thankful, madam——’

‘My lord, you have every reason.’

‘I say, I am thankful; for I had a fear——’

She gave him a sharp look. ‘Do you fear, my lord? What have you to fear? Your friends are about you, your wife a prisoner. What have you to fear?’

‘The tongue, madam.’

She had goaded him to this, and could have had him at her mercy had she so willed it. But she was silent, husbanding her best weapon against good time.

He went headlong on. ‘I had words for your private ear. I had hoped that by a little intimacy, such as may be looked for between——But it’s all one.’

She affected not to understand, pored over his fretful scraps with the pure pondering of a child. ‘But——! Converse, intimacy between us! Who is to prevent it? Ah, my poor maids afflict you! What may be done before matrons must be guarded from the maids. Indeed, my lord, and that is my opinion. Go, my dears. The King is about to discuss the affairs of marriage.’

They went out. The King immediately came to her, stooped and took her hand up from her lap. She kept the other hidden.

‘My Mary,’ he said—‘My Mary! let all be new-born between us.’

She heard the falter in his voice, but considered rather his fine white hand as it held her own, and judged it with a cool brain. A frail hand for a man! So white, so thinly boned, the veins so blue! Could such hands ever hold her again? And how hot and dry! A fever must be eating him. Her own hands were cold. New-born love—for this hectic youth!

‘New-born, my lord?’ she echoed him, sighing. ‘Alas, that which must be born should be paid for first. And what the reckoning of that may be now, you know as well as I. May not one new birth be as much as I can hope for, or desire? I do think so.’

Fully as well as she he knew the peril she had been in, she and the load she carried. He went down on his knee beside her, and, holding her one hand, sought after the other, which she hid.

‘My dear,’ he said earnestly, ‘oh, my dear, judge me not hardly. I endeavoured to shield you last night—I held you fast—they dared not touch you! Remember it, my Mary. As for my faults, I own them fairly. I was provoked—anger moved me—bitter anger. I am young. I am not even-tempered: remember this and forgive me. And, I pray you, give me your hand.—No, the other, the other! For I need it, my heart—indeed and indeed.’ That hand was gripped about a cold thing in her lap, under her needlework. He could not have it without that which it held; and now she knew that he should not. For now she scorned him—that a man who had laid his own hands to man’s work should now be on his knees, pleading for his wife’s hands instead of snatching them—why, she herself was the better man! Womanlike, she played with what she could have killed in a flash.

‘My other hand, my lord? Do you ask for it? You had it once, when you put rings upon it, but let it go. Do you ask for it again? It can give you no joy.’

‘I need it, I need it! You should not deny me.’ He craved it abjectly. ‘Oh, my soul, my soul, I kiss the one—let me kiss the other, lest it be jealous.’

Unhappy conceit! Her eyes paled, and you might have thought her tongue a snake's, darting, forked, flickering out and in as she struck hard.

'Traitor!' thus she stabbed him—'Traitor, son of a traitor, take and kiss it if you dare.' She laid above her caught hand that other, cool and firm, and opened it to show him the handle of his own dagger. She took the blade by the point and held the thing up, swinging before his shocked eyes. 'Lick that, hound!' she said: 'you should know the taste of it better than I.'

He dropped her one hand, stared stupidly at the other: but as his gaze concentrated upon the long smear on the blade you could have seen the sweat rising on his temples.

She had read him exquisitely. After the first brunt of terror, rage was what he felt—furious rage against the man whom he supposed to have betrayed him. 'Oh, horrible traitor!' he muttered by the window, whither he had betaken himself for refuge,—'Oh, Archie Douglas, if I could be even with thee for this! Oh, man, man, man, what a curious, beastly villain!' He was much too angry now to be tender of his wife—either of her pity or revenge; he turned upon her, threatening her from his window.

'You shall not intimidate me. I am no baby in your hands. This man is a villain, I tell you, whom I shall pursue till he is below my heel. He has laid this, look you for a trap. This was got by theft, and displayed by malice—devilish craft of a traitor. And do you suppose I shall let it go by? You mistake me, by God, if you do. Foul thief!—black, foul theft!'

She pointed to the smear on the blade. 'And this?' she asked him: 'what of this? Was this got by theft, my lord? Was this dry blood thieved from a dead man? Or do I mistake, as you suppose? Nay, wretch, but you know that I do not. The man was dead long before you dared touch him. Dead and in rags—and then the King drove in his blade!' Her face—Hecate in the winter—withered him more than her words.

Though these contained a dreadful truth, the other chilled his blood. He crept aimlessly about the room, feeling his heart fritter to water, and all the remains of his heat congested in his head. He tried to straighten his back, his knees: there seemed no sap in his bones. And she sat on, with cold critical eyes, and her lips hard together.

'My Mary,' he began to stammer, 'this is all a plot against my life—surely, surely you see it. I have enemies, the worse in that they are concealed—I see now that all the past has been but a plot—why, yes, it is plain as the daylight! I entreat you to hear me: this is most dangerous villainy—I can prove it. They swore to stand my friends—fast, fast they swore it. And here—to your hand—is proof positive. Surely, surely, you see how I am trapped by these shameful traffickers!'

Her eyes never left his face, but followed him about the room on his aimless tour; and whether he turned from the window or the wall, so sure as he looked up he saw them on him. They drove him into speech. 'I meant honestly,' he began again, shifting away from those watchful lights; 'I meant honestly indeed. I have lived amiss—oh, I know it well! A man is led into sin, and one sin leads to another. But I am punished, threatened, in peril. Let me escape these nets and snares, I may do well yet. My Mary, all may be well! Let us stand together—you and I'—he came towards her with his hands out, stopped, started back. 'Look away—look away; take your eyes from off me—they burn!' He covered his own. 'O God, my God, how miserable I am!'

'You are a prisoner as I am,' said the Queen. 'We stand together because we are tied together. And as for my eyes, what you abhor in them is what you have put there. But since we are fellow-prisoners, methinks——'

He looked wildly. 'Who says I am prisoner? If I am—if I am—why, I am betrayed on all hands. My kinsmen—my father—no, no, no! That is foolishness. Madam,' he asked her, being desperate, 'who told you that I was a prisoner?'

She glanced at the dagger. ‘This tells me. Why, think you, should Archie Douglas have laid that in the grave, except for me to find it there?’

It was, or it might have been, ludicrous to see his dismay. He stared, with dots where his eyes should have been; he puffed his cheeks and blew them empty; in his words he lost all sense of proportion.

‘Beastly villain! Why, it is a plot against me! Why, they may murder me! Why, this may have been their whole intent! Lord God, a plot!’

He pondered this dreadfully, seeing no way of escape, struggling with the injury of it and the pity of it. Consideration that she was in the same plight, that he had plotted against her, and now himself was plotted against: there was food for humour in such a thought, but no food for him. Of the two feelings he had, resentment prevailed, and brought his cunning into play. ‘By heaven and hell,’ he said, ‘but I can counter shrewdly on these knaves. Just wait a little.’ He cheered as he fumbled in his bosom. ‘You shall see, you shall see—now you shall see whether or no I can foin and parry with these night-stabbers. Oh, the treachery, the treachery! But wait a little—now, now, now!’

He produced papers in a gush—bonds, schedules, signatures, seals—all tumbled pell-mell into her lap. She read there what she had guessed beforehand: Morton, Ruthven, Lindsay, Douglas, Lethington—ah, she had forgotten this lover of Mary Fleming’s!—Boyd—yes, yes, and the stout Kirkcaldy of Grange. Not her brothers? No: but she suspected that Lethington’s name implied Moray’s. Well, Sir James would win her back Moray, she hoped. She did not trouble with any more. ‘Yes, yes, your friends, my lord. Your friends,’ she repeated, lingering on the pleasant word, ‘who have made use of you to injure me, and now have dropped you out of window. Well! And now what will you do, fellow-prisoner?’

At her knees now, his wretched head in her lap, his wretched tears staining her, he confessed the whole business, sparing nobody, not even himself; and as his

miserable manhood lay spilling there it staled—like sour milk in sweet—any remnants of attraction his tall person may have had for her. She could calculate as she listened—and so she did—to what extent she might serve herself yet of this watery fool. But she could not for the life of her have expressed her contempt for him. The thing had come to pass too exactly after her calculation. If he had been a boy she might have pitied him, or if, on entering her presence, he had laid sudden hands upon her, exulting in his force and using it mannishly; had he been greedy, overbearing, insolent, snatching—and a man!—she might, once more and for ever, have given him all her heart. But a blubbering, truth-telling oaf—heaven and earth! could she have wedded this? Well, he would serve to get her out of Holyrood; and meantime she was tired and must forgive, to get rid of him.

This was not so easy as it sounds, because at the first word of human toleration she uttered he pricked up his pampered ears. As she went on to speak of the lesson he had learned, of the wisdom of trusting her for the future and of being ruled by her experience and judgment, he brushed his eyes and began to encroach. His tears had done him good, and her recollected air gave him courage; he felt shriven, more at ease. So he enriched himself of her hand again, he edged up to share her seat; very soon she felt his arm stealing about her waist. She allowed these things because she had decided that she must.

He now became very confidential, owning freely to his jealousy of the Italian—surely pardonable in a lover!—talking somewhat of his abilities with women, his high-handed ways (which he admitted that he had in excess: ‘a fault, that!‘), his ambitions towards kingship, crowns-matrimonial, and the like trappings of manhood. She listened patiently, saying little, judging and planning incessantly. This he took for favour, advanced from stronghold to stronghold, growing as he climbed. The unborn child—pledge of their love: he spoke of that. He was sly, used double meanings; he took her presently by the chin and kissed her cheek. Unresisted, he kissed her again and again. ‘Redintegratio amoris!’ he cried, really

believing it at the moment. This very night he would prove to her his amendment. Journeys end in lovers' meeting! If she would have patience she should be a happy wife yet. Would she—might he hope? Should this day be a second wedding day? Her heart was as still as freezing water, but her head prompted her to sigh and half smile.

'You consent! You consent! Oh, happy fortune!' he cried, and kissed her mouth and eyes, and possessed as much as he could.

'Enough, my lord, enough!' said she. 'You forget, I think, that I am a wife.'

He cursed himself for having for one moment forgotten it, threw himself at her knees and kissed her held hands over and over, then jumped to his feet, all his courage restored. 'Farewell, lady! Farewell, sweet Queen! I go to count the hours.' He went out humming a tavern catch about Moll and Peg. She called her women in, to wash her face and hands.

By riding long and changing often Sir James Melvill had been able to salute the Earl of Moray on the home side of Dunbar. The great man travelled, primus inter pares, a little apart from his companions in exile—and without Mr. Secretary Lethington. The fact is that Mr. Secretary was as much distrusted by his friends as by Lord Moray himself, and had been required at the last moment to stay in town. Sir James, thanks to that, was not long in coming to close quarters with the Earl, and frankly told him that he had been sent by the Queen's Majesty to welcome him home. Lord Moray was bound to confess to himself that, certainly, he had not looked for that. He had expected to come back a personage to be feared, but not one to be desired. The notion was not displeasing—for if you are desired it may very well be because you are feared. So all the advantage at starting lay with Sir James.

He went on to say how much need her Majesty felt in her heart to stand well with her blood relations. As for old differences—ah, well, well, they were happily over and done with. My lord would not look for the Queen to confess to an error in

judgment, nor would she, certainly, ever reproach him with the past. There was no question of a treaty of forgiveness between a sister and her brother. Urgency of the heart, mutual needs, were all! And her needs were grievous, no question. Why, the very desire she had for his help was proof that the past was past. Did not his lordship think so?

His lordship listened to this tolerant chatter as became a grave statesman. Without a sign to betray his face he requested his civil friend—'worthy Sir James Melvill'—to rehearse the late occurrences—'Of the which,' he said, 'hearing somewhat at Berwick, I had a heavy heart, misdoubting what part I might be called upon to play in the same.'

Whereupon Sir James, with the like gravity, related to his noble friend all the details of a plot which nobody knew more exactly than the man who heard him. It added zest to the comic interlude that Sir James also knew quite well that my lord had been one of the conspirators.

At the end his lordship said: 'I thank you, Sir James Melvill, for your tender recital of matters which may well cause heart-searching in us all. Happy is that queen, I consider, who has such a diligent servant! And happy also am I, who can be sure of one such colleague as yourself!'

'All goes well,' thinks Melvill. 'I have my old sow by the lug.'

If he had one lug, the Queen got the other. For when my Lord of Moray reached Edinburgh that night, he was told that her Majesty awaited him at Holyroodhouse. Prisoner or not, she received him there, smiling and eager to see him—and her gaolers standing by! And whenas he hesitated, darkly bowing before her, she came forward in a pretty, shy way; and, 'Oh, brother, brother, I am glad you have come to me,' she said, and gave him her hands, and let him kiss her cheek.

He murmured something proper,—his duty always remembered, and the rest of the phrases,—but she, as if clinging to him, ran on in a homelier speech. 'Indeed, there

was need of you, brother James!' she assured him, and went on to tell him that which moved the stony man to tears. At least, it is so reported, and I am glad to believe it.

She walked with him afterwards in full hall, talking low and quickly—candour itself. Her tones had a throbbing note, and a note of confidence, which changed the whole scene as she recited it. I repeat, the hall was full while she walked with him there, up and down in the flickering firelight—full of the men whose plots he had shared, and hoped to profit by. Fine spectacle for my lords of the Privy Council, for Mr. Archie Douglas and his cousin Morton, fine for Mr. Secretary Lethington! Before she kissed her brother good-night, before she went to bed, she felt that she had done a good day's work. And now, with her triumph as good as won, she was ready for the crowning of it.

There she was out-generalled: there she was beaten. Match for all these men's wit, she was outwitted by one man's sodden flesh. They undressed her, prepared her for bed. She lay there in her pale, fragrant beauty, solace for any lord's desire, and conscious of it, and more fine for the knowledge. She took deep breaths and draughts of ease; she assured herself that she was very fair; she watched the glimmering taper and read the shadows on the pictured wall as she waited for the crowning of her toil. The day had been hers against all odds; the day is not always to Venus, but the night is her demesne. So she waited and drowsed, smiling her wise smile, secure, superb, and at ease. But King Harry Darnley, very drunk, lay stertorous in his own bed; nor dared Forrest, nor Standen, nor any man of his household, stir him out of that. The Queen of Wine and Honey had digged a pit of sweetness and hidden a fine web all about it, and was fallen into the midst of it herself.

And so, it is like enough, if the boar had not timely rent the thigh of Adonis, Dame Venus herself might have writhed, helpless in just such toils.

CHAPTER VII AFTERTASTE

The Queen woke at eight o'clock in the morning and called for a cup of cold water. She sat up to drink, and was told that Antony Standen had been at the door at half-past six, the King himself at seven. Listening to this news with her lips in the water, her eyes grew bitter-bright. 'He shall have old waiting at my chamber door,' she said, 'before he wins it.' Then she began to weep and fling herself about, to bite the coverlet and to gloom among the pillows. 'If I forget this past night may my God forget me.' O daughter of Babylon, wasted with misery! She lay down again and shut her eyes, but fretted all the time, twitching her arms and legs, making little angry noises, shifting from side to side. Mary Seton sat by the bed, cool and discreet.

The minutes passed, she enduring, until at last, unable to bear the tripping of them, she started up so violently that a great pillow rolled on to the floor. 'I could kill myself, Seton,' she said, grinding her little teeth together, 'I could kill myself for this late piece of work. Verjuice in me!—I should die to drink my own milk. And all of you there, whispering by the door, wagering, nudging one another—"He'll never come—never. Not he!" Oh, Jesu-Christ!' she cried, straining up her bare arms, 'let this wound of mine keep green until the time!'

'Hush, dear madam, oh, hush!' says Seton, flushing to hear her; but the Queen turned her a white, hardy face.

'Why should I be hushed? Let me cry out my shame to all the world, that am the scorn of men and wedded women. Who heeds? What matter what I say? Leave me alone—I'll not be hushed down.'

Seton was undismayed. 'No wedded woman am I. I love you, madam, and therefore I shall speak with you. I say that, as he has proved his unworthiness, so you must prove your pride. I say——'

There was hasty knocking at the door; the maid ran: 'Who is it knocks?'

‘The King’s valet is without. The King asks if her Majesty is awake.’

‘Let him ask,’ said the Queen: ‘I will never see him again. Say that I am at prayers.’

Seton called, ‘Reply that Her Majesty is unable to see the King at this time. Her Majesty awoke early, and is now at prayers.’ She returned to the bed, where the Queen lay on her elbow, picking her handkerchief to pieces with her teeth.

‘Sweet madam,’ she said, ‘bethink you now of what must be done this day. You wish to be avenged of your enemies....’

The Queen looked keenly up.

‘Well, well, of all your enemies. But for this you must first be free. And it grows late.’

The Queen put her hair from her face and looked at the light coming in. She sat up briskly. ‘You are right, ma mie. Come and kiss me. I have been playing baby until my head aches.’

‘You will play differently now, I see,’ said Seton, ‘and other heads may wish they had a chance to ache.’

The Queen took her maid’s face in her dry hands. ‘Oh, Seton,’ she said, ‘you are a cordial to me. They have taken my poor David, but have left me you.’

‘Nay, madam,’ says Seton, ‘they might take me too, and you need none of my strong waters. There is wine enough in your honey for all your occasions.’

A shadow of her late gloom crossed over her. ‘My honey has been racked with galls. ’Tis you that have cleared it. Give me my nightgown, and send for Father Roche. I will say my prayers.’

With a spirit so responsive as hers, the will to move was a signal for scheming to begin. Up and down her mind went the bobbing looms, across and across the humming shuttles, spinning the fine threads together into a fabric whose warp was vengeance and the woof escape from self-scorn. She must be free from prison this

coming night; but that was not the half: she intended to leave her captors in the bonds she quitted. So high-mettled was she that I doubt whether she would have accepted the first at the price of giving up the second. Those being the ends of her purpose, all her planning was to adjust the means; and the first thing that she saw (and, with great courage, faced) was that the King—this mutilated god, this botch, this travesty of lover and lord—must come out with her. Long before demure Father Roche could answer his summons she had admitted that, and strung herself to accept it. She must drag him after her—a hobble on a donkey's leg—because she dared not leave him behind. He had betrayed his friends to her—true; but if she forsook him he would run to them again and twice betray her. She shrugged him out of mind. Bah! if she must take him she would take him. 'Twas to be hoped he would get pleasure of it—and so much for that. But whom dared she leave? She could think of no one as yet but her brother Moray. Overnight she had separated him from the others, and she judged that he would remain separate. Her thought was this:—'He is a rogue among rogues, I grant. But if you trust one rogue in a pack, all the others will distrust him. Therefore he, being shunned by them, will cleave to me; and they, not knowing how far I trust him, will falter and look doubtfully at one another; and some of them will come over to him, and then the others will be stranded.' Superficial reasoning, rough-and-ready inference, all this. She knew it quite well, but judged that it would meet the case of Scotland. It was only, as it were, the scum of the vats she had seen brewing in France.... But I keep Father Roche from his prayers.

Affairs in the palace and precincts kept their outward calm in the face of the buzzing town. Train-bands paraded the street, the Castle was for her Majesty, the gates were faithful. In the presence of such monitors as these the burgesses and their wives kept their mouths shut as they stood at shop-doors, and when they greeted at the close-ends they looked, but did not ask, for news. But the Earl of Morton's men still held the palace, and he himself inspected the guard. There were no attempts to

dispute his hold, so far as he could learn, no blood-sheddings above the ordinary, no libels on the Cross, no voices lifted against him in the night. He held a morning audience in the Little Throne-room, with his cousin Douglas for Chief Secretary; and to his suitors, speaking him fair, gave fair replies. But it may be admitted he was very uneasy.

That had not been a pleasant view for him overnight, when the great Earl of Moray, newly returned, walked the hall with the Queen upon his arm. His jaw had dropped to see it. Here was a turn given to our affairs! Dreams troubled him, wakefulness, and flying fancies, which to pursue was torment and not to pursue certain ruin. He slept late and rose late. At a sort of levee, which he held as he dressed, he was peevish, snapped at the faithful Archie, and almost quarrelled with Ruthven.

‘Do you bite, my lord?’ had said that savage. ‘If I am to lose my head it shall be in kinder company. I salute your lordship.’ And so he slammed out.

Morton knew that he must smooth him down before the day was over, but just now there were more pressing needs. He told his cousin that he must see the King at the earliest.

Archie wagged his silvery head, looking as wise as an old stork. ‘Why, that is very well,’ says he; ‘but how if he will not see you?’

‘What do you mean, man?’ cried the Earl upon him.

‘Why, this, cousin,’ said Archie: ‘that the King is out of all hand the morn. I went to his door betimes and listened for him, but could hear nothing forby the snivelling of his boy, therefore made so bold as to open. There I found the minion Forrest crying his heart out over the bed, and could hear our kinsman within howling blasphemy in English.’

‘Pooh, man, ’tis his way of a morning,’ said Morton, heartening himself. ‘What did you then?’

Archie screwed his lips to the whistle, and cocked one eyebrow at the expense of the

other.

‘What did I? I did the foolishest thing of all my days, when I sent in my name by the boy. Strutting moorcock, call me, that hadna seen him all the day before! Oh, cousin Morton, out comes our King like a blustering gale o’ March, and takes me by the twa lugs, and wrenches at me thereby, and shakes me to and fro as if I were a sieve for seeds. “Ye black-hearted, poisonous beast!” he roars; “ye damned, nest-fouling chick of a drab and a preacher!” says he—ah, and worse nor that, cousin, if I could lay my tongue to sic filthy conversation. “I’ll teach ye,” says he thunderous, “I’ll teach ye to play your games with your King!” He was fumbling for his dagger the while, and would have stabbed me through and through but for them that stood by and got him off me. Cousin, I fairly ran.’

The Earl looked sternly at him. ‘Tell me the truth, you Archie. What devil’s trick had you played upon him?’

He looked so blankly, swore so earnestly, Nothing, upon his honour, that he had to be believed.

‘Well then,’ said Morton, ‘what may this betide?’

‘Woe can tell your lordship! Little good to you and me belike.’

Lord Morton said, ‘I doubt he’ll play us false. I doubt the knave was working the courage into him.’

And there you see why he was uneasy in his ruling of the palace. Heavy, ox-like, slow-footed man, thick-blooded, fond of thick pleasures, slow to see, slow to follow, slow to give up—he felt now, without more rhyme or reason to support him, that his peril was great. The King was about to betray him. A hot mist of rage flooded his eyes at the thought; and then his heart gave a surge upwards and he felt the thick water on his tongue. ‘If he betray me, may God help him if He cares!’

After his duties in the Little Throne-room, in this grave conjuncture, it seemed good to him to get speech with Mr. Secretary, who had been let out of the house, but had

let himself in again when his master, my lord of Moray, came home.

‘Pray, Mr. Secretar,’ says he, ‘have you any tidings of my lord of Moray?’

Lethington became dry. ‘I had proposed to meet my lord, as your lordship may recollect. It seemed good to your lordship that I should not go, but that Sir James Melvill should—with results which I need not particularise. I have not been sent for by my lord of Moray since his home-coming, therefore I know no more of his lordship than your lordship’s self knows.’

The Earl of Morton rumbled his lips. ‘Prutt! Prutt! I wonder now....’ He began to feel sick of his authority.

‘The King, Mr. Secretar,’ he began again, ‘is in some distemperature at this present. I am in doubt—it is not yet plain to me—I regret the fact, I say.’

‘One should see his Majesty,’ says Lethington. ‘No doubt but Mr. Archibald here——’

‘By my soul, man,’ said Mr. Archibald with fervour, ‘I don’t go near him again for a thousand pound—English.’

‘No, no, Mr. Secretar,’ says my lord; ‘but consider whether yourself should not adventure my lord of Moray.’

‘My lord——’

Morton lifted his hand. ‘Man,’ he said, ‘you must do it. I tell you, the sooner the better.’ The hand fell upon the table with a thud. Lethington started, then left the room without a word.

Very little was said between the two gentlemen at this moment in charge of Holyrood until the Secretary’s return. The Master of Lindsay intruded upon them to report that the Earl of Lennox had left the palace, had left Edinburgh, and had ridden hard to the west. Lord Morton nodded to signify that his ears could do their duty.

‘Like son, like father,’ said Archie when the Master had gone.

Soon afterwards Lethington knocked at the door, entered, advanced to the table, and stood there, looking at the ink-horn, which he moved gently about.

‘Well, sir! We are here to listen,’ cried Morton, in a fever.

Lethington was slow to answer even then.

‘I have been admitted to my lord of Moray,—so much there is to say. He had his reader with him, but came out to me. When I began to speak he regretted at once that he could not hear me at any length. He showed me his table encumbered with business, and declined at the present to add any more to the litter. I urged your lordship’s desire to have speech with him as soon as might be; he replied that his own desire was always, in all things, to serve your lordship. I said, “Serve his lordship then in this”: upon the which he owned that he failed of strength. “I have a traveller’s ache in my bones,” saith he. “Let my Lord Morton have patience.”’

He stopped there.

Lord Morton took a turn about the room. ‘No more than that said he, Lethington? No more than that?’

‘His lordship said no more, my lord. And therefore, seeing that he plainly wished it, I took my leave.’

The Earl looked at Archie Douglas: some secret intelligence passed between them in which the Secretary had no share.

‘I am going to speak with my lord of Ruthven in his chamber,’ then said he. ‘And, cousin, do you come also.’

The guard presented arms to the great man as he went down the hall, and a few underlings—women of the house, grooms of the closet and coffer—ran after him with petitions; but he waved away all and sundry. They fell back, herded into groups and whispered together. The Secretary came out alone and paced the hall deep in thought. One or two eyed him anxiously. How did he stand now? It was a parlous

time for Scotland when nobody knew to whom to cringe for a favour.

Then—two hours after dinner—word was brought down into the hall that the Queen would receive the Earl of Morton and certain other named persons in the Throne-room. Great debate over this. Lord Ruthven was for declining to go. ‘We are masters here. ’Tis for us to receive.’

But Lord Lindsay shook his ragged head. ‘No, no, Ruthven,’ he says, ‘take counsel, my fine man. It is ill to go, but worse to stay away.’

‘How’s that, then?’ cries Ruthven, white and fierce.

‘Why, thus,’ the elder replied. ‘If you go, you show that you are master. If you go not, you betray that you doubt it.’

‘I see it precisely contrary,’ says Ruthven.

‘Then,’ he was told, ‘you have a short vision. It is the strong man can afford to unbar the door.’

The Earl of Morton was clearly for going. ‘I take it, my lord of Moray is behind this message. Let us see what he will do. He is bound to us as fast as man can be.’

They sent up Lethington, who came back with the answer that my lord of Moray had been summoned in like wise, and would not fail of attendance upon her Majesty. This settled the masters of Holyrood. ‘Where he goes there must we needs be also.’

Archie Douglas and Lethington had not been required by the Queen; but when Archie was for rubbing his hands over that, the other advised him to take his time.

‘You are not the less surely hanged because they let you see you are not worth hanging,’ said the Secretary. Archie damned him for a black Genevan.

At the time set the Earls of Morton, Argyll, and Glencairn, the Lords Ruthven, Rothes, and Lindsay, and some few more, went upstairs with what state they could muster.

They found the Queen on the throne, pale, stiff in the set of her head, but perfectly

self-possessed. Three of her maids and Lady Argyll were behind the throne. Upon her right hand stood the King in a long ermine cloak, upon her left the Earl of Moray in black velvet. Lord John Stuart and a sprinkling of young men held the inner door, and a secretary, in poor Davy's shoes, sat at a little table in the window. The six lords filed in according to their degrees of ranking. Ruthven, behind Lindsay, jogged his elbow: 'See the pair of them there. Betrayed, man, betrayed!'

None of them was pleased to see that Moray had been admitted first, and yet none of them in his heart had expected anything else. It was the King who drew all their reproaches: in some sense or another Moray was chartered in villainy.

The Queen, looking straight before her, moistened her lips twice, and spoke in a low voice, very slowly and distinctly.

'I have sent for you, my lords, that I may hear in the presence of the King my consort, and of these my kindred and friends, what your wisdoms may have to declare concerning some late doings of yours. As I ask without heat, so I shall expect to be answered.' Pausing here, she looked down at her hands placid in her lap. So unconscious did she seem of anything but her own dignity and sweet estate, you might have taken her for a girl at her first Communion.

The Earl of Morton moved out a step, and made the best speech he could of it. He had the gift, permitted to slow-witted men, of appearing more honest than he was; for tardiness of utterance is easily mistaken for gravity, and gravity (in due season) for uprightness. One has got into the idle habit of connecting roguery with fluency. But it must be allowed to Morton that he did not attempt to disavow his colleagues. If he urged his own great wrongs as an excuse for violence, he claimed that the wrongs of Scotland had cried to him louder still. He now held the palace, he said, for the prevention of mischief, and should be glad to be relieved of the heavy duty. Then he talked roundabout—of requitals in general—how violent griefs provoked violent medicines—how men will fight tooth and nail for their consciences. Lastly

he made bolder. ‘If I fear not, madam, to invoke the holy eyes of my God upon my doings, it would not become me to quail under your Majesty’s. And if that which I hold dearest is enchained, I should be a recreant knight indeed if I failed of a rescue.’ He glanced toward the King at this point; but the young man might have been a carven effigy. His end therefore—for he knew now that he had been betrayed—was a lame one: a plea for mutual recovery of esteem, an act of oblivion, articles to be drawn up and signed, et cætera. The Queen, placidly regarding her fingers, drew on the others after him one by one.

The Earl of Glencairn had nothing to say, as he proved by every word he uttered; the Earl of Argyll began a speech, but caught his wife’s eye and never finished it. Lord Lindsay, an honest, hot-gospel, rough sort of man—who might have been a Knox in his way—said a great deal. But he was long over it, and slow, and prolix; and the Queen none too patient. At ‘Secondly, madam, you shall mark——’ she began to tap with her toe; and then one yet more impatient broke in, feeling that he must shriek under his irritation unless he could relieve it by speech. This was Lord Ruthven, a monomaniac, with one cry for the world and one upon whom to cry it. If he spoke his rages to the Queen in form, he aimed them at the King in substance, and never once looked elsewhere, or threatened with his finger any other than that stock-headed starer out of painted eyes. He thrust away Lindsay with a pawing hand, and—‘Oh, madam, will you listen to me now?’ says he. ‘We speak our pieces before ye like bairns on a bench, who have acted not long since like men, and men wronged. And who are we, when all’s said, to justify ourselves? Who was the most aggrieved among us? Let that man speak. Who had most cause to cry out, Down with the thief of my honour? Let him say it now. What was our injury compared to that man’s? If we played in his scene, who gave out the parts? If we laid hands upon our Queen, by whose command did we so? And into whose hands did we commit her royal person? Let him answer, and beat us down with his words, if to any hands but his own.’ Wrought up by his own eloquence, driving home his terrible questions,

he had advanced unawares close to the man he threatened. The King jumped back with a short cry; but the Queen, who had been straining forward to listen, like a racer at his mark, interposed.

‘I am listening,’ she said; ‘continue, Ruthven.’

Ruthven, at this check, began to cast about for his words. He had lost his flow. ‘As for yon Davy, madam, I’ll not deny airt and pairt in his taking——’

‘Why, how should you indeed?’ says the Queen, smiling rather sharply.

‘I say I will not, madam,’ says Ruthven, flurried; then with a savage snarl he turned short on the King and fleshed his tooth there.

‘And you!’ he raved at him: ‘deny it you, if you dare!’

The King went white as a sheet.

‘Man,’ said the Earl of Morton finely, ‘hold your peace. I lead this company.’

Lord Ruthven said no more, and Morton took up anew his parable. What he did was well done: he did not give ground, yet was conciliatory. It was a case for terms, he said. Let articles be drawn up, lands be restored, offices stand as before the slaughter, the old forfeitures be overlooked, religion on either side be as it had been: in fact, let that come which all hoped for, the Golden Age of Peace.

The Queen consulted with her brother, ignored her husband, then accepted. Lethington was to draw up articles and submit them. For Peace’s sake, if it were possible, she would sign them. Rising from her throne, she dismissed her gaolers. She took Moray’s arm, just touched the King’s with two fingers, and walked through the lines made by her friends, a page going before to clear the way. The moment she was in her room she sent Des-Essars out with a letter, which she had ready-written, for the Earl of Bothwell.

Left with his fellow-tragedians, Ruthven for a time was ungovernable, with no words but ‘black traitor—false, perjuring beast of a thief’—and the like. Morton, to

the full as bartered as himself, did not try to hold him. He too was working into a steady resentment, and kindling a grudge which would smoulder the longer but burn the more fiercely than the madman's spluttering bonfire. And he was against all sudden follies. When Ruthven, foaming, howled that he would stab the King in the back, Morton grumbled, 'Too quick a death for him'; and Lindsay said drily, 'No death at all. Yon lad is wiser than Davy—wears a shirt that would turn any blade.' 'Then I'll have at him in his bed,' says Ruthven. And Lindsay, to clinch the matter, scoffs at him with, 'Pooh, man, the Queen is his shirt of mail. Are you blind?'

Into this yeasty flood, with courage truly remarkable, the Earl of Moray steered his barque, coming sedately back from his escort of the Queen. At first they were so curious about his visit that they forgot the vehement suspicion there was of treachery from him also. The precision of his steering was admirable, but he ran too close to the rocks when he spoke of the Queen as 'a young lady in delicate health, for whom, considering her eager temper and frail body, the worst might have been feared in the late violent doings.'

Here Morton cut in. 'I call God to witness, my lord, and you, too, Ruthven, shall answer for me, whether or not I forbade the slaughter of that fellow before her face. For I feared, my lord, that very health of hers.'

'And you did well to fear it, my lord,' said the Earl of Moray; and that was the turn too much.

Said Ruthven to him dangerously, 'You make me sick of my work.' He peered with grinning malice into the inscrutable face. 'Tell me, you, my lord of Moray, what did you look for in the business? What thought you would come of murder at the feet of a woman big? God in heaven, sir, what is it you look for? what is it you think of day after day?'

Lord Moray blinked—but no more. 'Hush, hush, Lord Ruthven, lest you utter what would grieve all who love Scotland.'

Ruthven howled. ‘Man, do you talk of Scotland? Are we friends here? Are we in the kirk? If we are in council, for God’s sake talk your mind. Ah!—talk of that, my good lord——’ he pointed to the empty throne. ‘Man, man, man! there’s your kirk and your altar—you prater about Scotland’s love.’ For a moment he fairly withered the man; but then, as drowning in a flood-tide of despair, he lifted up his hands and covered his tormented eyes. ‘Oh, I am sick just,’ he said, ‘sick of your lying—sick, I tell you, sick—sick to death!’

The Earl of Moray made a little sign with his eyebrows and closed eyes; and they left him alone with Ruthven. It should never be denied of this man that he had the courage of his father’s race.

The ‘Articles of Peace and Oblivion’ were drawn up, tendered on knees, and overlooked by her Majesty.

‘I see your name here, Mr. Secretary, as in need of mercy,’ she said, with a finger on the place. Of course she had known that he was up to the chin in the plot, but she could rarely resist making the sensitive man wriggle.

He murmured something unusually fatuous, painfully conscious of his standing.

‘Oh, sir,’ she said, ‘if you seek for my pardon you shall have it. I am contented with a few things. But go you now and sue for it in the maids’ closet. You will find Fleming there. I cannot answer for her, I warn you; for if you say to a maid, “Love me, love my dog,” it is possible she may rejoin, “Serve me, serve my mistress.” That, at least, is the old-fashioned pleading in the courts of love.’

He was greatly confused, the obsequious, fertile man, and she greatly entertained.

‘Go, Mr. Secretary, and pray you find some phrases as you go. Tongues ring sharply in the closet.’ She signed the Articles, and he was backing himself out when she stopped him with a seemingly careless word. ‘Ah, I had almost forgot. These Articles breathe peace.’ She took them from him and read the words. ‘“Peace, mutual forbearance and goodwill”: very fair words, upon which we must hope for

fair performance. The guard at the doors and gates is removed no doubt? See to that, Mr. Secretary, before you can hope for pardon in the maids' closet. Your lady will not love you the more because you keep her in a cage.'

This was kittle work, as they say. Unless the guard were off she could never get out. Lethington, however, took the hint, acted upon his own responsibility, and found none to stop him. The lords—masters of Holyrood—were otherwise employed: Lord Ruthven spoke of hanging himself; the Earl of Morton was inclining to think that Articles might, for this once, make all safe. Alone, the Earl of Moray admonished his servant, not for removing the guard, but for not having done so earlier. What peace he made afterwards in the maids' closet hath never been revealed.

The Queen went to bed very early and slept like a child in arms. Everything was in train.

At two o'clock in the morning the King was called, but answered the summons himself, fully dressed, armed and cloaked.

'I am ready,' he said, before the messenger could speak. 'Fetch Standen. I go to the Queen.'

He crept along the passage to the dimly lighted cabinet, where he had of late seen murder, and had to wait there as best he could. He spent the time in walking up and down—an exercise whereby a man, in fear already, gains terror with every pace: so agitated was he that when, after an age of squittering misery, the Queen came in deeply hooded, he forgot everything and burst out with 'O God, madam, make haste!'

She gave him no answer, but poured herself some wine, added water, and drank. It was terrible to him to see how much at her ease she was, sipping her drink, looking about the cabinet, recalling critically (if the truth is to be told) the stasimons of the late tragic scene.

Mary Seton came in, and Des-Essars, labouring with a portmantle and some pistols.

‘Drink, my children,’ she bade them in French, and they obeyed, taking stay and leisure from her.

The King bit his nails, fretted and fumed—had not had the nerve to drink, even if he had had the invitation.

Standen stood by the wall, stolid as his habit was—the flaxen, solemn English youth, with but one cherubic face for a rape, a funeral, a battle, a christening, or the sacrament. The Queen drew Seton’s attention to him in a whisper, and made the girl laugh.

Presently they heard a step, and then Stewart of Traquair was to be seen, stalwart and watchful, in the doorway.

‘Ready, Traquair?’—the Queen’s voice.

‘All’s ready, ma’am.’

She fastened her hood, patting the bows flat. ‘Come, Seton, come, Baptist,’ she said, and gave her hand into Traquair’s.

He kissed it before he led her away. Des-Essars went first with a shaded lantern.

The great dark house was perfectly quiet as they went downstairs and through the chapel by the tombs of the kings. Just here, however, the Queen stopped and called back Des-Essars. ‘Where does he lie?’ she asked him; and he pointed out the stone—she was standing almost upon it—and for many a day remembered the curious regard she had for it: how she hovered, as it were, over the place, looking at it, smiling quietly towards it, as if it afforded her some quaint thought. Words have been put into her mouth which, according to him, she never said—melodramatic words they are, rough makeshifts of some kind of art embodying what was to come. According to Des-Essars, she said nothing, neither resolved, nor promised, nor predicted; nothing broke her smiling, considering silence over this new grave.

‘To see her there,’ he says, ‘in the lantern-light, so easy, so absorbed, so amused,

was terrible to more witnesses than one. It opened to me secret doors never yet suspected. Was murder only curious to her? Was horror a kind of joy?'

But it frightened Mary Seton out of her courage. 'Oh, what do you see in there, madam?' she whispered. 'What moves your mirth in his grave?'

The Queen turned her head as if shaken out of a stare. She met Mary Seton's eyes in the lantern-light, and laughed.

'Come away, madam, come away. Look no more. There's a taint.'

'Yes, yes,' says the Queen; 'I am ready. Where is the King?'

'The King is gone, madam,' said Stewart of Traquair; 'and I think your Majesty will do well to be after him.'

This was true. Arthur Erskine, holding the horses outside the town wall, told her that the King had ridden forward at once, at a gallop, with his man Standen. She was therefore left with but two—himself and Traquair—for escort; but he assured her that every step had been taken, she would be in no sort of danger.

'Danger!' she said, laughing lightly. 'No, no, Erskine, I do not fear it. Ruthven's dagger seeks not my back.'

They lifted her up, the rest mounted after her; they walked their horses clear of the suburb. After some half-mile or more of steady trotting the Queen reined up and stopped the party. She listened; they all did. Far away you could hear the regular galloping of a horse, pulsing in the dark like some muffled pendulum. Now and again another's broke into it and confused the rhythm.

'There rides in haste our sovereign lord,' said the Queen. 'Come, we must follow him.'

By Niddry House—under the lee of the wall—she found the Earls of Huntly and Bothwell, Lord Seton, and a company of twenty horsemen waiting. The hour had gone five.

‘God save Scotland!’ had called Traquair, and Bothwell’s strident voice had countercried, ‘God save the Queen of Scotland!’

‘That voice hath blithe assurance,’ said she when she heard it. She joyed in adventure and adventurers.

She asked for news of the King. ‘Where is my consort, Lord Bothwell? Rode he this way?’

‘Madam, he did, and had a most mischievous scare of us. We knew him by the way he damned us all. But he’s well away by now. You may hear him yet.’

She gloomed at that. ‘Ay,’ said she, ‘I have heard him. I shall always hear him, I think.’ Then she shivered. ‘Let us ride on, sirs; the night is chill.’

Nobody spoke much. Lord Bothwell kept close to her right hand, Lord Huntly to her left. They would change horses at Gladsmuir.

The tide was breaking over wet rocks, one pale streak of light burnished the rim of the sea, as Lord Bothwell lifted down his Queen. Astounding to feel how fresh and feat she was! The dark hull of a castle could just be seen, suspended as it seemed above a cloud-bank, with sea-birds looming suddenly large or fading to be small as they swept in and out of the fog. Little tired waves broke and recoiled near by upon the weedy stones.

‘Dunbar, madam,’ says Bothwell, his hands still holding her—‘and the good grey guard of the water.’

The King, they told her, had been in bed those three hours.

CHAPTER VIII KING’S EVIL

Sir James Melvill, wise and mature, travelled gentleman, made nothing of a ride to Dunbar in the slush of snow. He was careful to take it before the dawn, and arrived late, to find the Queen not visible. They told him she had come in some hours after daybreak, exhausted, but not nearly so exhausted as her horse. It was hardly likely

she would rise the day.

‘You’ll let her Majesty know that I’m here, with my service to ye, Mr. Erskine. And since ye’re so obliging I’ll take a mouthful just of your spiced wine.’ Thus Sir James; who was sipping at this comfortable cup when the Earl of Bothwell came in, stamping the winter from his boots, and recalled him to his privileges. To see him make his bow to a lord was to get a lesson in the niceties of precedence. He knew to the turn of a hair how far to go, and unless the occasion were extraordinary, never departed from the Decreet of Ranking. In the present case, however, all things considered, he may have judged, ‘This Earl has merited the salutation of a Prince-Bishop.’ That presupposed, the thing was well done. Sir James’s heels went smartly together—but without a click, which would have been too military for the day; the body was slightly bent, with one hand across the breast. But his head fell far, and remained down-hung in deepest reverence of the hero. It is exactly thus that a devotional traveller in a foreign town might salute, but not adore, the passing Host. ‘I will not bow the knee to Baal; no, but I will honour this people’s God.’ And thus bowed Sir James.

‘Now, who graces me so highly?’ cried Bothwell when he saw him; and immediately, ‘Eh, sirs, it is honest Sir James! So the wind hath veered in town already! Man, you’re my weathercock in this realm. Your hand, Sir James, your hand, your hand. Never stoop that venerable pow to me.’

‘Always the servant of your lordship,’ murmured Sir James, much gratified.

‘Havers, James!’ says Bothwell, and sat upon the table. He swung his leg and looked at his sea boots as he talked, reflecting aloud, rather than conversing.

‘The Queen is sound asleep,’ he said, ‘as well enough she may be. Good sakes, my man, what a proud and gladsome lady have we there! I tell you, I have seen young men ride into action more tardily than she into the perilous dark. She flung herself to the arms of foul weather like a lammock to his dam’s dug. You’d have said’—he

lowered his voice—‘you’d have said she was at the hunting of a hare, if you’d seen her gallop—with Adonis fleeting before her.’

Sir James nodded, as if to say—‘A hint is more than enough for me.’

‘Well!’ cried Bothwell, ‘well! What scared the gowk, then?’

‘My lord,’ said Sir James, ‘you must observe, he had been by when Lord Ruthven’s knife was at work, slicing Davy. He knew the way of it, d’ye see?’

Bothwell flung up his head. ‘Ay! he was all in a flutter of fear. The bitter fools that they are! Every traitor of them betraying the other, and a scamper who shall do mischief and be first away. But this one here—he’s none too safe, ye ken. He’s dug his own grave, I doubt. Before long time you and I, Melvill, shall see him by Davy’s side.’

‘Ah, my lord of Bothwell——’ Sir James was scandalised.

‘Fear nothing, man—I must talk. Here, in this place, what is he? Who heeds him, where he comes or whither he goes? Why, this skipjack of Brabant is the better man!’

The skipjack of Brabant was Des-Essars, come down to call Lord Bothwell to the Queen. She was about to hold a council, and Melvill was to abide the upshot.

‘Is the King to be there, do you know, Baptist?’ says my lord, his hand on the lad’s shoulder.

‘The King sleeps, my lord,’ he replied. ‘I heard her Majesty say that he could not do better.’

‘Her Majesty has the rights of him by now,’ says Bothwell. ‘Well—we shall work none the worse without him. Sir James, your servant. If I can help you, you shall see her.’

‘So your lordship will bind me fast to your service,’ bowed Sir James, and watched the pair depart. He observed that Des-Essars’ crown was level with the Earl’s

cheek-bone.

Let me deal with the fruit of this council while I may. Sir James took a seed of it, as it were, back to Edinburgh, planted and watered it, and saw an abundant harvest, of sweet and bitter mixed. As for instance,—to the Earls of Moray and Argyll went full pardons of all offences; to Glencairn and Rothes the hope of some such thing upon proof of good disposition—just enough to separate men not quite dangerous from men desperate. To them, those desperate men, came the last shock. Writs of treason were out against the Earl of Morton, Lords Ruthven and Lindsay and the Master of Lindsay, against Archibald Douglas of Whittingehame, William Kirkcaldy of Grange, Ker of Fawdonsyde and their likes; also, definitely and beyond doubt, against William Maitland, younger of Lethington. The Secretary had to thank Lord Bothwell for that, for the Queen would have spared him if she could for Mary Fleming's sake. These writs were served that very night and copies affixed to the Market-cross. The smaller fry—men in Morton's livery, jackals and foxes of the doors—were to be taken as they fell in and hanged at conveniency. Many were apprehended in their beds before Sir James could be snug in his own.

One may look, too, for a moment at the last conference of them that of late had been masters of Holyrood. It was had in Lord Morton's big house—a desultory colloquy broken by long glooms.

'If you are still for hanging yourself, Ruthven,' said my Lord Morton, in one of these pauses, 'you've time.'

And Ruthven turned his eyes about with evident pain. Those thought, who looked at him, that he had not so much time. He was horribly ill, with fever in bones and blood. 'I'm not for that now, my lord,' he said, 'I have a better game than that in hand.'

'I could name you one if you were needing it,' said Morton again, with a glance towards Archie Douglas. Listening and watching, the grey-headed youth chuckled,

and rubbed his dry hands together.

‘Ay,’ said Ruthven, observing the action, and sickening of actor and it, ‘slough your skin, snake, and bite the better.’

‘Man, Ruthven,’ said Morton impatiently, ‘you talk too much of what you will do, and spend too much of your spleen on them that would serve ye if ye would let them. Body of me, we have time before us to scheme a great propyne for this good town that spews us out like so much garbage.’

‘We have that, cousin,’ says Archie, ‘if but we accord together.’

‘Ah, traitors all, traitors all!’ Ruthven was muttering to himself; then (as he thought of the chief of traitors) burst out—‘When we have done his butcher’s work—he heels us out of doors! Sublime, he washes his hands and goes to bed. We are the night-men, look you. Foh, we smell of our trade! what king could endure us? Oh, lying, sleek, milky traitor!’

Lord Morton, whose rage lay much deeper, thought all this just wind and vapour. ‘To fret and cry treachery, Ruthven! Pooh, a French trick, never like to save your face. Why, poor splutterer, nothing will save that but to mar another’s face.’

‘Your talk against my talk,’ cried Ruthven; ‘and will you do it any better?’

Lord Morton flushed to a heavy crimson colour, and his eyes were almost hidden. ‘Ay, mark me, that I will. I will score him deep with this infamy.’ He went to the window and stood there alone. Nobody could draw him into talk again.

There was much bustle in Edinburgh during the week, and more suitors to the Earl of Moray than he had time to see. Mr. Secretary got no joy out of him; he was kind to the Earl of Morton and spoke him many hopeful words; he shook his finger at Lord Ruthven. ‘Fie, my lord,’ he said, ‘you should wear a finer face. Turn you to your God, Lord Ruthven, and store up grain against the lean years to come. Root up these darnels from your garden-plot, lest they choke the good seed sowed in you. Let stout Mr. Knox be your exemplar, then; behold how he can harden his brows.

Farewell, my lord: be sure of my friendship; take kindly to the soil of England. There are stout hearts in Newcastle, a godly congregation, to which I commend you.'

Ruthven turned away from him without a word to say, and never saw him again. With Morton, Lindsay, and the rest, he took the English road. Mr. Secretary Lethington went to my lord Atholl's in the west; my lord of Argyll became a Queen's man. Within the bare week after the flight to Dunbar the ragged corse of the Italian lay as untrodden by enemies as if Jerusalem had been his sepulture. But we are out-running our matter: we must be back at Dunbar with Queen Mary.

From that castle Lord Bothwell wrote to his wife, to this effect:—

Attend me not these many days. The alders may bud by Hermitage Water before I kiss the neck of my dear. For such business as here we have was never done in the Debatable Land since Solway Moss was reddened; such a riding in and forth of messengers, such a sealing of dooms, rewards and forfeitures—no, nor such a flocking of lords anxious to prove their wisdoms in their loves.... She is hearted like a man. She rises early every day, and sets to her blessing and banning of men's lives with as sharp an edge as I to my beef at noon. She has a care for all who have served or dis-served her, and is no more frugal of her embracing than of her spurning heel. One man only she hath clean out of mind; for him she hath neither inclination nor disgust. She asketh not his company, neither seeketh to have him away. He is as though he were not—still air in the chamber, for which you ope not the window, as needing more of it, nor shut-to the window, for fear of more. Doth he enter her presence—why not? the room is wide. Doth he go out—why not? the world is wider. How this came about it were too long to tell you; this only will I say, that it came late, for at her first alighting here she feared him mortally, as if she viewed in him the ghost of her old self. That was a sickness of the mind, not against nature; now gone, and he with it. Needs must I admire her for the banishment....

But to return. Business ended—more sharply than you would believe by any young head but your own—she wins to the open weather. She walks abroad, she takes my arm. Yes, and indeed, I am grown to be somewhat in this realm. She rides o'er the brae; your servant at her stirrup; she sails the sea, your lover at the helm. You belie your own courage when you doubt this princess's, my dear heart. For, to say nothing of her trust in me, which you will own to be bold in any lady (and most bold in herself), she has the mettle of a blood-horse, whom to stroke is to sting. She is far gone with child, and you may guess with what zest, seeing her regard for her partner in it. In truth, she hath a horror; because her aim is to forget what she can never forgive, and so every drag upon her leaping spirit seems to remind her of him and his deeds. Oh, but she suffers and is strong!... I hear you say to me, 'Fie, you are bewitched. A spell! A spell!'—but I laugh at you. There is a still-faced, raven-haired witch-wife in Liddesdale working upon me under the moon. Aha, Mistress Sanctity, watch for me o' nights.

Yestreen the Q. spake of your Serenity. 'She hates me,' quoth she, 'for her father's sake, in whose cruel disgrace I vow I had no part; but I shall make her love me yet.' And when I laughed somewhat, she gave a thring of the shoulder. 'I'ld have you know, Lord Bothwell,' saith she, 'that there's no wife nor bairn in this land can refuse the kisses of my mouth.' Thinks I, 'You are bold to say it. You may come to crave them.' Quant à moy, ma doulce amye, je te bayse les mains.

You can see that he had been laughing at her in the old way, not boisterously this time, but under the beard, in his little twinkling eyes; and that, in the old way, she had been braced by his bravery. He had guessed—you can see that too—that she had some need of him, and how necessary it was that her loathing for her husband should pass into mere indifference. But he had no notion at that time how pressing that need was. Not she herself had realised the horror she had until the night after reaching Dunbar, when the King, by Standen, had renewed certain proposals, frustrate before by his laches. It may have been sudden panic, it may have been a

trick of memory—God knows what it was; but she had flooded with scarlet, then turned dead white, had murmured some excuse, and with bowed head and feeble, expostulating hands, had left the room. She did not come back that night. She had called Des-Essars, fled with him into the turret, found an empty chamber under the leads, had the door locked, a great coffer jammed against it—and had stayed there so till morning. The young man, writing a word or two upon it, says that she was almost rigid at first, in a waking trance; and that she sat 'pinned to his side' while the maids and valets hunted her high and low. 'I did what I could,' he writes; 'talked nonsense, told old tales, sang saucy songs, which by that time of my life I had been glad to have forgotten, and, affecting a nonchalance which I was far from feeling, recovered her a little. She began to be curious whether they would find her, judged by the ear how the scent lay, laughed to hear Mistress Seton panting on the stair, and Carwood screaming—"There's a great rat in my road!" Presently she slept, with her head on my knees and my jacket over her shoulders. I took her down to bed before morning, and in the daylight she had partly recovered herself. She transacted business, ate a meal; but I remarked that she trembled whenever the King entered the room, and faltered when she was obliged to reply to him—faltered and turned up her eyes, as fowls do when they are sleepy. Fortunately for her, he was sulky, and did not renew his advances.'

I suspect that she found out—for she was rigid in self-probing—that if she allowed herself to abhor him for an unspeakable affront, she would have to scorn herself even more for having given him the means of affronting her. Right punishment: she would admit that she had deserved it. She had been the basest of women (she would say) when she offered that which was to her a sacrament, in barter for mere political advantage. Why, yes! she had prepared to sell herself to this wallowing swine in order to escape her prison; and if he snored the bargain out of his head it was because he was a hog,—but then, O God! what was she? So, from not daring to think of that night of shame, she passed to fearing to think of the shameful recreants

in it; and as we ever peer at what we dread, it came about that she could think of nothing else, and was in torment. Des-Essars gives none of this; it was not in his power to get at it; but he saw, what we can never see, that she suffered atrociously, that her case grew desperate. Hear him. ‘One day I came with a message to her chamber door, early; the door was half-open. I had a shocking vision of her abed, lying there in a bed of torture, like one stung; on her face, writhing and moaning, tossing her hands—short breath, tearless sobbing, sharp cries to God; while Mary Seton read aloud out of Saint-Augustin by the fog-bound cresset light. She read on through everything—pausing only to put our Mistress back into the middle of the bed, for fear lest she might fall out and hurt herself.’

If this is true—and we know that it is—why, then, out of such waking delirium, out of anguish so dry, Queen Mary must have been delivered if she were not to die of it.

The Earl of Bothwell was not a man of imagination, though he had a quick fancy. He read his Queen in this state of hers with interest at first, and some amusement, not then knowing how dire it was. He saw that she would turn white and leave any room into which King Darnley entered; he knew that she would ride far to avoid him, and sometimes, indeed, under sudden stress, would use whip and spur and fly from him like a hunted thief. When he found out something—not very much, for Des-Essars would not speak—of the events of the night in the turret, moved by good-nature, he put himself in the way to help her. He got more maids fetched from Edinburgh—Fleming and Mary Sempill—and himself stayed with her as long as he dared, and longer than he cared. And then, one day by chance, he got a full view of her haunted mind—a field of broken lights indeed! and saw how far he might travel there if he chose, and with what profit to himself.

He was with her afoot on the links behind the town—sandy hillocks of dry bents, and a grey waste at such a season, abode of the wind and the plovers; he with her, almost alone. Des-Essars, who walked behind them, had strayed with the dogs after

a hare; the wind, blowing in from the sea, brought up wisps and patches of fog in which the boy was hidden. Talking as she went, carelessly, of the things of France, he listening more or less, she stopped of a sudden, choked a cry in the throat, and caught at his arm. ‘Look, look, look!’ she said: ‘what comes this way?’ He followed the direction of her fixed eyes, and saw a riderless horse loom out of the vapour, come on doubtingly at a free trot, shaking his head and snuffing about him as if he partly believed in his freedom. It shaped as a great grey Flemish horse, assuredly one of the King’s.

The Queen began to tremble, to mutter and moan. ‘Oh, oh, the great horse! Free—it’s free! Oh, if it could be so! Oh, my lord, oh——I’m afraid!’

‘It is indeed the King’s horse, madam,’ he said. ‘I fear—some misfortune.’

But she stared at him. ‘Misfortune!’ she cried out. ‘Oh, are you blind? Go and see—go and make sure. I must be assured—nothing is certain yet. Run, my lord, run fast!’

He made to obey, and instantly she clung to his arm to stop him. She was in wild fear.

‘No—no—no—you must not leave me here! There are voices in the sea-wind—too many voices. A clamour, a clamour! Those that cry at me through the door, those that are out on the sea—a many, a many! I tell you I am afraid.’ Her fear irritated her; she stamped her foot. ‘Do you hear me? I am afraid. You shall not leave me.’

There was no doubt. She was beside herself—looking all about, her teeth chattering, fingers griping his arm.

‘Why, then, I will send the lad, ma’am,’ says Bothwell. ‘You need have no fear with me. I hear no voices in the wind.’

She looked at him wonderfully. ‘Do you never hear them at night?’ Then her eyes paled, and the pupils dwindled to little specks of black. ‘Come with me,’ she said in whisper, ‘a-tiptoe; come softly with me. We must find him—we can never be sure

till we see him lying. There is one way: you lift the eyelids. Better than a mirror to the nose. Come, come: I must look at him, to be very sure.' She stared into the white sky, and gave a sudden gasp, pointing outwards while her eyes searched his face. 'Look!' she said: 'the birds over there. They are about him already. Come, we shall be too late.' She led him away in a feverish hurry, through bush and briar, talking all the time. 'Blood on his face—on his mouth and shut hands. He gripped his dagger by the blade, and it bit to the bone. He comes and cries at my door—all foul from his work—and asks me let him in. But I hold it—I am very strong. He always comes—but now!' She laughed insanely, and gave a skip in the air. 'O come, my lord—hurry, hurry!'

The loose horse had trotted gaily by them as the astonished Lord Bothwell followed where he was haled. Presently, however, he heard another sound, and pulled back to listen to it. 'Hearken a moment,' says he. 'Yes, yes! I thought as much. Here comes another horse—galloping like a fiend—a ridden horse.'

She started, forced herself to listen, knew the truth. 'He is hunting! Take me—hide me—keep me safe! Bothwell, keep him off me!'

She knew not what she said or did; but he, full of pity now, drew her behind a clump of whims and held her with his arm.

'There, there, madam, comfort yourself,' he said. 'None shall harm you that harm not me first. How shall you be hurt if you are not to be seen? Trust yourself to me.'

She shook in his arm like a man in an ague; uncontrollable fits of shaking possessed her, under which, as they passed through her, she shut her eyes, and with bent head endured them. So much she suffered that, if he had not let his wits go to work, he would have hailed the King as he went pounding by. He supposed that she had been shocked mad by that late business of hasty blood. Of course he was wrong, but the guess was enough to prevent him following his first purpose, and so killing her outright.

The King came rocking down the brae, red and furious, intent upon the truant horse; and as he went, Bothwell made bold to glance at the Queen. What he saw in her hag-ridden face was curious enough to set him thinking hard; curious, but yet, as he saw it, unmistakable. There was vacancy there, the inability to reason which troubles the mentally afflicted; there were despair and misery, natural enough if the poor lady was going mad—and knew it. But—oh, there was no doubt of it!—there was in the drawn lines of her face blank, undisguised disappointment. He saw it all now. She had believed him dead, her heart had leaped; and now she had just seen him alive, galloping his horse. Clang goes the cage door again upon my lady! Now, here was a state of things!

When the King was out of sight and hearing, swallowed in the growing fog, and she a little recovered, and a little ashamed, he began to talk with her; and in time she listened to what he had to say. He spoke well, neither forgetting the respect due to her, which before he had been prone to do, nor that due to himself as a man of the world. He did not disguise from her that he thought very lightly of David's killing.

'Saucy servants, in my opinion,' he said, 'must take what they deserve if they expect more than they are worth. They demand equality—well, and when they meet gentlemen with daggers, they get it.' But he hastened to add that to have killed the fellow before her face must have been the act of beasts or madmen—'and, saving his respect, madam, your consort was one and your Ruthven the other.'

To his great surprise she then said quietly that she was of the same mind, and not greatly afflicted by the deed, or the manner of it either. She had seen men killed in France; queens should be blooded as well as hounds. She also considered that Davy had been presumptuous. He had known his aptitudes too well. But useful he had certainly been, and she intended to have another out of the same nest—Joseph, his brother. Singular lady! she had found time to write into Piedmont for him.

'Well then, madam,' says Bothwell, with a shrug, 'all this being your true mind, I

own myself at a loss how to take your extreme alarms.'

She bit her lip. 'I am better. Maybe they were foolish. Who knows? I cannot tell you any more than this. I had nearly forgot that wicked deed. But there are other offences—women find—which cannot, can never be forgotten.' She grew impatient. 'Ah, but it is not tolerable to discuss such things.'

Even then he did not know what she meant. She had been mortally offended by the King, and offended to the point of horror—but by something worse than murder and strife in the chamber, by something which she could not speak of! What under Heaven had that red-faced, stable-legged lad in him which could terrify her?

'Madam,' he said, 'if you cannot talk of it, you cannot tell it me, and there is an end. My counsel to you is this: put the young lord and his sottishness out of your royal head. Look at him stoutly and aver that he is naught. You have shown that you can face a rebel kingdom; face now your rebel heart. For I say that your heart is a rebel against your head, swerving and backing like a jade that needs the spur. Ride your heart, madam! Ply whip to the flanks, bring it up to the boggart in the corn. Thus only your heart shall nose out the empty truth. Why, good lack! what is there to credit all your alarm but silly fed flesh and seething liquor? Look at him, judge him, flick your fingers at him, and forget him. Madam, I speak freely.'

She said faintly that he was very right. She had suffered much of late in all ways: she spoke of pains in the side, in the head, of fancies at night, etc. She owned that she desired his good opinion of her courage, and promised she would try to earn it. Looking tired and ill, smiling as if she knew only too well there was no smiling matter, she held out her hand to him at the entry of the town. He bowed over and kissed it. Mildly she thanked him and went her ways with Des-Essars.

He wrote to the countess soon after:—

Very strange matters chance here daily, of the which I write not exactly for fear of misreading. One thing I plainly understand, the K. shall never more prosper here.

While he was beloved he was something, and when he was dreaded he was much; but now that he comes and goes unnoticed he is nothing at all. And so he will remain, I suppose, until the lying-in, which will be in June coming they say. Ill betide him then if, when she is reminded of him in his son, he play her any trick. I would not give a snap of the finger and thumb for his life. We are for Edinburgh on Monday morn, whence look infallibly for my tidings.

The King, then, was nothing at all. Nerved by her brawny councillor, she had faced her 'boggart in the corn,' and in two days' time could curl her fine lip to remember him. That is a proof that she was sane at the root, needing no more than such bitter as his rough tongue could give to restore her tone. And, having ridded her fears, she soon found that she could rid her memory altogether. The King went out and in, as Bothwell had written, unnoticed. He made no more attempts to come at her, spoke to none but his own company, felt that he was in disgrace, and sulked. Lord Bothwell scoffed at him by implication—by every keen shaft from his eyes and every wag of his head; Lord Huntly kept at a distance; Sir James altered his salutation. On the Sunday before they should move back to town they were speaking of the rebel lords, whether they were now in England or yet on the road; and Bothwell began to cry up Ruthven, his madness, his knives, his friends' knives. The King got up and left the table. He told Standen afterwards that he should not go to Edinburgh. Standen told Des-Essars, and he told the Queen.

'Oh, but he shall,' she said at once, consulted her friends, and sent him a verbal message that she should need him there. He felt this badly—but obeyed it.

For, much against her inclination, she had made up her mind that she must drag the chain which had been forged upon her; she must keep the King in her eye for fear he should work her a mischief. His father Lennox was in Glasgow, an escaped enemy: it would never do for him to go thither. Or suppose he were to return to England! No, no, she must keep him in Edinburgh, keep him cowed, and yet not allow him to

grow desperate. Worse than that, the time was coming on when she must have him by her side, in the house, perhaps nearer still. He was now ‘the Queen’s dearest Consort,’ but soon he would be ‘the Prince’s dearest father’ and a power in the land. The Earl of Bothwell, consulted, was precise about that—awkwardly precise.

‘Folk will talk, madam, about you and him. He’ll not want for a faction to cry, “The King keeps aloof! Well he may, knowing what he knows.” Oh, have him with you, ma’am, as near as may be. For hawks dinna pick out hawks’ een, as they say; and if he owns to the child—why, he should know his own.’

She flushed. ‘You speak too plainly, my lord.’

‘Not if I mean honestly, ma’am.’

‘I hope you mean so,’ said she, ‘but the sound of your phrase is otherwise.’

‘I was speaking in character, ma’am. Mark that.’

She was looking down at her lap when next she spoke, carelessly at her careless fingers. ‘Whose child do they allege it?’

The directness of the question and indirectness of its manner puzzled him. He could not tell whether to be blunt or fine.

‘Madam, I am no scandal-monger, I hope, and have little pleasure in the grunting of hogs in a sty. But hogs will grunt, as your Majesty knows.’

She did not raise her eyes, but said: ‘It will be better that you answer me in a few words. One will suffice.’

He tried—he began—but could not do it. ‘Madam,’ he said, ‘you must answer for yourself. All I will ask is this: what, think you, drew the King to the deed he did?’

She lifted her head and gave him one long look. Rather, it seemed long. He knelt down quickly and kissed her knee.

He rose and began to justify himself. ‘You forced me to say it—it may have been my duty—make it not my offence. God knows I needed no such royal answer as you

have given me—not I! I think no evil of your Majesty, nor have I ever.'

She flashed her eyes upon him—not angrily by any means. 'Oh, my lord, may I be sure of that? Come, I will tell you what I seem to remember. There was a day when you enlarged yourself from my prison and rode, a free man, to Haddington. What said you of me there among your friends?'

He puzzled over this. 'I can charge myself with nothing. Your Grace knows more of me than I do.'

'Did you not speak in the hearing of one Pringle concerning me and my uncle the Cardinal? Did you give me a name then? Come, come, my lord, be plain. Did you not?'

He burst out laughing. 'The voice is the voice of Queen Mary, but the words are of Black James Stuart! Oho, madam, you will hear finer tales than this concerning me, if you sound that thoughtful man.'

She pressed him, but he would neither deny nor affirm. 'I shall not defend myself, madam, before your Majesty. But I will meet the Earl of Moray, and wager him in battle, if you give me leave: in battle of one and one, or of a score, or of ten score. Let him repeat his charge in the Grassmarket if he dare.'

Baffled here, she harped back upon the child. She said that she needed to be sure of his good opinion of her. Then he made her heart beat fast, for he came and put his hand upon the back of her chair and stood right over her: she could feel the strength of his eyes, like beams from the sun, driving down upon her.

'Madam, and my sovereign lady, as God is my judge, this is the truth. I loved you once, and, at love's bidding, staked all on a great design. My plot was unmannerly, but so is love; you were offended with me, as your right was. I loved you no less, but honoured you the more, because of that. If now I thought evil of you—such evil as you suspect in me—I would tell you so for the sake of that love I gave you before.'

She bowed her head and thanked him humbly; did not look up, nor stir from her place below him.

‘As meek as a mouse!’—he could not remember ever to have seen her so before. What was in her heart? It sent him away thoughtful. Next day he rode at her side to Edinburgh.

Established there more firmly than at any time since her reign began; with a council packed with her friends, with Lord Huntly (her slave) for Chancellor; with her open enemies ruined and in exile, her secret enemies abject at her knees, her husband in disgrace, and her child near its birth—in this comfortable state of her affairs, the Earl of Bothwell suddenly asked leave to go into his own country. She was piqued, and could not help showing it.

‘You desire to—you will consort with—one who loves me little? Well, my lord, well! How should I hinder your going, since I cannot quench your desire?’

Thinks he, ‘Now, now, what root of grievance is this, sprouting here?’ Aloud he said, ‘Madam, I am content—and more than content—to stay by your Majesty so long as you find me of use. But the time is at hand, and you have said it, when you will refuse me harbourage.’

‘Yes, yes,’ she said quickly, her face aflame: ‘you cannot be with me in the castle.’

She had agreed to lie-in there, and had forbidden quarters to Lords Bothwell and Huntly alike. Do you ask why? Mary Seton might have answered you in part—but scornfully, since women have no need to ask such things. They know them. ‘Lord Huntly! Lord Huntly!’ I can hear her say—a pretty, vehement little creature—‘Lord Huntly! And he a known lover of our mistress? How should he be there?’ Pass Lord Huntly: what of Lord Bothwell? She would shake her head. ‘No, no,’ she would say, ‘it could not be. He is a faithful friend.’ Well, then, what of that? She would rise quickly and walk to the window. ‘I cannot tell you, sir, why he is not to be there. But I am very clear that she would not suffer it. Oh, for example——impossible!’ You

would get no more from her. And what more could you want?

But the Queen was still frowning over his leave of absence, and pinching her lip. Then she broke out, in the midst of her private thoughts: ‘But I cannot refuse you! How can I? You having asked to go—what is the worth of your staying, when your heart is——And yet—there is the King——’ She looked slily up. ‘My lord, do you dare to trust your pupil alone?’

His face took a gay air. ‘If I am your tutor, madam——’

‘Why,’ said she, ‘what else can you be? My confessor? My cousin? My brother? What else?’

He laughed, avoiding her inquiry. ‘To be your brother would be to own kinship with my lord of Moray. A dangerous degree, ma’am, for one of the pair.’

‘I would not have you for my brother,’ she said thoughtfully.

Responsive thought struck fire in his eyes. ‘I will ask you this. Will your Grace receive me into the castle? There I could be of service—maybe.’

He watched her intently now—watched until he saw the flag come fluttering down. She lowered her eyes; he could hardly hear her words.

‘No, no. You must not be there. Afterwards—come soon.’ She waited there, hanging on the last word; then rose. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘it is better that you should go. I will not——’ She spoke wildly. ‘Go, my lord, go.’

He knelt to her before he obeyed; at the door she called him back. Quickly he returned, but she would not look at him.

‘I wish to tell you—as plainly as I can——’ So she began, speaking slowly, feeling for her words. ‘The King shall be there with me—in the castle. It is painful to me—I conceive that you must know it. But I shall do as you advise—that scandal may be averted.’ She strained her arms down, stiffening them, gave an impatient shake of the head. ‘Heaven watch over me! And you, my lord, do you pray. Ah, but you use

not prayer!' She seemed conscious that she was speaking double and he not understanding. It made her angry enough to look at him. 'Well, well, why are you here still? Go quickly, I say—go.'

Go he did, a puzzling, excited man.

Before he left the city he saw his brother-in-law, Lord Huntly, for a moment. 'Geordie,' he said, 'I'm for the Border. I'm going to my wife. Are you for yours or do you stay here?'

'I stay.'

'You may be wise. I am going to my wife—and I may be wise. God knows that I know not. I have not seen her for five months.'

Lord Huntly had no answer. He had not seen his for over a year. Presently Bothwell makes another cast.

'I took leave of the Queen of late. She was greatly wrought upon—distempered. Sent me off—called me back—sent me off again, after some wild words. I know not what to make of it.'

'Help her through it, God!' said Huntly.

'I think it is a matter for Lucina,' said Bothwell, and went his road.

He travelled musingly by the hill-ways into Liddesdale, French Paris behind him. At the top of the pass—Note o' the Gate, they call it—whence first you see the brown valley of the Liddel, and all the hills, quiet guardians about the silver water, he reined up, and stood looking over his lands.

'Yonder awaits me the fairest dark lady in Scotland, and (to my mind) the fairest demesne: the open country and the good red deer. Oh, the bonny holms, the green knowes, and the ledged rocks! Houp, man! We are free of the scented chambers and all their whisperings here.'

'It is most certain, my lord,' said French Paris, 'that we have left the direction of

those whisperings to Monsieur de Moray.'

Lord Bothwell was stung. 'Monsieur de Moray! Monsieur de Moray! Pooh, rascal, she has her husband with her now. And that may be even worse for me.'

French Paris looked demurely at the reins sliding in his fingers. 'True, my lord, she has his Majesty. I have remarked that women in the Queen's condition have extraordinary inclination for their husbands. It is reasonable.'

'You are a fool, Paris,' said the Earl.

But when he was at Hermitage, his proud wife upon his knee, my lord swore to himself over and over again that he was the happiest rogue not yet hanged. And yet he could not but hear, beneath all his protestations, that slow, wounded voice,—'Afterwards—come soon.' Good lord! what was the meaning of the like of that?

CHAPTER IX THE WASHING OF HANDS

To a woman's affair flocked matron and maid, till the castle seemed a hive of rock-bees. Afar off, it was said, you could hear them humming within; on sudden alarms out they came in a swarm, and ill fared physician or priest, or discreet, wide-eared gentleman sent by his wife to get a piece of news. June was in and well in, skies were clean, the twilight long in coming and loth to go. Queen Mary lay idle by her window, and watched the red roofs turn purple, the hills grow black, the paling of the light from yellow to green, the night's solemn gathering-in, the star shine clear in a dark-blue bed out there over Arthur's Seat. Her time was short—but one could scarcely tell. She often felt that she scarcely cared to tell when this crowning hour was to come.

Quick-spirited, sanguine young woman, she bade fair to be weary of matron and maid alike, with their everlasting talk of 'the promise of Scotland,' their midwifery stories, their nods and winks, their portentous cares over what she had supposed a

pretty ordinary business. It was to be seen that she was fretting, and the truth was that she was in much too good health: bodily ease had never been pleasant to her, and never been safe. Her mind grew arrogant and luxurious at once, felt itself free to range in regions unlawful; and so did range, the lax flesh playing courier. So while the humming and swarming of the household bees went on over and about her listless head, while she snapped twice at the maids for every once the matrons chafed her, in her mind she walked where she fain would have had her body to be: and then, sick of this futility, she grew peevish and wished she had never been born. Upon such a crisis, intending for the best, Mary Beaton superinduced a stout, easily-flushed, gamesome lady, her aunt Lady Forbes of Reres.

Mary Beaton was now the wife of Mr. Ogilvy of Boyne; but this aunt of hers was of the father's side. A Beaton, she, niece of the great murdered cardinal, sister of the witch-wife of Buccleuch, and in these, no less than in her own respects, a lady to be aware of. She was in her days of silver and russet now, who before may have been of dangerous beauty—of that quickly-ripe, drowsy, blowsy, Venetian sort, disastrous to mankind. Of it, indeed, the clear ravages remained, though cushioned deep in comfortable flesh; traceable there, as in the velvety bosses of a green hill you mark the contours of what was once a citadel of war. Her grey hair she now wore over her ears, to conceal (as the Queen averred) members which were so well stuffed with gallant lore as to be independent for the rest of their lives. She had a pretty mouth—a little overhung—and dimpled chin, light green eyes, fat, pleasurable hands, a merry voice and a railing tongue. Thanks to the combination, she could be malicious without ceasing to amuse. To those who know—and by this time I hope they are many—it is good evidence of her abilities and merits alike that Mary Livingstone could not abide the woman.

It was not required that she should. The Queen, too languid to judge her, listened to the savoury tales of this Reres by the hour together, neither laughing nor chuckling, but for all that fully content. So one might watch audacious archery, and admire the

barbed flights, even when some pricked oneself. Lady Reres was of that kind of woman who can never speak of men without marking the gender of them. All the persons on her scene wore transparent draperies; to hear her you would have supposed that the one business of man were to pursue his helpmate, and of woman to stroke her own beauties. She spared neither age nor sex from her categories: all must be stuffed in somewhere; nor did the very throne exempt the sitter from service. The throne of Scotland, for instance! She made it sufficiently appear to Queen Mary that her royal father had been a mighty hunter. She knew the romantic origin of all the by-blows—'Cupid's trophies,' as she called them (O my Lord of Moray!)—and did not scruple to reveal them to the ears of Lady Argyll, herself the daughter of Margaret Erskine, and quite aware of it. Then she must adventure Queen Marie of Lorraine—the one saint whose lamp had never grown dim upon her daughter's altar—and hint that she had been consciously fair and not unconsciously pursued. 'And I speak as one who should know, sweet madam,' said this old Reres; 'for the Cardinal, fine man, was of my own kindred, and differed noways from the rest of the men. I mind very well—'twas at Linlithgow, where you were born, my Queen—Queen Marie sat by the window on a day, her hand at her side, at her foot a dropped rose. But oh! that flower was wan beside the roses in her face. Your Majesty hath not her hues—no, but you favour the Stuarts. "Dear sakes, madam," say I, "you have dropped your rose." So faintly as she smiled, I heard her sigh, and knew she could not answer me then. "Some one will pick up what I have let fall," saith she at last—and then, behind the curtain, I see a red shoe. I touched my lips—they were as red as your own in those days, madam—and slipped away, knowing my book. Hey! but red was the hue of the Court at that tide—with the tall Cardinal, and the tall rosy Queen, and the dropping, dropping roses.' The Queen let her talk. She had a soft, wheedling voice—a murmurous accompaniment to luxurious thought.

No doubt, when the body is unstrung you pet your thought, and indulge it in its

wanton ways. There is no harm in dreaming. The Queen lay waiting there, thrilled faintly with the sense of what was to come upon her, softly served and softly lapped. And in soft guise came into ministry the figures of her dreams, inviting, craving, imploring, grieving, clinging about her. She communed again with all her lovers, the highest and the lowest—from Charles of France, Most Christian King, a stormy boy, who frowned his black brows upon her and kissed so hotly on that day she saw him last, down to slim, grey-eyed Jean-Marie-Baptiste, whom by kindness she had made man. Others there were, stored in her mind, a many and a many—and any one of them would have died for her once. What of Mr. Knox, of the great hands? What of John Gordon, fiercest of old Huntly's sons? What of George Gordon, romantic, speechless lover at this hour? To each his own sweetness, to each the secret of his own desire: she savoured each by each as she lay, turning and snuggling and dreaming among her pillows. And when the cooing old Reres by the bed spoke of Lord Bothwell, she listened, sharply intent; and wondered if there were light enough left to betray her, and hoped not. Dangerous, desperate, hardy man! He was a theme upon which Lady Reres descanted at large. Let his draperies be as they would, his gender was never in doubt.

Reres had known James Bothwell—so she always called him—for many years; for although his only numbered thirty yet, and she confessed to five-and-forty, he had come into blossom as quick as a pear-tree in a mild Lent: at fifteen and a half James Bothwell——! She lifted up her hands to end the sentence.

'They say—under the breath I speak it—that of late he hath cast his eyes above him. Ah, and how high above him, and how saucily, let others tell your Majesty.' Queen Mary's hot ears needed no telling. 'They say it drove my lord of Arran into raving fits. Fie then, and out upon you, Bothwell, if Majesty cannot be a hedge about a lovely woman! But so it hath ever been with all that disordered blood of Hepburn: thieves all, all thieving greatly. I need not go back far—and yet they tell the tale of the first Hepburn of them, and of Queen Joan, widow of our first James. What did

those two at Dunbar together?' At Dunbar—a Hepburn and a dead Queen of Scots—alack! and what had done this living Queen with her Hepburn there?

'A pest upon them all!' cries Reres; 'for what did the son of that Hepburn with a Queen? And the father of our James Bothwell, what did he? For if James Bothwell's father loved not your Majesty's own mother, and loved her not in vain—why should our man find himself a straitened earl at this day? But so it is, they say, and so is like to be, that every Hepburn of Bothwell dieth for love of a Queen of Scots. Foh, then! and is our man to vary the tide of his race? Oh, madam, I could tell your Majesty some deal of his prowess! Listen now: he loved my sister Buccleuch, and me he loved. Greedy, greedy! Oh, there's a many and many a woman hath greeted sore for him to come back. But he never came, my Queen of Honey, he never came! And let not her,' she darkly said, 'that hath him now, think to keep him. No, no, the turtle hath mated too high. He is like the king-eagle that sits lonely on his rock, and fears not look at the sun: for why? he bideth the time when he may choose to fly upward. Did he mate with my sister—a Hob to her Jill? Mated he with me? God knows whom he will mate with or mate not. He has but to ask and have, I think.'

'Pull the curtain, pull the curtain,' says Queen Mary; 'the light vexes my eyes.'

'And stings your fair cheek, my Honey-Queen,' says wise Lady Reres, and gives her a happy kiss.

So it is that a woman of experience, who carries her outlay gallantly, approves herself to her junior, who wishes to carry her own as gallantly as may be. But Mary Livingstone—Mistress Sempill, as they called her now—mother already and hoping to be mother again, used to bounce out of the bedchamber whenever Lady Reres entered it with her James Bothwell on the tip of her quick tongue.

In the drowsy days of mid-June the Queen suffered and bare a son. First to know it outside the castle-hive was brisk Sir James Melvill, who had it from Mary Beaton before they fired the guns on the platform; and that same night, by the soaring lights

of the bonfires, rode out of Lothian to carry the great news into England. No man saw Queen Mary for four days, though the castle was filled to overflowing and the Earl of Huntly walked all night about the courtyards, telling himself that for the sake of mother and child the vile father must be kept alive. The King was lodged in the castle by now; and one good reason for Huntly's vigil may have been that his Majesty and his people had swamped the house-room. The Earls of Moray, Argyll and Mar were there; Atholl also and Crawfurd (to name no more)—the two last linked with Huntly against two of the first, and all alike watching Lord Moray for a sign. It seemed, now this child was come, no man knew just what line he should take. So each looked doubtfully at his neighbour, and an eye of each was linked to Moray's eyes of mystery. At the end of her four days' grace the Queen sent for her brothers first among men—the three black Stuarts, James, John, and Robert; and two of them obeyed her.

In the dark, faint-smelling chamber, as they knelt about her bed, she put her thin hand over the edge that they might kiss it, and seemed touched that they should do it with such reverence. They could see her fixed eyes—large now, and all black—upon them, seeking, wondering, considering if their homage might be real. As if no answer was to be read out of them, she sighed and turned away her head. She spoke faintly, in the voice of a woman too tired to be disheartened. 'You shall see your Prince, my lords. Fetch me in the Prince.'

The child was brought in upon a cushion, a mouthing, pushing, red epitome of our pretensions, with a blind pitiful face. Lady Mar and Lady Reres held it between them, passed it elaborately under the review of the lords; and as these looked upon it in the way men use, as if timid to admit relationship with a thing so absurd—here is a James Stuart to be taken, and that other left!—the Queen watched them with bitter relish, turned to be a cynic now, for the emptiness of disenchantment was upon her. To win this mock-reverence of theirs she had laboured and spent! With this, O God, she had paid a price! Now let all go: for they looked at her prize as at so much

puling flesh, and had kissed her hand on the same valuation. Pish! they would scheme and plot and lie over the son as they had over the mother—and the only honest fellow in all Scotland was Death, who had just made a fool of her! The child began to wail for its nurse, and pricked her into a dry heat. For it is to be known that she could not nurse her baby. ‘Take him, take him, good Reres. I cannot bear the noise he makes, nor can ease him any. And you, my lords, shall come again if you will. Come when the King is by.’ Here, as if suddenly urged by some anxiety, she raised herself in the bed. They saw how white she was, and how fearfully in earnest. ‘Fail me not, brothers, in this. I desire you to be with me when the King is here.’

When they had both promised, they left her to sleep; but she could get none for fretting and tossing about.

Mary Livingstone said, How could she sleep? She was ‘woeful that she could not nurse her baby.’

Hereat the Queen took her by the arm and hurt her by her vehemence. ‘What honesty is left in this world but Death?’ she croaked in her misery. ‘When your blood-brothers compass your downfall, and your husband is a liar declared, and your own breasts play churl to your new-born child—oh, oh, oh, I would open my arms to bonny leman Death!’

Mary Livingstone, blind with tears, hung over her, but could not speak. The Queen drove her away, and had in the reminiscent, the caustic, the fertile Reres.

At two in the afternoon of a later day a great company was admitted; and the King, coming in last with an Englishman of his friends, stood for the first time these long weeks by the Queen’s bed. She was prepared for him, gave him her hand, but flinched evidently when he saluted it. The Countess of Mar brought in the Prince, having settled this function of honour with Reres as best she knew, and handed it about in the throng.

‘Give it to me, my Lady Mar,’ says the Queen in that dry, whispering voice of hers.

All the spring seemed gone out of her, so much she dragged her words. The moment she had it in bed with her it began its feeble wailing.

‘There, sir, there then! ’Tis your royal Mother has you!’ says Lady Mar; and the Queen, bothered and sick of the business before she had begun with it, grew deadly hot as she held it, rocking it about. The King gazed solemnly at his offspring: he blinked, but no more foolishly than any other man. The courtiers admired, happily not called upon to speak; in fact, nobody spoke except the infant, and Lady Mar, who pleaded in whispers. Nor did she whisper in vain, for presently the crying stopped, the Queen held up the child in her arms and searched vaguely the King’s face. I say, vaguely, because those who knew and loved her best could not in the least understand that questioning look, nor connect it with the words she spoke. She used no form of ceremony, neither sir’d nor my-lorded him; but poring blankly in his face, ‘God hath given you and me a son,’ she said.

The King was observed to blush. ‘And I thank God for him, madam,’ was his answer, as he stooped to kiss the child. He achieved his honourable purpose, though the Queen drew back as his face came near. Who did not see that?

Again she said, ‘You have kissed your very son.’ There was a silence upon all, and then she added in a voice aside—‘So much your son that I fear it will be the worse for him hereafter.’ Coming at such a time, from such a mouth, the words dropped upon that hushed assembly like an Oracle. No Scot of them all durst say anything, nor could the French Ambassador find phrases convenient. The King may or may not have heard her—he was slow. But plain Sir William Stanley in his Lancashire voice cried out, ‘God save your Majesties, and the Prince your son!’ She looked about to find who spoke so heartily, and they told her the name and station of the man. She observed him with interest, held up the child for him to see.

‘Look upon him, sir, for whom you pray so stoutly. This is the prince I hope shall first unite two realms.’

‘Why, madam,’ says Sir William, ‘shall he succeed before your Majesty and his father?’

He meant well, but did unhappily. The Queen gave back the child to Lady Mar before she replied.

Then, ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I think he shall, and for this reason. Because his father has broken my heart.’

Not a soul dared to move. The King started—as one jerks in first sleep—grew violently red, looked from face to face, found no friendliness in any, and broke out desperately: ‘Is this your promise? Is this your promise? To forget and forgive?’

She was as hard as flint. ‘I have forgiven,’ she said, ‘but I shall never forget. Would that I could! But what if I had died that snowy night? Or what if Fawdonsyde’s pistol had shot my babe in me?’

‘Madam,’ said the King, ‘these things are past.’

She threw herself back, face to the wall. ‘Ay, they are past. Well, let them go.’ She shut her eyes resolutely until they were all gone out; and when that, which seemed the only thing to be done, was well done, she opened them again, with a new and sharp outlook upon affairs. She sent one of the women for Des-Essars, another for the physician.

To this latter, who found her sitting up in bed with very bright eyes, she said, ‘Master Physician, I feel stronger, having done all the disagreeable duties which seemed expected of me. I wish for your consideration of this matter: when can I rise from this bed?’

He gravely pondered. ‘Madam, in these heats I dare not advise you to be moved. Nourishment and repose should work wonders for your Majesty, as indeed you tell me that they have.’

‘At least, they would if I could get them,’ she replied.

‘All Scotland would give herself to provide them, madam, for your solace.’

‘They are the last things I should look for from Scotland,’ said the Queen. ‘Nourishment and repose! I shall leave my bed to-morrow.’

‘Madam,’ said the doctor, ‘I have but done my duty.’

‘Ah, duty!’ she said. ‘And have I not done mine? Now, good sir, I intend my pleasure.’

Dismissing him, she turned to Des-Essars, who stood erect by the door. ‘I desire to wash my hands, Jean-Marie. Bring basin and towel.’

As he served her at the bed’s edge, she dipped and rinsed her hands—carefully, formally, smiling to herself as at the good performance of some secret rite. This might have been lustral water, Jordan’s, or that sluggish flow of Lethe’s. She held up her wet hands before the lad’s face. ‘Do you see any speck?’

‘Oh no, madam.’

‘Be very sure,’ she said; ‘look well again. These hands, mark you, have been in Scotland four years.’ She rinsed again and wrung them of drops; smelt them, and seemed pleased. ‘Roses they smell of now—not Scotland,’ she said. ‘So I am free of Scotland.’ She dried her hands and sent him away with the service—‘But come back soon,’ she said; ‘I have more for you to do.’

Des-Essars returned. ‘Wait you there,’ said she, ‘while I write a letter.’ She wrote, pausing here and there, looking wisely for a word or two—sometimes at the prim-faced youth, as if she could find one there—scoring out, underlining, smiling, biting the pen. She ended—did not re-read.

‘Bring taper and wax.’ She sealed her letter with her signet ring, and held it out. ‘Take this incontinent to my lord of Bothwell. At Hermitage in Liddesdale you shall find him. Be secret and sure. You have never failed me yet, and I trust you more than most. I trusted you four years ago, when you were a boy: now you are nearly a

man, and shall prove to be fully one if you do this errand faithfully. Ask for French Paris at your first coming in—thus you will get at my lord privily. Now go, remembering how much I entrust you with—my happiness, and hope, and honour.' He made to leave her, but she cried, 'Stay. You love me, I think. Come nearer—come very near. Nearer, nearer, foolish boy. What, are you so timid? Now—stoop down and kiss me here.' She touched her cheek, then offered it.

He flushed up to the roots of his hair and had nothing to say; but he was never one to refuse chances. She said, 'You have kissed a Queen. Now go, and earn your wages.' He marched from the room, grown man, and took the way in half an hour.

At his castle of Hermitage, deep in the hills, the Earl of Bothwell frowned over his letter, and having read it many times, went on frowning as he fingered it. 'Now, if any faith might be given to a princess,' he thought to himself, 'those two should never be together again man and wife. The pledge is here, the written word.' He chuckled low in his throat, then shrugged like an Italian. 'The word of a prince, the bond of a weathercock! Let the words go for words—but the heart that devised, the head that spun, the hand that set them here—ah, a man may count on them!' He sprang to his feet, went to the window and looked out far into the sunny brown hills. He shook his fist at the blue sky. 'Oh, Bastard of Scotland, James misbegotten of James! Oh, my man, if these words are true, there shall come a grapple between you and me such as the men of the dales know not—and a backthrow for one of us, man James, which shall not be for me.' Leaning out of the window, he roared into the court for his men. 'Ho, Hob Elliott! Ho, Jock Scott! Armstrong, Willy Pringle, Paris, you French thief! Boot and saddle, you dogs of war—I take the North road this night.' He strode a turn or more about the room, shaking his letter in his hand. 'Better than a charter, better than a sasine, bond above bonds!'

But he went to his wife's bower. 'My heart,' saith he, 'I must leave thee this night—I am called to town. God knoweth the end of the adventure. Read, my soul,

read, and then advise.'

She read the French slowly, he behind her, his face almost touching her cheek, prompting her with a word or two; but so eager as he was, he was always in front, and had to come back for her, mastering his impatience. At the end she sat quietly, looking at her hands. His excitement was not to be borne.

'Well, my girl, well?'

'Go to her, my lord.'

'You say that!'

She replied calmly, 'No, it is she that says it—it is veiled in these lines.'

He took her face between his hands. 'But it is thou that sendest me—hey? Be very sure now what thou art about. If I go, I go to the end. I stay never when I ride out o' nights until I have the cattle in byre.'

Her deep eyes met his without faltering. 'Let her have of you what she will. I have what I have.'

Now she had made him wary. He could not be sure what she was at—unless it were one thing.

'Dost thou send me,' he asked her, 'to be her bane? art thou so still and steadfast a hater?'

'I send you not at all,' she answered. 'It is she that calls. Remember that against the time when you have need to remember it.'

He caught her up and kissed her repeatedly. 'Sit thou still, Jeannie, and watch,' says he; 'keep my house and stuff, and have a prayer on thy lips for me. Never doubt me, my dear. Doubt all the world to come, but doubt not me.'

She said, 'I am very sure of you—both of what you will do, and what you will not do.'

He kissed her again, and left her. She did not come out to see him ride away.

Cantering on grass through the hot starry night, he called Des-Essars to his side and questioned him closely about the letter. How did she write it? What did she say? Who was by?

‘My lord,’ said Baptist, ‘I myself was by. No other at all. She bade me take it straight to your lordship, surely and secretly. She wrote it herself and sealed it with the ring on her forefinger. But she wrote nothing until she had washed her hands.’

‘Why, my lad,’ says he, ‘were her hands so foul?’

‘My lord, they were the fairest, whitest hands in the world. But she washed them many times, until, as she said, they smelt of roses, and not of Scotland.’

‘The plot thickens, God strike me! What else, boy?’

‘Nothing more, my lord, save that she gave me the letter, as I have told your lordship, and sent me directly away.’

CHAPTER X EXTRACTS FROM THE DIURNALL OF THE MASTER OF SEMPILL

That sandy-haired, fresh-coloured, tall gentleman, John Sempill, Master of Sempill, received his Mary Livingstone on her return from the Court with more demonstration than was held seemly in Scotland; but they were his own servants who saw him, and he was sincerely glad to have her back. Not only the pattern housewife, but the ornament of his hearth, the most buxom of the Maries, the highest-headed, greatest-hearted, the ruddiest and the ripest—well might he say, as he fondled her, ‘My lammie, thou art a salve for my sair een,’ and even more to the same effect.

‘By your favour, Master,’ quoth she, ‘you shall give over your pawing. I am travel-weary and heart-weary, and you trouble me.’

‘Heart-weary, dear love!’ cried the Master. ‘And you so new back to your bairn and your man!’

‘I am full fain of you, Master, and fine you know it. And our bairn is the pride of my eyes. But I grieve over what I’ve left behind me; my heart is woe for her. And indeed, if you must have it, I am near famishing for want of bite and sup.’

‘Come away, woman, come away,’ said the Master, justly shocked. ‘There’s the best pasty on the board that ever you set your bonny teeth to, and a brew of malt unmatched in Renfrew. Or would you have the Canary? Or happen the French wine is to your liking? Give a name to it, wife, for it’s a’ your ain, ye ken.’ He hovered about her, anxious to serve, while she pulled at her gauntlets.

‘The fiend is in the gloves, I think. There then, they’re off. Master, I’ll take a cup of the red French wine. Maybe it will put heart into me.’

‘Take your victual, take your victual, my lady,’ says the Master, ‘I’ll be back just now.’ He was his own cellarer, prudent man, and was apt to excuse himself by saying that one lock was better than two.

The wine brought back the colour to her cheeks and loosened the joints of her tongue. All he had now to do was to listen to her troubles: and he did listen. It is likely that, had she been less charged with them, she had been warier; but she was indeed surcharged. He soon understood that it was the coming of the Earl of Bothwell that had caused her return.

‘Not that I would not have braved him out, you must know, Master—bristling boar though he be, dangerous, boastful, glorious man. It would take a dozen of Hepburns to scare me from my duty. But oh,’tis herself that scares me now! So changed, so sore changed. You might lay it to witchcraft and be no fool.’

‘’Twill be the lying-in, I doubt,’ says the sage Master. ‘You mind how hardly my sister Menzies took her first. Ay, ’twill be that.’

Mary Livingstone would not have it. ‘There are many that say so, but I am not one. No, no. I know very well where to look for it. Witchcraft it is, night-spells. I mind the beginning o’t. Why, when I first saw her, all dim as I was with my tears, her

heart went out to me—held out to me in her stretched hands. She took me to her sweet warm bosom, and I could have swooned for joy of her, to be there again. “Oh, Livingstone, my dear, my dear! Come back to me at last!” And so we weep and cling together, and all’s as it had ever been. For you know very well we were never long divided.’

‘Never long enough for me, Mary, in my courting time.’

‘She was expecting her wean from day to day, and I tell you she longed for the hour. She was aye sewing his little clothes—embroidering them—ciphers and crowns and the like. She worked him his guiding-strings with her own hands, every stitch—gold knot-work, you never saw better. And all her talk was of him.’

‘Likely, likely,’ murmured the Master.

‘She never wavered but it was to be a prince, for all that we teased her—spoke of the Princess Mary that was coming—or should it not be Princess Margaret? She smiled in her steady way, as she uses when she feels wise, knowing what others cannot know. “No other Mary in Scotland,” she said. “There are five of us now, and Scotland can hold no more. My Prince Jamie must wed with a Margaret if he needs one.” No, she never doubted, and you see she was right. Oh, she was right and well before the magic got to work!

‘To me she used to talk, more nearly than to the others. Poor Fleming! You’ll have heard of her sore disgrace—for favouring that lank Lethington of hers. She is suspect, you must know, of seeking his recall, so hath no privacy with our mistress. Beaton and Seton were never of such account; so ’twas to me she spoke her secrets—over and over in the long still forenoons, wondering and doubting and hoping, poor lamb. “Do you think he’ll lippen to me, Livingstone?” she would say. “Did your own child laugh to see his mother? I think ’twould break my heart,” she said, “if he greeted in my arms.” She intended to be nurse to him herself: that I will hold by before the Thronéd Three on Doomsday. Not a night went by but, when I

came to her in the morn, she bade me look, and try, and be sure. I told her true, she could do it. And what hindered her, pray? What drove away her milk? Eh, sir, I doubt I know too well.

‘It was Beaton brought in that old quean, that liggar-lady of Bothwell’s, that lickorish, ramping Reres. Mother’s sister of Beaton’s she is, own sister to the wise wife of Buccleuch, with witchcraft in the marrow of her. What made Beaton do it? Let God tell you if He care. I think the Lord God may well have covered His face to hear her tales. Such a tainted history I never listened to—pourriture de France! Oh, Master, I’ve heard the Count of Anjou and his minions, and Madame Marguerite and all hers at their wicked talk. I’ve heard Bothwell blaspheme high Heaven in three tongues, and had the bloat Italian scald my ears with a single word. But the Reres beats all. Good guide us, where hath she not made herself snug? Whose purchase hath she not been? Man, I cannot tell you the tales she told, nor one-quarter the shamefulness she dared to report. And the soft lingering tongue of the woman! And how she lets her scabrous words drop from her like butter from a hot spoon! My poor lamb was weary of bed and body, I’ll allow. I’ll own the old limmer made her laugh; she never could refuse a jest, as you know, however salted it might be. No: she must listen and must laugh, while I could have stabbed the old speckled wife. But my Queen Mary kept her at the bedside; and there they were, she and this Reres, for ever kuttering and whispering together. ’Twas then, in my belief, the cast was made, and the wax moulded and the spells set working.

‘For mark you this. The pains came on o’ the Wednesday morn, in the small grey hours; and by nine o’clock the child was born alive. It wailed from the first—never was such a fretful bairn; and she could hear him, and grieved over it, and could not find rest when most she needed it. And then—when they put it to her—she could not nurse it. Oh, Master, I could have maimed my own breast to help her! She tried—sore, sore she tried; she schooled herself to smile, though the sweat fairly bathed her; she crooned to it, sang her French, her pretty stammering Scots; but all

to no purpose—no purpose at all. The child just labbered itself and her—my bonny lamb—and got no meat.

‘Master, it fairly broke her spirit. She did not fret, she did not lament, but lay just, and stared at the wall; and not a maid nor woman among us could rouse her. The old Reres tried her sculduddery and night-house talk, but did no better than we with our coaxing and prayers. She had no heart, no care, no pride in the world; but just let all go, and thrung herself face to the wall.

‘The lords came about her, and she showed them their prince: you could see she scorned them on their knees, and herself to whom they knelt. The craven King came in behind them, and she bade him kiss his own son. She looked him over, with all the dry rage withering her face—you’ld have said she had chalked herself!—and spoke him terrible words. “I may forgive, but I shall never forget,” she said: and to an Englishman who was with him—“He has broken my heart.” A King! He’s a spoiled toy in her hands; and the like is all the glory of Scotland—a thing of no worth to her. What hath changed her so but witchcraft? Ah, what else hath such a wicked virtue? Soon after this she sent for Bothwell; and when he came she was up and about—mad, mad, mad for her pastime; drinking of pleasure, you may say, like a thirsty dog, that fairly bites the water. Oh, Master, I am sick at the heart with all I’ve seen and heard!’

‘Let me comfort my Heart and Joy!’ said the really loving Master, and applied himself to the marital privilege. Extracts from his Diurnall, with which I have been favoured by a learned Pen, shall follow here—not without their illustrative value in this narrative. I omit all reference to the redding of the hay, the wool sales of each week, statistical comparisons of the lands of Beltrees with other sheep-ground, Sandy Graeme’s hen, the draining of Kelpie’s Moss, a famous hunting of rats on Lammas Day, and other matters of a domestic or fleeting interest.

It is not without pain, be it added, that I allow the Master to display himself naked,

as it were, and far from ashamed. It will be seen—I regret to say it—that he was not above trafficking his good wife's heart, or sending her to grass—in pastoral figure!—when the milk ran dry. Commerce and the Affections! Well, he was not alone in Scotland; there were belted Earls in the trade with him—canny chafferers in the market-place, or (in Knox's phrase) Flies at the Honeypot. He was no better than his neighbours; and you will hear the conclusion of their whole matter, from a shrewd observer, at the end of this book.

The first date in the Diurnall of any moment to us is—

July the 22.—Yester-een my dear wife Mary Livingstone, blessed be God, returned to her home. Being comforted and stayed, she had much to rehearse of Court doings. Great tales: Forbes of Reres' lady, a very gamester; the Earl of Both., and others. Harsh entreaty of the K—— before many witnesses. Mem. Not to forget own advantage in such news, nor the Earl of Bedf(ord) and Mr. C(ecil).[4]

July the 24.—I wrote out my proffer fair for the Earl of Bed(ford). John Leng rode with it, a sad [discreet] person. Wool sales this week ... Sandy Graeme: havers anent his hen.... M(ary) L(ivingstone) easier in mind, haler in body. Spake freely of the Court. The Q—— sent a French youth for the Earl of Both., and when he came saw him alone in her chamber. This would be great news for Engl(and), but and if they would pay my price. Mem. To be stiff, not to abate. Æquam memento rebus in arduis servare mentem.

July the 27.— ... M. L(ivingstone) saith that her mate Fl(eming) would give all lawful things to have back the Sec(retary), even to her allegiance as a subject; so intemperate is the passion of love in women. Saith that the Earl of Both. desires the K—— to recall Mr. A(rchibald) D(ouglas) in order that he may betray my Lo. of M(oray) to the Q——. Maybe the K—— would do it, if he had enough credit with her. The K—— hates my lord of Both. as mortally as ever he did the late Italian, but not with any more reason; at least M. L(ivingstone) will not admit any. Pressed her,

but as yet fruitlessly. She is clear that there will be open strife between the Earls of Both. and Mo(ray): but the darker man hath a sure hold on himself and his friends. Mem. To write all this fairly to-morrow in the new Spanish cipher. Mem. 2. She saith that the Earl of H(untly) is now Chanc(ellor) and a declared lover of the Q——. Harmless, because the Q—— hath little to give but scorn to them that openly love her.

August the 3.—Letter from my lord of Bed(ford). His gross English manners. He asks roundly what price is demanded. This is shameful dealing—greatly offended. John Leng saw my lord personally in Berw(ick), and was asked to devise secret means to speak with me. Most certain that he hath writ to the Q—— of Eng(land). I shall tell him nothing as yet, and write but round about.... News this day that the Q—— hath gone to Alloa; but mark in what manner. The K—— was invited; and offered himself to ride with her. Refused. Whereupon he set out alone, only his English with him; and the Q—— embarked with the lord of Both. in a little ship from Newhaven. Our informant saith not who accompanied them, save that they were famous robbers and pirates. Suspect Ormiston and Hay of Tala, known to me for desperate men. M(ary) S(eton) went along with her. Lady Re(res) took the Pr(ince). Mem. M. L(ivingstone) should go to Alloa, but it likes her not to leave her child. Her shape too.... Mem. 2. To write, very shortly and finally, into Eng(land).

August the 7.—News this day from M. Fl(eming). Sir James Mel(vill) gave the K—— a cocker spaniel of his own rearing, and the K—— boasting of this (for they are rare who show him any kindness in these days), it came to the Q——'s ears. Fl(eming) writeth that she rated Sir James sharply for this in the gallery at Alloa, saying, 'I cannot trust one that loves them that I love not.' Sir James all pothered to reply; rare for him. She flung away before the words were ready, and took my lord of Both(well's) arm....

The Earl of Mor(ton) writeth me from Northumberland with a fat buck from

Chillingham. Hopeth I will stand his friend for the sake of my father, whom (saith he) he entirely loves. His heart is woe for Scotland, and any news which may help him thither he will be thankful of. Mem. To write him civilly my thanks, and tell him something, but not near all. Enough to let him see that I know more....

Sandy Graeme very resolute upon the hen; spake insolently to me this day. He threatens to pursue....

August the 15.—The K——, we hear, flew into a great passion of late, and threatened to have the life out of my Lord of Mor(ay)—but not in my lord's hearing. He is vexed to death that the Q—— consorts with those two earls, his chief enemies (as he thinks): I mean Both. and Mor(ay). The Q—— reported his threat to her brother; and now the K—— is gone away, supposed to Dunfermline; but he kept it very secret. The Q—— is to hunt the deer in Meggatdale, we learn. I have at last prevailed upon M. L(ivingstone) to seek the Court. She goes, but not willingly. In my letter of this day to Eng(land) I plainly said that the intelligence I had was worthy the Q—— of Eng(land's) study. 'Let her write soon,'I said, 'or——' and so left it. Quos ego ...! a powerful construction, aposiopesis hight. Mem. To see that John Leng renders just accounts of his spending on my business.

August the 17.—My dear wife set out this day for the Court at Stirling. Grievous charges of travel cheerfully borne by me. She hath promised to write fully. Recommended her to have circumspect dealing with my lord of Bothw., to be complaisant without laxity of principle. 'Tis plain courtesy to salute the Rising Sun, though savouring of idolatry if carried to wicked lengths. She high-headed as ever....

A letter from the Earl of Mor(ton), which she desired to read with me before she departed, wondering that he should honour me. Lucky that the bay horse would not stand.... He writeth plainly that he desires my service to win him home from his exile: asketh me guiding lights, how the land lies, etc. Promises much, but more to be regarded is his power to do harm. Of all lords in this realm he hath the longest

and deepest memory. But whom can he hate of mine? Whom of any other body's but of One, and that one hated sorest of all men? Very rich also is he, and covetous to have more. Mem. To sleep upon the letter I shall write him before returning his messenger. He saith that A. D(ouglas) is full of business of all sorts. I fear, a shameful dealer.

August the 23.—Letter from my wife, the first she hath writ; full of juicy meat. The Q—— took the K—— into favour again and suffered his company in Meggatdale. She fears what he may do against her if he is alone, or with his father. The lords of Bothw., Mor(ay), and Ma(r) present there; and M. S(eton) and a few more. Cramalt would not hold near so many. Some lay at Henderland, some with Scott of Tushielaw. Scott of Harden offered and was refused—supposed for fear of the Douglas house by-north of him. Afterwards they went to Traq(uair). The K——, being disguised in drink, held monstrous open talk of the Q—— there, calling her a brood mare of his, and other such filthy boasting. Sharply rebuked by my lord Both., he had no reply to make. Thus it is with him, I see. The least favour shown, it flieth to his head. At heart he is a very craven. He is a rogue in grain....

News that Ker of Cessford hath slain the Abbot of Kelso. Met on the bridge, each with a company, and had words; from words fell to blows. Tu ne cede malis, sed contra audentior ito. True: but how if life be threatened? Is it not wiser to bend to the gale? And where doth this Evil One lie, and how to be discerned by simple man? Alas! the times are lawless! Mem. John Leng not home from Ber(wick). He may have with him that which would make him worth the robbery. To enquire for him at the post.

... Sandy Graeme: his hen a rankling thorn, whereof, it seems, I must die daily....

August the 28.—I learn that M. Fl(eming) hath won her suit. The Earl of Ath(oll) wrought for her, and my lord of Mor(ay) did not gainsay. Therefore Mr. S(ecretary) cometh back. The Q——, it is said, pleaded with my lord of Bothw. to do the man

no harm—very meekly, as a wife with her husband. So it was done, and he received at Sir W. Betts' house in Stirling, after dinner. Present, the Q——, Lady Ma(r), Earls of Ath(oll), Mor(ay), and Bothw. Leth(ington) went down on his two knees, they say, wept, kissed hands. Then, when he was on his feet again, the Q—— took him by the one hand and gave her other to the lords in turn. My lord of Bothw. could not refuse her. Leth(ington) as proud as a cock, saith my dear wife, who saw him afterwards at the coucher by Fl(eming's) side. I suppose she will have him now. He is restored to all his offices and is sent away to Edinburgh, whither the Q—— must go soon to oversee her revenues. She will lodge in the Chequer House, I hear. Now, why doth she so? They establish the Pr(ince) at Stirling: Lady Re(res) to be Mistress of his household, an evil choice. My wife hateth her so sore she will not write her name, lest, as she saith, the pen should stink. Scandalous doings at Stirling abound. The Q—— in a short kirtle, loose hair, dancing about the Cross with young men and maids: not possible to be restrained in anything she is conceited of. Mem. To consider closely about the Chequer House. I mind that one Master Chalmers, a philosophic doubter of mysteries, is neighbour unto it. A friend of my lord of Bothw. in old times. They say, his pædagogue. Sed quære....

John Leng returned Monday last. I fear little to be done with Engl(and). Mr. C(ecil), most indurate, crafty man, must needs 'see the goods before he can appraise them.' A likely profit! Mem. To consider of the Earl of Mor(ton), if he knoweth of Leth(ington) in new favour? A good stroke for him, well worth some outlay. But the charge of a messenger for such a thing?...

September the 24.—Strong matter from my wife—the strongest—writ from Edinburgh. There came in a letter from the K——'s father, my lord of Len(nox), long a stranger to the Court (and with good reason of his own), which put the Q—— in a flutter. She was taken ill and kept her bed. My wife saw her. This lord, it seems, wrote to her Majesty that he could no longer answer for the mind of the K—— his son; that it was not in his power to stay the K—— from a voyage abroad. Much

more; but this the first. The Q—— wept and tossed herself about. Note this well: the Earl of Bothw. was at Hermitage in Liddesdale.

But of this, and its wild results, I prefer my own relation. No more as yet of the Master.

[4] The Earl of Bedford was English Commissioner at Berwick, a ready purchaser from scandal-mongers. Mr. C. is, of course, the famous English Secretary.

CHAPTER XI ARMIDA DOUBTFUL IN THE GARDEN

To the Chequer House at Edinburgh belonged a pleasant garden of yew alleys, grass walks, nut-trees, and bowers cut out of box. You could pace the round of it by the limiting wall, keeping on turf all the way, and see the sky-line broken by the red gables and spires of the little clean city, being nevertheless within boskage so generous that no man's window could spy upon you. Thus it was that orderly Mr. David Chalmers, in his decent furred robe and skull-cap, was able to tread his own plot, his hands coupled behind his back, and to meditate upon Philosophy, Gnomic Poetry, and Moral Emblems, undisturbed by the wafts of song, rustling of maids' farthingales, flying feet of pages, or sound of kisses refused or snatched, which those neighbour green recesses witnessed and kept to themselves. In the Chequer Garden, this mellow end of September, the Court took solace while the state revenues were under review, the Queen's custom being to work in the garden-room, a long covered loggia edging the slopes of grass, from nine to eleven in the forenoon, then to walk for an hour, and then to dine. Holyrood was wide, Holyrood was near, Holyrood stood empty: this was a whim of hers—no more.

Great days were these for Mr. Secretary Lethington: to feel the sun of royal favour genially warm upon his back once more; to seek (and surely find) assurance of good fortune in the brown eyes of the sweetest, most modest, gentlest-hearted lady in Scotland. Did he not owe everything to Mary Fleming? And was she not a sweet creditor? And next to her he stood indebted to the weather. The man was sensitive to

climate, and, like all sensitive men, loved autumn best. ‘This slope sun, which will neither scorch nor refuse his clemency, dearest lady,’ he said; ‘these milky skies, which never seem to lose the freshness of dawn; the very gentle death—most merciful!—which each Day suffers; the balm of Night’s dipped fingers shed upon our brows: are not these things an augury (O my true love!) of even life for you and me? Even life, a peaceful ending of our days, with the angry solstice turned, the dry heat, the bared wrath of the sun far from us! Indeed, indeed, I do believe it.’ Mary Fleming, looking steadfastly into the pale sky, would be too sure of herself to feel abashed by his fervour. ‘And I, sir,’ she would answer, ‘pray for it daily.’

Mr. Secretary, at such times as these, felt purified, ennobled, a clean man. Working with the Queen through mornings of golden mist and veiled heat, he did his very best in her service, and laboured to respond to all her moods with that alacrity, clear sight, and good-humour which he saw very well his present state required. He was one of those men who, like beasts of chase, take colour from their surroundings. If you stroke your dormouse his coat will answer; he will burnish to a foxy brightness under the hand. And so with Mr. Secretary. His lady-love was kind, his sovereign trusted him again: he shone under such favour, dared to be in charity with all men, and was most worthy of trust. He thought little of bygone stresses, of the late months when he had lurked, gnawing his cheek, in the hills of the west; it was impossible for the like of him to believe that he had ever been otherwise than now he was. He fancied himself a book opened at a clean page, and never turned back to regard earlier chapters, blotted and ugly. Forward, rather, looked he—upon many fair folios of untouched vellum. ‘Upon these we will print in golden types, my heart, the gestes of the twin-flight to the stars of William Maitland of Lethington and Mary Fleming, his spouse: deux cors, ung coer!’ And she, loving soul, believed the man.

The Queen, since that summer’s day when, with ritual, she had washed her hands in rose-water, had known many moods. Some were of dangerous sweetness, as of treading a brink hand in hand; some of full joy in air and weather, as when Lord

Bothwell and his men steered her across the dancing sea, and the little ship, plunging in blue waters, tossed up the spray to kiss her cheeks, or sting unmannerly her happy eyes. There had been days also of high revelry at Stirling—dancings, hawkings, romping games, disguises; days of bravado, where Memory was dared to do her worst. All of these, as Mary Livingstone told her husband, with Lord Bothwell at her side and the King out of mind. Some days she had had of doubtful questioning, of heart-probing, drawing-back; a sense (to be nursed) of nothing yet lost, of all being yet well; and others—but then she had been quite alone—when, upon her knees, with bent-down head and hands crossed over the breast, she had whispered to herself the words of fate: 'Behold one stronger than I, who, coming, shall overshadow me. Take me, lord, take me, take me, such as I am.' After such times as these she would walk among her women with a rapt, pure face, her soul sitting in her eyes, or half-risen, quivering there, trembling in strength, sensing the air, beating, ready to fly. Then, as they looked at her wondering, she would sit with them and talk gently, in a low kind voice, about their affairs; and Mary Livingstone, who knew her at her best when she was quick and masterful, feared most for her then; and Mary Fleming, who had but one thought in her heart, took courage—and at some such time pleaded for, and won back, her banished lover.

So it was with her during all that summer and early autumn, while the Master of Sempill (healthy-faced man) was filling his Diurnall, and doing his best to fill his pocket, by emptying his wife of confidences and betraying her afterwards. But when she came back from Stirling, enriched in divers ways, she had to find that the graceless King had not lost his power of the spur. By degrees and degrees dark rumours gathered about her, of which he was the nucleus. She heard of his quarrelling at Dunfermline, of a night-fray at Cameron Brig in which he was suspected of a share; of his man Standen with a wounded head, and the King swearing he would burn the doer of it out of house and jacket. Now, who had wounded Standen's head? Nobody could tell her.

Then there were threats sent about town and country by craped messengers: ‘The Earl of Moray should beware how he rides abroad’; or ‘Let the Lord of Bothwell look to the inmates of his house’—and so forth. Worse than these were the hints thrown out to Du Croc, the French Ambassador—hints which pointed at the safety of the prince her son, and at the King as the author of them. Flying words had been caught in galleries and corridors; somebody saw the white face of Forrest, his chamber-child, frozen by terror into silence. They had him in among them, and twisted his arm: he would not deny, he would not affirm, but wept copiously and moaned for his mother in Winchester. Mysteries and mischiefs were all about her; and everything she could gather insisted on one fact—that the King intended action of his own oversea or in England—she could not tell which.

Loathing the task as much as the taskmaster, she looked her affairs in the face. For one thing, they gave her back a distorted image of her own face. She had washed her hands, she had been happy, thought herself free,—why, why, what a purblind fool! She had been playing the May Day queen, like any chimney-sweeper’s wench, in a torn petticoat. A rent panoply to cover her, a mantle-royal full of old clouts! The discovery threw her into despair: ‘Here am I, Mary of France and Scotland, a crowned woman—bankrupt, at the mercy of a sot to whom I lent my honour twice!’ Under the bite and rankle of this thought, grown fearfully eager, she looked about all ways for escape. Divorce! No, no, that would bastardise her son. The strong hand, then! Let her lay hands upon the traitor to her throne and bed. There was ample proof against him; the Riccio plot had been enough by itself—but what stayed her was the question, whose hands should she set at him? Why, who was there in all Scotland at this hour who would show him any mercy, once he had him? She could not answer that; there was nobody. No. She stood—she was sure of it—between the King and his murder. ‘But for me,’ she said bitterly, ‘but for me, whom he has dipped in shame, he is a dead man.’ For a long time she stood pondering this, a bleak smile on her lips, and one finger touching her breast.

So might she remain standing; but she could not have him slain. Not though he had sought to betray her, spurned her worth, made her a mock; not though he would steal her child, tamper with her enemies, sell her for a price. All this was true, and more. She grew scarlet to admit to herself that more was true. She was his wedded wife, at his beck and call: and now she loved a Man; and love (as always) made her pure virgin. The shame of the truth flooded her with colour.—But no! She stood between the King and his murderers. If he persisted in his misdeeds, she had but to stand aside and they would kill him. Well, she could not stand aside; therefore she must coax him back to decency—by the arts of women.

Hateful necessity! And yet if you had seen her at her window as she faced it, looking askance at the green sky, you would have thought her just a love-sick girl spying for her lover: for that was her wont, to smile, and peer, and turn her pretty head; pick with her fingers at the pleats of her gown, and be most winning when at the verge of loss. And even when she had decided upon bargaining with the man she abhorred, she did not abhor the act. It would be a delicate exercise of the wits—most delicate. For observe this well, you who desire to know her: although she stood between the man and his murder, while she stood there she was absolutely at his mercy. He could do what he chose with her. Bargaining! He could drive the most terrible bargain. If she decided that he must not be killed, she must needs deal tenderly with him, and fib and cheat to save him. For she knew very well that whatever compunction she had, he would have none. In a word, she must prepare to save him alive, and pay him dearly for the hateful privilege.

Very well. These conclusions worked out, she deliberately sent word that she would see him, and he came to her (as she had foreseen) in his worst mood—the hectoring mood which knew her extremity and built upon it.

He had grown blotched, fatter in the face. His lower lip hung down; there were creases underneath his angry eyes. Excess of all sorts, but mostly of liquor, was

responsible for the thickening of what had never been fine, and made him his own parody. He still held up his head, still straddled his legs and stuck out his elbows; he still had the arrogant way with him, and still appeared a fool when he was most in danger of becoming a man. He knew that his mere neighbourhood made her sick, and what reason she had—cheapened by him as she had been, held for a thing of nought, driven to feel herself vile. Knowing all this, and resenting in her her knowledge of his degradation, he was blusterously sulky; but knowing further that she had sent for him because she was afraid of what he might do against her, he was ready to bully her. If there is one baser than he who takes heart to do wrong from his wife's tenderness, it is, I suppose, the man who grows rich upon her dishonour. There is mighty little to choose.

After a constrained greeting and uncomfortable pause, she began the struggle. Directly she touched upon the rumours, whose flying ends she had caught, he flamed out, wagging his finger at her as if she had been taken red-handed in some misdeed. Ah, if she considered that he could be taken up and cast aside, lifted, carried about like a girl's plaything, it was a thing his honour could not brook. Let her reflect upon that. He knew very well what his own position was—how near he stood to the two thrones, how his child's birth made his title stronger. He had had to think for himself what he should do—with his friends, since those who should naturally be about him chose to keep away, or could not dare be near him. He had plans, thoughts, projects; had not made up his mind: but let her take notice that he was about it. It was not to be thought that a prince of any spirit could suffer as he suffered now.

'Ah, sir,' she said here, putting up a hand, 'and think you not whether I have suffered, or whether I suffer now?'

He glared at her.

'You have friends, madam, a sufficiency—ah, a redundancy, in whose commerce I

cannot see you engage without suffering. You keep them from me—perhaps wisely. There is my lord of Moray: with him I might have a reckoning. But no! You hide him in your gown.'

'How availed my gown to David?' She was stung into this.

He squared his shoulders. 'The man paid dearly for what he had. He should have counted the cost. So should others count. Let my lord of Bothwell figure out his bill.'

'No more of that, my lord,' she cried in a rage. 'You little know what my gown hides, if not that it shelters yourself. Do you know, sir, from what I am screening you?'

'You screen me, madam! You! But I cannot suffer it. It is to abase me. I cannot suffer it. But it's all of a piece—I am shortened every way. My friends are warned off me—my father a suspect—my means of living straitened—I have no money, no credit. I, the King-Consort, the father of the Prince! Oh, fie, madam, this is a scandal and crying shame. Where are my rights—where is one of them? Where is my right to be by your side? Where are my rights of a husband?'

'They are where you put them—and as you have made them.'

He began to storm; but as she met every blast with the same words, he took another course. 'A truce,' he said, 'madam, to your taunts. These may be my last words to you, or the first of many happier speeches. The past is past and over. I have admitted the excesses of my youth and temper; you have condoned them, or so professed. Now, madam, I say this: You have sent for me—here I am. If you suffer me, I stay, and use you as a loving man his wife. But if you will not, I go; and maybe you see me not again.'

She fairly cowered at the choice. She covered her ears. 'Ah, no, no! Ah, but that is not possible!' Why, was she to break her written promise, make foul again her washen hands? She sat astare, beaten down and dumb; and the words of her vow

came up, as it were, fiery out of the floor, and smote her in the face like a hot breath.

But his courage rose at the glimpse of so much power in his hands. Not possible, said she. Ah, but he said it was essential. He looked at her, white and extended there; he felt and exulted in his strength. And then it came surging into his mind that she must be his price to stay, and that either to get her again or to lose her he would drown Scotland in blood.

There was a wild-beating pause, in the which she sat, catching at the edge of the coffer, her face turned to the window. He could see her strained throat, her short-rising breast, and knew that he could prevail. For once in his foolish life he took the straight road to what he craved; for he shook his hair back, strode directly to her, took her up and caught her round the arms. So she was all a prisoner. ‘Aha, my wood-bird, aha! Now, now I have you in a net. Not again do you escape.’ He began to kiss her face; there was no escape indeed. Abashed, overwhelmed, half-swooning, she gave up; and so made her bargain. To save him from murder she murdered her own honour. So she would put it to herself. But let us, for our part, record it in her honour.

If you will reason out his nature—which is that of the fed mule—you will find his behaviour next day in the Council of a piece with all the rest. Having been made master by her nobility, he supposed himself master by the grace of God given to man. When he marched into the Council Chamber and took her proffered hand, his pride swelled up into his eyes, and made him see thickly. Ho! now for the manly part. Here, in the midst of his enemies—before this black Moray, this dark-smiling Huntly, this lean thief Lethington—here, too, he would play the man.

Knowing him pledged to her, the Queen was gentle. ‘I beseech you, my lord,’ she said, ‘if you have any grief against me—as now I think you have not—or any cause which moves you to quit this realm (which I cannot suppose), declare it before these lords. If I have denied you any right, either of access to the prince our son, or any

other right, pray you rehearse it now.'

He would not speak out. He pursed his lips, frowned, raised his eyebrows, tapped his heel on the floor. He said that he must be advised. He did not see any of his friends here, with whom he must consult. There were many things to consider, many calls upon him—from here, from there, from elsewhere. He could not speak hastily, he said, or give pledges.

Blankly dismayed, she began: 'But, my good lord, your promise to me——' really forgetting for that moment what his promises were worth. There, however, she stopped—the words seemed to choke her.

Lethington rose and addressed him, speaking in French, and good French. This was a courtesy to the Queen, one of those trifling, terrible things which cost all Scotland dear. For the King blushed to the roots of his hair, and there was no hiding blushes upon that blond face. He tried to answer in English; but a look of comical dismay in Lethington warned him that he had blundered the sense. He broke off short—furious, hot all over, blind with mortification, and mad.

'You speak too much French for me, Mr. Secretary. My Scots, I doubt, would not be to your liking, either of phrase or deed.' His lip shook—he was nearly sobbing. 'Madam,' he cried out, 'madam, adieu. You will not see my face for many days.' He lifted that hot, passionate, boy's face. 'Gentlemen, adieu.'

Turning on his heel he walked directly from the room and pulled-to the door after him. The Queen turned faint and had to be helped. They fetched in women to see to her; and the Council broke up, with a common intelligence passed silently from man to man.

Mary Livingstone, half the night through, heard her miserable wail. 'Thrice a traitor, who has taught treachery to me! Thrice a traitor—and myself a lying woman!' She heard her talking to herself—pattering the words like a mad-woman. 'I must do it—I must do it—no sleep for me until I do it. All, all, all—nothing hid. Things shall go

as they must. But he will never believe in me again—and oh! he will be right.'

The very next day she sent for the Earl of Bothwell, who was at Hermitage; and, when it was time, awaited him in that shady garden of the Chequer House—she alone in the mirk of evening. Whenas she heard his quick tread upon the grass she shivered a little and drew her hood close about her face; so that all he could see—and that darkly—was her tall figure, the thin white wrist and the hand holding the hood about her chin. Prepared for any flight of her mind, grown so much the less ceremonious as he was the more familiar, he saluted her with exaggerated courtliness; the plumes of his hat brushed the grass as he swept them round him. She did not move or speak. He looked for her eyes, but could not see them.

'Madam, I am here. Always, in all places, at the service of my Sovereign.'

'Hush!' she said: 'not so loud. I have to speak with you upon an urgent affair. I can hardly bring myself to do it—and yet—I must.'

'Madam, I fear that you suffer. Why should you speak?'

'Because I must. You called me your Sovereign.'

'And so, madam, you are, and shall be.'

'That is why I choose to speak.' She took a long deep breath. 'The King has been here,' she said; 'has been here and is gone.'

He replied nothing, but watched her swaying outline. There would be more to come.

'I had reason to fear what he might contrive against my peace—against my crown, and my son. Many things I feared. He came here because I sent for him. And I saw him.'

No help came from the watcher. Still he could not see her face, hard as he might look for it. She drove herself to her work.

'He required of me certain assurances, otherwise, he said, he would leave the kingdom. I dared not allow him to depart, for I knew that he would work against me

in England or oversea. Moreover, leaving me, his life would be in instant danger. He did not know that; therefore what he proposed was dangerous to himself and to me. Do you understand? I feared that he would steal my son and take him to England.'

Bothwell said, 'I understand your fears.'

'Therefore,' said she, 'I urged him to remain. This he promised to do'—it was fine to see how her voice grew clear to the attack—'if I would yield him that which I had purposed never to give him again. Do you understand me now?' She almost wailed the question.

He hastened to help her. 'Yes, yes, madam. I beg you to say no more.'

But she threw back her hood, and showed him her tense white face. 'I shall say all. No man shall hinder me. He had once betrayed me and held me up to the scorn of all women, and I promised you it should never be again. Yet it was—the realm, my son, were in danger—and—oh, sir, he has betrayed me now beyond repair! He has had all of me, and now is gone I know not where—proud of his lies, laughing at my folly.' A terrible shuddering beset her—terrible to hear.

'Oh, madam,' said Lord Bothwell, 'let him laugh while he can. What else hath a fool but his laughter?'

She stretched out her hands wide, and he drew nearer.

'And for me, Bothwell? What is left for me?'

'Madam,' he said earnestly, 'all is left. All which that blasphemer was not fit to give, since he was not fit to receive. Worship is left you, service of true men.'

She grew very serious. He could see her eyes now; all black.

'Not from you, Bothwell. Never more from you, since I have lied.'

He took a step forward. 'More from me, madam (if you care to have it), than perhaps is fitting from a subject; and yet less than perhaps may be reasonable from a man.'

‘No, no,’—she shook her head,—‘I have lied. Not from you now.’

He laughed aloud. ‘Madam, beseech you see what I see. A noble lady, justly enraged, who yet can stoop to comfort her subject—who can humble herself to prove her kindness. Is that not worshipful? Is not that serviceworthy? Oh, most glorious humility! Oh, proudest pride of all! That Queen Mary should make confession to James Hepburn! Why, Heaven above us, madam, for what do you take me: a block of stone—a wooden stub? Madam, Mistress, Queen—I am beaten to your feet—I am water——’ He heard her sob, saw that she had covered her face with her hands: he ran towards her. God of Gods, what was this? ‘Have I offended your Majesty? Am I so unhappy?’

She shook her head. ‘No, no, no! I cannot talk—but I am not wretched. I am happy, I think—comforted.’

He considered her. He considered intently, every muscle at a stretch. He bit his moustache, pressing it into his teeth with his fingers—moved forward—stopped, like a hawk poised in mid-air: he nodded his head savagely, came up to her, and with gentle firmness took her by the wrists, drew her hands from her face. ‘Look now at me,’ he said.

She did not struggle to be free, but kept her face averted, strongly bent downward.

‘Look you at me.’

She shook her head. He felt her tears fall hot on his hands.

‘But now,’ he said, ‘you must do as I bid you.’

Slowly she lifted then her head and faced him, looking up. He saw the glittering tears; an honest tenderness gave honesty to his words. ‘My heart!’ he said, ‘my heart!’ and kissed her where she stood.

Then he turned and left her alone; went by her into the thicket and climbed the wall into the neighbouring garden. For a long time she stayed, with her two hands clasped

at her neck, where his had put them—for a long time, wondering and trembling and blushing in the dark.

CHAPTER XII SCOTCHMEN'S BUSINESS

When the Earl of Bothwell took off his boots that same night, he said, as he threw them to his man Paris, 'In the morning we go to business.'

'Ha, in a good hour!' says Paris, a boot in each hand. 'And to what business will your lordship be pleased to go?'

'Man's business, you fool,' says the Earl; 'carving and clearing business; road-making business.'

Paris swung a boot. 'I consider that there is no gentleman in this deplorable country so apt for that business,' he said. 'Do you ask me why? I will tell your lordship very willingly. It is because there is no other gentleman in this country at all.'

'Apt or not,' says Lord Bothwell, scratching in his beard, 'it is myself who will do it.' He stared at the floor, laughed, caught the word on his lips and kept it suspended while he considered. Then he added, 'And I signed the contract, and sealed it, but an hour ago.' He threw himself naked on his bed, and Paris covered him with his blankets.

'Happy dreams to your lordship, of the contract!'

'Go to the devil,' says my lord: 'I'm asleep.' And by the next moment he was snoring.

Paris sat upon the floor, with a guttering candle beside him, and made notches on a tally-stick. He told them over on his fingers and got them pat before he lay down.

In the morning he sat upon the edge of his master's bed—a familiarity which had long been allowed him—produced his tally, and enlarged upon it.

'Master,' he said, 'for your purpose these persons are the best, as I shall shortly rehearse to you. I have chosen each and every for some quality which is

pre-eminently useful, in which I believe him to be singular. The first is Monsieur Ker of Fawdonsyde, who, it is true, is at the moment in disgrace for his part in the Italian's affair. That can be got over, I think; and if so, well so. He has the strongest wrist in this kingdom, next to your lordship's, and will do for a spare string to our bow: for I take it yourself will be our first—not likely to fail, I grant; but one must always be prepared in these cases for a sudden jerk aside. Monsieur de Fawdonsyde may be trusted to stop that. They tell me also of him that he can see in the dark, and I can well believe it—a yellow-eyed man! Nothing could be more useful to us; for somebody is sure to blow the lights out, and in the ensuing scramble the wrong man might be hurt, and some happy household plunged into grief. Next, I certainly think that you should have home Monsieur Archibald. He—if he do no more—will be a comfortable stalking-horse. He is kinsman—he was greatly beloved by our man in the old days; and could make himself loved again, for he has a supple mind. (Not so, however, his cousin, Monsieur de Morton. He is too stiff a hater for our purpose, and could not conceal it even if he would.) Now, I will tell you one other reason in favour of Monsieur Archibald. I never knew a gentleman of birth who could feel for chain mail in a more natural and loving manner, except perhaps Milord Ruthven, unhappily deceased. His son does not take after him. But I saw Monsieur Archibald take the late David, when there was a thought of going to work upon him, round by the middle, and try his back in every part—just as though he loved the very feel of him. And yet the two were enemies! And yet David suspected nothing! It could not have been better done: so I sincerely advise you to have him. Monsieur d'Ormiston you will of course take with you. He has ears like a hare's, and so nice a valuation of his own skin that you may be sure the roads will be open for you when the affair is happily ended. But my next choice will astonish you. Be prepared—listen, my lord. It is Monsieur de Lennox! What! you cry—the father to put away the son! With great respect, I hold to my opinion. I believe Monsieur de Lennox could be persuaded—and evidently you could have no more valuable colleague—for two

little reasons of cogency. He is miserable in the ill-favour of our Queen, and he ardently desires to stand well again with the English Queen. This, then, would be his opportunity of gratifying both. And it is by no means outside experience that a father should assist at his son's demise. There was a well-known case at Parma, when we were in Italy; and if the Queen-Mother did not contrive the exit of the late King Francis, then Maître Ambroise Paré is a fool, and not a fine surgeon. Why did she have the funeral oration prepared a week before that King's death? Ah, the thing is evident! Both of these are Italians, you will say? I confess it. But if King Philip of Spain hath not an eye of the same cast upon Monseigneur Don Carlos I shall be surprised—and mark this: Monsieur de Lennox is a hungry man, out of favour and out of money. His lady, who has the purse, is in the Tower of London; he himself dare not leave Glasgow, where he starves. Moreover, he has another son. Now——'

But here the Earl of Bothwell sat up in his bed.

'What are you talking about, you fool?' he asked, gaping.

'I am discussing the making of your lordship's road,' says Paris, 'of which you did me the honour to speak overnight.'

His master gave him a clout on the head, which knocked him sideways to the floor. 'You soiled cut-purse!' he roared at him, 'you famous pirate, you jack-for-the-string, what are you about? Do you think you are at sea, that you can talk bloody designs to the open sky? Do you think us all thieves on a galley, and the redding of a realm as easy as to club the warder of a bench? Astounding fool! with your blustering and botching, you'll bring me to a wooden bolster one of these days.' He leaped from his bed, and put his foot on the man's neck. 'If I don't make you swallow your infamous tally, call me a dunce!'

Paris lay still, pale but serious. 'It is difficult to discuss matters of moment in this posture,' he said; 'but I can assure your lordship that I have given a great deal of thought to your business.'

‘And who under Heaven asked you for thought?’ cried his master. ‘Or who in Heaven gave you the wit for it? Get up, you monkey-man, and fetch me my clothes. We don’t go to work that way in Scotland.’

‘I am conscious of it, master,’ said Paris, ‘and pity it is. There is a saying in Italy, which dates from a very old case of our kind, Cosa fatta capo ha: a thing done, say they, is done with. Now here, a thing is so long a-contriving that it is in danger of not being done at all. Love of Heaven, sir! for what would you wait? What can your lordship want beside the bounden gratitude of the Qu——.’ He stopped, because the Earl struck him on the mouth with the back of his hand.

‘No names, you damned parrot!’

Paris, ashamed of himself, wiped his lips. ‘I admit the indiscretion, my lord, and regret it. But my question was pertinent.’

‘It was cursed nonsense,’ said the Earl, ‘and as impertinent as yourself. Suppose I took this road of yours—what would old Sourface be about? Where would his prim eyes be? Looking through his fingers—seeing and not seeing—for sure! Why, you toss-pot, we must have him roped and gagged, or he’ll have us roped, I can tell you—and as high as Haman. Bah! you make me ashamed that ever I held words with such a gull. Peace now, mind your business, and get me my drink. I am going abroad—then to the Council.’

The first person of consequence he accosted that day was the Lord of Lethington. The Secretary went in desperate fear of him, as you could have told by the start he gave when he felt the heavy hand clap his shoulder.

‘What scares you, man?’ The bluff voice was heard all over the quadrangle, and many paused to see the play. ‘What scares you, man? You watch me like a hare—and me your good friend and all!’

‘I hope to serve your good lordship,’ says Mr. Secretary, ‘in the service that holds us both.’

‘Yes, yes, we had best work together. Now see here, man—come apart.’ He took the unwilling arm, and bent towards the timorous ear. Men on the watch saw the Secretary’s interest grow as he listened: in the midst of their pacing he stopped of his own accord, and pulled up his companion.

‘Yes, my good lord, I could do that. There would be no harm.’

‘Let my lord of Moray understand,’ continues Lord Bothwell, ‘that signed words cannot say all that they import. That is reasonable. But such as they are, such as they bear, he himself must sign with the rest of us. I shall not act without him, nor can the Queen be served. Very well. Go to him presently, taking with you my lord of Atholl. I seek first my lord of Argyll, next my brother Huntly. We shall have the Earl of Crawfurd with us, Mar I doubt not also; the Lords Seton, Livingstone, Fleming, Herries——’

‘These for certain,’ says Lethington; then hesitated.

‘Well, man? Out wi’t.’

‘There is just this. Your lordship knows my lord of Moray—a most politic nobleman.’

‘Politic! A pest!’

‘He is ever chary of putting hand to paper. I know of one band, never signed by him. He wrote a letter, by which all thought——But it purported nothing. However, that is happily past.’

‘He signed away Davy,’ says Bothwell very calmly.

The Secretary turned quickly. ‘No, my lord, no! Upon my oath he never did. Nothing would make him.’

Bothwell considered his twitching brows. ‘He signed the letter which you now have, Lethington. By that you hold him, cunning rogue though he be. Now, take me this way. If he signs not to me before the Council, to the effect that what I sign there he

signs also, I move no further.'

'Your lordship will be wise. But——Oh, his fingers are stiff at the pen!'

'Master Cecil in England can make them supple,' says Bothwell, 'working at them through the palm. And so can you, my friend, if I make you.'

Mr. Secretary closed his eyes.

'You hold his letter,' Bothwell went on, 'wherein he implicates himself in Davy's killing. Now, if I go to him with the news?'

'Ha, my lord! But he knows very well that I have it.'

'Of course he knows. But the Queen does not know it.[5] Now, if I tell him that you will use the letter against him with the Queen, Mr. Secretary, you will be hanged.'

The Secretary flinched. 'My lord,' he said, 'what is it that you want from me?'

'Your master's sign-manual, hireling,' says Bothwell. 'Go and get it.'

He left him to scheme it out, of all wretches in Scotland at that hour the one I could pity the most. Lethington was a man who saw every head an empty pot compared with his own; and yet, by mere pusillanimity, he had to empty himself to fill them. He was a coward, must have countenance if he were to have courage. With a brain like his, a man might lord it over half Europe; yet the water in his heart made him bond-slave of every old Scots thief in turn. The only two he dared to best and betray were——Well! we shall have to see him do it soon enough. And yet, I say, pity Mr. Secretary!

The Earl of Atholl, kindly, dull man, who was his friend through all, went with him now to beard the Bastard of Scotland. Bolt upright in his elbow-chair, his Bible on one hand, his sword and gloves on the other, my lord of Moray listened to what was said without movement. His face was a mask, his hands placid, his eyes fixed on the standish. Atholl talked, Lethington talked, but not a word was said of Bothwell so long as the first of these two was in the room. The moment he was out of it, the

question came sharp and short.

‘Who stands in the dark of this, Lethington? Who is at your back?’

Lethington never lied to his master. ‘My lord, it was the Earl of Bothwell came suddenly upon me this morning.’

‘You surprise me, sir. I had not thought you shared confidences with that lord.’

‘Nor have I ever, my lord,’ says Lethington, with much truth; ‘nor did I to-day. Such confidence as there was came from him.’

‘Did he confide in you indeed? And what had he for your ear?’

The Secretary narrowed his eyes. ‘Matters, my lord, of such intimacy that I still marvel how they came to his knowledge.’

‘I do not share your wonder. He is greatly trusted by the Queen.’

‘True, my lord. But such things as he knoweth are not, as I conjecture, fully known to her Majesty.’

Now it was that the Earl of Moray looked solemnly at his servant. ‘You shall name these things to me, Lethington, if you please.’

‘He knoweth, my lord, for certain, the names of all who were privy to the bond for Davy’s slaughter.’

‘Why, yes, yes,’ says Lord Moray, ‘no doubt but he does. For all of them were confessed to by the King, who, indeed, showed her Majesty the bond.’

Mr. Secretary looked out of window. ‘I said, All who were privy, my lord. I did not refer to the bond. He knows more than is known to her Majesty; but considers now what may be his duty in her regard.’

My Lord Moray blinked like an owl that fears the light. He looked at his hands, sighed, cleared his brow of seams. ‘It would be well that I should confer with his lordship upon that matter, before the Council sits,’ he said. ‘Pray you, ask him to favour me at his leisure—at his perfect leisure, Lethington. And when he is here—if

he thinks well to come—it would be convenient that yourself were by, in case of need. The matter is a high one, and we may be thankful of your experience. God speed you, Lethington. God speed you well!'

Conference there then was between two acute intellects, which it would be profitable to report, if one could translate it. But, where, in a conversation, every other word is left out, the record must needs be tedious. The Queen was not once mentioned, nor the King neither. The Earl of Bothwell gave no hint that he knew his fellow-councillor dipped deep in murder; the Earl of Moray did not let it appear that he knew the other stripping for the same red bath. Each understood each; each was necessary to the other; each knew how far he could go with his ally, and where their roads must fork; above all, both were statesmen in conference, to whom decency of debate was a tradition. Naming no names, fixing no prices, they haggled, nevertheless, as acutely as old wives on the quayside; and Mr. Secretary, nimble between them, reduced into writing the incomprehensible. Thus it was that the Earl of Bothwell promised under his hand to be the friend of the Earl of Moray, 'so far as lay within the Queen's obedience'; the Earl of Moray signified by the same tokens that he would attend the Council and further the Queen's service in the matters to be moved by the Earl of Bothwell, 'so far as lay within the province of a Christian.' Then Lord Bothwell, apparently satisfied, went away to his friend and brother-in-law, my Lord Huntly.

To the Council—it was the seventh of October—came the lords: the Queen not present. It was a short and curious convocation, as silent as that of Hamlet's politic worms, busy upon the affairs of Polonius. The Earl of Huntly, as Chancellor, produced a parchment writing, which was held up, but not read. 'My lords,' he said, 'you shall see in the act of my hand at the pen a service tendered to our sovereign lady, the which, seeing you are acquainted with its nature, I do not discuss with your lordships. Active service of the prince, my lords, may be of two kinds: open movement against enemies avowed, and secret defence against a masked, ambushed

enemy.' He signed the writing, and passed to the Earl of Moray. This one looked at it, read it through twice; took a pen, inspected the point, dipped; detected a hair in the quill, removed it, wiped his fingers, dipped again—and signed, 'James.' The parchment then went briskly about. Last to sign it, far below the others, was the Lord of Lethington.

And what was in this famous bond? The Master of Sempill, eager for news, got wind of it, and enshrined it in his Diurnall. He has—

October the 9.—At a council two days since—the Q—— not present, but the Earl of Both. returned from the country—I hear from my wife, who had it from her father (there present), there was a band passed round the board, read silently and signed by each lord present. Its terms: That the Q—— only should be obeyed as natural sovereign, and the authority of her dearest consort, and of all others whomsoever, of no force without her pleasure first known. The Lords Both., Hun(tley), Mor(ay), Arg(yll), Atholl, and the Secretary signed this, among others. My father not present. Thus goeth a King out of Scotland. Mem. Great news for my lord of Mort(on) here....

The Q. will go to Jedburgh, I hear, to a Justice Court; my wife with her. She took leave of the lord of Bothw. after the Council. A long time together....

The Master was out in his dates. The very night after the Council Lord Bothwell rode fast into Liddesdale; and next day the Queen, with her brothers, Lord Huntly, and the Court, went over the hills to Jedburgh. The King was believed to be in the West with his father, but no one knew for certain where he was.

[5] My lord was wrong there. She knew it perfectly well.

END OF MEN'S BUSINESS

BOOK THE THIRD MARKET OF WOMEN

CHAPTER I STORMY OPENING

It is rather better than five years since you first met with Des-Essars in the sunny garden at Nancy, and as yet I have but dipped into the curious little furtive book which, for my own part, although its authenticity has been disputed, I attribute to him without hesitation—Le Secret des Secrets, as it is called. For such neglect as this may be I have the first-rate excuse that it contains nothing to what has been my purpose; all that there is of it, prior to the October 1566 where now we are, seeming to have been added by way of prologue to the Revealed Mysteries he thought himself inspired to declare. Probably, no secrets had, so far, come in his way, or none worth speaking of. 'Boys' secrets,' as he says somewhere, 'are truly but a mode of communicating news, which when it is particularly urgent to be spread, is called a secret. The term ensures that it will be listened to with attention and repeated instantly.' You may gather, therefore, that Le Secret des Secrets was not of this order, more especially since he tells us himself that it would never have been imparted at all but for the Queen's, his mistress's, danger. Plainly, then, he compiled his book in Queen Mary's extreme hour of need, when her neck was beneath her 'good Sister's' heel—and only in the hope of withdrawing it. Those were hasty times for all who loved the poor lady; the Secret des Secrets bears signs of haste. Its author scamped his prologue, took his title for granted, and plunged off into the turmoil of his matter like the swimmer who goes to save life. But you and I, who know something about him by this time, have intelligence enough to determine whether he was worthy, or likely to be judged worthy, of the keeping of a Queen's heart. So much only I have thought fit to declare concerning the origin of a curious little book: for curious it is, partly in the facts it contains, and even more in the facts it seems to search for—facts of mental process, as I may call them.

He begins in this manner:—

'About ten of the clock on the night of the 6th-7th October'—that is, the reader sees,

on the night when Bothwell kissed her in the Chequer Garden—'the Queen's Majesty, who had been supposed alone, meditating in the garden, came stilly into the house, passed the hall, up the stair, and through the anteroom where I, Mr. Erskine, Mistress Seton and Mistress Fleming were playing at trumps; and on to her cabinet without word said by any one of us. We stood up as she came in, but none spake, for her looks and motions forbade it. She walked evenly and quickly, in a rapt state of the soul, her head bent and hands clasped together under her chin, just as a priest will go, carrying the Sacrament to the bedridden or dying. But presently, after she was gone, Mistress Fleming went to see whether she had need of anything; and returned, saying that her Majesty had been made ready for bed and lain down in it, without word, without prayers. Shortly afterwards the ladies went to their beds, and I sat alone in the antechamber on my duty of the night; and so sitting fell asleep with my face in my arm.

'I suppose that it was midnight or thereabout when I was awakened by a touch on my head, and starting up, saw the Queen in her bedgown, her hair all loose about her, standing above me. Being unable to sleep, she said, she desired company. I asked her, should I read, sing, or tell her a tale? But she, still smiling, being, as I thought, in a rapt condition of trance, shook her head. "If you were to read I should not listen, if you were to sing the household would wake. Stay as you are," said she, and began to walk about the chamber and to speak of a variety of matters, but not at all connectedly. I replied as best I was able, which was heavily and without wit—for I had been sound asleep a few moments before. Something was presently said of my lord of Bothwell: I think that she led the talk towards him. I said, I marvelled he should stay so long in Liddesdale, with the Court here in town. She stopped her pacing and crossed her arms at her neck, as I had seen her do when she came in from the garden. Looking closely and strangely at me, she said, "He is not in Liddesdale. He is here. I have seen him this night." Then, as I wondered, she sat down by the table, her face shaded from the candle by her hand, and regarded me for some time

without speaking.

‘She then said that, although it might seem very extraordinary to me, she had good reason for what she was about to do; that for the present I must believe that, and be sure that she would not impart to me her greatest secret had she not proved me worthy of the trust. She then told me, without any more preface, that she should be called the happiest of women, in that, being beloved, she loved truly again. She said that she had been consecrated a lover that very night by a pledge not only sweet in itself, but sweet as the assurance of all sweetness. She touched her mouth; and “Yes,” she said, “all unworthy as I am, this great treasure hath been bestowed into my keeping. See henceforward in me, most faithful, proved friend, not your mistress so much as your sister, a servant even as you are, devoted to the greatest service a woman can take upon her—subjection, namely, to Love, that puissant and terrible lord.”

‘While I wondered still more greatly, she grew largely eloquent. Her soul, she said, was in two certain hands “like a caught bird”; but such bondage was true freedom to the generous heart, being liberty to give. She owned that she was telling me things known to no others but herself and her beloved. “I am your sister and fellow-servant,” said she, “whispering secrets in the dark. Marvel not at it; for women are so made that if they cannot confide in one or another they must die of the burning knowledge they have; and I, alas, am so placed that, with women all about me, and loving women, there is none, no, not one, in whom I can trust.”

‘I knew already who her lover was, and could not but agree with her in what she had to admit of her women. One and all they were against my lord of Bothwell. Mistress Livingstone hated him so vehemently she could not trust herself near him; Mistress Fleming was at the discretion of Mr. Secretary Lethington, a declared enemy of his lordship’s; Mistress Beaton was wife to a man who did not deny that he was still the servant of Lady Bothwell; in Mistress Seton my mistress never had confided. So she

had some reasons for what she was pleased to do—another being that I, of all her servants, had been most familiar with his lordship—and I was certain that she had others, not yet declared. Indeed, she hinted as much when she said that she had proved me upon a late occasion, that she loved me, and knew of my love for her. “In time to come,” said she—“I cannot tell how soon or in what sort, such matters being out of my hands—I may have to ask you other service than this of listening to my confidence; I may require of you to dare great deeds, and to do them. If you will be my sworn brother, I shall see in you my champion-at-need, and be the happier for the knowledge. What say you, then, Baptist?” she asked me.

‘Kneeling before her, I promised that I would keep her secret and do all her pleasure. I watched her throughout. She was quite composed, entirely serious, did not seem to imagine that she was playing a love-sick game—and was not, altogether. I am sure of that, watching her as I did. She made me lift my right hand up, and stooped forward and kissed the open palm before she went away. Here is the beginning of Mysteries, which I, unworthy servant, was privileged to share.’

I am not, myself, prepared to say that there is more mystery in this than the young man put into the telling of it. She trusted the youth, required an outlet, and made, in the circumstances, the wisest choice.

Two days after the performance, at any rate, she set out for Jedburgh, as you know, in a fine bold humour and with a fine company. She went in state and wore her state manners; rode for the most part between her brother Moray and the Earl of Huntly, seemed to avoid her women, and had little to say to them when of necessity they were with her. She did her bravest to be discreet, and there is no reason to suppose that anybody about her had more than an inkling of the true state of her heart. Lord Bothwell’s leave-taking had been done in public the day before, and gallantly done. He had been at the pains to tell her that he was going to his wife, she to smile as she commended him for his honest errand. She had given him her hand and wished him

well, and had not even followed him with her looks to the door. The Earl of Moray, not an observant man by nature, suspected nothing; what Lord Huntly may have guessed he kept to himself. This poor speechless, enamoured nobleman! his trouble was that he kept everything to himself and congested his heart as well as his head-piece. So much so that the Queen once confessed to Adam Gordon, his brother, that she had 'forgotten he was a lover of hers'! She spent the first night out at Borthwick, and next morning rode on to Jedburgh in madcap spirits—which were destined to be rudely checked by what she met there. A slap in the face, sharp enough to stop the breath, it was: news with which the town was humming. It seemed that the Earl of Bothwell had fought in the hills with Elliot of Park, had slain his man, and been slain of him.

My Lord Moray was the first to bear her this tale; and when he told it—just as nakedly as I have put it up there—she turned upon him a tense, malignant face, and said that he lied. 'Madam, I grieve,' says he—'my lord of Bothwell lies dead in Liddesdale.' 'O liar, you lie!' she said, 'or God lives not and reigns.' Many persons heard her, and saw the proud man flinch; and then Des-Essars, young Gordon, and Lethington all broke into the room together, each with his version gathered out of gossip. My lord was not killed, as had been feared at first, but sorely wounded, lying at Hermitage, three doctors about him, and despaired of. 'One doctor! one doctor!' cried Adam, correcting Lethington.

'I waited by him,' says Des-Essars, 'and then, while she looked wildly from one face to another, I said that it was true there was but one doctor, and that the case was none so desperate. She flew at me. "How do you know this? How do you know it?" I replied that I had just got the tale from French Paris. I think she would have fallen if I had not put my hands out, which made her draw back in time. "French Paris!" cried she; "why, then, my lord has sent word. Fly, fly, fly, Baptist: bring him to me." This I did, to the great discomfiture of one, at least, in her company.'

Thus Des-Essars turns his honours to account.

She saw the valet alone, and sent him away with his pockets lined: afterwards her spirits rose so high that had Moray noticed nothing he must have been the most careless of men. She made inordinately much of Des-Essars, fondling him in all men's sight; she gave him a gold chain to hang round his neck, and said, in her brother's presence, that she would belt him an earl when he was older; 'for thus should the prince reward faithful service and the spoken truth.' He affected not to have heard her—but it was idle to talk of secrets after that. Here was a rent in the bag big enough for the cat's head.

And it would appear that she herself was aware of it, for after a couple of days, just enough time for the necessary ceremonial business of her coming, she gave out publicly her intention to ride into Liddesdale, and her pleasure that Moray, Huntly, and the Secretary should accompany her. Others would she none, save grooms and a few archers. My Lord Moray bowed his head in sign of obedience, but spoke his thoughts to no man. He kept himself aloof from the Court as much as he could, in a house of his own, received his suitors and friends there at all hours, maintained considerable state—more grooms at his doors than at the Queen's. Some thought he was entrenching himself against the day when his place might be required of him; some thought that day not far off. All were baffled by the Queen's choice of him and his acquiescence.

Betimes in a morning which broke with gales and wild fits of weeping from the sky, she set out, going by Bedrule, Hobkirk, and the shoulder of Windburgh Hill. Nothing recked she, singing her snatches of French songs, whether it blew or rained; and the weather had so little mercy on her that she was wetted through before she had won to Stitchell—the most southerly spur of a great clump of land from which, on a fair day, you can look down upon all Liddesdale and the Vale of Hermitage. There, on that windy edge, in a driving rain which blew her hair to cling about and

sheathe her face like jagged bronze, she stayed, and peered down through the mist to see her trysting-place. But a dense shower blotted out the valleys; and the castle of the Hermitage lies low, scowling in shade be the sun never so high. Undaunted still, although she saw nothing but the storm drowning the lowlands, it added to her zest that what she sought so ardently lay down there in mystery. Singing, shaking her head—all her colours up for this day of hide-and-seek—fine carmine, gleaming nut-brown eyes, scarlet lips parted to show her white teeth—she looked a bacchante drunk upon fierce draughts of weather, a creature of the secret places of the earth, stung by some sly god. The bit in her teeth, fretting, shaking her head—who now should rein her up? Two out of the three men with her watched her closely as she stood on Stitchell, resolving this doubt; the third, who was Huntly, would not look at her. Primly pried my lord of Moray out of the corners of his eyes, and pursed his lips and ruled his back more than common stiff. But gloomily looked Mr. Secretary, as he chewed a sour root: he felt himself too old for such a headlong service as hers must be, and too weary of schemes to work with Moray against her. Yet he must choose—he knew it well. Finely he could read within the chill outlines of that Master of his destiny all the sombre exhilaration which he was so careful to hide. 'He hath set his lures, this dark fowler; he hath his hand upon the cords. The silly partridge wantons in the furrow: nearly he hath his great desire. But what to me are he and his desires, O my God, what are they to me?' He thought of Mary Fleming now at her prayers, thanking her Saviour for the glory of his love. His love—Lethington's love! Lord, Lord, if he dared to mingle in so fragrant a pasture as hers, what should he do raking in the midden with an Earl of Moray? Overdriven, fragile, self-wounding wretch—pity this Lethington.

It is true that Lord Moray saw the partridge in the shadow of the net; it is true that he was elated in his decent Scots way; but you would have needed the trained eyesight of Lethington to detect the quiver of the nerves. The Queen broke in upon all reflections, coming towards them at a canter: 'Set on, sirs, set on! The hours grow

late, and we cannot see our haven. Come with me, brother; come, my Lord Huntly.' Down into the racing mists they went, squelching through quag and moss.

Hermitage made the best show it could in the Sovereign's honour. Every horse in the country was saddled and manned by some shag-haired Hepburn or another. Where Hermitage Water joins Liddel they met her in a troop, which broke at her advance and lined the way.

No pleasant sight, this, for my lord of Moray. 'The Hepburns!' cried he, when he saw them. 'Caution, madam, caution here. What and if they compass a treachery?'

'La-la-la,' says the Queen. 'Methinks, I should know a traitor when I see him. Come, my lord, come with me.' But when he would not, she struck her horse on the flank, and Huntly spurred to follow her close. Cantering freely into the midst, she held out her hand, saying, 'Sirs, you are well met. Am I well come?'

They closed about her, howling their loyalty, and some leaned over the saddle-peak to catch at her skirt to kiss it. She made them free of her hand, let them jostle and mumble over that; they fought each other for a touch of it, struck out at horses' heads to fend them off while they spurred on their own; they battled, cursed, and howled—for all the world like schoolboys at a cake. To Moray's eyes she was lost, swallowed up in this horde of cattle-thieves; for he saw the whole party now in motion, jingling and bickering into the white mist. He lifted up a protestant hand. 'Oh, Mr. Secretar, oh, sir, what cantrips are these?'

'She is the Scythian Diana,' says Lethington, grinning awry, 'and these are her true believers. We are dullards not to have known it.'

'She is Diana of the Ephesians, I largely gather,' his master replied. 'Come, come, we must follow to the end.' For his own part, he judged the end not far.

Her dripping skirts so clung about her—to say nothing that she was rigid with stiffness and shot all over with rheumatic pains—she had to be helped from the saddle and supported by force into the house. A bound victim of love, tied by the

knees! upon Huntly's arm and Ormiston's she shuffled into the hall, and stood in the midst, boldly claiming hospitable entreaty. It was sorry to see her eager spirit hobbled to a body so numbed. As from the trap some bright-eyed creature of the wood looks out, so she, swaying there on two men's arms, testified her incurable hope by colour and quick breath. But calm and cold, as the moon that rides above a winter night, stood the Countess of Bothwell with her women, and stately curtsied.

The Queen laughed as she swayed. 'I am a mermaid, my child,' says she, 'sadly encumbered by my weeds. I have lost my golden comb, and my witching song is gone in a croak. You need not fear to take me in.'

The young Countess said, 'Suffer me conduct your Majesty to the chambers. All the household stuff is at your service.'

She shook her head. 'Witchcraft may come back with comfort! No, no, my dear, I will not plunder you. I shall do very well as I am.' Madness! She was on pin-points till she saw her lover; but it was not that which made her refuse warmth and dry clothes. It was a word of her own, which had turned aside as she used it and given her a stab. Would she not 'plunder' this lady, good lack? She had a scruple, you perceive.

Tongue-tied Huntly was in great distress. 'I would heartily urge you, madam——' and so forth; and his sister made the cold addition that all was prepared.

The Queen was now trembling. 'You are kind—but I have no need. I am very well, and cannot stay long. Let me fulfil my errand—see my wounded councillor—and depart. Come, take me to him now. Will you do me this kindness?' She spoke like a child, with eagerness too simple to be indecent.

'I will prepare my lord, madam, for the high honour you propose him,' says the Countess, after a moment's pause.

'Yes, yes—go now.'

She went to the fire and held her shaking hands towards it. Do what she could, there

was no staying the shivering-fits, nor the clouds of steam that came from her, nor the ring of water round her skirts.

Huntly was miserable. ‘I beseech you, I beseech you, madam, dry yourself. This is——Oh, but you run into grave peril. I would that I could make you believe that all this house is yours, and all hearts in it——’

‘All hearts—all hearts—it may be,’ she said with a break in her voice; ‘but some there are here with no hearts. Ah, what heart is in a body that would not find some pity for me?’

He was dreadfully moved, leaned ardently towards her. ‘Madam! madam! You know my heart—I have never hid it from you. You talk of pity. Why, is not the piteous heart acquaint with pitifulness? Ah, then pity me! Let me serve you.’

Then her ague ceased, and she looked at him full, with brimming eyes. ‘Take me up to him, Huntly. I cannot bear myself.’

The fine colour flushed him. ‘Come, madam; I will take you.’

She followed him up the stair—and the Earl of Moray’s eyes followed her.

Here is one difference between imagination and fancy, that the first will leap full-fledged into the life of the upper air from the egg of its beginning, while the second crouches long callow in the nest, and must be fostered into plumage before it can take its pretty flights. Here, of these two who had been separate for a week, she had flown far beyond the man’s wayfaring, and stood upon a height which he could scarcely hope to see. To keep touch with her might call for all his wit. For what had actually passed between them but a couple of snatched kisses in the dark? No more, upon his honour, to his sense. For though he had built upon them a fine castle—with the bricks of Spain—he would have been the first to own himself a fool for so doing. But she! Not only had she reared a fair solid house of chambers and courts, but she had lived with him in it, a secret life. Here she had had him safe since the hour he left her in the garden. In her thought he was bound to her, she to him, by sacraments;

they were, like all lovers, of eternal eld. No beginning and no end will love own up to. It is necessary to remember this.

Therefore, while he made an effort to get up from the bed on which he lay strapped, she had prevented him by running forward and kneeling lover-wise by his side. As she had hoped, she was now lower than he, nearer the floor; thence she had looked searchingly in his face, but said nothing, too full of love, too bashful to begin. The Countess stood at the bed-head, her brother Huntly drooped at the foot. The Queen had no eyes for them.

‘Speak to me of your welfare—assure me. I have been in great grief.’

To this he could only stammer some words of thanks, not perceiving yet by any means on what side to take her. But she would have none of his thanks.

‘You must speak to me, for I have dreamed deeply of this hour. Ah, how they have stricken you!’ She touched his bandages, lingering about that one upon his head as if she could not leave it alone. ‘Oh, curious knife, to search so deep! Oh, greedy Park, to take so much! But I think I should have taken more—had I been wiser.’

‘Rise, madam, rise,’ he said, ‘or I must rise. I may not see you kneeling.’

She laughed. ‘I shall tell you my wicked thought when I knew that I should see you lying here,’ she said, ‘and then you will not grudge me my knees. No, but you shall shrive me again as once before you did—if you are merciful to poor women.’

As it was evident that she disregarded and would disregard any company in the room, Huntly began to speak, with a good deal of dignity. ‘Madam, by your leave——’

She looked about, and saw him ready to quit her. ‘Yes, yes,’ she said, ‘do what you will’; and turned to her absorbing service.

‘Come, sister,’ says Huntly, and beckoned out the Countess, who swiftly followed him. He shut the chamber door.

The Countess had great self-command. ‘Will you tell me what this means, Huntly?’

He looked at her, knitting his black brows. ‘I think you know very well, sister.’

As she was walking away from him to her own chamber, he called her back. She had her hand on the latch. ‘Well?’ she said, ‘what more?’

‘This much,’ said he. ‘You see how it is now with those two. What you purpose to do in the likely flow of affairs I know not; but I know my own part. I cannot forget that I stand debtor to her for my honour, my mere life, and all my hope in the world. She has suffered, been very friendless, forsaken oft, betrayed on all hands—mine among them. She may suffer yet more; but not again by me, nor I hope by any of my kin. She will be forsaken again; but I will never forsake her now. She will need friends in time to come: well, she may reckon upon one. Long ago I prayed her to trust Gordon, and at the time she had little cause to do it. Now you shall see her answer my desire—and not in vain. So much, for all that she hath forgiven in me, and for all that she hath redeemed for me—so much, I tell you, I owe her.’

The Countess returned his gaze with no less steadfastness, from under brows no less serried. ‘And I,’ she said, ‘a Gordon as much as you are, do owe her more than you choose to acknowledge for your part.’

She went into her chamber; but Huntly remained in the gallery outside the shut doors.

CHAPTER II THE BRAINSICK SONATA

Asked afterwards by his brother-in-law Argyll how he had survived that long battle homewards through the howling dark, the Earl of Moray, citing scripture, had replied, Except the Lord had been on our side—! How far he strained the text, or how far hoped of it, he did not choose to say, but in his private mind he thought he saw all the fruit ready to fall to his hand whenever he should hold it out. No need to shake the tree. The Queen’s white palfrey made a false step and went girth-deep into

the moss. None could see her, for she had spurred on alone into the jaws of the weather, feeling already (it may be) the fret of the fever in her bones which afterwards overcame her; nor could any hear her, for she let no cry. And when the horse, struggling desperately, hinnied his alarms, it had not been Lord Moray who had hastened to save. Huntly, rather, it was who, shrieking her name into the wind, caught at last the faint echo of her voice, and plunged into the clinging, spongy mess to her rescue. Alas, then, was she mad? or drunk with love? 'Here I am, Mary of Scotland, clogged and trammelled, like a bird in a net.' And then, O Lord of Life! she had laughed snugly and stroked herself—there in the gulf of death. Huntly, a man for omens, dated all misery to come from this staring moment.

After it he would not let go of her rein for the rest of the ride, but braved (as never before) her coaxing, irony, rage—lastly her tears of mortification. Longing to be alone with her lover, hating the very shadow of any other man, she was scathing and unworthy. 'If Bothwell were here you would not dare what now you do. You hold me because there is no man to stop you. It is a brave show you make of me here! Well, take your joy of numb flesh—how are you likely to be served with it quick?' and so on mercilessly. Towards the end of an intolerable journey she became drowsy through fatigue, and rather light-headed. The honest gentleman put his arm round her and induced her head to his shoulder. She yawned incessantly, her wits wandered; she spoke to him as if he were Bothwell, and set his cheeks burning. For a few minutes at a time, now and again, she slept, while he supported her as best he could, all his reverent love for the exquisite, flashing, crowned creature of his memories swallowed up now in pity for the draggled huntress in her need.

She was too tired to sleep when, late at night, they had laid her abed. She tossed, threw her head and arms about, was hot, was cold, shivered, sweated, wailed to herself, chattered, sang, whined nonsense. At first the women, having her to themselves, learned all that she had been careful to hide from them; all that Huntly had shut within the chamber door at Hermitage was enacted before them—or a kind

of limping, tragic travesty of it. So then they grew frightened, and lost their heads: Mary Livingstone sent after Lord Moray; Mary Fleming called in Lethington; Mary Seton, with presence of mind, fetched Des-Essars. Before a keen audience, then, she harped monotonously and grotesquely upon the day's doings. She read scraps of her poems to Bothwell—and few had known that she had writ any! She wooed him to stoop down his head, wreathed her arms about a phantom of him, tortured and reproached herself. All was done with that straining effort to rehearse which never fails in sickbed delirium.

'Ah, wait—wait before you judge me, my lord. I have a better piece yet—with more of my heart's blood in the words. Now, now, how does it go?' She began to cry and wring her hands. 'Oh, give me my coffer before he leaves me! This one piece he must have. I wept when I wrote it—let him see the stain.' She was running still upon her poems. Fleming was to give her the little coffer, of which the key was always round her neck.

Lord Moray was earnest that it should be given her, but would not let it be seen how earnest. 'Maybe it will soothe her to have the coffer. Give it her, mistress,' he said.

Des-Essars, seeing his drift, was against it, but of course could do nothing.

They gave the box into her wandering hands, and she was quiet for a while, nursing it in her arms; neither seeking to open it nor trying her memory without it. It was to be hoped, even now, that she would betray herself no further.

What need to deny that Lord Moray was curious? He shook with curiosity. The thing was of the utmost moment; and it commands my admiration of this patient man to know that he could be patient still, and sit by his sick sister's bed, his head on his hand—and all his hopes and schemes trembling to be confirmed by a little gimcrack gilt box. The prize he fought for he got—betraying nothing, he heard her betray all. When the madness wrought in her again, she opened the coffer, and began to patter her verses as she hunted in it, turning paper after paper (every scrap

her condemnation), incapable of reading any.

Her mind seemed full of words. They came over her in clouds, flocking about her—clambering, winged creatures, like the pigeons which crowd and flicker round one who calls them down. They formed themselves in phrases, in staves, in verses—laboriously drilled to them, no doubt—once coherent, but now torn from their sequence, and, like sections of a broken battle-line, absolutely, not relatively whole. Simple verse it was, untrained, ill-measured; yet with a hurt note in it, a cry, a whimper of love, infinitely touching to read now—but to have heard it then from the dry lips, to have had it come moaning from the blind, breathless, insatiable girl! Des-Essars says that he could scarcely endure it.

‘Las!’ one snatch began—

Las! n’est-il pas ja en possession

Du corps, du cœur qui ne refuse paine,

Ny dishonneur, en la vie incertaine,

Offense de parents, ni pire affliction?

What a hearing for my Lord Moray! And again she broke out falteringly—

Entre ses mains et en son plein pouvoir

Je metz mon filz, mon honneur et ma vie,

Mon pais, mes subjects, mon âme assubjectie

Est tout à luy, et n’ay autre vaulloir

Pour mon object que sans le decevoir

Suivre je veux malgré toute l’envoie

Qu’issir en peult....

Her voice broke here, and with it the thread: she could not continue, but looked from one to another, tears streaming down her cheeks, nodded her head at them, and ‘You

know, you know,' she whimpered, 'this is the very truth.' Alas! they could not doubt it.

And then, suddenly, as it were at the parting of a cloud, her soul looked out of her eyes sanely; she came to herself, saw the disturbed faces of her friends, and caught sight of her brother's among them. She jumped about as quickly as a caught child, and that lightning, sentinel wit of hers sprang upon guard. But for a moment—when she saw Moray there—she betrayed herself. 'Oh, brother, you startled me!' she said.

He was careful. 'Alas! I find you in grief, madam.'

'Thoughts, brother, thoughts!'

'Sad thoughts, I fear, madam. We are concerned to find your Majesty so disturbed.'

She eyed him vaguely, being unable just then to realise how completely she had yielded him her secret. Extreme fatigue swam over her; her head nodded even as she watched him. When Mary Livingstone laid her down gently and stroked her hair back she drowsed into a swooning sleep. Over her unconscious form a hasty little drama was enacting, very curious.

The Earl of Moray, seeing her hold relaxed, rose quietly from his chair and stretched one of his hands towards the gilt coffer. Des-Essars, in a flash of thought, nudged Huntly. 'Quick,' he whispered—'take the coffer'; and Huntly whipped his arm out and reached it first. Moray drew back, as a cat his paw from a wetness, and shuddered slightly. Huntly says, in a low voice: 'Monsieur Des-Essars, I give this casket in your charge until her Majesty shall give direction. It is open. Come with me and I will seal it.'

Moray was not the man to forgive such a thing in the Queen's page; nor did he ever.

She was awake and fully conscious for a few hours of the next day. Father Lesley, an old friend, was allowed to see her, and needed not the evidence of physic, ticks of the pulse, heat of the blood: he could use his senses.

He warned her of her extremity. This was a grave matter, graver than she might suppose. Her eyes turned upon him, black and serious; but then, after a little, she smiled up saucily in his face. ‘Why, I hope,’ she said, ‘there is no need to fear death—if death it be. I am sure my friends will plead kindly for me, and as for my enemies, what can they say worse than they have said?’

‘The Christian, ma’am,’ says Lesley, ‘has no concern with friend or foe at such a time. The road he must travel, he will have no arm to bear upon, save the proffered arm of the Cross.’

‘True,’ she said. ‘I hope I shall die a Christian, as I have tried to live.’

Her mind must have been preternaturally sharp, for a chance word of the admonition which he thought good to deliver set it to work. ‘Likewise it behoveth the Christian, madam—so strict an account is required of the highly favoured—to repent him of the mischances of sleep and dreams. Unlawful, luxurious dreaming, the mutterings of sinful words when our bodies lie bound in slumber are stumbling-blocks to the soul agog to meet his Saviour at the gate.’

He rambled on and on, the godly ignoramus, the while her wits flew far. Mutterings of dreams—had she betrayed herself? Then—to whom? It behoved her to be certain. She bundled out the priest and had in the confidant. From Des-Essars she learned the extent of her delirium; he brought her the casket, unlocked, sealed by the Chancellor, from which, he told her, she had read ‘certain sonnets.’ Love-laden lady! she stopped him here, laughing as she fingered her coffer, lifting and snapping-to the lid. ‘My sonnets? They are here, many and many. I shall read them to him some day. And to you some. Shall I——?’

Positively, she was about to begin, but he implored her to lock up the box of mischief and secrete it somewhere.

‘Guard it for me, my dear,’ she said. ‘What else have I done in my fever?’

He told her, many hidden matters had been disclosed, as well of the King as of

others. It was not for him to say that nothing was left unrevealed; only that he knew of nothing. She had spoken, for instance, of a token, and had pointed to where it lay. Her eyes sparkled as she flashed out her hand from under the bedclothes, holding forth a ring upon a chain. 'Here it is! He gave it me himself, and fastened it upon me with a kiss.'

'Ha!' He was frightened. 'Let me keep it safe for you, madam, until——'

'Safe? Will they cut it from my body, think you? Never, never. You shall watch over my casket, but this is a part of me.'

He makes free to comment upon this episode. 'And I confess,' he says, 'that I exulted in her constant noble courage, and found nothing amiss in it, that she had stooped from her high estate. Rather I held it matter for praise and excitation of the thought and sense. For, properly viewed, there is nothing of beauty more divine than holy humility, nor hath there ever been since once the Lord of Glory and Might bowed His sacred head.'

But when she would have had him devise with her fresh methods of concealment, dust-throwing, head-burying, and the like, he told her fairly that it was too late.

'I am bold to assure your Majesty that there is no man nor woman about this Court that wots not throughly of your Majesty's private affairs. And, madam, if Dolet, if Carwood, if Mistress Fleming and Mistress Seton talk to each other of them over the hearth, what think you can be hidden from my lord of Moray—to say not that he hath been constant at your bedside, and hath heard you cry verses?'

Pondering these fateful truths, suddenly she tired of shifts. 'Well, then, come what may of it,' she cried out, 'let them whisper their fill. I have done with whispering.'

She said that she wished to sleep—had the maids in and composed herself to that end. About midnight she awoke terribly in pain; shivering, crying aloud that her hour was come, unable to turn. The doctors were called to her, all the house was broad awake. She began after a time to vomit blood, and so continued for a night, a

day and a night, shaken to pieces and at her last gasp.

Under this new agony she weakened so fast that the crying aloud of secrets stopped for mere weakness: all believed that she must die. The Earl of Moray, who had kept aloof after his fierce little struggle with Huntly, now assumed the direction of affairs, none staying him. He took upon himself to send for the King, that being his duty, as he said, to the State. The duty was not to be denied, though there was peril in it.

'I fear, my lord,' said Lethington, 'I fear the effect of the King's presence upon her Majesty's frail habit.'

Lord Huntly roundly said that any ill effect from such a measure would lie at his colleague's door. 'And I marvel much, my lord of Moray, that you, who have heard her Majesty's wandering speech and know the extremes of her dislike, should have proposed to call hither the one person left in Scotland whom she hath reason at once to reproach and fear.'

Moray waved his hand. 'The Queen, my sister, is at death's door. And will you tell me who has so much right to lead her to it as her husband?'

'To drive her to it, belike your lordship means!' cried Huntly as he flung out of the room. His counter-stroke was to send word over to the Hermitage. Let Bothwell make haste. Adam Gordon took the message.

But before either King or lover could be looked for there dawned a day upon Jedburgh, upon the darkened grey house in the Wynd, which the Queen herself believed to be her last. She was in that state of the body when the ghostly tenant, all preened for departure, has clear dominion, and earthly affections and earthly cares are ridded and done with. In other words, she had forgotten Bothwell.

She confessed to Father Roche and received the Sacrament; she kissed her Maries—all there but Lady Boyne, who had been Beaton; called the lords about her and looked gently in the face of each in turn—not asking of them any more, but

enjoining, rather, and as if requiring. ‘My lords, under the wise hands of God I lie waiting here, and what I speak is from the verge of the dark. Serve, I desire you, the prince my son, remembering his tender helpless years, and dealing patiently with his silly understanding. Be not harsh with them that are left of the old religion: you cannot tax me with severity to your own. Let Scotland serve God in peace, every man after his own conscience. I am too weak to command, and have no breath to spare for beseeching. My lords, this is my last desire. Is there any here who will refuse me?’

She looked about from one strong face to another; saw Huntly crying, Argyll struggling to keep tears back, Lethington with his head bowed down, as if he would pray. She saw her half-brother John Stuart watching her from under his brows; lastly her half-brother Moray, whose face, fixed and blanched, told her nothing. Sighing, she raised herself. Here was one for her dying breath, for one last cajolery! She put up her hand to touch his, and he started as if suddenly awakened, but commanded himself.

‘Brother,’ she said, in a whisper half audible, ‘oh, brother, vex none in Scotland, for my sake.’

He stooped, took up and kissed her hand; and she let it fall with a long sigh of content. Presently after, she straightened herself, as if conscious of the near end, joined her palms together, and began the Creed in a sharp, painful voice quite unlike her own, fantastic and heart-piercing at once. In the middle she stopped.

‘Qui propter nos homines et propter—et propter——I misremember the rest——’

‘Salutem, madam, ’tis nostram salutem,’ says Father Lesley, with a sob.

‘God give it me, a sinner,’ she said, and turned her cheek to the pillow, and lay caught and still. The physician put his hand to her heart, and made a sign. Lesley tiptoed to the windows and set them open.

The Earl of Moray lifted up his head. ‘I fear, my lords, that the worst is come upon

us. The Queen, my sister—alas!' He covered his eyes for a moment, then, in a different tone and a changed aspect, began to give order. 'Mr. Secretary, cause messengers to ride to Glasgow to the prince's father. My Lord Chancellor, you should convene a council of the estates. Doctor, I must have a word with you.'

By these sort of phrases he sent one and all flocking to the door like sheep about a narrow entry. Des-Essars lingered about, but what could he do? The Earl's cold eye was upon him.

'You, sir—what do you here? I will deal with you anon. Meantime, avoid a matter which is not for you.'

The lad went out, hanging his head.

Last to go were the weeping maids and Father Roche, the Queen's Confessor, who, before he left her, placed his crucifix under her closed hand.

This too was observed. 'Take up your idol, sir,' said Lord Moray; 'take back your idol. Suchlike are vain things.'

But Father Roche took no notice of him, and went away without his crucifix.

The physician had remained, a little twinkle-eyed man, with white eyebrows like cornices of snow. He curved and raised them before the greatest man in Scotland.

'You need me, my lord?'

'I do not at this present. Await my summons in the anteroom.'

He was alone with the passing soul, which even now might be adrift by the window, streaming out to its long flight.

He looked sharply and seriously about the room, omitting nothing from his scrutiny. There stood the writing-desk in the window, covered in geranium leather, with stamped ciphers in gold upon it, F and M interlaced, the Crown-royal of France above them. He stole to it and tried it: locked. He lifted it from the table, put it on the floor under the vallance of the bed, then went on searching with his keen eyes.

These winning him nothing, he moved softly about and tried one or two likely coverts—the curtains, the vallance; moved a hand-mirror, disturbed some books, a cloak upon a chair. He was puzzled, he put his hand to his mouth, bit his finger, hesitating. Presently he crept up to the bed and looked at her who lay there so still. He could see by the form she made that she was crouched on her side with her knees bent, and judged it extraordinary, and talked to himself about it. 'They lie straighter—down there. They prepare themselves——Who would die twisted? What if the soul——?' His heart gave him trouble. He stopped here and breathed hard.

The hand that held the crucifix—it was the right hand—was out: it showed a ring upon one finger, only one. The left hand he could not see—but it was very necessary to be seen. Gingerly he drew back the bedclothes, slowly, tentatively, then more boldly. They were away: and there lay the casket, enclosed within the half-hoop of the body. That she should have tricked him in her dying agony was a real shock to him, and, by angering, gave him strength. He reached out his hand to take it—he touched it—stopped, while his guilty glance sought her grey face. O King Christ! he saw her glimmering eyes, all black, fixed upon him—with lazy suspicion, without wink of eyelid or stir of the huddled body to tell him whether she lived or was dead. His tongue clove to his palate—he felt crimson with shame: to rob the dead, and the dead to see him! After a pause of terrible gazing he stepped backwards, and back, and back. He felt behind him, opened the door, and called hoarsely: 'The Queen lives! She lives! Come in—come in!'

The passages were alive in an instant, doors banged, feet scampered the stairs. The first person to come in was Des-Essars, turned for the moment from youth to Angel of Judgment. He dashed by Moray, threw himself upon the Queen's coffer, snatched it, and with it backed to the wall. There, with his arms about it, he stood at bay, panting and watching the enemy.

But the room was now full. Women, crowded together, were all about the bed. In the

midst knelt the doctor by the Queen. Huntly, Lethington, Argyll, and Erskine stood grouped.

‘What have you, Baptist, in your hands?’ says Huntly.

‘It is her Majesty’s treasure, my lord, which you committed to my keeping.’

‘Where gat you it, man?’ asked Argyll.

But before he could be answered my Lord Moray lifted up hand and voice. ‘Let all them,’ he said, ‘that are of Christ’s true Church give thanks with me unto God for this abounding mercy.’

Lethington, Argyll, some of the women, stood with covered faces while his lordship prayed aloud. Huntly watched the Queen, and presently got his great reward. Her eyes were turned upon him; she knew him, nodded her head and smiled. He fell to his knees.

So quick her recovery, in two days’ time there was no more talk of the piece of Scotland or of the Credo half-remembered. The earth and the men of the earth resumed their places and re-pointed their goads; as she grew stronger so grew her anxieties. Lord Bothwell sent, by Adam Gordon (who had gone to fetch him) his humble duty to her Majesty, ‘thanking God hourly for her recovery.’ His physicians, he said, would in no wise suffer him attempt the journey as yet—no, not in a litter. The Queen chafed, and wrote him querulous letters; but nothing would tempt him out. She got very few and very guarded replies, so fell to her sonnets again.

The truth is, that the Earl of Bothwell, having set his hand to a business which, if temperately handled, promised most fair, kept rigidly to the line he had thought out for himself; and thus affords the rare example of a man who, by nature advancing upon gusts of passion, can keep himself, by shrewd calculation, to an orderly gait. The means to his end which he had appointed, and took, were of the most singular ever used by expectant lover—to French Paris, for instance, they were a cause of dismay—and yet they succeeded most exactly. They were, in fact, to do nothing at

all. He had found out by careful study of the lady that the less he advanced the farther she would carry him, the less he asked for the more she would lay at his feet, the less he said the larger her interpretation of his hidden mind. She was a fine, sensitive instrument—like a violin, now wounded, now caressed by the bow, shrieking when he slashed at the strings, sobbing when he plucked them with callous fingers, moaning when he was gentle, shrilling when he so chose it. In a word, he had to deal with loyalty, extreme generosity, a magnanimity which knew nothing of the sale and exchange of hearts. He had known this for some years; he now based his calculations upon it without ruth—the last person in the world to whom her magnificent largess could appeal; and (as French Paris would say) of the last nation in the world. To a man like him the gift only imports, not the giving. It is an actuary's question; while to her and her kind the act is the whole of the matter: deepest shame were to know herself rich in one poor loincloth while he had a bare patch whereon to hang it. She was that true Prodigal, most glorious when most naked.

Des-Essars, alone in her confidence during these hours of strain, makes an acute deduction. 'Her letters of this time will show very plainly,' he says, 'that she was brought by his chill silence to that extreme point of desire where sacrifice and loss seem the top of bliss. It was no longer a man that she longed for, but an Act. Fasting for a Sacrament, the bread and wine of her need was Surrender. I say that this fond distress of hers, these absorbed eyes filled often with tears for no reason, her suspense when waiting—and vainly—for a messenger's return; her abandonment before the altar, her cries in the night—such things, I say, were reasonable to me, and to all who, in the Florentine's phrase, have "understanding of love." But to the Court it seemed unreasonable.'

Unreasonable! It seemed perverse, unspeakable. The maids were dumb with shame. The one thing which Mary Fleming would not discuss with Lethington, or allow him to discuss in her hearing, was the Queen's disease. Mary Livingstone went about

like one in a trance—sand-blind, stumbling after some elfin light. She spoke to none, remembered none. Judge the feelings of her Master of Sempill, who could tell his friends in England nothing! Mary Seton, too, kept her pretty lips locked up. Once, when Fleming pressed her,—what time they were abed—she said shortly: 'I am her servant, and shall be till I die. If you are her judge, I know it not. You are none of mine.'

'No, no, no!' cried poor Fleming. 'You wrong me. Who am I to judge?'

'Who indeed?' said Mary Seton, and turned over.

The Court was divided in these harassing days, because the Earl of Moray drew off a large proportion of it to his own house. Thither resorted Argyll, Glencairn and Atholl, my lord of Mar when he could, and Lethington when he dared; there also and always was the Lord Lindsay, that blotched zealot, with his rumpled hair and starched frill. Huntly, of course, held closely by the Queen, refusing to admit the second Court; Lord Livingstone was faithful, as became the father of Mary Sempill. He rubbed his chapped hands over the fire, and cried three times a day that all was well: a folly so palpable that everybody laughed. Lesley stayed by her, a tearful spectacle; Lord Herries too, very gloomy. Such state as there was—and it was draggled state—Arthur Erskine and Traquair maintained; but the Queen was quite unconscious of state. Royal dignity had never been a virtue of hers; she was always either too keen or too dejected to have time for it. Whether old Lord Livingstone treated her jocosely, or old Lord Mar with implied reproof in every grating search for a word—if Bothwell had written she did not heed them; and if he had not, she sat watching for French Paris at the window, and still did not heed them.

And undoubtedly old Lord Livingstone was jocose—abounded in nods and winks. 'Just a fond wife,' he described her to his friends, and so treated her to her face. It is to be believed, had she heard it, that she would have been proud of the title. So, during the misty short days and long wet nights of October she cheapened herself in

Love’s honour, and was held cheap by Scotch thickwits.

On the night of the 28th of the month the King came to see her. He arrived very late, and departed in a fury within the twenty-four hours. His clatter, his guards, his horses and himself filled the town; he took up lodging in the Abbey, and caused himself to be announced by heralds at the lowly door of the Queen’s House.

Perhaps she was worn out by watching for another comer; perhaps she was ill, perhaps angry—it is not to be known. She would hardly notice him when he came in; spoke languidly, dragging her words, and would not on any account be alone with him. He demanded, as his right, that her women should leave her; she raised her eyebrows, not her eyes, until he repeated his desire in a louder voice.

Then she said, ‘What right have you kept, what right have you ever done, that you should have any rights left you here?’

‘Madam, I have every right—that of a father, that of a consort—’

‘You have waived it—refused it—denied it—and betrayed it.’

‘Ah, never, never!’

‘Twice, sir, to my bitter cost.’

He laughed harshly to hear such words. ‘Sirs,’ he said to those with him, ‘I see how it is. Rumour for once is no fibster.’

‘Come away, my lord, come your ways,’ said old Livingstone. ‘You will do harm to yourself.’

He cried out, ‘None shall dictate to me in this realm.’

And then Moray said, ‘Sir, I would seriously advise you—for your good——’

The King stared at him, gibed at him. ‘If you seek my good, my lord, God judge me, ’tis for the first time.’

‘It is the good of us all,’ said Moray. ‘Her Grace is overwrought. Let me entreat your patience. This coming is something sudden, though so long attended. In the

morning maybe——’

The King threatened. ‘And what is this but the morn? The morn! The morn’s morn I depart with the light, and for long time—be you sure of that.’

He kept his word; and she, proud of her loyalty, wrote to her lover how constant she had been. ‘He would have stayed did I but nod. Guess you how stiff I kept my head.’ That touching sentence brought Lord Bothwell hot-foot to Jedburgh—to find her waiting for him at the head of the stair.

She could hardly suffer him to come into the room: her longing seemed to choke her. ‘You have come to praise me—O generous lover! You can trust me now! Oh, tell me that I have been faithful!’

He turned shortly and shut the door. Then, ‘Madam,’ he said bluntly, ‘I cannot praise you at all, though I must not presume to do otherwise.’

She paled at that, and smiled faintly, as if to show him that the pain could be borne.

‘I am very dull, my lord. Speak plainly to me.’

So indeed he did. ‘You should at all costs have kept him by you. At all costs, madam, at all costs. Here we could have dealt with him—but now——!’ He stopped an exclamation of fury, just in time. ‘And who can tell whether he will try you again?... Oh, it was ill judged. I regret it.’

She pored upon his face, wonder fanning her eyes. ‘You regret my faith! Regret my honour, saved for you! Strange griefs, my lord.’

‘I regret ill policy. The man is treasonable up to the ears: there were many ways of doing. Now there are none at all. Gone, all gone! What have I dared to pray for—what you have deigned to offer me; what my ears have heard and my eyes seen—all that my senses have lured me to believe: this one act of your Majesty’s has belied! Ah!’ He dug his heel into the carpet. He folded his arms. ‘Well, it is not for me to reproach my Sovereign, or to complain that her realm holds one fool the more.

The Lord gives and takes away—pshaw! and why not the Lady?'

She stretched out her arms to him, there being none to stay her. 'Oh, what are you saying? Is it possible?' She came close, she crept, touched his face. 'If you doubt me I must die. Prove me—behold me here. Take me—I am yours.'

'No, madam,' he snarled like a dog, 'a pest upon it! You are not mine: you are his.'

She sank down, kneeling by the table, and hid her face. Murmuring some excuse, that she was overwrought, that he would fetch women, he left her and went directly to Lord Moray's house. There he found Lethington.

'The Queen is very ill, as it seems to me,' he said, 'nor is it hard to see where is the core of her malady. If that loon from Glasgow comes ruffling before her again, I shall not be able to answer for what I may do. Tell you that to my lord, I care not; nay, I desire you to tell him. We should be friends, he and I, for we now have one aim and one service, and as sworn servants should do our duty without flinching. I commit these thoughts to you, Lethington, that you and I, with your patron here, may take counsel together how best to serve the Queen with a cure for her disease. It is indurate, mark you; we may need to cut deep; but it becomes not men to falter. You and I have had our differences, which I believe to be sunk in this common trouble. We may be happy yet—God knows. Devise something, devise anything, and you shall not find me behindhand. Let there be an end of our factions. Why, man, there are but two when all's said—the Queen's and that other's. Count me your friend in any occasion you may have. Farewell. You will find me at Hermitage.'

Lethington was greatly moved. 'Stay, my lord, stay,' he said, coming forward with propitiatory hands. 'My lord of Moray will receive you.'

'I can't stay. There are good reasons for going, and none for staying—now that that fellow is safe in Glasgow again. Let my lord do his part and call upon me for mine. When do you wed, Lethington?'

The Secretary blushed. 'It stands with the Queen's pleasure, my lord. My mistress

would never fail hers, and so I must be patient.'

'Hearken, my good friend,' said Bothwell, with a hand on his shoulder. 'I am pretty well in her Majesty's favour, I believe. Now, if a word from me——'

'Upon my soul, I am greatly obliged to your lordship.'

'Say no more, man. You shall be sped to church. Farewell.'

He rode fast to Hermitage that day, and threw himself upon his bed. They told him that the Countess was asleep.

'Why, then,' says he, 'she shall have her sleep while she can.'

As he had expected, he got a letter next noon, with tears upon it, had he cared to look for them, and in every stiff clause a cry of the heart....

I submit myself henceforward wholly unto you.... In you is all my hope, my only friend, without whom I cannot endure.... Prove me again: I shall not fail you. All this night I have kept watch while the world is asleep. Now I am very sure I shall not fail again. Sir, if I think apart, it is because I dwell apart; but if I may trust you that shall be amended. I pray it be. But I hear you say, It is for yourself to deal in it. Again I beseech your patience if I am slow to learn how best to please you. My tutors and governors praised me as a child for aptness to learn. Now the lessons grow sharper and I the more dull....

My brother came to visit me this few hours since. He spake kindly of you, and of him[6] as the sole mischief-worker here. I answered as I thought myself free to do, but now misdoubt me, fearful of your displeasure. You used harsh punishment towards me: I feel sore beaten, as with rods. If I sleep I shall be the stronger for it; but that is easy said. Now if I write Alas! you may scorn me; and yet I feel directed to no other word, save Welladay! Sir, if it should stand within your pleasure to give pleasure to your friend, you will reply by this bearer; in whom you may trust as much as I ask you to trust

Your discomfited, perfect friend

M. R.

He answered coldly, but with great respect, and only kept the messenger back two days.

[6] King Henry Darnley.

CHAPTER III DESCANT UPON A THEME AS OLD AS JASON

It is from Des-Essars that I borrowed that similitude of Lord Bothwell to a violin-player. The young man pictures him as such, at this very time, sitting deep in his chair at the Hermitage, his instrument upon his crossed knee—his lovely, sensitive instrument! He screws at the keys, in his leisurely, strong way, and now and again plucks out a chord, ‘until, under the throbbing notes, he judges that he hath wrung up his music to the tragic pitch.’ The figure is adroit in its fitness to the persons involved, but puzzling in this respect—that with executant so deliberate and instrument so fine the pitch should be so slow of attainment.

Face the facts, as she herself did (with a shiver of self-pity), and ask yourself what on earth he was about. Consider his fury at her dismissal of the King, his coldness through her appeals for mercy: what could they point to but one thing? ‘Over and over again,’ says Des-Essars, ‘my mistress told me that his lordship would do nothing overt while the King her husband was alive; and I acquiesced in silence. It was too evident. She added, immediately, “And I, Baptist—what can I do? What will become of me? I cannot live without my Beloved—nay, I cannot discern life or death under the canopy of Heaven unless he is there moving and directing it. As well ask me to behold a vista of days in which the sun should never shine. This is a thing which forbids thought, for it denies the wish to live.” To such effect she expressed herself often, and then would remain silent, as to be sure did I, each of us, no doubt, pondering the next question (or its answer)—What stood in the way of her

happiness? What kept the King alive? The answer lay on the tip of the tongue. She! She only preserved the worthless life; she only stood in her own light. Ah, she knew that well enough, and so did I, and so did every man in Scotland save one—the blind upstart himself.

'A dangerous knowledge, truly: dangerous by reason of the ease with which she could provide remedy for her pain. Let her move a finger, let her wink an eyelid, shrug a shoulder, and from one side or another would come on a king's executioner, clothed in the livery of Justice, Proper Resentment, Vengeance, Envy, Greed or Malice—for under one and all of these ensigns he was threatened by death. And I will answer for it that the question flickered hourly in flame-red letters before her eyes, Why standeth the Queen of Scots in the way of Justice? O specious enemy! O reasonable Satan! What! this fellow, a drunkard, a vile thing, treacherous, a liar, a craven—this, whom to kill were to serve God, alone to shut her out from good days? I know that her hand must have itched to give the signal; I know that the Devil prevailed; but not yet, not yet awhile—not till she was reeling, faint, caught up, swirled, overwhelmed by misery and terror. At this time, though suffering made her eyes gaunt and her mouth to grin, she kept her hands rigidly from any sign.

'It is, withal, a curious thing, not to be disregarded by the judicious, that the Countess of Bothwell, and her claims and pretentions, never entered her thoughts. In her opinion, women—other women—were the toys of men. This world of ours she saw as a garden, a flowery desert place in which stood two persons, the Lover and the Beloved. Observe this, you who read the tale; for presently after my Lord Bothwell observed it, and, by playing upon it, attuned her to his tragic pitch.'

She left Jedburgh on 10th November, her terrible beleaguering question not yet answered. She went a kind of progress by the Tweed valley, by Kelso, Wark, Hume, Langton, Berwick, stayed in the gaunt houses which are still to be seen fretting the ramparts of that lonely road—towers reared upon woody bluffs to command all

ways of danger, square, turreted fortresses looking keenly out upon the bare lands which they scarcely called their own and had grown lean in defending. All about her as she went were the lords, every man of them with his own game in his head, watching the moves of every other. Argyll and Glencairn were shadows of Moray; Crawfurd and Atholl for the moment held with Huntly and the throne. Lethington was the dog of whoso would throw him a task; Livingstone, jocular still, kept mostly with the women.

The Queen's moods, as she journeyed slowly through that wintering country, changed as the weather does in late autumn. Winds blow hot and winds blow cold, tempests are never far off; frost follows, when the sun glitters but is chill, and the ice-splinters lie late, like poniards in the ridged ways. She rode sometimes for a whole day in bitter silence, her face as bleak as the upland bents, and sometimes she spurred furiously in front, her hair blown back and face on fire with her mad thoughts. Unseen of any, she clenched her fists, she clenched her teeth. 'I am a queen, a queen! I choose to do it. It is my right, it is my need.'

She had fits of uncontrollable weeping; they caught her unawares now and then, her face all blurred with tears. This was when she had been pitying herself as victim of a new torment—new at least to her. 'He sits alone with a woman who hates me. He pinches her chin—they laugh together over my letters. Fool! I will write no more.' The more a fool in that she wrote within the next hour.

When she grew frightened to find how solitary she was, she turned in the saddle more than once, and hunted all faces for a friendly one. Wearisome quest, foredoomed to failure! Moray, with his straight rock of brow, sat like a cliff, looking steadfastly before him; Argyll counted the sheep on the hillside; Livingstone, a ruddy old fool, hummed a tune, or said, 'H'm, h'm! All's for the best in this braw world, come rain come sun.'

And the maids, the Maries, once her bosom familiars! There Livingstone bites her

prudish lip, here Fleming peers askance at Lethington; Seton says something sharply witty to Lady Argyll, and makes the grim lady hinny like a mare.

Far behind, in the ruck of the cavalcade, she may catch sight of a youth on a jennet, a pale-faced youth with a widish nose and smut-rimmed light eyes. He has a French soul; he loves her. There, at least, is one that judges nothing, condemns nothing, approves nothing. She is she, and he her slave. Is she angry?—The sun's hidden then. Does she smile?—The sun rises. Does she kiss him?—Ho! the sun atop of summer. Suppose that she were Medea: suppose for a moment that she slew—no, no, the term is inexact—suppose that she stood aside, and men justly offended came in and slew King Jason? This slave of hers would say, 'The sun, shining, hath struck one to earth.'

Yes, here was a trusty friend who would as soon blame the sun for his sunstroke, or the lightning for his flash of murder, as blame her. She would call him to her, then, and make him ride by her for half a day. She would take his hand, lean aside to kiss him, to rest her head on his shoulder, to stroke his cheek; she would call him her lover, her fere, her true and perfect knight—fool him, in fine, to the top of his bent. And to all that she said or did, Des-Essars, if we may believe him, decently replied: 'Yes, it is quite true that I love your Majesty. I have no other thought but that, nor have I ever had.'

Thus she rode progress towards her soul's peril, changing from fierce heat to shrivelling cold as fast as the autumn weather.

It was at Kelso that she got letters from the King, foolish and blusterous letters in the Quos ego ...! style which the Master of Sempill admired. Let her Majesty understand his mind was made up. Let her Majesty receive him in Edinburgh, or ... this was their tenor; with them in her hand and one from Bothwell burning in her bosom she showed Mr. Secretary a disturbed, dangerous face. Pale as she was nowadays, and thin, he was shocked to see her hungry lines. He thought her like some queen of old,

Jocasta or Althæa, with whom the Furies held midnight traffic. ‘Do you see this? Is it never to end?’

He did not stay to peruse the letters. ‘Madam,’ he said, ‘let us take order in these painful matters. Leave them to your faithful friends, and all shall be to your contentation.’

She turned away; her staring eyes saw nothing but misery. ‘Take order, say you? If you fear so much as to speak above a whisper, how shall you dare do anything? Friends! what friend have I but one? Death is my patient, waiting friend; and so I shall prove him before many more days.’

‘Alas, madam, speak not so wildly.’

She looked fiercely, wrinkling up her eyes at him. ‘But I tell you, sir, that if this load be not lifted from me, I shall end it my own way.’

That night a plan was laid before the Earls of Moray and Argyll. Lethington spoke it, but Huntly stood over him as stiffly imminent as a pine, or he had never found a word to say.

After a great deal of elliptic talk he came to terms, by saying, ‘The business can be done promptly and without scandalous parade of force. When her Majesty is at Craigmillar making ready for the Prince’s baptism, he will certainly come, for he would never endure to be passed over at such a time, when the ambassadors of France and England may be brought to acknowledge him. Well, then, my lords, if we confront him with our proofs of his oft-meditated treason he will deny them. If we essay to apprehend him he will resist us; and resistance, doubtless, might provoke our men to—to——’ Here he looked about him.

‘You have said enough, Lethington,’ Huntly broke in. ‘We shall be ready, those of us who are true men.’ He watched Moray darkly as he spoke, but drew forth no reply. It was Argyll who took up the talk—took it up to the rafters as it were, since he leaned back in his chair and cast up his eyes.

‘Look at him for a Lennox Stuart, God help us! Lennox Stuart and rank Papist he is. To leave at large the like of that is to have a collie turned rogue ranging your hillside. Why, gentlemen,’ and he looked from man to man, ‘shall we leave him to raven the flock?’

‘I adhere to the plan,’ said Huntly. ‘Count upon me and mine. I take it you stand in with us, my Lord of Argyll. What says my Lord of Moray?’

The great man became judicial. He gave them the feeling, as he intended, that he had been surveying a far wider field than they could scan. Under that arching sky, which he was able to range in, and from whose study they had called him down, their little schemes took up that just inch which was their proper scope. If he had not remarked them earlier, not his the all-seeing eye; but he was obliged to his friends for drawing him to the care of matters so curious, so well-deserving of a quiet hour.

‘We must talk at large of these somewhat serious concerns, my lords. We must take our time, hasten so far as we may, but with a temperate spur—ay, a temperate spur. We must consult, discriminate those who stand our friends from those who are unfriendly; from those who cry, not without reason, for recognition. We must not omit those who are afar off, nor those who will come about us asking questions—what is to be lost, what gained? Many considerations rise up on the instant, others will crowd upon us. Where are my lords of Crawfurd and Atholl? Are they behind you? I cannot see them. What says my lord of Lindsay, that very steadfast Christian? Where, alas, is my lord of Morton’s honour?’

‘Sir,’ cried Huntly, fuming, ‘we can resolve your many questions when you have answered our one. We asked you not, what says one or what says another? but, rather, what says your lordship?’

Lord Moray smiled. ‘Ah, my Lord Chancellor, if your lordship had not been so long a stranger to my poor house, your question had hardly been put to me. Those who know me best, my lord, do not need to confirm by vain assurances my love of

country, or desire to serve the throne of my dear sister. Forgive me if I say that, with older eyes than your lordship's, I take a wider range. I see your distresses—perhaps I see a remedy. Perhaps your proposal is one, perhaps it is a danger worse than the disease. It may be——'

He threatened to become interminable, so Huntly, with no patience at command, left him in the midst. With disapproval in every prim line of his face Lord Moray watched him go. He said nothing more; and why should he say anything, when all was forwarding as he wished? He did repeat to the Secretary, afterwards and in private, that it was sore pity to have the Earl of Morton still in exile—a saying which that worthy misapprehended. But here the Councils stopped, though the Queen did not, but pushed on to Berwick, and reached Edinburgh by mid-November. At Craigmillar, where she chose to stay, they were resumed under the more hopeful auspices of Lord Bothwell, whom at last she summoned to her side out of Liddesdale.

This is because jealousy, that canker in the green-wood, was groping in her now, though not, even yet, of that sordid kind which is concerned with its own wound. She no longer wrote to Bothwell save on details of business, because she conceived her letters distasteful to him; and she would not have recalled him had not Lethington assured her of the common need of his counsel. The sort of jealousy she suffered filled her, rather, with a kind of noble zeal to do him honour. Although she would not write to him, she could never rest without news of his daily doings. So when she heard that he and his Countess were reading Petrarch together, many hurt lines, but no vulgar splenetic lines, were committed to the casket.

Elle pour son honneur vous doibt obeyssance,

Moy vous obeyssant j'en puis recevoir blasme,

N'estant, à mon regret, comme elle, vostre femme.

She wrote, and believed, that she grudged Lady Bothwell nothing:

Je ne la playns d’aymer done ardamment

Celuy qui n’a en sens, ny en vaillance,

En beauté, en bonté, ny en constance

Point de seconde. Je vis en ceste foy.

‘God pity this poor lady!’ Des-Essars bursts forth, having been imparted these outrageous lines. ‘She who could believe that my Lord Bothwell was without peer in beauty, kindness, and constancy, might very well believe that she herself was not jealous of his wife.’

Jealous or no, it was jealousy of a strange kind. When her beloved answered his summons by attending her at Craigmillar, she received him with a dewy gratefulness which went near to touch him. ‘You have come, then! Oh, but you are good to your friend,’—a speech which for the moment bereft him of speech. She asked after the Countess, spoke of her as her sister, pitied her sitting alone at Hermitage, and inspired the gross-minded man with enthusiasm for her exalted mood.

He threw himself into the plotting and whispering with which the Court was rife, talked long hours with Lethington, was civil to Moray and his ‘flock,’ as he called Argyll and the rest. Nothing much came of it all. Moray went so far as to suggest divorce. Lethington thought much of it, and carried it to Bothwell, who thought nothing of it. He declined to discuss it with her Majesty.

‘Take your proposal to her if you choose,’ he said; ‘lay it before her. I know what she will say, and agree with her beforehand. This is no way of doing for men, or for crowned women.’

He had the rights of it. ‘What!’ she cried, ‘and make my son a bastard! And he to be King of England! I think they have had bastards enough on that throne. Your plan is foolish.’

Lethington was upon his mettle. He was to be married come Christmas, and,

indebted for this prospect to the Queen and Bothwell, was desirous to owe her as much more as she would lend him. ‘Madam,’ he said, ‘I cannot admit my plan to be so dangerous to the Prince’s highness; but I will content you yet. Give me leave to devise yet once more.’

‘Devise as you will, sir,’ said she, ‘but be quick, or I shall begin with devices of my own. You know that a foumart in a trap scruples not to use tooth and claw. And he is wise, since soft glances are never likely to help him.’ Almost immediately she began to cry at the thought of herself in a trap, ‘to cry and torment herself,’ says the annalist. And one night, at supper with a few of them, she lashed out in a fury at her impotence. ‘Ah, it is too much, what I suffer among you all! I have borne him a son, and he would steal him from my breast. He would tip that innocent tongue with poison that he may envenom his mother. If I am not soon quit of this there is but one end to it.’

Patience, they counselled. ‘Ay, madam,’ said foolish old Livingstone, ‘patience, and shuffle the cards.’

‘Shuffle you yours, my lord,’ she said, looking lofty, ‘if you think them worthy of Fortune’s second thoughts. For me, I know a shorter way to end the game.’

In private, she and Bothwell were in full accord. She was to obey him, and leave him alone. ‘No questions, my soul!’ he was for ever saying to her, half jocularly, half with meaning that she was to be blind, deaf, and dumb. She shut her eyes and mouth and put her fingers to her ears; and in time this became a habit. ‘My prince, my master,’ she said once, and gave him both her hands, ‘I am your servant, and submit to you in all things. Use me well.’ He kissed her fondly as he swore that so he would.

It was after the King had visited her and gone again, whither no one knew, that Lethington produced his second plan. As before, he was careful to submit it to Bothwell. What did his good lordship think of this? The King was to meet her

Majesty at Stirling for the Prince's baptism; he would be ill received by the ambassadors, and therefore mutinous, probably with outcry. Let one then, with all proofs in his hands, indict him of treason. Let him be summoned to answer, and upon refusal, arrested. He would certainly resist, with violence. The end was sure. Now, what did his good lordship think?

His good lordship spoke his plain mind, as he always did to Lethington, whom he scorned. 'You don't kill a sheep with hounds and horn. Pray, my friend, where will be my lord of Moray all this while? Will he wind the horn? I do not remember that that is his way. Or will he find occasions to be in his lands? Or turn his coat and cry, God bless our King-Consort and the True Kirk?'

Lethington had a late autumnal smile, with teeth showing through like the first frost. 'I will tell your lordship what he will do. He will see and not see. He will look on and not behold.'

'You mean, I gather, that he will be at his prayers, looking through his fingers while we foul ours?'

'Your lordship is most precise.'

However, his plan went before the Queen, who gave it a gloomy approval. 'He is so clogged with treason, he will never run. You will have an easy capture. Let nothing be done till my son be christened.'

Immediately afterwards she was instructed by Bothwell that the project was as vain as wind, because it depended upon two unstable things. First, if he allowed himself to be taken, what on earth was to be done with him? There must be an assize. And to which side in that would Moray lean?

She could not answer him.

'No,' said he, 'you cannot; nor can any man in Scotland.'

'I am of your mind,' she said—superfluous assurance!

‘Well, then,’ he went on, ‘let them stir their broth of grouts. They are all greedy knaves together: perchance one or another will tumble into the stew and we be quit of him.’

‘But if we leave them,’ she hesitated, ‘they may attempt to take him—and then——’

Bothwell laughed. ‘Nay, I will see to it that they do not. Oh, madam, trust your honest lover, and all shall go greatly for you and me.’

She threw herself into his arms. Trust him! O God, had she not found a man at last?

When they all met at Stirling to christen the Prince, the King was so ill received that, as Lethington had expected, he refused to leave his lodging even for the ceremony. He was literally alone, without his father, without any Scots lord to his name; sitting for the most part in a small room, drinking and playing cards. He used to ride out at night so that he need not tempt the discourtesy of the wayfarers; and once, when the guard at the gate hesitated about passing him in, he flew into a tempest of rage, drew, and killed the man on the spot. Lethington flew from lord to lord. What better opportunity than this?

Everything was prepared, all the proofs gathered in. There were letters of his to the Queen-Mother of France, to his own mother, Lady Lennox, to the English Catholics, to the Duke of Norfolk, to certain Jesuits in the West. One Highgate brought intercepted papers—a chart of Scilly, a plan of Scarborough Castle: and some other fellow was fished up, a bladder full of whispers of a plot to steal the Prince. Lastly, to crown the image of a perfect traitor, there was a draft proclamation of himself as Regent of Scotland. Enough here to hang a better man!

‘Well,’ said Huntly, when Lethington showed him the whole budget, ‘take your measures, show me my place, and meet me at your own time. I’ll not fail you.’

That night Lord Bothwell came into the Queen’s chamber while she was at her prayers. She saw him, but pretended that she did not, finished her rosary, and bowed her head over it; then got up and kissed him before all her circle. Very soon they

were alone together.

‘I disturbed you,’ he said; ‘I regret it.’

‘Regret it not—it was sweet disturbance. My heart flew faster than my beads.’

He took her hand up. ‘Why do you tell me such things? Do you know what disorder they work in me?’

She pretended that she must disengage her hand, but he would not allow it.

‘Alas, sir,’ she said, ‘we whip each other, you and I. Each is a torment to the other. One runs, the other chases,—but whither?’

‘Quick, quick to the goal!’

‘Take me thither in your arms, my Bothwell. Carry me, lest I faint by the way.’

‘No fainting now. The hour is come, and I with it. I have counsel for you.’

‘Counsel me—I will be faithful.’

‘I recommend, then, to your clemency the Earl of Morton, his kinsman Douglas of Whittinghame, and all their factions.’

She pondered the saying, not discerning at first what it purported, yet fearing to ask him lest he should be impatient of her stupidity. No man had ever made her feel stupid but this one.

‘Do you wish it?’ she asked him.

‘I advise it.’

‘They are no friends of yours?’

‘They may become so.’

‘And you remember that they greatly offended me?’

‘Oh, madam,’ he cried out irritably, ‘who has not offended you in this wicked land? Did not your sour brother offend you? Has not Lethington offended? Have not Huntly and I? Believe me, this Morton has himself been offended, and by the very

man who has offended you more vilely than any other. There was one who betrayed you to the Douglases, but that same man betrayed the Douglases to you. Therefore I say, if you wish to redeem your honour, let Morton redeem his, and your affair is done. You force me to speak plainly.'

She saw his meaning now, and her eyes grew blank with fear. 'Hush,' she said, 'speak no plainer. Those two will kill him.'

He shrugged. 'You speak plainer than I. In advising you, however, to send open letters of pardon to Morton and his cousin, I have but done my duty, as we had agreed it should be. But it is for your Majesty to follow or to leave, as you will. I am still the servant.'

She went slowly to him, took up his hands and put them on her shoulders. He let her have the weight. 'Now I feel your strong hands, Bothwell.'

'It is you that put them there.'

'It is where they should be. Servants use not so their hands, but only masters. And good servants soon grow to love the yoke.' Suddenly she dropped to his feet and embraced his knees. 'I am yours, I am yours! Do as you will with me and all.'

Open letters were despatched to Lord Morton and Mr. Archie Douglas, that, on certain terms, they and their factions might gain pardon and remission of forfeitures. On the evening of the same day the King left Stirling without any farewells and sped to Glasgow.

Lethington, completely fooled, ran open-mouthed to Bothwell. 'Here is a discomfiture, my lord! I am dumbfounded. Just when we were sure of him.'

'Maybe you were too sure. There will be a vent-hole in your body politic.'

'My lord, I can answer for the entirety of it. Tush, my credit is gone! I am vexed to death.'

'I see that it puts you out. But courage, man! you will find a way yet.'

‘If I find one now, after this rebuff, it will be owing to your lordship’s good opinion,’ said the guileless Lethington: ‘a sharp spur to me, I do assure you.’

Bothwell took him by the arm. ‘Do you feel so sure,’ he asked him, ‘that our man hath not had a fright?’

‘What fright? Not possible—or I am not up with your lordship.’

Bothwell half-closed his eyes. ‘How do you suppose he would look upon the return of Morton and the Douglases?’

Lethington started, then stared at the floor. ‘Ay,’ he said—‘ay! I had not given that a thought. Man, Lord Bothwell,’ he whispered, ‘yon’s his death-warrant, and he knows it.’

Lord Bothwell clacked his tongue.

CHAPTER IV SHE LOOKS BACK ONCE

Just at this point in the story Des-Essars confesses to the desire having been hot within him to assassinate the Earl of Bothwell; and writing it down when the opportunity had come and was gone, he may well say, ‘What would have been the pain and loss of dear blood, had I done it, in comparison to present anguish?’ He is, however, forced to admit that he did not meditate so violent a deed for the sake of avoiding future disaster, but rather to make the present more tolerable. It was his lot to be much with the Queen and her chosen lover; he owns that he found the constant fret of their intercourse almost impossible to be borne. ‘I declare before God and the angels,’ he says, ‘that her dreadful lavishing of herself during these weeks of waste and desire caused my heart to bleed. She stripped herself bare of every grace of mind, spirit, and person, and strewed it in his way, heaping one upon another until he seemed to be wading knee-deep in her charms. Nay, but he wallowed in them like a brute-beast, unrecognising and unthankful—a state of affairs unparalleled since Galahad (who was a good knight) lay abed and was nourished upon the blood of a

king's virgin daughter. How different this knight from that, let these pages declare; and my mistress's high mind, how similar to that spending martyr's. For it is most certain that all her acts towards the Lord Bothwell were moved by magnanimity. Stripping herself nobly, she stood the more noble for her nakedness. She suffered horribly: his the horrible sin. Love—in the great manner of it—should be a conflict of generosity; either lover should be emulous of pain and loss. But here she gave and this accursed butcher took; she spent and he got.

'I saw them together at their various houses of sojourn during this winter: at Drymen in Perth, a house of my Lord Drummond's; at Tullibardine, at Callander, and again in Edinburgh. Little joy had they of each other, God wot! There are two kinds of lovers' joys, as I think—the mellow and the sharp. The one is rooted in the heart and the other in the sense, but both alike need leisure of mind if they are to bear fruit; for in the contemplation of our happiness lies the greatest happiness of all. Now, these two were never at rest; they could never look upon each other and let the eyes dwell there with the thought, My Beloved is mine and I am his, and as it is now so it shall be. No, but they looked beyond each other through a tangle of sin and error, searching until their eyeballs ached if haply they might discover a gleam beyond of that windless garden of the Hesperides wherein was put their hope. Fond searching, fond hope! they could never win the garden. Her desires were boundless, unappeasable, and so were his; for she sought to be perfect slave and he to be absolute master. And how was she to be his servant, who was born a queen? and how he the master he sought to be, when no empire the world ever saw would have contented him? But the greatest bar of severance between them was this: there was no community of interest possible between them. For, to her, this Bothwell was the only End; and to him this fair sweet Queen was only a Means. This is a pregnant oracle of mine, worth your travail. Perpend it, you who read.'

Des-Essars did not believe that Lord Bothwell loved the Queen. He had been often at Hermitage, you must remember, and seen the Earl and Countess together. My lord

was not regardful of bystanders when he chose to fondle his handsome wife. When the two were separated, as now they were, the observant young man was aware that they wrote frequently to each other: French Paris was for ever coming and going between Liddesdale and his master's lodging, wherever that might chance to be. He was certain, too, that the Queen knew it. 'Paris used to deliver to my lord his wife's letters, and he read them in the Queen's very presence, with scarce a "By your leave, ma'am"; and at such times I have seen her Majesty pace about the garden in great misery, pull at the rowan berries until she scattered them, pluck at the branches of trees and send the dry leaves flying; and once—as I shall never forget—she thrust her hand and bare arm into a thicket of nettles, and when she drew it out it was all red to the elbow, with sore white blotches upon it where the poison had boiled the blood. Her arm went stiff afterwards, but she never let him know the reason.'

After the christening, about Christmas-time, the Earl of Morton and his friends came home to Scotland, were introduced into the Queen's presence by the Earls of Bothwell and Huntly, and upon submission (and their knees) restored to their former estates. She had nothing to say to them, but sat like one entranced, looking fixedly at the floor while Bothwell made his speech, and Morton after him, in his bluff way, expressed his contrition and desire to be of service in the future. Mr. Archie Douglas, one of a crowd of repentant rebels, contented himself with cheering. 'God save your Majesty!' was his cry, and 'Confusion to all your enemies!' whereupon my Lord Morton bethought him of the real occasion of his recall, and added to his speech a few words more.

'Oh, ay!' he said: 'by our fruits you shall judge us, madam, whether we be gratefully replanted in this dear soil or no. Try us, madam, upon whomsoever hath aggrieved you, or endangered your throne, or the thrones of them that are to follow you—try us, I say, and see whether our appetites to serve you are not whetted by our long absence.'

She had started and looked hastily at Bothwell,—evidently she was frightened. Her lips moved for some time before any sound came forth from them, but presently she said that she should not fail to call for service in the field when she required it. ‘But the realm is now at peace,’ she added, ‘and I hope will remain so.’

Morton said: ‘Amen to that. Yet be prepared, madam, as the sailors are, when they lie becalmed upon a sea like oil, but see a brown haze hang where sky and water meet. And, madam, trust yourself to them that are weatherwise in this country.’

She stammered. ‘I know not what you need fear for me—I hardly understand. I am very well served—very well advised—but I thank you for your friendly warning....’ She forced herself to speak, but could not make a coherent sentence. Bothwell intervened, and presently took away his new friends.

Lord Morton went to the Douglas house of Whittingehame, a leafy place in Haddington, not far from the sea. Thither in the first days of January repaired Bothwell and Huntly, while the Queen stayed in Edinburgh, friendless, except for Des-Essars and Mary Seton. She passed her days like one in a dream, speaking seldom, kneeling at altars but not praying, negligent of her surroundings, sometimes of her person, only alert when a messenger might be looked for with a letter. Often found in tears, either she could not or she would not account for them. One day she bade Des-Essars go with her letter-carriers to Whittingehame. ‘What would you have me do there, madam?’ he asked.

She played drearily with his sword-strap. ‘Do? What do spies in general? See—judge for yourself—look through my eyes if you can.’

He turned to go, and she caught at his arm. ‘Baptist,’ she said, ‘I am in the dark, and horribly afraid. Look you, I know not what they are doing there together. They whisper and wink and nod at each other; they say little and mean much. I cannot divine what they intend—or what they will presently ask me to do. I saw Archie Douglas grin like a wolf that day he was here—I know not what he grinned at. They

tell me nothing—nothing! Do not suppose but that I trust my lord; but, Baptist, find out something. I need courage.' She lay back exhausted, and when he came to her waved him off, whispering that he was to be quick and go.

He departed, reached Whittingehame within the day, saw what he could—which was precisely nothing, for Lord Bothwell was away and Lord Morton not visible—and on his road home again heard that the King lay dangerously ill at Glasgow, of smallpox or worse. He took that news in his pocket, and none that he could have gleaned from the whispers of Whittingehame could have had effect so surprising. For the first time for many a month he saw his Queen sane, sweet, crying woman. She fell on her knees, hiding her face in his sleeve, and gave thanks to God. When she rose up and went back to her chair he saw the tears in her eyes. She asked him no further of Bothwell and Morton at their secrets, or of Archie's grins. When he came and knelt before her she took his face in her hands and kissed it. 'God hath saved me, my dear, and by you,' she said. 'He hath heard my prayers. I am sure now that I shall find mercy. O fortunate messenger! O happy soul, whom thou hast redeemed!'

'Madam,' he said eagerly, seeing now why she was so thankful, 'let me go to Glasgow. You cannot otherwise be sure of this report. The King may be ill, and yet not mortally. Let us be sure before we give thanks.'

She was crying freely. 'I have not deserved so great a mercy, God knoweth. I have been near to deadly sin. Yes, yes—go, Baptist. Go at once, and return with speed.' It was settled that he should take with him her physician and a message of excuse that business kept her from him. He went to prepare himself; she to write to Bothwell a brave and hopeful letter concerning this streak of blue in her storm-packed sky. Before dark Des-Essars was away on a fresh horse.

Up from Whittingehame in a day or two came Mr. Secretary Lethington, very busy; and had private speech with the Queen, reporting the councils of her friends down

there. She listened idly to his urgings of this and that. What interest had she now in plots woven under yew trees or in panelled chambers, when high Heaven itself had declared for her quarrel? Did Archie grin like a wolf, Morton flush and handle his dagger? Let them—let them! An angel with a flaming sword stood on the house-roof at Glasgow, and their little rages were nought.

At the end of his circuitous oration—'Well, have you ended?' she asked him.

'Madam, I have no more to say.'

She took a scrap of paper and scribbled on it with a pen. 'Read that, if you please, and take it with you back again.'

'Show to the Earl of Morton,' he read, 'that the Queen will hear no speech of the matter arranged with him.'

Bothwell laughed to see the dropped jaws, aghast at this rebuff. But she, confident in the help of high Heaven—which had plucked her, as she said, from the brink of the pit—had recovered all her audacity. And so she waited, almost happy again, for the return of her messenger.

Des-Essars was gone for more than a week; it was not until the ninth day from his departure that he brought back his report. I know not what she had expected—some miraculous dealing or another by which God was to signify that she was set free to follow her desires; but whatever it was, the young Brabanter could not end her suspense. So far as the doctors could judge, the King's illness might be sweated out of him: they were trying that when he left. The fever must run its course; no one could say that it must needs end fatally. Her Majesty was to hope, said the doctors; and so said Des-Essars, giving the word a twist round. To hope! She was worn thin with hoping.

The King was horrible, he told her, and wore a taffeta mask. He was peevish, but not furious; had not enough strength left him for that. He lay and snapped at all who came near him, harmlessly, like a snake robbed of its fang. The light hurt his eyes,

so he lay in the dark; but, being extremely curious about himself, he had a candle burning constantly beside him, and a hand-glass on the bed, in which he was always looking at his face: a sign of morbid affection of the brain, the doctors considered. The Queen said carelessly, ‘Why, what else hath he ever cared for in life but his own person?’

She asked what he had replied to her message of excuse. Des-Essars, who had not been allowed to talk with him, and had only seen what he did see when the sick man slept, had delivered it by Standen. Through Standen also came the answer. The King’s words were, ‘This much you shall say to the Queen: that I wish Stirling were Jedburgh, and Glasgow the Hermitage, and I the Earl of Bothwell as I lie here; and then I doubt not but she would be quickly with me undesired.’

She flushed, but not with shame. ‘Doth he think me at Stirling? He is out there; but otherwise, my dear, he is right enough.’ She turned away with a sigh. ‘Well, what can I do but wait?’ She was not allowed to wait long.

Bothwell came to see her, and stayed till near midnight in secret talk. It was wild and snowy, much like that night, as Des-Essars remembered, in which Davy had been slain, near a year ago; one of those nights when the mind, unhappy and querulous, calls up every nerve to the extreme point of tension. The young man, apprehensive of any and every evil, kept the watch. He heard the door shut, Bothwell’s step in the corridor; he flew to the antechamber, hoping that she might send for him. But though he waited there an hour or more in miserable suspense, neither daring to show himself nor to leave the place, he heard nothing. Between two and three o’clock in the morning he fell asleep over the table, wrapped in his cloak. As once before, she came in, a candle in her hand, and awoke him by touching his head.

He sprang up, broad awake in an instant; he saw her. ‘Oh, your face!’ he cried out. ‘Haunted! haunted!’ It was a face all grey, and as still as marble save for the

looming eyes.

‘You sleep,’ she said, ‘but I keep vigil. Bid me good-bye. I am going away.’

He said, ‘Where you go, I go. I dare not leave you as now you are.’

She was in a stare. ‘I am going to the King.’

‘To the King!’ It horrified him. ‘You—alone?’

‘I am sent: I must go.’

‘I go with you.’

She shook her head. ‘You cannot. What I do I must do myself. Now bid me good speed upon my journey.’

He folded his arms. ‘I think I will not. I think the best wish I could make for you would be that you should die.’

This she did not deny; but said she: ‘Vain wishing! I know that I shall not die until my lord has made me his. After that it had better be soon.’

He asked her, with trembling voice, what she wanted with the King; for he verily thought that she was going there for one dreadful purpose. She avoided the question. The King had been asking for her, she said, and it was her duty to obey him. ‘He is mending fast, they tell me; and with his health his strength will return. I had rather’—she said it with a sick shudder—‘I had rather see him before he is able to move.’

‘Madam,’ urged the young man, much agitated, ‘I entreat you, for the love of Christ! You must not touch him, or allow.... He is one sore—hideous—poisoned through and through. On my knees I beg of you. Nay, before you go you shall kill me.’

She looked beside and beyond him in her set, pinched way; he saw the doom written plain on her face. In an agony, not knowing what he did, he confronted her boldly. ‘I shall prevent you. You shall not go.’

She said, looking at him now with softened eyes: ‘Oh, if it were possible even now

that I might be as once I was, even now I would say to thee, my friend, Take me, O true heart, for I would be true like thee! Ah, if it were possible! Ah, if it were possible!' Her great eyes seemed homes of mournful light; so longingly did she look that, for a moment, he thought he had conquered her. She gave a shake of the head, and when she looked at him again the kindly hue had gone. 'But it is not possible—and I am a soiled woman, wounded in the side and defiled by my own blood; for my desire is not as thine.'

'Oh,' cried he, 'what are you saying? Do you condemn yourself?'

She shook her head. 'I neither condemn nor condone: I speak the truth. I ache for my lover; I must work my fingers to the bone for him.'

'Not while I have mine—to work for you—to sin for you.'

'You cannot. Your fingers are too tender.'

This angered him. 'How can you say that, madam? How can you hurt me so? You know that I love you. Is it nothing to you? Less than nothing?'

She said, 'It is much. Come, you and I will kiss together for the last time.' She smiled a welcome, held out her arms; sobbing, he put them down and took her in his own instead, and held her close. There for a while she was content to be. But when he began to take more than his due, she gently disengaged herself, having won her object, which was to depart without him. 'Adieu, dear faithful friend,' she said—'pray for me'; and as he knelt before her, she stooped down and lifted up his head by the chin, and kissed him on the forehead, and was gone. After that, she was inaccessible to him, her door denied.

In three days' time—on the 23rd of January—she started for Glasgow with Lords Livingstone, Herries, and Traquair. Bothwell went part of her way, to where the roads divide. Her last public act had been to allow of the marriage between Fleming and Lethington. 'And now,' she said, 'I shall have but one Mary left, who came hither with four. So endeth our Maids' Adventure.' But if I am right, it had ended

long before. Now she was but a beast driven by the herdsmen to the market, there to be cheapened by the butcher.

Of his own moving adventure of the night when, for one moment, she assuredly looked back over her shoulder, Des-Essars writes what I consider his most fatuous page. ‘There was,’ he says, ‘a kind of very passion in that close embrace; and I knew, by the way she returned my kisses, that she was strongly inclined to me. Indeed, she said as much when she told me that it would have been possible, at an earlier day, for her to love me as she had once loved the King; with ardour, namely, like a fanciful child, in the secret mind, with the body but little concerned in the matter.[7] But it was too late. She owned herself tainted; he had taught her vice. She could be child no more, girl in love no more; alas, no, but a thirsty nymph stung by an evil spirit, ever restless, ever craving, never to be appeased....’

There is more in the same strain, which I say is fatuous. Whether she had a tenderness for him or not—and no doubt she had one—she was not revealing it then. Far from it, she wanted to escape, and this was her readiest way. She was at her old cajolery when she let him embrace and kiss her; and maybe she did kiss back. It is to be observed that she got her way immediately afterwards.

[7] His own report stultifies him here. According to him, she did not say it would have been possible, but oh, that it had been possible.

CHAPTER V MEDEA IN THE BEDCHAMBER

Women, in the experience of French Paris, as he once informed a select company of his acquaintance, could only be trusted to do a thing, and never to cause a thing to be done. ‘They will always find a thousand reasons why it should not be done, or why it should be done another way—their way, an older way, a newer way, any way in the world but yours. Burn the boats, burn the boats, dear sirs, when you need a woman to help you, as you constantly do in delicate affairs.’ He instanced, as a case in point, his own confidence in Queen Mary, and his master’s want of confidence,

when the pair of them rode with her part of her way to Glasgow; and how he was entirely justified by her subsequent behaviour. It made little difference in the end, to be sure; but no doubt she would have been saved a good deal of distress if Bothwell had been as instructed as his lacquey. As it is, it is to be feared that he fretted her sadly. It was not only heartless to play upon her jealousy, to put her so sharply upon her honour, but it was bad policy on his part; for if the creature of your use starts a-quivering at the touch of your hand, how are you served if by your whip and spurs you set her plunging madly into the dark, shying and swerving and cracking her heart? You wear out your tool before the time. That is just what Bothwell did.

The fact is that, as aforesaid, she was too sensitive an instrument for his coarse fingers. As well give Blind Jack a fiddle of Cremona for his tap-room jiggeries. If my lord wanted work from her which Moll Bawd or Kate Cutsheet would have done better, he should have known wiselier how to get it than by using the only stimulus such hacks could feel. This tremulous, starting, docile creature to be pricked on by jealousy, forsooth! Why, that had been King Darnley's silly way. 'I would that Glasgow might be the Hermitage and myself the Earl of Bothwell as I lie here,' he had said; and it made her laugh and admit the truth. But this Bothwell was no finer. 'Ohè! a many weary leagues before I win my home! Well, I am sure of a welcome there.' And then, when she bent her head to the way, 'Ay, Queens and Kings, and all gudemen and wives are in the like case. Bed and board—it comes down e'en to that. Love is just a flaunty scarf to draw the eye with. You see it purfling at a window, and, think you, that should be a dainty white hand a-working there!'

She lifted her face to meet the driving snow, looked into the dun sky and saw it speckled with black—her own colours henceforward! Thus would she be from her soul outwards—sodden grey, and speckled with black. The burden of her heart was so heavy that she groaned aloud. 'You falter, you fear!' cried that fidgety brute. 'Mercy, mercy,' she stammered; 'I shall fail if you speak to me.'

The snow was falling fast, but there was no wind, when she said farewell to her lover at Callander gate. He would not go in; purposed to ride southward into Liddesdale with but one change of horses, fearing that the wind would get up after dark and make the hill-roads impossible. The Black Laird of Ormiston, Tala, and Bowton were to go with him; he left Paris behind to be her messenger if she should need to send one. There was no time to spare. ‘Set on, gentlemen,’ he said, ‘I will overtake you.’

He shook the snow from his cloak, set it flying from eyelashes and beard, drew near to the sombre lady where she stood in the midst of her little company, and put his hand upon her saddle-bow. ‘God speed your Grace upon your goodly errand,’ he said—whereat she gave a little moan of the voice, but did not otherwise respond—‘and send us soon a happy meeting—Amen!’

She looked at him piercingly for a second of time, and then resumed her staring and glooming. He cried her farewell once more, saluted the lords, and pounded over the frozen marsh. One could hear him talking and laughing for a long way, and the barking answers of Ormiston.

The Queen rode up the avenue to the doors, and was taken to bed by Mary Seton and Carwood. She kept her chamber all that evening and night, but sent for Paris early in the morning. He saw her in bed, thin and drawn in the face, very narrow-eyed, and with a short cough. She handed him a great sack, sealed and tied, and a letter.

‘Take these to your master at the Hermitage. You shall have what horses you need. In that pack are four hundred crowns. You see how much trust I have in you.’

Paris assured her that her trust was well bestowed, as she should find out by his quick return to her.

She laughed, not happily. ‘I hope so. I came from France, and to France I go in my need.’

‘Why, madam,’ says Paris, ‘does your Majesty intend for my country?’

‘No, no. I shall see the land of France no more. I spoke of Frenchmen, who are tender towards women.’

Paris felt inspired to say that none loved her Majesty more entirely than the men of his nation, who had delicate sensibility for the perfections of ladies. And he modestly adduced as another example Monsieur Des-Essars, lately advanced to be one of her esquires.

She coloured faintly. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I believe he loves me well. Him also I trust—you, Paris, and Monsieur Des-Essars.’

Paris fell upon his knees. She changed her mood instantly, bade him begone with the treasure, and rejoin her at Glasgow with letters from my lord.

Paris faithfully performed his errand, in spite of the snow with which the country was blanketed as deeply as in a fleece.

‘My lord was glad of the money,’ he tells us, ‘and sent Monsieur de Tala away with it immediately. Before I left him to go to the Queen at Glasgow he told me of his plot, which was to blow the King up with gunpowder as he lay in a lodging at Edinburgh. I said, the King was not at Edinburgh yet. “No, fool,” says he, “but he soon will be.” He showed me papers of association whereon I was to believe stood the names of my lord himself, of my Lords Morton, Argyll, Huntly, Ruthven, and Lindsay, of Mr. Douglas, Mr. James Balfour, and others. He pointed to one name far below the others. “That,” he said, “is of our friend the White Rat,”—my own name for Mr. Secretary. He asked me what I thought of it; I told him, I thought no good of it. “Why not, you fool?” he jeered at me. I replied, “Because, my lord, you do not show me the name of names.”

‘Although he knew entirely well what name I meant, he forced me to mention Monsieur de Moray, and then was angry that I did so. He said that lord would not meddle. I said, “He is wise.” Then he began to jump about the chamber, hopping from board to board like a crow with his wing cut. “My lord of Moray! My lord of

Moray!" cried he out. "He will neither help nor hinder; but it is all one. It is late now to change advice—as why should we change for a fool's word such as thine? If we have Lethington, blockhead, have we not his master?"

'I said, No; for those gentlemen who interested themselves in the late David had Mr. Secretary, and thought they had the Earl of Moray also. But they found out their mistake the next day, when he came back and, rounding upon them, turned every one of them out.

'"Well," he cried—"Well! What then? What is all that to the purpose? Did he not sign my bond at the Council of October?" That bond was what we used to call "Of the Scotchmen's Business," because all present signed a paper in favour of the Queen, which was not read aloud. I admitted that he had signed it; but I was not convinced by that. I considered that it pledged him to nothing. I thought it my duty to add, "You are my master, my lord. If you command me in this I shall serve you, because in my opinion it is the business of servants to obey, not to advise. But I say, for the last time, Beware the Earl of Moray." My master began to rail and swear at his lordship—a natural but vain thing to do. I was silent.

'The next day after, he told me that he had revealed his plan to Monsieur Hob of Ormiston and to his brother-in-law, my lord of Huntly. If I had dared I should have asked him whether my lady the Countess had been informed; and I did ask it of her woman Torles, who was a friend of mine. But Torles said that, so far as she knew, the Countess never spoke with my lord about the Queen's affairs.

'I was curious about another thing, exceedingly curious. "Tell me, my dear Torles," I said, "our lord and lady—are they still good friends?" From the way that she looked at me, her sly way, and grinned, I knew the answer. "They are better friends, my fine man, than you and I are ever likely to be." I said something gallant, to the effect that there might be better reasons, and played some little foolishness or other, which pleased her very much. Next morning I started to go to Glasgow with letters

for the Queen’s Majesty.’

That was on the 26th January, the very day when Mr. Secretary Lethington was married to his Fleming. Paris heard that he took her to his house of Lethington, but (as he truly adds) the affair is of no moment, where he took her, or whether he took her at all. ‘It was long since she had been of the Queen’s party; indeed, I always understood that it was a love-match between them, entered into at first sight; and that Mistress Fleming had been alienated from her allegiance from the beginning.’ Paris was sorry. ‘She was a pretty and a modest lady, in a Court where those two graces were seldom in partnership.’

He learned at Glasgow that the King was still very sick, and the Queen in a low condition of body. It seems that when she had reached the house she would not have the patient informed of the fact, and would not go to him that same night. Some of the Hamiltons had met her on the road, and returned with her into the town. There was a full house, quite a Court, and a great company about her at supper. Lady Reres was there, an old friend of her Majesty’s, and of Lord Bothwell’s too, and Lord Livingstone, full of his pranks. He, it seems, had rallied the Queen finely about her despondency and long silences; said in a loud whisper that he was ready for a toast to an absentee if she would promise to drink to the name he would cry; and although she would not do it, but shook her head and looked away, his broad tongue was always hovering about Bothwell’s name. It is to be supposed that he drank to many distant friends, for Bastien, the Queen’s valet, told Paris that his lordship grew very blithe after supper. ‘If you will believe me, Paris,’ he said, ‘as her Majesty was warming her foot at the fire, leaning upon this Monsieur de Livingstone’s shoulder, his jolly lordship took her round the middle as if she had been his wench, and cried out upon her doleful visage. “Be merry,” says he, “and leave the dumps to him you have left behind you.” She flung away from him as if he teased her, but allowed his arm to be where it was, and his hardy hand too.’

Great dealings for the Parises and Bastiens to snigger at. I suppose it is no wonder that they unqueened her, since, however fast they went to work, it was never so fast as she did it to herself. They tell me it was always the way with her family, to choose rather to be easy in low company than stiff with the great folk about them. The common sort, therefore, loved the race of Stuart, and the lords detested it. But we must follow Paris if we are to see the Queen.

Though he delivered his letters as soon as he arrived, he was not sent for until late at night. The King's man, Joachim, took him upstairs, saying as they went, 'I hope thou hast a stout stomach; for take it from me, all is not very savoury up here.'

Paris replied that he had been so long in the service of gentlemen that their savour meant little to him, even that of diseased gentlemen.

'Right,' says Joachim; 'right for thee, my little game-cock. But thou shalt not find the Queen in too merry pin, be assured.'

Carwood, her finger to her lip, met him in the corridor, passed him in through the anteroom, and pulled aside the heavy curtain. 'Go in softly,' she said, 'and be careful of your feet. It is very dark, and the King sleeps. In with you.'

She drew back and let the curtain drive him forward. Certainly it was plaguey dark. He saw the Queen at the far end of the chamber writing a letter, haloed in the light of a single taper. She looked up when she heard him, but did not beckon him nearer; so he stayed where he was, and, as his eyes grew used to the gloom, looked about him.

It was a spacious room, but low in the ceiling, and raftered, with heavy curtains across the windows, which were embayed. A great bed was in the midst of the wall, canopied and crowned, with plumes at the corners and hangings on all sides but one—the door side. He could not see the King lying there, though he could hear his short breaths, 'like a dog's with its tongue out'; but presently, to his huge discomfort, he made out a sitting figure close to the pillow on the farther side, and

not six paces from him across the bed—man or woman he never knew. It might have been a dead person, he said, for all the motion that it made. ‘It sat deep in the shadow, hooded, so that you could not see its face, or whether it had a face; and one white hand supported the hood. It did not stir when the sufferer needed assistance, such as water, or the turning of a pillow, or a handkerchief. It was a silent witness of everything done and to be gone through with; gave me lead in the bowels, as they say, the horrors in the hair.’

It may have been Mary Seton, or a priest, or a watching nun; at any rate, it terrified Paris, his head already weakened by the burden of that fetid chamber. The air was overpowering, tainted to sourness, seeming to clog the eyelids and stifle the light.

By and by the Queen beckoned him forward, putting up her finger to enjoin a soft tread. He came on like a cat, and stood within touching distance of her, and saw that she was kneeling at a table, writing with extreme rapidity, tears running down her face. There was a silver crucifix in front of her, to which she turned her eyes from time to time, as if referring to it the words which cost her so much to put down. Once, after a frenzy of penmanship, she held out her hands to it in protest; then reverently took it up and kissed it, to sanctify so the words she was writing: ‘The good year send us that God knit us together for ever for the most faithful couple that ever He did knit together.’ Paris knew very well to whom she wrote so fully, who was to read this stained, passionate letter, ill scrawled on scraps of old paper, scored with guilt, blotted with shameful tears, loving, repentant, wilful, petulant, unspeakably loyal and tender, all by turns. At this moment the King called to her.

He lay, you must know, with a handkerchief over his face. Paris had believed him asleep, for his breathing, though short, was regular, and his moaning and the working of his tongue counted for little in a sick man’s slumber. But while she was in the thick of her work at the table he coughed and called out to her in distress, ‘Mary, O Mary! where are you gone?’ And when she did not answer, but went on

with the unspinning of the thought in her mind, and let him call ‘Mary, O Mary!’ Paris, looking from one to the other—and awfully on that shrouded third—found blame for her in his heart.

She finished her line, got up, and went to the foot of the bed. ‘You call me? What is your pleasure?’

‘His pleasure! Faith of a Christian!’ thinks Paris.

The King whispered, ‘Water, in Christ’s name’; and Paris heard the clicking of his dry tongue. Nevertheless he said, ‘Let me fetch you the water, madam.’

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘fetch it you. And I would that one of us could be drowned in the water.’

He poured some into a cup and took it to her.

‘Give it him,’ says she, ‘give it him. I dare not go nearer.’

The King heard that, and became sadly agitated. He wriggled his legs, tossed about, and began to wail feebly. In the end she had to take it, but you could see that she was nearly sick with loathing of him, natural and otherwise. For to say nothing that she had to lift the handkerchief, that he was hideous, his breath like poison, she was so made that only one could possess her at a time. If she loved a man she could not abide that any other should claim a right of her—least of all one who had a title to claim it.

The water cooled his fever for a time and brought him vitality. He talked, babbled, in the random way of the very sick, plunging headlong into the heart of a trouble and flying out before one can help with a hand. But he was quick enough to see that she did not respond readily, and sly enough to try her upon themes which he judged would be stimulating. He confessed with facile tears the faults of his youth and temper, begged her pardon times and again for his offences against her. ‘Oh, I have done wickedly by you, my love, but all’s over now. You shall see how well we will do together.’

Said she, ‘It will be better to wait a while. Talk not too much, lest you tax yourself.’

He rolled about, blinking his sightless eyes. ‘Do not be hard upon me! I repent—I tell you that I do. Pardon me, my Mary, pardon my faults. Let us be as we were once—lovers—wedded lovers—all in all!’ Paris saw her sway, with shut eyes, as she listened to him. ‘I would have you sleep now, my lord. It will be best for you. You tire yourself by talking.’

He begged for a kiss, and, when she affected not to hear him, grew very wild. It was a curious thing that she did then, watched by Paris with wonder. She dipped the tips of her two forefingers in the cup of water, and, putting them together, touched the back of his hand with them. ‘Ah, the balm of your cool sweet lips!’ he cried out, and was satisfied. But when he asked her to kiss his forehead she, in turn, became agitated, laughing and crying at once, and rocked herself about before she could repeat the touch of her two wet fingers on so foul a place. Again he sighed his content, and lay quiet, and presently dozed again.

She left him instantly and went back to her writing. She wrote fast; the fierce pen screamed over the paper: ‘You make me dissemble so much that I am afraid thereof with horror.... You almost make me play the part of a traitor.... If it were not for obeying I had rather be dead. My heart bleedeth at it....’ And again, ‘Alas! I never deceived anybody, but I remit myself wholly to your will. Send me word what I shall do, and whatsoever happen unto me I will obey you.... Think also if you will not find some invention more secret by physic; for he is to take physic at Craigmillar and the baths also, and shall not come forth for a long time....

... ‘It is very late; and although I should never be tired in writing to you, yet I will end after kissing your hands. Excuse my evil writing and read this over twice.... Pray remember your friend and write to her, and often. Love me always as I shall love you.’

She put a bracelet of twisted hair in between the sheets, made a packet of the whole,

and beckoned Paris to follow her into the next room. ‘Take you this,’ she said, ‘whither you know well, and tell my lord all that you have seen and heard. He will learn so that I am a faithful and obedient lover. And if he should be jealous, and ask you in what manner I have behaved myself here, you may show him.’ So speaking, she joined her two forefingers, as he had seen her do before, and touched the table with them. He was not likely to forget that, however. It struck him as an ingenious and quaint device.

‘If my lord need me,’ she went on, ‘he can send you to Linlithgow, where I shall lie one night. Thence I shall go directly to Craigmillar with the King’s litter. It is late, and I must go to bed, if not to sleep. Other women lie abed, comforted, or to be comforted before daylight; but that cannot I be as yet. Now go, Paris.’

He said, ‘Madam, be of good heart. All things come by waiting.’

She sighed, but said nothing. He made his reverence, and away.

CHAPTER VI KIRK O’ FIELD

The Earl of Bothwell returned to Edinburgh the day before the Queen was to leave Glasgow, and sent for Des-Essars to come to his lodging. ‘Baptist,’ he said, ‘I understand that her Majesty will be at Linlithgow this night, with the King in his litter. She will look to see me there, but I cannot go, with all my affairs in this town out of train and no one to overlook them but myself. I desire you, therefore, to go with the escort that is to meet her, and to give her this message from me: “It has not been found possible to accommodate the King at Craigmillar, but a house has been got for him near Saint-Mary-in-the-Field, and properly furnished. Please your Majesty, therefore, direct his bearers thither.”’

He made him repeat the words two or three times until he was sure of them; then added, ‘If the Queen ask you more concerning this house, with intent to know more, and not for mere curiosity, you shall tell her that it is near the great house of the

Hamiltons, in the which the Archbishop now lodges. She will be satisfied with that, you will find, and ask you no more.'

Des-Essars understood him perfectly; but in case the reader do not, I shall remind him that this Archbishop Hamilton of Saint Andrews was brother of the old Duke of Châtelherault, of whom he used to hear in the beginning of this book—one of the clan, then, which disputed the Succession with the Lennox Stuarts and was regarded by the King as an hereditary enemy, with a blood-feud neither quenched nor quenchable. That same Archbishop, when the Queen was at Stirling for the baptism, scaring of the King, recall of Morton and the rest of the deeds done there, had been restored to his consistorial powers, and put at liberty to bind and loose according to his discretion and that of Saint Peter his master. There had been some talk at the time as to why he had been so highly favoured, and the opinion commonly held that he was to divorce the Queen from the King. That was not French Paris's opinion, for one. In Edinburgh now, at any rate, was this Archbishop Hamilton with the keys of binding and loosing in his hands, not as yet making any use of them, and lodging in the great family house without the city wall.

Well, the escort departed for Linlithgow, Des-Essars with it. This is what he says of his adored mistress:

'I think she was glad to see me, as certainly was I to see her looking so hale and fresh. Her eyes were like wet stars; she kissed me twice at meeting, with lips which had regained their vivid scarlet, were cool but not dry. I hastened to excuse my Lord Bothwell on the score of affairs. "Yes, yes, I know how pressed he is," she replied. "I know he would have come if it had been possible. He has sent me the best proxy by you." I told her that my Lord Huntly would be here momently, but she made a pouting mouth and a little grimace—then looked slily at me and laughed.

'I rehearsed faithfully my Lord Bothwell's message, and could not see that she was particularly interested in the King's actual lodging—though that is by no means to

imply that she was not interested. It is due to say that I never knew any person in all my experience of Courts and policy so quick as she not only to conceal her thoughts, but also to foresee when it would behove her to conceal them. It was next to impossible to surprise her heart out of her.

‘She asked me eagerly for Edinburgh news. I told her that the Hamiltons were in their own house; the Archbishop there already, and my Lord of Arbroath expected every day. She said in a simple, wondering kind of a way, “Why, the Hamilton house is next neighbour unto the King’s, I suppose?”

‘“Madam,” I said, “it is. And so my Lord Bothwell bid me remind your Majesty.”

‘She laughed; a little confusedly. “Better the King should not know of it,” she said. “He hates that family, and fears them, too. But that is not extraordinary, for he always hates those whom he fears.”

‘She asked, was my lord of Morton in town? I replied that he was, with a strong guard about his doors and a goodly company within them, as Mr. Archibald Douglas of Whittingehame and his brother, Captain Cullen, Mr. Balfour of Fliske, and others like him, and also the laird of Grange. To him resorted most of the lords of the new religion; they, namely, of Lindsay, Ruthven, Glencairn, and Argyll. My lord of Bothwell, however, lodging in the Huntly house, had a larger following than the Douglases; for all the Hamiltons paid him court as well as his own friends. She did not ask me, but I told her that her brother, my Lord Moray, kept much to himself, and saw few but ministers of his religion, such as Mr. Wood and Mr. Craig, and Mr. Secretary Lethington, who (with his wife) was lodged in his lordship’s house, and worked with him every day.

‘She stopped me here by looking long at me, and then asking shortly, “Have you heard anything of my Lady Bothwell?” which confused me very much. I could only reply that I had heard she had been indisposed. “I am sorry to hear it,” said she in quite an ordinary tone, “and am sorry also for her, when she finds out that her

sickness is not what she hopes it is. You have not seen her, I suppose?" I had not.

'"I have seen her in illness," she pursued. "It does not become white-faced women to be so, for to be pale is one thing, but to be pallid another. When the transparency departs from a complexion of ivory, the residuum is paste. I myself have not a high colour by nature: yet when I am ill, as I am now, I always have fever, and look better than when my health is better. Did you not think, when you saw me first this morning, that I looked well?"

'I had thought she looked both beautiful and well, and told her so. She was pleased.

'"I love you, Baptist, when you look at me like that, and your words find echo in your eyes. Now I will tell you that the joy of seeing you again had much to say to my good looks. But I think that women would always rather look well than be well."

'As soon as my Lord Huntly had come in and dined, we departed from Linlithgow. Her Majesty rode on with that lord, Lord Livingstone and the others, leaving me behind with Mr. Erskine and the ladies, to conduct the King's litter safely to the house prepared for him. I did not see his face nor hear him speak, but understood that he was greatly better. His hand, which was often outside the curtains, waving about, looked that of a clean man. He kept it out there, my Lady Reres told me, in the hope that her Majesty would see and touch it. Once, when it had been signalling about for some while, her ladyship said, "'Tis a black shame there should be a man's hand wagging and no woman's to slip into it." So then she let him get hold of hers; and he, thinking he had the Queen's, squeezed and fondled it until she was tired. We got him by nightfall into a mean little house, set in a garden the most disconsolate and weed-grown that ever you saw. It was a wild, wet evening, and as we went down Thieves' Row the deplorable inhabitants of that street of stews and wicked dens were at their doors watching us. As we came by they pointed to the gable of the house, and uttered harsh and jeering cries. Lady Reres screamed and covered her face. There was perched an old raven on the gable-end, that croaked like any

philosopher in the dumps; and as we set down the litter in the roadway, he flapped his ragged wings twice or thrice, and flew off into the dark, trailing his legs behind him. The people thought it an ill-omen....'

Here, for the time being, I forsake Des-Essars, and that for two reasons: the first, that I have a man to hand who knew more; the second, that what little the Brabanter did know he did not care to tell. A more than common acquaintance with his work assures me that his secret preoccupied him from hereabouts to the end—that Secret des Secrets of his which he thought so important as to have written his book for nothing else but to hold it. We shall come upon it all in good time, and see more evidently than now we do another, and what we may call supererogatory secret, which is that he grew bolder in his passion for the Queen, and she, perhaps, a little inclined to humour it. But for the present we leave him, and turn to the brisk narrative of one who knew nearly everything that was to be known, and could hazard a sharp guess at things which, it almost seems, could never perfectly be known. I mean, of course, our assured friend French Paris—bought, once for all, with a crown piece.

French Paris asks, in his bright way, 'Do you know that lane that runs straight from the Cowgate to the old house by the Blackfriars—the Blackfriars' Wynd, as they call it?' You nod your head, and he continues. 'Well, towards the end of that same lane, if you wish to reach the convent house, you pass through the ancient wall of the city by a gate in it which is called the Kirk o' Field Port. This will lead you to the Blackfriars' Church, but not until you have turned the angle of the wall and followed the road round it towards the left hand. Within that angle stands another church, Saint Mary-of-the-Field, which has nothing to do with what I have to tell you. But mark what I say now. You go through the Kirk o' Field Port; you turn to the left round by the wall; on your right hand, at no great distance along, you behold a row of poor hovels at right angles to your present direction—doorless cabins, windowless, without chimneys, swarming with pigs, fowls, and filthy children;

between them a very vile road full of holes and quags and broken potsherds. That is called Thieves' Row, and for the best of good reasons. Nevertheless, behind those little pigs' houses, on either hand, there are gardens very fair; and if you venture up, above the thatch of the roofs you will see the tops of fine trees waving in a cleaner air than you would believe possible, and find in the full middle of this Thieves' Row, again on either hand, a garden gate right in among the mean tenements. That which is on the right hand leads into the old Blackfriars' Garden, a great tangled place of trees and greensward with thickets interspersed; the other, on the left hand, belongs to the garden of the house wherein they lodged the King when they had brought him from Glasgow. Above the gate could once be seen the gable-end of the house itself; but you will not see it now if you look for it. And if you stood in the garden of his house and looked out over the boskage, you could see the hotel of the Lord Archbishop of Saint Andrews, the Hamilton House. Usefully enough, as it turned out, there let a little door from the corner of the King's garden right upon the Archbishop's house.

'To tell you of the King's lodging, it was as mean as you please, built of rough-cast work upon arches of rubble and plaster, with a flight of stairs from the ground-level reaching to the first floor—the piano nobile, save the mark! Upon that floor was a fair hall, and a chamber in which the Queen might lie when she chose, wardrobe, maids' chamber, cabinet, and such like. The King lay on the floor above, having his own chamber for his great bed, with a little dressing-room near by. His servants, of whom he had not more than three or four, slept some in the passage and some in the hall; except his chamber-child, who lay in the bedchamber itself, on or below the foot of the King's great bed. Now those stairs of which I told you just now led directly from the garden to the hall upon the first floor; but out of the Queen's chamber there was a door giving on to a flight of wooden steps, very convenient, as thereby she could come in and out of the house without being disturbed. All this I observed for myself, as my master desired me, when Nelson, the King's man, was

showing me how ill-furnished and meanly found it was to be the lodging of so great a gentleman.

‘To say nothing of the garden, which, in that winter season, was miserable indeed, I was bound to agree that the house wanted repair. Nelson showed me where the roof let in water; he showed me the holes of rats, the track of their runs across the floors, and the places where they had gnawed the edges of the doors. “And, if you will believe me, Paris,” said he, “there is not so much as a key to a lock in the whole crazy cabin.” This was a thing which I was glad to have learned, and to bring to my master’s knowledge when, at the last moment, he thought fit to acquaint me with his pleasure. I had heard, in outline, what it was, on the day before I went to the Queen at Glasgow; but I will ask you to believe that he told me no more until the morning of the day when I received his commands to go to work. This is entirely true; though it is equally true that I found out a good deal for myself. My master, you must understand, had not a fool under his authority. No, no!

‘I did not myself see the Queen for two or three days after the King’s coming in, though I took many letters to her and bore back her replies. When I say I did not see her, that is a lie: I did—but never to speak with her, merely as one may pass in the street. I was struck with her fine looks and the shrill sound of her laughter: she talked more than ordinarily, and never spared herself in the dance. Once, or maybe twice, she visited the King in his lodging—not to sleep there herself, though her bed stood always ready, but going down to supper and remaining till late in the evening: never alone; once with the Lords Moray and Argyll, and once with (among other company) her brother, the Lord Robert, and a Spanish youth very much in his confidence. As to this second visit, Monsieur Des-Essars, who was there, told me a singular thing,[8] namely, that this Lord Robert had been moved to impart to the King the danger he lay in—that is, close to the Hamiltons, and with my Lord Morton at large and in favour in Edinburgh. Now, for some reason or another, it seems that his Majesty repeated the confidence to the Queen herself just as I have told it to you.

Whereupon, said Monsieur Des-Essars, she flew into a passion, commanded the Lord Robert into her presence, and when he was before her, the King lying on his bed, bade him repeat the story if he dare. My Lord Robert laughed it off as done by way of a jest, and the Queen, more and more angry, sent him away. Now, here comes what I call the cream of the jest. "You may judge from this, Paris," said M. Des-Essars to me, "how monstrous foolish it is to suppose that the Queen devises some mischief against her consort, or shares the counsels of any of his enemies. For certainly, if she did, she would not provoke them into betraying her in his own presence."

'I thanked his honour, but when he had gone I burst out laughing to myself. Do you ask why? First of all, none knew better than M. Des-Essars how the Queen stood with regard to her husband, and why my lord of Morton had been suffered to come home. None knew better than he, except it were the Queen herself, that the King was to be removed, she standing aside. Very well: then why did M. Des-Essars try to hoodwink me, except in the hope to gather testimony on all sides against what he feared must take place? But why did the Queen bring my Lord Robert face to face with the King, she knowing too well that his warning had bones and blood in it? Ah! that is more delicate webbery: she was a better politician than her young friend. To begin with, there was no real danger; for the Lord Robert knew nothing, and was nothing but a windbag. His confusion, therefore (he was at heart a coward), would give the King confidence. But, secondly, I am sure she still hoped that his Majesty might be removed without my master's aid. I think she said to herself, "The King gains his health"—as indeed he did, with his natural skin coming back again, and the clear colour to his eyes—"and with health," she would reason it, "his choler will return. To confront these two, with a lie between them, may provoke a quarrel. The daggers are handy: who can say what the end of this may be? One of two mishaps: the King will kill Lord Robert, or Lord Robert the King; either way will be good." Observe, I know nothing; but that is how I read the story.

‘Now, all this while my master was very busy, very brisk and happy, singing at the top of his voice as he went about his business—as he always did on the verge of a great enterprise; but the first precise information I had that our work was close at hand was upon 9th February, being a Sunday. My master lodging at the Lord Huntly’s house in the Cowgate, I was standing at the door at, maybe, seven o’clock in the morning; black as Hell it was, but the cold not extraordinary. There came some woman down the street with a lantern swinging, and stopped quite close to me. She swung her lantern-light into my face, and, the moment she saw that I was I, began to speak in an urgent way. She was Margaret Carwood, one of the Queen’s women.

‘“Oh, Paris,” she says, “I have been sent express to you! You are to go down to the King’s lodging and fetch away the quilt which lies on the Queen’s bed there.”

‘I knew this quilt well—a handsome piece of work, of Genoa velvet, much overlaid with gold thread, which they say had belonged to the old Queen.

‘I asked, “By whose order come you, my good Carwood?” for I was not everybody’s man.

‘She replied, “By the Queen’s own, given to me by word of mouth, not an hour since. Go now, go, Paris. She is in a rare fluster, and will not rest.”

‘“Toho!” I say, “she disquieteth herself about this quilt.”

‘And Carwood said, “Ay, for it belonged to her lady mother, and is therefore worth rubies in her sight. She hath not slept a wink since she woke dreaming of it.”

‘To be short, this gave me, as they say, food for thoughts. Then, about the eleven o’clock, as the people were coming out from their sermon, I had more of the same provender—and a full meal of it. Judge for yourselves when I tell you with what the vomiting church doors were buzzing. My lord of Moray had left Edinburgh overnight and gone northward, to Lochleven, to see his mother, the Lady Douglas. He had taken secret leave of the Queen, and immediately after was away. Oh,

Monsieur de Moray, Monsieur de Moray! is not your lordship the archetype and everlasting pattern of all rats that are and shall be in the world?

‘Now, putting the one thing on the top of the other, you may believe that I was not at all surprised to get my master’s orders the same day, to convey certain gunpowder from Hamilton House through the King’s garden into the Queen’s chamber so soon as it was quite dark. There you have the reason why the quilt had been saved. Powrie, Dalgleish, and Patrick Wilson were to help me; Monsieur Hob d’Ormiston would show us how to dispose of our loads and spread the train for the slow match. In Hamilton House it lay, mark you well! I will make the figs in the face of anybody who tells me that the Hamiltons were not up to the chin in the affair. How should we use their house without their leave? There were the Archbishop and Monsieur d’Arbroath involved. But enough! It is obvious. And I can tell you of another gentleman heavily involved, no one more certainly than I. It was my lord of Huntly: yes, gentlemen, no less a man.

‘It fell out about the five o’clock that, judging it dark enough for far more delicate work than this of powder-laying, I was setting out to join my colleagues by Hamilton House, when my Lord Huntly sends down a valet for me to go to his cabinet. I had had very few dealings with this young nobleman, whom (to say truth) I had always considered something of a dunce. He was as silent as his sister, my master’s lady, and, after his fashion, as good to look upon. You never saw a straighter-legged man, nor a straighter-looking, nor one who carried, as I had thought, an empty head higher in the air. That was my mistake. He was an old lover of the Queen’s, whom she fancied less than his brother Sir Adam. He, that Sir Adam, had been bosom-friend of Monsieur Des-Essars when the pair of them were boys, and had shared the Queen’s favours together, which very likely were not so bountiful as common rumour would have them. He certainly was a fiery youth, who may one day do greatly. But I admit that I had held my Lord Huntly for a want-wit—and that I was very much mistaken.

‘I went up and into his cabinet, and found him standing before the fire, with his legs spread out.

‘“Paris,” says he, “you are off on an errand of your master’s, I jealouse; one that might take you not a hundred miles from the Blackfriars’ Garden.”

‘I admitted all this. “I might tell you,” he says, “that I know that errand of yours, and share in the enterprise which directs it. Maybe you have been shown my name upon a parchment writing: I know that you are in your master’s confidence.”

‘I replied that I had understood his lordship had been made privy to my master’s thoughts in many matters, as was only reasonable, seeing the relationship between both their lordships: upon which he said, “You are a sly little devil, Paris, but have a kind of honesty, too.” I thanked him for his good opinion; and then he says, looking very hard at me, “Your master is now abroad upon this weighty business, and has left me to order matters at home. Now mark me well, Paris, and fail not in any particular, at your extreme peril. The train is to be put to proof at two o’clock of the morning by the bell of Saint Giles’, but not a moment before. You are to tell this to Mr. Hobbie Ormiston, who will report it to your master. Do you swear upon your mother’s soul in Paradise that you will deliver this message?” he says. I promised, and, what is more, I kept my promise; but at the time I thought it very odd that my master, generally so careful in these nice undertakings, should have left the all-important direction of time when to so dull-minded a person as my Lord Huntly. To add to my bewilderment, Monsieur Hob also, when I gave him the message, told me that he had had it already from his lordship, and had repeated it to my master. Immediately afterwards we set to work at our little preliminaries, and were soon sweating and black as negroes.

‘That night there was a supper in the hall of the King’s lodging, the Queen being there, my master, the Earls of Huntly and Argyll, the Lord Livingstone and others, with the King lying on a couch that he might have their company. They were merry

enough at their meal, for I was working close by and heard them; and I could not help reflecting upon the drollery of it—for it was droll—that here were executioners and patient all laughing together, and I behind the party wall laying the table (as it were) for an ambrosial banquet for one at least of the company. It is impossible to avoid these humorous images, or I find it so.

‘Bastien the Breton had that very morning been married to Dolet—both Queen’s servants. She had been at their mass, and (loving them fondly, as she was prone to love her servants) intended to be present at the masque of the night and to put the bride to bed. She, my master, Monsieur de Huntly, and Mistress Seton were all to go; they were at this supper in their masquing gear. My master’s was very rich, being of a black satin doublet slashed with cloth of silver, black velvet trunks trussed and tagged with the same. My lord of Huntly was all in white. I did not fairly see the Queen’s gown, which was of a dark colour, I think of claret, and her neck and bosom bare. I remember that she had a small crown of daisies and pearls, and a collar of the same things.

‘At eleven o’clock, or perhaps a little after, the Queen’s linkmen and carriers were called for. Nelson told me that she kissed the King very affectionately, and promised to see him the next day. He was positive about that, for (being curious) I asked him if he had certainly heard her say that.

‘“Oh, yes,” he said, “and I’ll tell you why. The King caught her by the little finger and held her. ‘Next day, say you?’ he asked her. ‘And when will you say, “This night,” Mary?‘

‘“She laughed and swung her hand to and fro, and his with it that held it. ‘Soon,’ she said, ‘soon.’”

‘This is what Nelson told me: he was never the man to have conceived that charming scene of comedy. Well, to continue, my master was to escort her Majesty out of the house, the grooms going before with torches. Her litter was in Thieves’

Row, as you may believe when you reflect that our train of gunpowder extended down her private flight of steps, across the garden to the door which gives on to Hamilton House. All my work lay on that side, and there I should have been; but by some extraordinary mischance it happened that I was just outside the door when my master led her Majesty out, and so—in a full light of torches—she came plump upon me.

‘That was a very unfortunate incident, for I was as black as a charcoal-burner. But there it was: I came full tilt upon her and my lord, and saw her face in the light of the torches as fair and delicate as a flower, and her eyes exceedingly bright and luminous, like stars in midsummer. She was whispering and laughing on my master’s arm, and he (somewhat distracted) saying, “Ay, ay,” in the way he has when he is bothered and wishes to be quiet.

‘But at the sight of me flat against the wall she gave a short cry, and crushed her bosom with her free hand. “O God! O God! who is this?”

‘She caught at my master’s arm. By my head, I had given her a fright—just as the colliers of old gave that Count of Tuscany who thought they were devils come to require his soul, and was converted to God, and built seven fine abbeys before he died. Her mouth was open; she did not breathe; her face was all white, and her eyes were all black.

‘“Pardon, madam, it is I, your servant, poor French Paris,” I said; and my master in a hurry, “There, ma’am, there; you see, it is a friend of ours.”

‘When she got her breath again, it came back in a flood, like to suffocate her. She struggled and fought for it so, I made sure she would faint. So did my master, who put his hand behind to catch her and save the noise of her fall. She shut her eyes, she tottered. Oh, it was a bad affair! But she recovered herself by some means, and did her bravest to carry it off. “Jesu, Paris, how begrimed you are!” she said, panting and swallowing; and my master damned me for a blackguardly spy, and bade me go

wash myself.

‘It is true I was behind the door, but most false that I was spying. God knows, I had enough secrets to keep without smelling for more. But that was not a time to be justifying myself. My master took the Queen away immediately, Mistress Seton with her. Afterwards I heard my Lords Argyll and Livingstone depart—but not M. de Huntly. I saw him again before I went out myself.

‘I waited about until I heard the King helped up to bed by his servants; I waited a long time. They sang a psalm in his chamber, and talked afterwards, laughing and humming airs. They had the boy to amuse them with fooleries: Heaven knows what they did or did not. I thought they would never finish. Finally, I heard the King call, “Good-night all,” saw the lights put out, and made a move at my best pace to get home, clean myself, and be ready for the others. Going through the garden along the edge of my powder-train, I met somebody, who called out, “It is I, the Earl of Huntly,” and then said, “Remember you of my words? It is now past midnight. Fire nothing until you hear the strokes of two. More depends upon that than you can understand. Now be off.” I wished his lordship a good-night, and he replied, “Go you to the devil with your nights.” So off I went.

‘We all made ready, and assembled in good time at the door of our house in the Cowgate: my master, M. Hob Ormiston, M. de Tala, M. de Bowton, myself, Powrie, Dalgleish, and Patrick Wilson. There may have been more—it seemed to me that one or another joined us as we went—in which case I know not their names. We went down by the Blackfriars’ Wynd, meeting nobody, through the Kirk o’ Field Port, and round by the wall to Hamilton House. A light was burning in the upper window of that mansion, and was not extinguished so long as I was there (though they tell me it was blown out after the explosion); but no man came out to join us at the appointed place. Half the company was stopped at the corner of the town wall by my master’s orders: he himself, M. d’Ormiston, and I went into the garden; and just

as we entered, so well had all been timed, I heard Saint Giles' toll the hour of two. I lighted the train; and then we all went back, joined the others (who had seen nothing dangerous outside the wall), and returned by the way we had come—no one saying anything. We may have been half of the way to the Gate—I cannot say—when the darkness was, as it were, split asunder as by a flare of lightning, one of those sheeted flames that illumines a whole quarter of the sky, and shows in the midst a jagged core of intenser light. And whilst we reeled before it came the crash and volley of the noise, as if all Hell were loosed about us. What became of our betters I know not, nor what became of any. For myself, I tell you fairly that I stooped and ran as if the air above me were full of flying devils.

'By some fate or other I ran, not to the city, but along the wall of the Blackfriars' Garden, a long way past the Gate, and lay down in a sort of kennel there was while I fetched up my breath again. Then, not daring to go back to the Wynd, for I was sure the whole town would be awake, I considered that the best thing for me to do was to climb that garden wall, and lie hidden within it until the citizens had wondered themselves to sleep. So I did, without difficulty, and felt my way through brakes and shrubberies into what seemed to be an open space. I lit my lantern, and found myself in a kind of trained arbour, oval or circular in shape, made all of clipped box. In the middle of it were a broad platt of grass and a dial: a snug enough place which would suit me very well. It appeared to me, too, that there was a settle on the far side, on which I could repose myself. Good! I would lie there.

'The path of light made by my lantern showed me now another thing—that I was not the only tenant of this garden. There lay a man in white midway of the grass. "Oho," thinks I, "I will have a close look at you, my friend, before I settle down." Peering at him from my safe distance, I saw that he had another beside him; and made sure that I was on the edge of an indiscretion. If here I was in a bower of bliss, it became me on all counts to withdraw. But first I must be sure: too much depended upon it. I drew nearer: the light fell upon those two who lay so still. My heart ceased to beat.

Stretched out upon that secret grass, with his eyes staring horribly into the dark, lay the King whom I had gone forth to slay—stark and dead there, and the dead boy by his side. By God and his Mother! I am a man of experience, with no call to be on punctilio with dead men. But that dead man, I am not ashamed to say, made me weep, after I had recovered myself a little.

‘God has shown me great mercy. I am not guilty of the King’s death, nor is my master. I should have supposed that my Lord Huntly killed him, to save the Queen from deadly sin, and could then have understood his urgent instructions to me not to go to work before a certain hour. If that had been so, all honour to him. I say, so I should have supposed; but one little circumstance made me hesitate. Near by, on the same grass platt, I found a velvet shoe, which I took back with me into town. It was purchased of me afterwards by Monsieur Archibald Douglas, that grey-headed young man, for six hundred crowns; and I believe I might have had double. That, mind you, told me a tale!

‘The King had been smothered, I consider. There were no wounds upon him of any sort, nor any clothes but his shirt. Taylor, the boy, was naked.

‘There, gentlemen, you have a relation of my share in these dark facts, told you by a man whose position (as you may say) between one world and another is likely to sober his fancy and incline him to the very truth.’

French Paris, a jaunty dog—with a kind of brisk, dog’s fidelity upon him which is a better quality in a rascal than no fidelity, or perhaps than dull fidelity—has very little more to say to you and me.

[8] Des-Essars himself, it is to be observed, omits this story altogether.

CHAPTER VII THE RED BRIDEGROOM

Margaret Carwood, the Queen’s woman, had a tale to tell, if she could be got to repeat it. She had undressed her mistress, who came in exceedingly late from

Bastien's masque, and put the bedgown upon her: then was the time for Father Roche to come in for prayers—if any time were left, which Carwood could not think was the case. Would her Majesty, considering the lateness of the hour, excuse his Reverence?

But her Majesty looked wildly at Carwood and began to rave. 'Do you think me leprous, Carwood? Am I not to be prayed with? Why, this is treason!' And she continued to shiver and mutter, 'Treason! Treason!' until the woman, terrified, called up the Chaplain, and he came in with the rest of the household and began the accustomed prayers. Gradually the Queen composed herself, and you could hear her voice—as usual—above all the others, leading the responses.

In the midst of the psalms of the hour, Carwood said, there struck on all ears a dull thud, like the booming of water upon a rock in the sea; the windows of the house shook, and litter was heard to fall behind the wainscot. Then complete silence—and out of that, far off in the city, rose a low and long wailing cry, 'as of one hurt to death and desolate.' Father Roche, who had stopped his Gloria Patri at the first shock, when he heard that cry, said sharply, 'O King of Glory, what's that?' and stared at the window, trembling like a very old man; and nobody else was much bolder than he. But the Queen, stiff as a stone, went on where he had left off, driving the words out of herself, higher and higher, faster and faster, until she finished on a shrill, fierce note:—'Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in sæcula sæculorum. Amen'; and only stopped there because it was not her part to begin the next psalm.

A strange midnight picture! There was Father Roche, the old Dominican, looking all ways for danger, twittering before the candles and cross; there Des-Essars on his knees, with his white face peaked and taut; there poor Carwood, her apron over her head, swaying about; there old Mother Reres spying wickedly out of the corners of her eyes at Mary Livingstone, stern as thunder. Erskine with his white staff stood at

the door, two clinging pages about him; in the midst, at her faldstool, the slim, fever-bright Queen in her furred gown, praying aloud, she alone, like a nun in ecstasy. With Father Roche in extremis, Des-Essars was the first to relieve the strain by boldly intoning the versicle; but there were no more prayers. Carwood and Livingstone took the Queen to bed, and Livingstone stayed with her. Carwood says that she herself slept 'like drowned weed.' When Livingstone woke her next morning, she heard the great bell tolling at Saint Giles'. She asked first of the Queen, and was told she was 'quiet.' She did not dare any more questions, and remained until midday inmate of the only house in town which did not know the news.

Mary Livingstone would say nothing to any one: in fact, so grim were her looks that no one cared to question her. Lady Reres kept her chamber. At nine o'clock the Earl of Huntly came up, with a very fixed face, and was taken to the Queen's bedchamber door by Des-Essars, who went no farther himself, but hung about the corridor and anteroom in case he might be sent for. Before long he heard the Queen in distress, crying and talking at once, a flood of broken words; and, whiles, Lord Huntly's voice, sombre and restrained, ill calculated to calm her. Presently Mary Livingstone opened the door, and he heard the Queen calling for him: 'Baptist, O Baptist, come—quick, quick!'

'Go to her,' says Livingstone drily; 'this is beyond my powers.'

He ran into the room, and saw her lying half-naked on her bed, face downwards, her hair all over her eyes. She looked like one in mortal agony.

'O madam, O sweet madam——' he began, being on his knees before her.

She lifted her head. 'Who calls me?'

She sat up, and parted her hair from her face with her finger-tips. He saw her transfigured, flushed like one with a heat-rash, and her eyes cloudy black, glazed and undiscerning. She was in a transport of feeling, far beyond his scope; but she

knew him, and cleared in his sight.

‘Baptist, the King is dead.’

‘Dead, madam! Oh, alas!’

She gripped him by the arm and steadied herself by it. She read his very soul; her eyes seemed to bite him. And she answered a question which he had not asked.

‘How should I know who slew him? How should I? I know not—I do not ask—nor need you—nor should you. But there is one who had no hand in it—be you sure of that. Let none call him murderer—he did nothing amiss. Do you hear? Do you understand? He is clean as new snow—and I—and I—clean as the snow, Baptist. O God! O God!’

She loosed his arm and flung herself down, shaken to pieces by her hard sobbing. Her face had been dry, her eyes tearless. If she could not weep, he thought, it must go hard with her. Livingstone came into the room and went to her help. She used no ceremony, got into the bed, and drew the poor distraught creature to her bosom, whispered to her, kissed and stroked her, mothered her as if it were one of her own children she was tending. The Queen clung to her. Lord Huntly drew Des-Essars aside, into the embrasure of the window.

‘Listen to me, Monsieur Des-Essars,’ he said: ‘I speak to you because I know that you are in her Majesty’s confidence. It is very necessary that her friends should understand what I am going to tell you. My Lord Bothwell had no part in the King’s death. It is true he intended it—I do not attempt to conceal that from you—and even that he went farther than intent; but the King was dead before he came. He had his own plans, and laid them well. But there were other plans of which he had no suspicion.’ Des-Essars would have spoken; Lord Huntly put a hand over his mouth. ‘Say nothing. Ask me not who did it. I was there, and saw it done. I believe that it was just, and will answer for my part when it is required of me.’

‘My lord,’ said Des-Essars, ‘your secret is safe with me. I will only say this: If that

person of whom you spake had no part in the deed, then she is free.'

'She is free,' said Huntly. 'I saw to that.'

'You saw to it—you?'

'I saw to it. It was I who deceived—that person—and delayed his plans. There was a time, long ago, when I played her false. She trusted me, believing in my honesty, and I forsook her. I have never been able to forgive myself or ceased to call myself traitor until now. And this time, when she has trusted me but little, I have served her.'

'I hope you may have served her, my lord, but——'

'Man,' said Huntly sternly, 'what are your hopes or mine to the purpose in a case of the sort? Do you not know her better? She would have had him, had he been soaked in blood. Well! now she can have him clean.'

Des-Essars knelt down and kissed the other's hand. 'My lord, you have given me a schooling in great love. If the time comes when there shall be need of me, I hope to prove myself your good pupil.'

'Get up,' said Huntly, not pleased with this tribute; 'they serve best who talk least. But you may be sure that the time is at hand when there will be need of more than you and me.' He looked sadly out of window, across the red roofs, out into the slowly brightening sky. Des-Essars was silent.

They announced the Earl of Bothwell. The Queen put back her hair and wiped her eyes—for Mary Livingstone had thawed her hard grief. She covered herself up to the neck. Bothwell came in, with a low reverence at the door, and made room for Livingstone to go out. She swept by him like a Queen-mother. Queen Mary beckoned him to the bedside, and gave him both her hands to hold. 'Oh, you have come to me! Oh, you have come to me!' was all she could say. She could not speak coherently for her full heart. He bent over and kissed her; and for a time they remained so, whispering brokenly to each other and kissing. 'Have you heard

Huntly's tale?' she asked him aloud.

He was now sitting composedly by her bed, one leg over the other.

'Yes, yes, long ago! We have had our talk together.'

She fingered the counterpane. 'Belike he told you more than I could win of him. He will name no names.'

Bothwell laughed shortly.

'He is wise. Names make mischief. I could wish his own were as well out of that as mine is. Heard you of Archie's shoe?'

She had not. He told her of Paris's discovery in the garden; they both laughed at Archie's mishap. Bothwell supposed it would cost him five hundred crowns to redeem. We know from Paris that it cost him six.

My Lord Bothwell's opinion, which he expressed with great freedom, was that Morton and the Douglases had killed the King soon after he had been put to bed. The body had been cold when Paris found it—cold and stiff. Then there was a woman, who had been talking with her neighbours, and found herself under examination in the Tolbooth before she could end her tale. She lived in Thieves' Row. She declared, and nothing so far had shaken her, that a tick or two after midnight she had heard the scuffling of many feet in the road, and a voice which cried aloud, 'Pity me, kinsmen, for the love of Him who pitied all the world!' She heard it distinctly; but, being in bed, and accustomed to hear such petitions, did not get up, and soon after fell asleep. Also there had been heard a boy crying, 'Enough to break your heart,' she said. But it had not broken her rest, for all that. This was the story, and——'Well, now,' says my Lord Bothwell, 'what else are you to make of that?'

Des-Essars, watching the Queen's face under this recital, saw the clouds gather for a storm. Lord Huntly had listened to it with unmoved face. At the end he said gravely, 'He was long dying'; and no one spoke or moved for some minutes until the Queen

suddenly hid her face and sobbed, and cried out that she wished she herself were dead. Lord Bothwell, at that, put his arms about her with rough familiarity, lifted her half out of bed to his own breast, kissed her lax lips, and said, ‘That wilt thou unwish within these few days. What! when thou art thine own mistress and all? No, but thou wilt desire to live rather, to be my dear comfort and delight. For now, look thou, my honey-Queen, thou and I are to get our bliss of one another.’ She, not responding by word or sign, but struggling and striving to be free of his arms, presently he put her down again, and left her. Huntly followed him; and they went up to the Council, which was set for noon.

‘I remained kneeling by her,’ says Des-Essars, ‘while she lay without motion, until presently I found that she was in a heavy sleep. When I went downstairs I heard that Mistress Livingstone had left the Court and gone to her husband, Sempill, at Beltrees.’

The silence of the town during those first few days of doubt was a terrifying thing, enough to try the nerves of the stoutest man; it drove the Queen to such dangerous excesses of exaltation and despondency that all her friends were on tenterhooks to get her away before the storm (which all knew must be brooding) should burst. For what could it portend but a storm, this fatal silence, this unearthly suspense of clamour and judgment? It was not that the citizens merely held their tongues from rumour: it was more literally silence; they talked not at all. If you walked up the Netherbow or round the porch of Saint Giles’; if you hung about the Luckenbooths at noon or ventured any of the Wynds at sun-setting—wheresoever you went about Edinburgh, you heard the padding of feet sparsely on the flagstones; but no voices, no hawkers’ cries, no women calling their children out of the gutters, nor bickering of men in the ale-shops, nor laughter, nor bewailing. The great houses were closely shut and guarded; the Lords of the Privy Council transacted their business behind close doors; messengers came and went, none questioning; the post came galloping down the hill with a clatter which you would have thought enough to open every

window in the High Street and show you every pretty girl at her best. But no! So long as the King remained above ground, Death kept his wrinkled hand upon Edinburgh and made the place seem like a burying-ground, whose people were the mourners, crouched, whispering, against the walls—and all together huddled under the cold spell of the graves.

This continued until the day of the funeral, by which time it was absolutely necessary that the Queen should be got away. She agreed—was eager to go; and, before she went, saw the body of the King, which lay in the Chapel Royal, upon a tressle bed, dressed up in the gilt cuirass and white mantle which in life it had worn so bravely. Mary Seton and Des-Essars, who took her in, were so relieved to find their anxieties vain that they had no thought to be surprised. 'Not only did she stand and look upon the corpse without change of countenance or any sign of distress, but she had her wits all at command. The first thing she said was, "He looks nobly lying there so still: in life he was ever fidgeting with his person,"—which was quite true. And the next thing was, "Look you, look you, he lies just over Davy's grave!" And then she remembered that we were within one month of the anniversary of that poor wretch's undoing by this very dead; she reminded us of it. Without any more words, she remained there standing, looking earnestly at him and round about him; and bade one of the priests who watched go fetch a new candle, for one was nearly spent. So far as I could ascertain, she did not kneel or offer any prayer; and after a time she walked slowly away, without reverence to the altar—a strange omission in her—or any looking back. Nor did I ever hear her, of her own motion, speak of him again; but he became to her as though he had never been—which, in a sense that means he had touched or moved her, he never had. Before the funeral celebrations she went to my Lord Seton's house, and there remained waiting until the Earl of Bothwell could find time to visit her, full of projects, very sanguine and contented. She said to me one day, "You think my maids have forsaken me; you grieve over Livingstone and Fleming. Of the last I say nothing; but I can fetch Livingstone back

to me whenever I choose. You shall see." And she did it before very long.'

On the night following the funeral the profound silence of Edinburgh was broken by a long shrill cry, as of a wandering man. Several people heard him, and shivered in their beds; only one, bolder than the rest, saw him in a broad patch of moonlight. He came slowly down the midst of the Canongate, flap-hatted and cloaked; and as he went, now and again he threw up his head towards the moon, and cried, like one calling the news, 'Vengeance on those who caused me to shed innocent blood! O Lord, open the heavens and pour down vengeance on those that have destroyed the innocent!' Upon the hushed city the effect was terrible, as you may judge by this, that no windows were opened and no watchman ventured to stop the man. But next morning there was found a bill upon the Cross which accused Bothwell by name of the deed. It drew a crowd, and then, as by one consent, all tongues were loosened and all pens set free to rail. The Queen was not spared; pictures of her as the Siren, fish-tailed, ogling, naked, malign, made the walls shameful. The preachers took up the text and shrieked her name; and every night the shrouded crier went his rounds. The Red Bridegroom was on all tongues, the Pale Bride in all men's thoughts.

The Earl of Bothwell, strongly guarded as he was, took, or affected to take, no notice of the clamour; but Archie Douglas became very uneasy, and induced his cousin Morton to have the nightly brawler apprehended. He was therefore taken on the fourth night, and shut up in a pestilential prison called the Thief's Pit, where no doubt he shortly died. But his words lived after him, and he testified through all men's tongues. Among the many thousand rumours that got about was one, intolerable to Bothwell, that the Earl of Moray was about to return to Edinburgh, and, in the absence of the Queen, act for the general good of the realm. It was said also that Morton was in correspondence with him, and that it was by his orders that Mr. James Balfour, parson of Fliske, was to be arrested and confined to his own house. Adding to these things the daily letters of the Earl of Lennox to the Privy Council, appealing, in a father's name, to the honour of Scotland; adding also the

Queen’s letters to himself, my Lord Bothwell judged it wise to depart the town; so went down to her Majesty in the country, to Lord Seton’s house, where she still lay. And as he rode out of town, close hemmed in the ranks of his own spearmen, he heard for the first time that name which had been his ever since tongues began to wag: ‘Ay, there he goes for his wages, the Red Bridegroom.’

The night of his coming, old Lady Reres made mischief, if any were left to be made; for after supper, fiddlers being in the gallery, what must she to do but clap her hands to them and call for a tune. ‘Fiddlers,’ says she, ‘I call for “Well is me since I am free”‘; and she got it too. Lord Bothwell gave one of his great guffaws, and held out his hand at the signal; the Queen laughed as she took it and was pleased. They danced long and late. But next morning my Lord Seton made some kind of excuse, and left his own house, nor would he come back to it until the Court had removed. With him went the Earl of Argyll.

These departures were the signal for the most insensate revelry—led by the Queen, insisted upon by her, satisfying neither herself nor her lover, nor any of her friends. Des-Essars and the few faithful of the old stock looked on as best they could, always in silence. Not one of them would talk to another, for fear he should hear something with which he would be forced to agree. Le Secret des Secrets is extremely reticent over this insane ten days, in which the Queen—it must be said—was to be seen (by those who had the heart to observe) wooing a man to sin; and when he would not, after torments of deferred desire, of mortification, and of that reproach which never fails a baffled sinner, springing hot-eyed to the chase next day, following him about, wreathing her arms, kissing and whispering, beckoning, inviting, trying all ways to lure him on; heart-rending spectacle for any modest young man, but, to a worshipper-at-a-distance like our chronicler, an almost irremediable disaster, since it kept an open sore in the fair image he had made, and showed him horrible people, with eyesight as good as his own, leering at it. Yes! French Paris, Bastien, Carwood, Joachim, the baser sort—grooms, valets, chamber-women, scullions of the kitchen,

saw his flame-proud Queen craving, and craving in vain. He ground his teeth over the squalid comedy. His pen is as secret as death; but it is said that, on one occasion, when he had seen Bothwell stalk into the labyrinth, and soon afterwards the Queen, her head hooded, steal lightly after him, the comments of other beholders roused him to vehement action. It is said that he heard chuckling from the base court, and a 'Did you mark that? She is close on his heels—a good hound she!' and saw two greasy heads hobnobbing. He waited, blinking his eyes, until one began to whistle the ramping tune of 'O, gin Jocky wad but steal me!' then flashed into the court and drubbed a grinning cook-boy within a few inches of his life. What satisfaction this just exercise may have been was spoiled by the reflection that the flogged rascal knew why he had been made to smart: enough to make our young knight cut off the avenging hand.

These things weighed and considered, I think that what little he does say is curiously judicial. He remarks that the Queen his mistress, restless and miserable as she was, invited oblivion by eating and drinking too much, by dancing too much, by riding too hard; that she suffered from want of sleep; that, as for her love-affair, it was no joy to her. 'Hers was a plain case of mental love. But I say, Hum!—where the Lover makes an eidolon of the Beloved, and is happiest contemplating that, adorning it with flowers of fancy, and planning delights which can only be realised in solitude,—then the bodily presence of the adored creature effectually destroys the image: a seeming paradox.

'Thus, however, it was with my mistress. Never was man less suited to lady than this burly lord; never did lady contrive out of material so clumsy master of her bosom so divine. But his presence marred all, because it led her to indulge the monstrous reality instead of the idea. She was generous to a fault (all her faults, indeed, were due to excess of nobility), and most injudicious. Her submission to him tempted him all ways—to domineer, to be overbearing, insolent, a brute; to treat her on occasion as I am very sure my Lady Bothwell would never have allowed herself to be treated.

But the Queen bowed her head for still greater ignominy, although more than once I saw her flinch and look away, as if, poor soul, she turned quickly, to comfort herself, from the hateful, real Bothwell of fed flesh to that shining Bothwell of her heart and mind. In all this she was her own enemy; but (by a misfortune two-edged) in other ways she contrived enemies for him. Thus it was an act of madness to make him presents of the late king's stud, of his dogs and horse-furniture. She added—O doting, most unhappy prodigal!—the gilt armour and great golden casque with crimson plumes, by which the dolt king had been best known. Nothing that she could have done could have been worse judged. Quem Deus vult perdere! Alas and alas!

'Yet, I must say, it is due to my Lord Bothwell to remember that he was now what he had always been—not consciously cruel, not wilful to torment her, and by no means withholding from her what she so sorely needed of him by any scruples of conscience. Coarse in grain he was, and candidly appetent, but as continent as Joseph when his cautionary side was alert; and, true to his nation, he was at once greedy and cautious. He was never one to refuse gratification to a woman who loved him, if by granting it he could afford any real gratification to himself. It was a question of the scales with him. Now, in the present state of his ventures everything must wait upon security: and security was the last thing he had gained. He would have pleased her if he could, for he was by no means an ill-tempered man, nor a cruel man, unless his necessities drove him that way. And just now they did drive him. His position in Scotland was full of peril: he was universally credited with the King's death, had few friends, and could not count upon keeping those he had. In fine, everything that he had consistently striven after from the hour when he first saw the Queen at Nancy was just within his grasp. He had climbed the tree inch by inch, bruised himself, scratched himself, torn his clothes to rags; and now it seemed that he hung by a thread—and the fruit could not be plucked yet. The fruit was dropping ripe, but he dared not stretch out his hand for it, lest it should fall by his

shaking of the branch, or he by moving too soon. If either fell, he was a dead man. What wonder if he were fretful, gloomy, suspicious, full of harsh mockery? What wonder, again, if he seemed cruel in refusing to ease her smart until his neck were safe? No, I do not blame him. But I curse the hour in which his mother bore him—to be the bane of his country and his Queen. No more.'

The Court returned to Edinburgh upon the news that an Ambassador Extraordinary was come from England. Although there could be no doubt of the matter of his errand, Bothwell insisted upon his reception. In other respects the Queen was glad to go. Her malady kept her from any rest; the emptiness of the days aggravated it until it devoured the substance of her flesh. She had grown painfully thin; she had a constant cough—could not sleep, and was not nourished by meat and drink. Her eyes burned like sunken fires, her lips were as bright as blood, but all the rest of her was a dead, unwholesome white. She said that there was a rat gnawing at her heart. In such a desperate case it seemed to her friends that the murmurs and mutterings of Edinburgh could bring her no further harm: so she went, entered in semi-state, and got a fright.

Her reception was bad: not cold, but accompanied by the murmurs of a great and suspicious crowd. She heard the name they had for Bothwell—'The Red Bridegroom'—half-voiced with a grim snarl of humour in the tone. Nothing was actually said against herself, but she was acutely sensitive to shades of difference; and after riding rigidly down to Holyrood, the moment she had alighted she caught Des-Essars by the arm, and, 'You see! You see! They hate me!'

But Mr. Killigrew, from England, and the Earl of Morton, when she summoned him, soon assured her that what Scotland felt towards her was as nothing compared to the common abhorrence of her lover.

Bothwell went away to Liddesdale to see his wife. It is supposed that there was an understanding between him and the Queen, because she made no objection to his

going, and did not fret in his absence. She saw Mr. Killigrew alone, in a darkened room, saying: ‘The first thing his mistress, my sister, will ask him, is of my favour in affliction; and I know,’—she put her hand on her bosom—‘I know how thin I am become, and how the tears have worn themselves caves in my cheeks; and would not for all the world that they in England should know.’ The audience lasted half-an-hour; and when Mr. Killigrew left Holyrood, he went to Lord Morton’s house. Thence, it was afterwards found out, he made a journey to Dunkeld, and paid a two days’ visit to the Earl of Moray. There is no doubt he went back full charged to England.

Des-Essars gleaned all the news he could. He told the whole to Huntly, to the Queen what he must. The town was full of dangerous ferment, which at any moment might burst out. Most of the lords were in the country; most of them were, or had been, at Dunkeld: Seton, Argyll, Atholl, Lindsay, Morton, Mar had all conferred with Moray. What had they to say to him? What, above all, had Morton to say to him—Morton, who had killed the King? When Huntly had this question put, and could find no answer to it, he went directly to the Queen and advised her to send for her brother. She hated the necessity, but allowed it. Meanwhile, the King’s father, old Lennox, wrote daily letters to her and to the Council, crying vengeance on the murder. He did not hesitate, in writing to the lords, to name Bothwell, Tala, and Ormiston as the murderers; and they did not hesitate to repeat his charges to the Queen. Old Lady Reres, delighting in mischief, underscored the names in red whenever she could. The Queen was furious.

‘He is innocent of all—I know it for a truth. Who accuses my Lord of Bothwell accuses me. It is rank treason.’

These sort of speeches cannot acquit a man, and may convict their speaker.

Then my Lord Moray, in a courteous letter, excused himself from attendance upon his sovereign at this conjuncture. His health, he regretted to say, was far from good,

or he should not have failed to obey her Majesty. The Queen was much put about. Send a peremptory summons to the Earl of Morton, says Huntly; she did it without question. Morton came on the night of 8th March, and Des-Essars, who saw him ride into the courtyard at the head of a troop in his livery, remembered that on the same night a year ago he and these pikemen of his had been masters of Holyrood. What a whirligig! Masters of Holyrood; then outwitted, ruined, and banished; now back in favour, and, by the look of them, in a fair way to be masters again. The bluff lord had the masterful air; the way in which he announced himself seemed to say, 'Oh, she'll see me quick enough! She hath need of me, look you!' He was very much at his ease—cracked his jokes with Erskine all the way upstairs, and, meeting Lethington at the head of them, asked after his new wife, with a gross and somewhat premature rider to the general question.

She sent for her young confidant when the audience was over, and greeted him with, 'Now, foolish boy, you shall be contented. He is fast for us—will say nothing if we say nothing.'

'Oh, madam, did he seek to bargain with your Majesty?'

She laughed. 'No, no! Nor did I cross his palm with earnest-money. But there would have been no harm.'

'Madam,' he said, 'you shall forgive me for saying that there would have been much. It is not for the prince to compound with treason, nor for a noble, innocent lady to traffic with the guilty.'

She stopped his mouth, her hand upon it. 'Hush, thou foolish boy! What treason did he do? To set me free—is this treason? To rid me of my tyrant—was this guilt?'

He hung his head, and she watched his confusion; then, repenting, stroked his face, murmuring, 'Foolish boy! Fond boy! Fond and foolish both—to love a lover!'

She told him a secret. She had heard two women talking beyond the garden wall. They spoke laughingly together of the Red Bridegroom—'and of me, Baptist, they

spake somewhat.'

'I know, I know! Tell me no more.'

'Of me they spake,' she went on. '"Bothwell's wench," they said, "Bothwell's——"'

He caught at her wrist. 'Stop! I will not hear you! I shall kill myself if you say that word!'

She swung her hand to and fro, and his with it, which held her so fast. 'The word,' she said, 'is nothing without the thing—and the thing is not true. I would that it were! Do you set so much store by names and framed breaths and idle ceremonies, and call yourself my lover? Do you tell me to my face that if I called you to come to me, to stretch open your two arms and clasp me within them, and to fly with me this world of garniture and bending backs and wicked scheming heads, and abide night and morning, through noon-heat and evening glow and the secrets of long nights under the watching stars, fast by my side, with our mouths together and our hearts kissing, and our two souls molten to one—do you tell me now that you would deny me? Answer you.'

He faced her steadfastly. 'I do say so. I should deny you. I serve God, and honour you. How should I dare do you dishonour?'

She was very angry—shook him off. 'Leave my wrist. How do you presume to hold your Queen? Leave me alone! You insult me by look and word.'

He left her at once, but she sent for him early next morning and easily made amends.

Driven to it at last, on the 24th of the month she wrote to old Lennox that Bothwell should be tried by his peers. She did it partly because Huntly advised it as the only possible way to stop the growing clamour, but much more because she wanted Bothwell back. He had been with his wife all the month; Huntly also had been there more than once—Adam Gordon, old Lady Huntly. A family council was, perhaps, in the nature of the case; but all the members of that had returned a week ago, and why

should he remain? Why, indeed, if (as all Scotland believed) he had gone to urge divorce upon his Countess? So the excuse was made to serve: he was formally summoned; returned to town on the 28th; made public entry with an imposing force of his friends and adherents; kissed the Queen's hand in all men's sight, and on the same day sat at the Council board, and discussed with the others, who were to try him, the precedents for his own trial. This was no way to satisfy Lennox or Edinburgh.

The assize was fixed for 12th April. On the 7th of that month the Earl of Moray left Scotland without leave asked or leave-taking of the Queen. He stayed a day at Berwick, and had a long conference with the English Warden, then took ship and sailed for France. This should have given her pause, and did for a day or two; but to a craving nymph, stalking gauntly the waste places, what matters but the one thing? It made Des-Essars serious enough, and put French Paris in a dreadful fright. His master, he said, 'was fool enough to be glad at his going; but the Queen knew better. M. Des-Essars told me that she wept, and would have sent messengers after him to get him back if she could. Ah, and she was right! For when yet did that lord's departure betoken her anything but harm? Never, never, never!' says French Paris.

The trial itself was a form from beginning to end, with the Queen a declared partisan, and the assize packed with her friends or his. My lord rode down to it as to a wedding; he rode one of the dead king's horses—rode it gaily; and as he departed he looked up at the window and waved his hat, and all men saw the flutter of the Queen's white handkerchief; and some say that she herself was to be seen smiling and nodding to him. Certain it is that when he was cleared—a matter of a few hours—and came out into the light of day and the face of a huge crowd, which blocked the street from side to side, he was met by Lethington, bareheaded, and by Melvill, bowing to the earth, and by the concourse with a chill and rather terrible silence. One shrill cry went up in all that quiet, and one alone. 'Burn the hure!' was shrieked by a woman, but instantly hushed down, and nothing was heard after it but

the trampling of horses as Bothwell's troop went by. When the Queen met him at the foot of the palace stairs, he went down on his knees; but many saw the smile that looped up his mouth. She was very much moved, could not say more than, 'Get up—come—I must speak with you.'

He went upstairs with her—they two alone. The courts and yards of Holyrood were like a camp.

Such a state of things might not last for long. Bothwell could not go out of doors alone. Even in company his hand was always at his dagger, his eye for ever casting round, probing corners for ambushes, searching men's faces for signs of wavering or fixed purpose. Strong man as he was, circumstances were too many for him: he told Paris one day that he was 'near done.'

'Sir,' says Paris, 'and so, I take leave to say, is the Queen's majesty. If your lordship is for the seas——'

'Damn you, I am not!' said Bothwell.

He considered the case as closely as ever anything in his life, for he was engaged in a great game. He consulted one or two men—Melvill, Lord Livingstone, his leering old uncle of Orkney. He sounded Morton, Argyll, Bishop Lesley (as he now was become); and then he gave a supper at Ainslie's, opened his plans, and got their promises to stand by him. He wrote these out and made them sign. This was on 19th April, and that night he certainly saw the Queen. I say 'certainly' because Des-Essars, who was with her afterwards, was told by her that 'her lord' had gone into Liddesdale to harry the reivers. Something in her tone—he could not see her eyes—made him doubt her: a little something made him suspect that she intended him to doubt.

So, 'Reivers, ma'am!' he cried. 'Is this a time to consider the lifting of cattle, when yourself and him are in danger, and no man knows when the town may rise?'

Her answer was an odd one. She was sitting in a low chair by the wood fire, leaning

back, looking at the red embers through her fingers. Before she spoke she lowered her head, as if to put her face in shadow, and looked up at him sideways. He saw the gleam of one eye, the edge of her cheek where the light caught it. As he read her, she was laughing at him.

‘More may be lifted than cattle by these wild men of the Border. I am going to Stirling in two days’ time, and maybe we shall meet, my lord and I.’

He asked her calmly—accustomed to her way of declaring certainties as possibilities—was such a meeting arranged for? ‘Come to me, child,’ she said (though he was not a child), and when he obeyed, ‘Kneel by my side.’ She put her arm round his neck in a sisterly fashion, and said, ‘You shall be with me to Stirling, and again when we depart from Stirling. You forget not that you are my brother? Well, then, brother, I say to you, Leave me not now, for the time is at hand when I shall need you. I believe I am to be made the happiest woman in the world, and need you to share my joy as much as ever you did my sorrow. Hereafter, for many days, I may have no time to speak privately with you. Kiss me, therefore, and wish me happy days and nights.’

He kissed her, wondering and fearing. ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘bethink you what you are about! I beg of you to speak with my lord of Huntly in this business of Stirling.’

She said, ‘It is done. I have spoken with him: he was here but an hour gone. And I have Lethington on my side, and Mary Livingstone and Fleming will both be with me.’ She laughed at her thoughts; not for a long time had her old malicious gaiety been upon her. ‘I knew that I could win back Livingstone. Guess you how I did it.’ And when he could not, or would not, she whispered in his ear, ‘She believes I am with child by the King.’

Des-Essars had nothing to say, but she kept him by her, talking of her life about to begin, her joy and pride, love, duty, privilege, in a way so innocent and candid, she might have been a child at play. The hours were small when he bade her good-night,

and she said laughingly, ‘Yes, go now. I shall be wise to sleep while I may.’

As he went he stretched out his arms, let them fall, and shrugged his young shoulders—gestures all of despair.

Where all was prepared beforehand it was not hard to forecast the turn of events. It fell out much as Des-Essars had reasoned it over to himself. Upon a fresh spring morning of flitting clouds and dancing grasses, the Queen’s party, rounding the shoulder of a green hill, was suddenly advised of a company of horsemen, advancing at a leisurely trot, at some quarter mile’s distance. One could look upon what followed as at a play; for it may be taken for truth that not a man, soldier or other, so much as swept the uplands with his eye, so conscious was he that a play indeed it was! The oncoming troop was observed in silence; in silence, without word of command or lifted hand, each halted at a spear’s throw. The Earl of Bothwell, with two lieutenants, rode forward, baring his head as he came. Nobody of the Queen’s men went out to meet him; nobody hailed him; nobody moved to safeguard the Queen, who herself sat motionless upon her little white jennet, in the forefront of her escort, Mary Livingstone on one side of her and Mary Fleming on the other. The Earl came to her side, reining up short as his stirrup clicked against hers.

‘Madam, for your Grace’s protection and honour I am come to lead you to a safe hold. I beseech your Majesty take it not amiss in one who desires above all things to serve you.’

The Queen, in a very low voice, replied, ‘Lead me, sir, according to your good judgment.’

He took up the rein of her horse, wheeled, and led her away to his own troop, no one staying him. Mary Livingstone whipped after her, Mary Fleming followed. Then the Earl of Huntly, looking round upon the remnant, free there and armed upon the road, said in measured tones, ‘Follow, sirs, since it seems we are prisoners.’

If play it was, it was not even played properly, but had been reduced to a spiritless

rite. Yet, as Des-Essars has the wit to remark, to the Queen the whole had been an act of very beautiful symbolism. He had noticed, as no one else did, the gesture with which she gave herself up—her opened palms, bowed head, good eyes, at once trusting and thankful. Ah! she had been immodest once in her dire need, panting, blowsed, scratched, dishevelled by her ardent chase. He had seen her so, and shuddered. But now she was modest, but now she had regained virginity. A folded maid sought in marriage by a man, she had bowed her head. 'Lead me, sir, according to your good judgment!' Thus Des-Essars, fond lover! It is safe to assert that he was alone in discerning these fine things, as the lining of a very vulgar business.

The moment he had the Queen at Dunbar, which was reached by nightfall, my lord dismounted her and took her away. Led by his hand, she went without a word to her women, without any looking back. The rest of the company was left to shift as best it could. There were meat and drink on the spread tables; there may have been beds or there may not. The Queen was no more seen.

Sir James Melvill made an effort, let off a quip or two, ruminated aloud in an anecdotic vein, rallied Lethington, flattered Huntly, felt himself snubbed and knew that he deserved it, but waived off the feeling with his 'H'm, h'm!' and recovered his dignity. Huntly gloomed upright; Des-Essars was bent double, head in hands; Lethington walked up and down the hall, marking with his eye flagstones upon which he must alight at every step, or be ruined. To watch his mad athletics made his gentle wife grieve and Mary Sempill rage. Most of Bothwell's men were asleep; Ormiston was drunk; Hob, his brother, was both. Gradually silence, which had been fitful, became universal; and then they heard the wind moaning round the great house and the sea beating at the black rock on which it stands. The casements shook, doors far off slammed again and again, gulls and kittiwakes screamed as they swept to and fro over the strand; and as the doomed company sat on in the dark listening to all this, and some thinking with horror of what could be doing between those two in

the vast wind-possessed house, and some with pity welling like blood, and some shamefully, and some with wisely nodding heads—presently, when the shrilling of the birds grew piercingly loud, one of these banged against the window, and fought there at the glass, battling with wings of panic.

Mary Sempill rose with a shriek. ‘O God, save her! O God, save her!’ She was thinking of her Queen.

Nobody moved except Mary Fleming, who felt out the way to her and put arms about her.

Thus the night went on.

In the morning Paris came down and said that her Majesty desired to see Mistress Sempill. She was taken up, and found the Queen in bed in a darkened room. She walked to the edge of the bed and looked down, seeing little. The Queen lay still, one of her bare arms out of bed; this arm she slowly raised and touched her Livingstone’s cheek, then dropped it again heavily.

But her Livingstone had now recovered herself, and could afford to be cynical.

‘Well—Honeypot?’ said she.

‘Empty,’ said the Queen.

Then her Livingstone kissed her.

CHAPTER VIII THE BRIDE’S PRELUDE

French Paris took a letter to Lady Bothwell from Dunbar, as he thinks, on the day after the ravishing: he fixes his date from the fact that Sir James Melvill happened to tell him that it was his birthday, the 25th of April.

‘Not the first I have spent in durance, my good fellow,’ the genial gentleman had added, ‘although I tell you candidly that it is the first wedding-night—so to call it—at which I have assisted in such a place.’

Paris would have prolonged so interesting a conversation if his master had not been waiting to be dressed. As it was, he excused himself and hurried up to his duties; which done, my lord handed him a letter, saying, ‘Deliver this safely, at your peril; and remember also that whatsoever my lady shall ask you, she is to have a full answer.’

‘Your lordship may count upon me,’ says the valet, hoping with all his heart that she would not tax his countenance too far. Leaving the room, he was recalled.

‘One thing more, Paris. Your mistress will give you a coffer for me. Guard it well, as you value your neck; for, trust me, if you come not home with that intact, I will run you down though you were in the bury of Hell.’

‘Rest easy, my lord,’ said Paris superbly, ‘rest easy here, and disport yourself as seems good to your wisdom; for certainly I shall never fail you. Nor have I ever,’ added the poor complacent rogue, and took the thought with him up the gallows ladder.

It is a singular thing that Bothwell knew his wife so little as to provide against a line of conduct which she could never have taken. According to Paris, she asked him no awkward questions at all, but read her letter calmly, dipping a toast in white wine and whey as she read. At the end, after musing a while, looking extremely handsome, she said: ‘My lord, I see, makes no mention how long he remains at Dunbar. Knowest thou anything to the purpose?’

Nothing awkward here; but Paris blundered it. ‘Oh, my lady,’ he says, conscious of his red face, ‘I suppose his lordship will stay out the moon.’

‘What hath he to do with the moon, or the moon with him, fool?’ said the Countess; and soon afterwards sent him away, as without any value for her.

One can picture him then in the kitchen quarters—jaunty, abounding in winks and becks; or with the grooms in the stables—what conversations! The play, dragged by the weary, high players, must have quickened when the clowns tumbled through it.

Next day my lady had him up again to her chamber and gave him letters for Edinburgh: a large packet for a notary, one Balnaves or Balneaves, another for the Archbishop's Grace of Saint Andrews at Hamilton House.

'Deliver these with speed, Paris, and come back to me—but not here. I shall be at Crichton expecting you—and give you a packet for my lord.'

This is how Paris learned that process of divorce was begun. He dates it the 26th-27th April.

Demure, wide-eared scamp! he was not idle in town, I assure you; but ran from cawsey to cawsey, from tavern-parlour to still-room, into all churches, chapels, brothels, about the quays of Leith, up and down the tenement stairs, spying, watching, judging, and remembering. He was most amazed at the preachers, whose licence to talk exceeded all bounds of belief. There was one Cragg, well named for a rock-faced, square-hewn man, colleague of Mr. Knox's: to listen only to this firebrand! This Cragg—Paris heard him—rocked screaming and sweating over the brink of his pulpit, and hailed his Queen a Jezebel, a Potiphar's wife, a strumpet of the Apocalypse. 'And I could have wrung his brazen neck for him,' said Paris, 'but that all the people stood packed about him murmuring their agreement. It would have been my death to have declared myself—and I was vowed to return to my lord.'

The city seemed to be in the governance of the Earl of Morton, unsuspected of any hand in the late crime, and of Lord Lindsay, whom all hot gospellers loved. Close in with them was Grange—Kirkcaldy of Grange—a very busy man, Marshal of the City, Captain of the Guard, who kept surveillance of Holyrood and the lower town. Paris perceived that he was lieutenant to Lord Morton, a cultivable person if willing to be cultivated. About his doors, every day and at all hours of the day, he saw messengers stand with horses ready. Now and again one would come out with his despatches bound upon him, mount and ride off—south, north, west. Similarly,

others came in, white with dust, and delivered up their charges to the porter at the door. Paris, never without resource, inquired into the matter, and found out with whom Grange corresponded. With my Lord of Atholl at Perth! With my Lord of Moray in Paris! With Mr. Secretary Cecil in London! Why, this was treasonable stuff, hanging stuff, as he told his informant—Gavin Douglass, body-servant to Mr. Archie of the name—who knew it as well as he did.

'Oh, ay, you make up your mind to the treason o't, Paris,' says Gavin; 'but I recommend you let not my master catch you in this town. You have had six hundred gold crowns of his for the price of an old shoe—he has never ceased to talk of it, believe me. No later than yesterday he was at it, saying that pretty soon he could afford to give all his clothing to the world and stand up mother-naked as he was born, and be none the worse. "And to think," says he, "to think I could be such a custard-faced loon as to buy back my slipper from a rogue I shall be hanging in a week."'

Paris was indignant and hurt. 'I can see,' he said, 'that the lords of Scotland are at their favourite game of beggar-my-neighbour. Dieu de Dieu! what else could we have expected? Your Scotch way: roguery upon roguery, thieves on thieves' backs, traitors who betray their co-traitors—hogs and rats, one and all!'

He left Edinburgh much alarmed at the state of its affairs, determined to be done with the Countess at Crichton and back again in Dunbar as soon as might be; but, greatly to his annoyance, her ladyship, being busy with her law business, kept him four or five days kicking his heels: it was the 4th of May before she delivered him her packet. That was a coffer, strongly bound and clamped with iron, locked and sealed.

At the moment of his going Lady Bothwell said to him, 'Tell my lord, Paris, that this day he and I are free of each other; tell him that here I am and here remain.'

Paris, always the servant of a fine woman, knelt upon one knee. 'My lady,' he said,

‘your ladyship has never loved me, but I take God to witness that I have ever honoured your ladyship. Albeit I am a poor devil of a lacquey, madam, I have wit enough to know a great lady when I see her.’

Said the Countess: ‘If you think that I have a disliking for you, Paris, you are mistaken. I neither love nor hate you. I have never thought about you.’

‘Madam,’ said he, ‘why should your ladyship? I shall venture, none the less, to pray God give you all health, fame, and happiness.’

Lady Bothwell sat bolt upright, one firm hand on the table. ‘Health I have from God already. Fame, if you mean good fame, I have kept for myself. Happiness, if that lies in the satisfaction of abiding desire, I intend to have before long. Now begone with your charge.’

He went out shaking his head, muttering to himself: ‘Terrible lady! fine, carven, deep-eyed lady! What is her abiding desire?’

He found out afterwards.

The coffer and he came safe to Dunbar and into the presence of their master. The Queen was in the room: red eyes, hot patches in her cheeks, a swinging foot, fingers a-tap on the table——‘Ho! a tiff,’ thinks Paris.

My Lord Bothwell hands over the coffer, or rather puts it on the table by the Queen’s elbow. ‘Here is your testimony, ma mie. By my advice you burn every scrap of it.’

‘Shall I burn what has cost me so much, and you, it seems, so little?’ she asked bitterly. ‘Is it nothing to you that I have written with my blood and sealed with my tears?’

‘I had not analysed the ink,’ said my lord; ‘and if I had I should value your honour more. However, you must do what you will.’ She left him without answer; and by and by Des-Essars presented himself, saying that he had her Majesty’s command to

take charge of the coffer for her. Something in message or messenger seemed to anger the Earl. ‘Damn you, French monkey, you take too much in charge. Must her Majesty always have an ear to pull or a cheek to pinch? Man, Baptist, for two pence I’d have both your lugs off and a hot iron at your cheeks: with a broad C branded there, my man: ay, by God, and a double C! Chamberer Convict, man, Baptist!’

He worked himself crimson in the face, his eyes savage and red. ‘Mind your ways, young sir, mind your ways’—he threatened with his fist,—‘I warn ye mind your ways just now—lest you come into the deep mire, man, where no ground is.’

Des-Essars drilled his slim body to attention, and fixed his eyes on the opposite wall. The Earl glared at him open-mouthed, and fingered his dagger as though he itched to be at it. But presently he scoffed at himself—‘A white-faced boy to stand by side o’ me!’ He turned: ‘Take your coffer, master, and be out of this. A little more and I might colour you finely.’

Des-Essars removed both coffer and himself. Paris was trembling: he knew that what he had to report of Edinburgh’s doings would not make matters any better. Nor did they—though it may be doubted whether they could have made matters any worse.

The joys of love—love’s moment of victory, love’s rest, and possession of the spoils—are gossamer things: an adverse breath may shred them away. As for Love himself, you may call him a Lord or a Beast, give him his roseate wings or his cloven hoofs and tail: certainly there never was in the world so refined a glutton. Perfection is what he claims, no less; perfection of leisure to obtain, perfection of content, and all according to that standard of mind which, in a field without limit, grudges the stirring of a filament as a hindrance to the enormous calm he covets, and sees in a speck of sand a blemish upon his prize. ‘Alas! no man, no kingdom of this world, no ordering attainable by mortal minister could have appeased Queen Mary. She was made to hunt for happiness and never to find it. She had risked all upon this

cast of hers, had made it, at her last gasp had fallen upon the quarry. And now, clutching it, eyeing the coverts fearfully to right and left, starting at a whisper, cowering at the lightest shadow—like a beast of prey, she had no time to taste what she had so hardly won. O miserably stung by the rankling arrow! Poor Io, spurred by the gad-fly, what rest for thee? Come, ye calm-browed beneficent goddesses of the night! Handmaids of Death, come in! and with cool finger-tips close down these aching lids, and on these burning cheeks lay the balm of the last kiss; so the mutinous, famishing heart shall contend with Heaven no more!' The dithyrambic cry of Des-Essars does not indicate a comfortable state of things at Dunbar.

The Queen was madly in love, aching to be possessed, but knowing herself insecurely possessed. Her tyrant, master, beloved—whatever Bothwell may have desired to be—was harassed by events, and could not play the great lover even if he would. Rebellion gathered outside his stronghold, and he knew every surge of it; he was not safe from disaffection within doors, and had to watch for it like a cat at a mousehole. If the Queen had sinned to get a lover, he had risked his head to wive a queen. Well, and he had not got her yet, though she asked for nothing better all day and night. Queens and what they carry are not got by highway robbery: it's not only a question of kissing. You may steal a Queen for the bedchamber—but there's the Antechamber to be quieted, there's the Presence Chamber to be awed, there's the Throne Room to be shocked into obsequiousness: ah, and the Citadel to be taught to fly your banner. Brooding on these things—all to do except one—his lordship had no time for transports, and no temper neither. When the Queen wept he swore, when she pleaded he refused her, when she sulked he showed his satisfaction at being let alone, and when she stormed he stormed loudlier. He was not a man of fine perceptions: that was his strength, he knew. By the Lord, said he, let others, let her, know it too! And the sooner the better.

She would not discuss politics. Dunbar, which was to have been her bride-bower, should be so still, in defiance of beastly fact. She refused to hear what Paris had to

say of Edinburgh pulpits, of Morton's men-at-arms, Grange's flying messengers. When Bothwell spoke of the Prince at Stirling she promised him a new prince at Dunbar; when he cried out threats against Archie Douglas she stopped his mouth with kisses; when he summoned Liddesdale to arms she pouted because her arms were not enough for him. It was mad, it was unreasonable, it fretted him to feverish rages. He gnashed his teeth. Lethington kept rigidly out of his way: he was really in danger, and knew it; not a day passed but he made some plan of escape. Melvill spoke in whispers, could not have stood on more ceremony with his Maker. Huntly was always on the verge of a quarrel; and as for poor little Des-Essars, you know how he stood.

There came anon swift confirmation of Paris' fears: a letter from Hob Ormiston, now in Edinburgh, to his brother the Black Laird. Both worthies had been, as we know, with Bothwell on the night of Kirk o' Field. Hob wrote that Kirkcaldy of Grange had met him after sermon in a company of people, taxed him with the King's murder and threatened him with arrest 'in the Queen's name and for her honour.' He went in fear, did Hob; his life was in it. Now, might he not clear himself? Let his lordship of Bothwell be sounded upon that, who knew that he was as guiltless of that blood as his lordship's self. It would be black injustice that an innocent Hob should suffer while a blood-guttered Archie went scot-free, and a crowning indignity that he should perish under the actual guilty hands. For well he knew that my L—d of M——n stood behind Grange. Ormiston, with this crying letter in hand, sought out his master, and found him on the terrace overlooking the sea, walking up and down with the Queen and Lord Huntly. As he approached he saw her Majesty cover her mouth and strangle a yawn at birth.

Bothwell read the letter through, and handed it to the Queen. She also read it hastily. 'Innocent!' she mocked, with a curling, sulky lip, 'the innocent Hob—a good word! But this letter concerns you, Huntly, more than me.'

In turn the dark young lord read it. He was much longer at it, slower-witted; and before he was half-way through for the second time the Queen was out of patience.

‘Well! well! What do you make of it, you who know the very truth and do not choose to declare it? Are our friends to be cleared, or will you see them all butchered for the Douglases’ sake?’

He did not answer for a while, but looked far oversea with those hawk-eyes of his, which seemed able to rend the garniture of Heaven and descry the veiled secrets of God. When he turned his face towards her it was a far nobler than the soured face he looked upon.

‘But to clear them, madam—Hob and the like of Hob—am I to betray them that trusted me?’

She gave a thring of the shoulder, a fierce flash of her eye, and turned shortly, and went away by herself. There was a hot wrangle between the three men afterwards—in which Bothwell did not scruple to curse his brother-in-law for ‘meddling in what concerned him not,’ or (if he must meddle) for not meddling well[9]; but Huntly could not be moved.

Things like these drove Bothwell into action—to go through with his business, possess himself of Edinburgh and the Prince, and marry the Queen? Why not? He was free, he had her in the crook of his arm; he had but to go up to blow away the fog of dissidence: afflavit ventus, etc.! He urged her Majesty, lectured Lethington, conferred with Huntly, and got agreement, more or less. Well then, advance banners, and let the wind blow!

At the first tidings of the Queen’s approach, the Earl of Morton and his belongings—his Archie Douglas, his Captain Cullen, his Grange—departed the city and repaired to Stirling. This gave fair promise; and even the greeting she got when, pacing matronly by Bothwell’s side, surrounded by a live hedge of Bothwell’s spears, she entered the gates and went down to Holyrood, was so far good that it was

orderly. No salutations, no waving of bonnets; but close observation, a great concourse in a great quiet. She did not like that, though Bothwell took no notice. He had not expected to be welcome; and besides, he had other things to think of.

I extract the following from Des-Essars:—

‘The Queen had a way of touching what she was pleased with. She was like a child in that, had eyes in her fingers, could not keep her hands away, never had been able. To stroke, fondle, kiss, was as natural to her as to laugh aloud when she was pleased, or to speak urgently through tears when she was eager. I remember that, as we rode that day into the suburb of Edinburgh, she, being tired (for the way had been hot and long), put her hand on my shoulder; and that my lord looked furiously; and that she either could not, or would not see him. I had had reason only lately to suspect him of jealousy, though she as yet had never had any. But for this very innocent act of hers he rated her without stint or decorum when we were at Holyroodhouse; and as for me, I may say candidly that I walked with death as my shadow, and never lay down in my bed expecting to get out of it on the morrow.

‘The effect of his unreason upon her, when she could be brought to believe in it, was of the unhappiest. It lay not in her nobility to subserve ignoble suspicions. Our intercourse, far from ceasing out of deference to him, was therefore made secret, and what was wholly innocent stood vested in the garb of a dear-bought sin—an added zest which she had been much better without. I was removed from all direct service of her—for he saw to that; but she found means of communicating with me every day; waited for me at windows, followed me with her eyes, had little speedy, foolish signals of her own—a finger in her mouth, a hand to her side, her bosom touched, her head held askew, her head hung, a smile let to flutter—all of which were to be so much intelligence between us. She excelled in work of the kind, was boundlessly fertile, though I was a sad bungler. But, God forgive me! I soon learned in that blissful school, and became, I believe, something of a master.

‘I was not the only man of whom he was jealous, by any means. There was my Lord Livingstone, a free-living, easy man of advanced age, who had been accustomed to fondle her Majesty as his own daughter, and saw no reason to desist, being given none by herself. But one day my lord came in and found him with his hand on her shoulder. Out he flung again, with an oath; and there was a high quarrel, with daggers drawn. The Queen, who could never be curbed in this kind of way by any one, lover or beloved, dared his lordship to lay a finger on Livingstone; and he did not. There was also my lord of Arbroath, who had pretensions and a mind of his own; to whom she gave a horse, and induced more high words. There was my Lord Lindsay, who admired her hugely and said so: but to follow all the wandering of unreason in a gentleman once his own master, were unprofitable. All that I need add (for the sake of what ensued upon it) is that one day Mr. Secretary Lethington came into the Cabinet all grey-faced and shaking as with a palsy, and laid his hands upon the Queen’s chair, saying fearfully: “Sanctuary, madam, sanctuary! I stand in peril of my life.” It appeared that my lord, who abhorred him, had drawn on him in full hall. So then once more she grew angry and forbade his lordship to touch a hair of Lethington’s head: “For so sure as you do it,” she said, “I banish you the realm.” For the moment he was quite unnerved, and began to babble of obedience and his duty; and I say, let God record of our lady in that time of her disgrace that she had not forgotten how to stand as His vicegerent in Scotland.

‘Affairs went from bad to worse with her. We learned every day by our informers how the lords were gaining strength in the west, and stood almost in a state of war against us. They were close about the Prince—the chiefs of their faction being the Earls of Mar, Atholl, Argyll, Glencairn, and Morton. With them was Grange, the best soldier in the kingdom; and Lord Lindsay would have gone over, but that he grossly loved the Queen and could not keep his eyes off her. Letters intercepted from and to England made it certain that the Queen of that country was supporting our enemies and preparing for our ruin—nor was it without reason, as I am bound to

confess, for the safety of our young prince imported the welfare of her country as well as ours; and it may well have been distasteful to her English Majesty to have the fingers of the Earl of Bothwell so near to dipping in her dish. As if these troubles were not enough, we were presently to hear of flat rebellion under the Queen's very eyes, when we were told that Mr. Cragg, the preacher, would not read out the banns of marriage. That same was a stout man, after Mr. Knox's pattern. It is true they forced him by a writ to publish them, but neither summons before the council nor imminent peril of worse would keep his tongue quiet. He daily railed against those he was about to join in wedlock, and had to be banished the realm.

'Hard-faced was the Queen through these disastrous days, and all stony within; bearing alike, with weary, proud looks, the indifference of her trusted friends, the insolent suspicions of my lord of Bothwell, the constant rumours, even the shameful reports, put about concerning herself, as if she was ignorant of them. She was not, she could not be ignorant, but she was utterly negligent. To her but one thing was of concern—his love; and until she was sure of that all else might go as it would. True, he was jealous: at one time she had thought that a hopeful sign. But when she found out that in spite of her kindness he remained indifferent; when he abstained from her company and bed, when he absented himself for two days together—and was still jealous—she was bound to doubt the symptom. It wanted but one thing, in truth, to break down her pride and trail her lovely honour in the dust: and she had it sharp and stinging. O unutterable Secret of Secrets, never to be divulged but in this dying hour when she must ask for pity, since honest dealing is denied to her! She was stung—down fell she—and I saw her fall—heart-broken, and was never more the high Huntress, the Queen "delighting in arrows." My pen falters, my tears blind me; but write it I must: her fame, her birthright, nay, her gracious head, are in dire peril.[10]

'It was commonly suspected that Lethington was desirous of escaping to the lords at Stirling, among whom he could count upon one firm friend in the Earl of Atholl. To

say nothing that he went hourly in fear of my lord of Bothwell, and believed that the Queen distrusted him, he had been too long in the Earl of Moray's pocket—kept there as a man keeps a ferret—to be happy out of it. Nominally at large, a pretty shrewd watch was kept upon him, since it would not have been at all convenient to have him at large among her Majesty's enemies. He knew too much, and his wife, that had been Mistress Fleming, more than he. Therefore it was not intended that he should leave us. Yet I am certain that no day passed in which he did not make some plan of escape.

'It was for a step in one of such schemes, I suppose, though I cannot see how it should have helped him, that on the day before my lord of Bothwell was created Duke of Orkney, and three days before the marriage, he gave the Queen a thought which very soon possessed her altogether.

'My lord was away, but expected back that night; Lethington, being with some others in the Queen's Cabinet when the talk fell upon the Countess of Bothwell, told her Majesty that the lady was dwelling at Crichton. He said it very skilfully—quasi negligently and by the way—but instantly she caught at it, and took it amiss. "She has cast him off—let him cast her off. Crichton! Crichton! Why, he holds it of me! How then should Jean Gordon be there? Or do we share, she and I?" She spoke in her petulant, random way of hit or miss, meaning (it is likely) no more than that she was weary of Lethington. But he coughed behind his hand, and rising up suddenly, went to the window. The Queen marked the action, and called him back.

'"Come hither, Mr. Secretary," said she quietly; and he returned at once to her side.

'"You will please to explain yourself," she said. Very quiet she was, and so were we all.

'He began vast excuses, floundering and gasping like a man in deep water. The more he prevaricated the more steadfast she became in pursuit; and so remained until she had dragged out of him what he knew or had intended to imply. The sum and

substance was that Paris (a valet of my lord's) had of late taken letters to and from Crichton: common knowledge, said Lethington. And then, after a good deal, not to the purpose, he declared that my lord had spent two several nights there since the Court had returned to Edinburgh from Dunbar.

'The Queen, being white even to the lips, said faintly at the end that she did not believe him. Lethington replied that nothing but his duty to her would have induced him to relate facts so curious; the which, he added, must needs concern her Majesty, the Fountain of Honour, who, unsullied herself, could not brook defilement in any of the tributaries of her splendour. She dismissed us all with a wave of her hand—all but Mistress Sempill (who had been Mistress Livingstone), who stayed behind, and whose ringing voice I heard, as I shut the door, leap forward to be at grips with the calumny.

'She had recovered her gallantry by the evening. Incredible as it may seem, it is true that she publicly taxed my lord with the facts charged against him, when he returned. He did not start or change colour—looked sharply at her for an instant, no more.

'"Jealous, my Queen?" he asked her, laughing.

'"And if I am, my lord, I have an example before me," said she. "Have you not been pleased to condemn me in regard to this poor boy?"

'I bore that with what face I could: he regarded me with the look of a wild hog that grates his tooth. Anon he said: "Master Baptist and I know each other of old. I believe I can give as good account of the reckonings between my staff and his back as——Well, this is unprofitable jesting. Now, let me understand. Your Grace charges me with—what in particular?"

'"Oh, my lord," cried she, with a bold face, "I make no charges. I did but put you a question: whether you had visited your Castle of Crichton these late days—your Castle of Crichton which you hold of me in chief?"

‘He shrugged his shoulders; and “Chi lo sa?” quoth he, with a happy laugh. “Let your Majesty and me confer upon these and other high matters of state when my head is on better terms with my stomach. I am a fasting man, no match for your Majesty. Your Majesty knows the Spanish saw, When the belly is full it saith to the head, Sing, you rascal? I crave your leave, then, to get my singing voice again.” He took it with bravery, as you perceive; and, having his liberty, went away singing to supper.

‘He stayed below stairs for the rest of the night, drinking and talking with Sir James Melvill and my lord of Livingstone—ribald and dangerous talk, for he had a lewd mind, and neither discretion nor charm in the uses to which he put his tongue. The Queen sat miserably in the dark far into the night, and went to bed without prayers. I heard her cry out to Mistress Sempill that she wished she lay where the King was, and Sempill answered, “Damn him, damn him!” Next day, with what grace she could muster, she created my lord Duke of Orkney. That was done before noon; by five o’clock of the evening he was ridden away for Borthwick and Dunbar, as he said, upon State business. In three days’ time she was to marry him, O Heaven!

‘Early in the morning—the morrow after his going—she sent for me to come up to her bedchamber; and so I did, and found her very worn in the face, her hand hot and dry to the touch. Commanding herself with great effort, speaking slowly, she told me that she could not continue to live unless she could deny once and for all the truth of Lethington’s tale. My lord would not help her. “You know his way of mockery,” says she. “He laughs to tease me: but to me this is no laughing matter. Mary Sempill has been at me ever since——” Here she fretted, muttering to herself, “I do not believe it—I do not—I do not,” fidgeting her hands under the bedclothes; then, breaking off short, she said that she wished me to ride to Crichton with her that very day. She would take Mary Sempill—because she would not remain behind—Erskine would bring an escort; there would be no danger. I said that I was ready to live or die for her, and that all my care was to save her from unhappiness. I

asked her, Would she suffer Erskine and myself to go?

‘She stared at me. “Are you mad?” she asked. “Have you found me so patient, to sit at home in suspense? or so tame, to shirk my enemies? Nay, my child, nay, but I will prove Lethington a liar with my own eyes.” To be short, go she would and did; and we with her, as she had already contrived it.

‘The weather was hot—as hot as summer—and very still; riding as fast as we did, our bodily distresses saved our minds’. We had, as I reckon, some fifteen miles to go, by intricate roads, woodland ways, by the side of streams overhung with boughs, encumbered with boulders. The Queen was always in front, riding with Mistress Sempill: she set the pace, said nothing, and showed herself vexed by such little delays as were caused by Erskine sounding the banks for good fording-ground, or losing the road, as he once did, and trying a many before he could make up his mind. “Oh, you weary me with your Maybe yeas and Maybe nays!” she railed at him. “Why, man, I could smell my way to Crichton.” I believe her; for now I am sure that she had steeled herself for what she was to find there. I knew it not then: she allowed nothing of her mind to be seen. Nobody could be more secret than she when she saw fit.

‘That Castle of Crichton stands, as do most of them in these parts, on a woody bluff over a deep glen, out of the which, when you are in it, you can never see how near you may be to your journey’s end. Thus we wound our way at a foot’s pace along the banks of a small stream, in and out of the densest woodland—beautiful as a summer’s dream just then, with birds making vocal all the thickets, wild flowers at our feet, and blooming trees, wild cherry and hawthorn and the like, clouds come to earth and caught in the branches—and found a steep path to our right hand, and climbed it for half an hour: and lo! gaining the crest first, I saw before me, quite close, the place we sought—a fair tower of grey stone, with a battlemented house beside it, having an open gate in a barbican. Before the barbican was a lawn snowed

with daisies, and upon that two white greyhounds, which sat up when they first saw us, and then crouched, their muzzles between their paws. But as we advanced, jumping up and barking together, they raced together over the turf, met us, and leapt upwards to the Queen's hand. All beasts loved her, and she loved them.

'There was neither guard nor porter at the gates. They stood open upon an empty court, beyond which we could see the hall doors: open, they, also. In the air all about us was the sound of bees, and of doves hidden in the woody slopes; but no noises of humankind were to be heard: we all sat there on our horses, and watched, and listened, like errant adventurers of old time come upon an enchanted lodging, a castle and hermitage in a forest glade.

'Mistress Sempill broke silence. "'Tis not for us to enter—this still place," she said. "Come your ways, madam; you have seen what there is to be seen."

'The Queen, as one suddenly awakened, called to me. "Baptist, dismount and help me down. I am going in."

'I obeyed, and helped Mistress Sempill after. Erskine would stay with the guard. We three went through the gateway, crossed the inner court, and passed the doors into the hall—a long dusky chamber with windows full of escutcheons and achievements, and between them broad sheets of ancient arras which flapped gently in a little breeze. The sunlight, coming aslant, broke the gloom with radiant blue bars—to every window a bar. As we peered about us, presently Sempill gave a short little cry, then called to me, "Baptist, Baptist, have a care for her."

'It was an old woman come out of a door in the panel to look at us—old, grey and wrinkled. I asked her, Was any other within? She shook her head, pointing at the same time to her mouth, within which, when she opened it wide, I saw the seared stump of her tongue, and perceived that she had been maimed of that organ. Sempill remarked it also, and was afraid. "Oh, come away, for God's love!" said she: "there is witchcraft here"; and signed herself many times. But the Queen laughed, and went

up to the mutilated hag, and, patting her shoulder, went by her through the door by which she had come in, and turned to beckon us after her. So we climbed a narrow stair, built in the thickness of the wall round and round a pillar. In the gallery above were doors to left and right, some open upon empty, fragrant chambers, some shut and locked. I believe that I tried them all the length of the gallery on one side; and so came at the farther end to a short passage on my right hand: at the end of that a low-pitched door ajar. Thither I went on tiptoe, with a strong sense that that room was occupied. I know not what had certified me, save some prescience which men have at times. So certain was I, at least, that when I was at the door I knocked. I was answered, "Enter."

'I entered not. I dared not do it. I sped back to the Queen, who now stood with Sempill at the head of this short passage. For the moment my nerve was clean gone: "Some one there—let us go away!"—Who knows what hissed foolishness I let fly?—"I urge you: let us go away." But the Queen, rose-bright, keen as fire in the wind, threw up her head and flashed her eyes full upon me. "Stand aside, sir—I will go in." She pushed by me and went into the room without ceremony. We had followed her with beating hearts.

'She had not gone far—was not a yard from the door; nor do I marvel at it, nor need you. For by the open window sat the Countess of Bothwell at needlework, making, as I saw in a moment, a child's shift. If God the Father of all, who framed women nobly and urged them cast their hearts in the dust to make soft the ways of men—if He, I say, pausing in His vast survey, might have discerned this dear woman now, with the wound upon her still raw and bleeding whence she had torn that generous heart—naked, emptied, betrayed; ah, and face to face with that other woman also, not less injured, not less the vessel of a man's beastly convenience—I dare swear He would repent Him of His high benevolence, and say, "Tush, I have planned amiss. The waste is divine, the waster shall be crowned with the glory of the Magdalene, that Mary whom I would no more condemn. But what shall be done with him for

whom these women spent so vainly?" Thus, it might well be, would God reason with Himself. Yet who am I, poor bastard of a dead mother (spending she, too, with little avail) to interpret the reproaches of the Almighty?

'For an age of suspense, as it seemed to me, the Queen stood where we had found her—a yard from the door, perfectly still, but not rigid. No, but she was like a panther, all lithe and rippling, prest for a pounce, and had her eyes set fast upon the other. I was in a muck of fear, and Sempill muttering fast to herself her "O Christ, keep us all! O Christ, save her!" and the like, what time the Countess, affecting to be unaware, crossed one knee over the other and bent diligently to her needlework. The time seemed a slow hour, though I know not how long it may have been, before the Queen began to move about the room.

'I know what made her restless: it was curiosity. At first she had only had eyes for the lady; now she had seen what she was at work upon. Yes, and she had been at the same proud task herself not long since. I am certain that she was just then more curious than enraged. At least, instead of attacking as she was wont, with her arrows of speech leaping forward as she went, she said nothing, and began to walk the room restlessly, roaming about; never going near the window, but looking sidelong towards it as she passed to and fro: bright spots in her cheeks, her hands doubled, biting her lips, longing, but not yet resolved, to know all. The storm, which was not far off, gathered strength as she walked: I saw her shake her head, I saw a tear gleam and settle on her shoulder. And so at last she clenched her teeth, and stood before Lady Bothwell, grinning with misery.

'"O woman," she said, snarling, "what are you making there?"

'The Countess looked up, then down: the far-searching eyes she had! "I am making," said she, "a shift for my fair son that is to be—my lord's and mine."

'"You make for a bastard, woman," said the Queen; and the Countess smiled wisely.

'"Maybe I do, maybe. But this child of mine, look you, in my country we call a

love-child."

'The Queen reeled as if she were sick-faint, and had Sempill beside her in a moment, flaring with indignation.

'"Come you with me, madam," cried she; "come you with me. Will you bandy words with a——?"

'She was not suffered to get out her word. The Queen put her away gently, saying, "No, no, you shall not call her that, lest she may ask you some home questions."

'But the Countess was not offended. "Why should she not? What harm in a name? Call me as you will, ma'am, I shall never forbid you."

'"Have you no shame?" cried Sempill. "And you divorced on your own motion?"

'The Countess replied to the Queen, as if it had been she that spoke. "O, madam, if divorce stands not in your way, shall it stand in mine? You have given him your body, as I did mine; and the Church cannot gainsay me that. But I'll have you remember that when I got my child I was a wife; and when you get yours you'll be none, I doubt."

'At this spiteful speech the Queen, in her turn, smiled. She was far from that sort of recrimination. Presently she began in a new and colder tone—remembering her errand. "Why are you here?" she asked the Countess.

'She was answered, "It is my lord's pleasure."

'"He is very clement, I think," said the Queen.

'The Countess made no reply; and Sempill, who knew whether clemency had moved my lord or not, did all she could to prevent the Queen from knowing it also. Unfortunate lady! She gave her new suspicions.

'"You do not answer me, mistress," she said, in her high peremptory way. "I said that my lord is clement, and you make no reply. You will tell me these are your jointure-lands, I suppose? Let be for that. Tell me now this—How are you here?"

‘The Countess hereupon, and for the first time, looked her in the face, her own being venomous beyond a man’s belief.

‘“How am I here? Just as you may have been at Dunbar, madam—as his kept woman, just.”

‘“You lie! You lie!” cried the Queen. “Dear God, she is a liar! Take back your lies—they hurt me.”

‘She pressed her side with all her might. I thought that Sempill would have struck the cruel devil. But she never flinched.

‘“No, no, I am no liar, madam,” she answered. “You are his woman, and so am I. Eh, there’s been a many and a many of us—a brave company!”

‘The Queen was tussling with her breast, but could get no breath. I thought she was frightened at the sudden revelation, or confirmation, of how she stood: she faltered—she cast about—and then she said:

‘“I know that you lie, and I know why you lie. You hate me bitterly. This is mere malice.”

‘“It is not malice,” says the Countess; “it is the bare truth. Why should I spare you the truth—you of all women?”

‘“You hate too much, you hate too much! I have accorded with you—we have kissed each other. I tried to serve you. It is not my fault if my lord—if my lord——O Jeannie!” she said, with a pitiful gesture of stretched-out arms—“O Jeannie, have mercy upon me—have a thought for my sorrow!”

‘She came nearer as she spoke, so near that the two could have touched; and then the Countess, who had sat so still, turned her head a little back, and (like a white cat) laid her ears flat and struck at last.

‘“Woman,” she said, “when you raked my father out of his grave, and spat upon his dead corse, what thought had you for his flesh and blood? What mercy upon their

sorrow?”

‘The Queen, when she had understood her, wiped her eyes, and grew calmer. “I had no thought for you then, nor durst I have any. Princes must do justice without ruth; and he was a rebel, and so were you all. Your brothers Huntly and Adam have read me better.”

‘“Ay,” said the Countess, “the greedy loons! They put your fingers in their mouths and suck sweetness and solace—like enough they will read you well. But I am not of their fashion, you must know.” Stiffening herself, she spoke swiftly: “And if you could dishonour a dead old man whom you vow you had once loved, what wonder if I dishonour you whom I have always hated?”

‘The Queen smiled in a sweet, tired way, as if she was sorry for this woman. “Do you so hate me, Jeannie?”

‘And the Countess answered her: “Ay, worse than hell-fire for my dead father’s sake, and for my brother John’s, whom you slew. And so I am well content to be here, that you should see me unashamed, owner without asking of what you long for but can never have; and that I should see you at my feet, deeply abased.”

‘If her tongue had been a blade and her will behind it as the hand of one who lived for cruelty, she could not have got her dear desire more utterly than by these slow-stabbing words. Content to be here! Yea, lascivious devil that she was, I could see that she was rolling in her filthy comfort. But, by heaven, she was redeemed by the fading breath of the most unhappy lady that ever moaned about the world.

‘The Queen, I tell you, went directly to her—went close to her, without thought of fear or sickening of disgust. And she took the wicked white face between her hands and kissed the poisonous lips. And she said: “Hate me no more, Jeannie Gordon, for now I know that we are sisters in great sorrow, you and I. If we are not loved we must needs be unhappy; but in that we have loved, and do still love, we are not without recompense. So we must never rend each other; but you, poor lover, must

kiss me, your sister, as now I do you."

'I ask myself here—and others have asked me—was this sudden alteration in her Majesty that old sweet guile of hers, inveterate still and at work? Was it possible that, even now, she could stay and stoop to cajole this indurate woman, to woo her with kisses, kill her with kindness? I like not to consider: many there be, I know, who do believe it, Mistress Sempill being one. Who am I to judge that deep, working heart more narrowly than by what appears? Such questions are too nice; they are not for my answering. Candour compels me to record them; but I can only report what I saw and heard.

'I heard the Countess give a throttled cry, as she struggled like one caught in a fire; but the Queen kissed her again before she could free herself. When at last she had flung away, with crying and a blenched face—she who had been so hard before was now in a state of wild alarm, warning off our lady with her fighting hands. "No, no, no! Touch me not—defile not yourself. Oh, never that—I dare not suffer you!"

'"What, am I so vile?" says the poor Queen, misunderstanding her in this new mood. The Countess burst out into passionate weeping, which hurt her so much (for she was no tearful woman by nature) that she writhed under the affliction as if the grief within was tearing at her vitals. She shrieked, "Ah, no! Not you—not you—but I. Oh, you torture me, brand me with fire!" I could not guess what she meant, save that she was beaten, and her wicked passion with her.

'She sat up and stared at our Mistress, her face all writhen with grief. "Listen, listen—this is the truth as God knows it. That man who stands between us two and Heaven is your ruin and mine. For I love him not at all, and have consented to him now, degrading myself for hatred's sake. And for you, who have loved him so well, he has no care at all—but only for your crown and royal seat; for he loves me only—and so it has always been."

'The Queen could only nod her head. Mary Sempill said sternly: "Woman, you do

well to lash yourself at last; for none can hurt you beside yourself. Now, may God forgive you, for I never will."

'"Oh, Mary," says the Queen, "what have you or I to do with forgiveness of sins? Alas, we need it for ourselves. And she is in as bad a case as I am." Then, "Come to me now, Jeannie," she said; and most humbly that wicked, beaten woman crept up to her late enemy. The Queen embraced and comforted her. "Farewell, Jeannie," said she, "and think as well of me as you can. For I go on to I know not what—only I do think it will be unhappiness—and we shall never meet again." With sublime calm she turned to us, weeping behind her. "Come, my children, let us go our ways."

'This is the most terrible secret sorrow which broke her heart, and ends my plea for pity upon her who loved so fondly. My breath and strength are done; for I had them from her alone, and with her high heart's death dies my book.'

Honest, ingenuous, loyal Des-Essars! seeing, maybe, but in a glass darkly; seeing, certainly, not more than half—thou wert right there. If thy mistress beat the woman at last, it was with her fading breath. She knew herself beaten to the dust by the man.

[9] Here I am bound to agree with Bothwell; for if Huntly wished to keep him from blood-guiltiness and knew that he could, why not have kept him and his kegs away altogether? One answer may be, of course, that Morton and his friends would never have stood in had Bothwell and his been ruled out.

[10] Des-Essars, plainly, was at work during the Queen's captivity in England; and, as I judge, while the inquiry was being held in Westminster Hall in 1568.

CHAPTER IX THE BRIDE'S TRAGEDY

The heart being an organ of which we have opinions more gallant than practical, Des-Essars should perhaps have judged wiselier that his Secret of Secrets was what broke the Queen's spirit. There he had been right, for from this day onwards to the end of her throned life the tragedy is pure pity: she drifts, she suffers, but she

scarcely acts—unless the struggles of birds in nets can be called acts. After her spirit went rapidly her animal courage; after that her womanly habit. She was like to become a mere tortured beast. And as I have no taste for vivisection, nor can credit you with any, I shall be as short as I can.

Silent all the long way home from wooded Crichton to the sea, it might seem as if she had been hardening herself by silent meditation for what she knew must take place. She saw nothing of Bothwell that night—she was not yet ready for him; but she did what had to be done with Mary Sempill.

When that loyal soul came late into the bedchamber to bid her good-night, she found her mistress in bed, calm and clear in mind. Forewarned in some measure, as she stooped over to kiss her, the Queen did not as usual put out her arms to draw her friend nearer, but lay waiting for the kiss, which hovered, as it were, above her; and before it could come she said, ‘Do you kiss me, Mary? Wait while I tell you something. I am to be married to my lord come the day after to-morrow.’

Sempill, prepared or not, started back, on fire. ‘You’ll never do it. You’ll never dare to do it.’

‘I shall dare to do it, if I dare avouch it.’

Sempill was trembling. ‘I cannot endure it, cannot face it—most wicked! Oh, my dear love and my friend, you that have been all the world to me in times bygone, never go so far from me that I cannot follow you!’

The Queen bit her lip, and wrinkled her eyes where the tears were brimming, drowning her sight. ‘I must, I must—I cannot go back. Oh, have mercy upon me! Oh, Mary——’

Sempill hid her face. ‘I cannot see it done. I cannot know of it. I am—I do my best to be—an honest woman. These things be far from me—unholy things. As Christ is my Saviour, I believe He will pardon you and me all our sins of the hot blood. But not of the cold blood—not of the dry!’ She changed suddenly, as if struck chill.

‘Why, you will be an harlot!’ she said.

The Queen turned over in her bed and faced the wall.

Sempill went down on her knees. ‘I conjure you—I beseech you! Madam, I implore you! By your mother’s bliss and your father’s crown imperial, by the great calling of your birth! By Christ’s dear blood shed for you and all, by the sorrows of Our Lady—the swords in her heart—the tears that she shed; by her swooning at the Cross—I implore, I implore!—make not all these woes to be in vain. By your young child I conjure you—by my own upon earth and the other in my womb—by all calm and innocent things—oh, put it from you: suffer all things—even death, even death!’

There was no response. She rose and stood over the bed. ‘We have loved much, and had sweet commerce, you and I. Many have had sweetness of you and left you: Beaton is gone, Fleming is alienate. You drive me to go their way, you drive me from you. For if you do this, go I must. Honour is above all—and yon man, by my soul, is as foul as hell. Turn to me, my Mary, look at me once, and I shall never leave you till I die.’

She did not stir nor utter a sound; she lay like a log. Mary Sempill, with a sob that shook her to pieces, and a gesture of drowning hands, went out of the room, and at midnight left the palace. Those two, who had been lovers once and friends always, never met again in this world.

What the Queen’s motives may have been I know not, whether of desperate conviction that retreat was not possible, or of desperate effort to entice the man to her even at this last hour: let them go.[11] She held to her resolve next day; she faced the remnant of her friends, all she had left; lastly, she faced the strong man himself, and like a doll in his arms suffered his lying kisses upon her lips. And she never reproached him, being paralysed by the knowledge of what he would have done if she had. To see him throw up the head, expose the hairy throat, to see him laugh! She could not bear that.

On this day, the eve of her wedding, she found out that her courage had ebbed. Things frightened her now which before she would have scoffed at. A May marriage—hers was to be that: and they who feared ill-luck from such gave her fears. A Highland woman became possessed in the street, and prophesied to a crowd of people. She said that the Queen would be a famous wife, for she would have five husbands, and in the time of the fifth would be burned. ‘Name them, mother—name them!’ they cried; and the mad creature peered about with her sly eyes. ‘I dinna see him here, but the third is in this town, and the fourth likewise!’ ‘The fourth! Who is he?’ ‘He’s a Hamilton, I ken that fine, and dwells by Arbroath. I doubt his name will be Jock.’

Lord John! The Lord of Arbroath—why, yes, she had given him a great horse. They rehearse this tale at dinner, and see Bothwell grow red, and hear the Queen talk to herself: ‘Will they burn me? Yes, yes, that is the punishment of light women. Poor souls, they burn for ever!’

She carried the thought about with her all day, and at dusk was much agitated when they lit the candles. About supper-time Father Roche, asking to speak with her, was admitted. He told her that his conscience would not permit him to be any longer in her service. Bothwell had refused to be married with the mass: in Father Roche’s eyes this would be no marriage at all. She was angry for a second in her old royal way—her Tudor way; moved towards him swiftly as if she would have quelled him with a forked word; but stopped mid-road and let her hands unclench themselves. ‘Yes, yes, go your ways—you will find a well-trodden road. Why should you stop? I need you no more.’ He would have kissed her hands, but she put them behind her and stood still till he had gone. Then to bed, without prayers.

At ten o’clock of the morning she was married to him without state, without religion. There was no banquet: the city acted as if unaware of anything done; and after dinner she rode away with him to Borthwick. Melvill, Des-Essars, Lethington

went with her, Mary Seton and Carwood. Bothwell had his own friends, the Ormistons and others of mean degree.

With tears they put her to bed; but she had none. ‘I would that I might die within the next hour,’ she said to Des-Essars; and he, grown older and drier suddenly—‘By my soul, ma’am, it should be within less time, to do you service.’

She shook her head. ‘No, you are wrong. He needs me not. You will see.’ She sent him away to his misery, and remained alone in hers.

It cannot be known when the Earl went up. He stayed on in the parlour below, drinking with his friends so long as they remained above-board, talking loudly, boasting of what he had done and of what he should do yet. He took her back to Edinburgh within a few days, moved thereto by the urgency of public affairs.

Those who had not seen her go, but now saw her return, did not like her looks—so leaden-coloured, so listless and dejected, so thin she seemed. The French Ambassador—Du Croc, an old friend and a sage—waiting for audience, heard a quarrel in her cabinet, heard Bothwell mock and gibe, depart with little ceremony; and then the Queen in hysterics, calling for friends who had gone—for Livingstone, for Fleming.

Carwood came in. ‘O madam, what do you lack?’

‘My courage, my courage.’

Carwood, with a scream—‘God’s sake, ma’am, put down that knife!’

‘The knife is well enough,’ says she, ‘but the hand is numb. Feel me, Carwood: I am dead in the hand.’

Du Croc heard Carwood grunt as she tussled. ‘Leave it—leave it—give it me! But you shall. You are Queen, but my God to me. Leave it, I say——’ The Queen began to whimper and coax for the knife—called it her lover. Carwood flung open the window and threw it on to the grass.

No doubt the worst was to be feared, no doubt Bothwell had reason to be nervous. At the council-board, to which he ordered her to come, he told her what was before her. The lords were in league, clustered about the Prince: he was not ashamed to tell her in the hearing of all that she was useless without the child. Dejected, almost abject as she was become, she quailed—shrinking back, with wide eyes upon him—at this monstrous insult, as if she herself had been a child struck to the soul by something more brutish than your whips. Lord Herries rose in his place—'By the living God, my lord, I cannot hear such talk——' Bothwell was driven to extenuate. 'My meaning, madam, is that your Majesty can have no force in your arm, nor can your loyal friends have any force, without the Prince your son be with you. You know very well how your late consort desired to have him; and no man can say he was not wise. Believe me, madam—and these lords will bear me out—he is every whit as necessary to your Majesty and me.'

Huntly, on the Queen's left, leaned behind her chair and spoke in a fierce whisper: 'You forget, I think, that you speak to the Queen, and of the Queen. The Prince hath nothing but through her.'

'By God, Geordie,' he said, whispering back, but heard everywhere, 'and what have I but through her? I tell you fairly we have lost the main unless we can put up that cockerel.'

The Queen tried to justify herself to her tyrant. 'You know that I have tried—you know that my brother worked against me——'

'And he was wise. But now he is from home; we must try again.'

She let her head sink. 'I am weary—I am weary. Whom have we to send? Do you trust Lethington?'

This was not heard; but Lethington saw Bothwell's eye gleam red upon him.

'Him? I would as soon go myself. If he wormed in there, do you suppose we could ever draw him out again?'

‘No,’ she said aloud, ‘I am of your mind. Send we Melvill, then.’

He would not have Melvill: he chose Herries.

They sent out Lord Herries on a fruitless errand; fruitless in the main sense, but fruitful in another, since he brought back a waverer. This was the Earl of Argyll, head of a great name, but with no head of his own worth speaking about. He might have been welcome but for the news that came with him. All access to the Prince had been refused to Herries the moment it was known on whose behalf he asked it. The Countess of Mar mounted guard over the door, and would not leave until the Queen’s emissary was out of the house. There was more than statecraft here, as Herries had to confess: witchcraft from the Queen was in question, from the mother upon the child. The last time she had been to see him, they said, she had given him an apple, which he played with and presently cast down. A dog picked it up, ran under the table with it and began to mumble it. The dog, foaming and snaping, jerked away its life. ‘Treason and lies!’ roared Bothwell, who was present; ‘treason heaped on lies! Why, when was your Majesty last at Stirling?’ He had forgotten, though she had not.

‘It was the night before you took me at Almond Brig,’ she said; and, when he chuckled, broke out with vehemence of pain, ‘You laugh at it! You laugh still, O Christ! Will you laugh at my graveside, Bothwell?’ She hid her head in her arm and wept miserably. It was grievous to see her and not weep too. Yet these were no times in which to weep.

On the same day in which Lord Lindsay departed, to join the Lords at Stirling, Huntly also, most unhappily, asked leave to go to his lands. The Queen used him bitterly. She could be gentle with any other and move their pity: with him she must always be girding. ‘Do you turn traitor like your father? Have you too kept a dagger for my last hours?’ He did not break into reproaches, nor seek to justify himself, as he might have done—for no one had tried to serve her at more peril to himself. He

said, ‘Madam, I have tried to repair my faults committed against you,’ and turned away with a black look of despair. He went north, as she thought, lost to her: it was Bothwell who afterwards told her that he had gone to summon his kindred against the war which he saw could not be far off. So scornful are women to those who love them in vain—that should surely have touched her, but did not. Lord John Hamilton took Huntly’s empty place, too powerful an ally to be despised.

The Earl of Argyll came and went between Stirling and Edinburgh, very diligent to accommodate the two cities, if that might be. He dared—or was fool enough—to tell the Queen that all would be well if she would give up the King’s murderers. She replied: ‘Go back to Stirling, then, and take them. I do give them up. It is there you shall find them.’ Whether he knew this to be truth or not, for certain he did not report the message to the Earl of Morton. It would have fared ill with him if he had.

Before he could come back, a baffled but honest intermediary, Lethington had fled the Court and taken his wife with him. He went out, as he said, to ride in the meadows; he did ride there, but did not return. His wife slipt away separately, and joined her man at Callander; thence, when Lord Livingstone sent them word that he could not harbour the Queen’s enemies, they went on to Lord Fleming’s, Mary’s father’s house, and finally to Stirling. It was a bad sign that the gentle girl, flying like a thief at her husband’s bidding, should write no word, nor send any message to the Queen; it was a worse to the last few faithful that the Queen took no notice. All she was heard to say was that Fleming could not be blamed for paying her merchet.

Mercheta Mulicrum, Market of Women—the money-fee exacted by the lord of the soil before a girl could be wed, clean, to the man who chose her! Livingstone had paid it, Beaton had paid it; she, Queen Mary, God knows! had paid it deep. She shook her head—and was Fleming to escape? ‘No! but Love—that exorbitant lord—will have it of all of us women. And now’s for you, Seton!’

She looked strangely at the glowing, golden-haired girl before her; the green-eyed,

the sharp-tongued Mary Seton, last of her co-adventurers of six years agone. Fair Seton made no promises; but all the world knows that she alone stayed by her lady to the long and very end.

Returned from Stirling, my Lord of Argyll, with perturbed face, disorderly dress, and entire absence of manners, broke in upon the Queen's privacy, claiming secret words. The lords were prepared for the field. They intended an attack upon the lower town by land and water; they would surround Holyroodhouse, seize her person.

She flamed. 'You mean my husband's. It is him they seek.'

He did not affect to deny it. She sent for Bothwell and told him all.

Bothwell said: 'You are right. They want me. Well, they shall not have me so easily. You and I will away this night to Borthwick. Arbroath will be half way to us by now, and the Gordons not far behind. Let Adam go and hasten his brother. Madam, we should be speedy.'

She took Seton with her—having no other left; she took Des-Essars. Arthur Erskine was to captain Holyroodhouse. Bothwell had, perhaps, half a dozen of his dependents. They went after dark, but in safety.

There, at Borthwick, they stayed quietly through the 8th and 9th of June: close weather, with thunder brewing.

No news of Huntly, none of the Hamiltons. Bothwell was out each day for long spells, spying and judging. He opened communication with Dunbar, got in touch with his own country. At home sat the Queen with her two friends, very silent.

What was there to say? Who could nurse her broken heart save this one man, who had no thought to do it, nor any heart of his own, either, to spare for her? Spited had he been by Fortune, without doubt. He had had the Crown and Mantle of Scotland in his pair of hands; having schemed for six years to get them, he had had them, and felt their goodly weight: and here he was now in hiding, trusting for bare life to the help of men who had no reason to love him. Where, then, were his friends? He had

none, nor ever had but one—this fair, frail woman, whom he had desired for her store, and had emptied, and would now be rid of.

If his was a sorry case, what was hers? Alas, the heart sickens to think of it. With how high a head came she in, she and her cohort of maids, to win wild Scotland! Where were they? They had received their crowns, but she had besoiled and bedrabbled hers. They had lovers, they had children, they had troops of friends; but she, who had sought with panting mouth for very love, had had husbands who made love stink, and a child denied her, and no friend in Scotland but a girl and a poor boy. You say she had sought wrongly. I say she had overmastering need to seek. Love she must; and if she loved amiss it was that she loved too well. You say that she misused her friends. I deny that a girl set up where she was could have any friends at all. She was a well of sweet profit—the Honeypot; and they swarmed about her for their meat like house-flies; and when that was got, and she drained dry, they departed by the window in clouds, to settle and fasten about the nearest provand they could meet with: carrion or honeycomb, man’s flesh, dog’s flesh or maid’s flesh, what was it to them? In those days of dreadful silent waiting at Borthwick, less than a month after marriage, I tell you very plainly that she was beggared of all she had in the world, and knew it. The glutted flies had gone by the window, the gorged rats had scampered by the doors. So she remained alone with the man she had risked all to get, who was scheming to be rid of her. Her heart was broken, her love was murdered, her spirit was gone: what more could she suffer? One more thing—bodily terror, bodily fear.

[11] I am unwilling to intrude myself and my opinions, but feel drawn to suggest that the latter was her motive. If she had beaten the Countess at the eleventh hour, could she not beat the Earl? Was she not Huntress to the utterance? Let God (Who made her) pity her: I do believe it.

CHAPTER X THE KNOCKING AT BORTHWICK

The 10th of June had been a thunderous day, and was followed by a stifling night. In the lower parlour where the Queen lay the candles seemed to be clogged, the air charged with steam. Mary Seton sat on the floor by the couch, Des-Essars, bathed in sweat, leaned against the window-sill. In the hall beyond could be heard Bothwell's voice, grating querulously to young Crookstone and Paris about his ruined chances. He was not laughing any more—was not one, it was found, to bear misfortunes gaily. His tongue had mastered him of late, and his hand too. He had nearly killed Paris that morning with one smashing blow.

There came a puff of wind, with branches sweeping the window, the pattering, swishing sound as of heavy rain. 'Thank God for rain! Baptist, the window, lest I suffocate. The rain will cool the air.' He set it wide open, and leaned out. There was no rain at all; but the sky was a vaporous vault, through which, in every part, the veiled moon diffused her light. He saw a man standing on the grass as plainly as you see this paper, who presently, after considering him, went away towards the woods. It might have been one of their own sentries, it might have been any one: but why did it make his heart beat? He stayed where he was, watching intently, considering with himself whether he should tell the Queen, or by some ruse let my lord have warning without her knowledge. Then, while he was hammering it out, she got up and came to the window, and leaned over him, her hand on his shoulder.

'Poor prisoners, you and I, my Baptist.'

He turned to her with burning eyes. 'Madam, there can be no prison for me where you are; but my heart walks with yours through all space.'

'My heart,' she said, 'limps, and soon will be bedridden; and then yours will stop. You are tied to me, and I to him. The world has gone awry with us, my dear.'

Very nervous, on account of what he had seen, he had no answer ready. Thought, feeling, passion, desire, were all boiling and stirring together in his brain. The blood drummed at his ears, like a call to arms.

Suddenly—it all came with a leap—there was hasty knocking at the hall doors, and at the same instant a bench was overturned out there, and Bothwell went trampling towards the sound. Des-Essars, tensely moved, shut the windows and barred the shutters over them. The Queen watched him—her hands held her bosom. ‘What is it? Oh, what is it?’

‘Hush, for God’s sake! Let me listen.’

Mary Seton opened the parlour door, as calm as she had ever been. They listened all.

They heard a clamour of voices outside. ‘Bothwell! Bothwell! Let us in.’

‘Who are ye?’

‘We are hunted men—friends. We are here for our lives.’

Bothwell put his ear close to the door; his mouth worked fearfully, all his features were distorted. Heavens! how he listened.

‘Who are ye? Tell me that.’

‘Friends—friends—friends!’

He laughed horribly—with a hollow, barking noise, like a leopard’s cough. ‘By my God, Lindsay, I know ye now for a fine false friend. You shall never take me here.’

For answer, the knocking was doubled; men rained blows upon the door; and some ran round to the windows and jumped up at them, crying, ‘Let us in—let us in!’ Some glass was broken; but the shutter held. Mary Seton held the Queen close in her arms, Des-Essars stood in the doorway with a drawn sword. Bothwell came up to him for a moment. ‘By God, man, we’re rats in a drain—damned rats, by my soul! Ha!’ he turned as Paris came down from the turret, where he had been sent to spy.

The house, Paris said, was certainly surrounded. The torches made it plain that these were enemies. He had seen my lord of Morton on a white horse, my Lords Hume and Sempill and some more.

They all looked at each other, a poor ten that they were.

‘Hark to them now, master,’ says Paris. ‘They have a new cry.’

Bothwell listened, biting his tongue.

‘Murderer, murderer, come out! Come out, adulterous thief!’ This was Lindsay again. There was no sound of Morton’s voice, the thick, the rich and mellow note he had. But who was Morton, to call for the murderer?

Paris, after spying again, said that they were going to fire the doors; and added, ‘Master, it is hot enough without a fire. We had best be off.’

Bothwell looked at the Queen. ‘My dear, I must go.’

She barely turned her eyes upon him; but she said, ‘Do you leave me here?’ Scathing question from a bride, had a man been able to observe such things.

He said, ‘Ay, I do. It is me they want, these dogs. You will be safe if they know that I am away—and I will take care they do know it. I go to Dunbar, whence you shall hear from me by some means. Crookstone, come you with me, and come you, Hobbie. Paris, you stay here.’

‘Pardon, master,’ says Paris, ‘I go with your lordship.’

Pale Paris was measured with his eye. ‘I’ll kill you if you do, my fine man.’

‘That is your lordship’s affair,’ says Paris with deference; ‘but first I will show you the way out. There are horses in the undercroft.’

Bothwell lifted up his wife, held her in his arms and kissed her twice. ‘Fie, you are cold!’ he said, and put her down. She had lain listless against him, without kissing.

He turned at once and followed Paris; young Crookstone followed him. It seems that he got clear off in the way he intended, for the noises outside the house ceased; and in the grey of the morning, before three o’clock, all was quiet about the policies. They must have been within an ace of capturing him: in fact, Paris admitted afterwards that they were but a bowshot away at one time.

The Queen sent Seton for Des-Essars at about four o’clock in the morning. Neither

mistress nor maid had been to bed.

He found her in a high fever; her eyes glowing like jet, her face white and pinched; the stroke of her certain fate drawing down her mouth. She said, ‘I have been a false woman, a coward, and a shame to my race.’

‘God knows your Majesty is none of these.’

‘Baptist, I am going to my lord.’

‘Oh, madam, God forbid you!’

‘God will forbid me presently if I do not. It should have been last night—I may be too late. But make haste.’

They procured a guide of a sort, a wretched poltroon of a fellow, who twice tried to run for it and leave them in Yester woods. Des-Essars, after the second attempt, rode beside him with a cocked pistol in his hand. From Yester they went north by Haddington, for fear of Whittingehame and the Douglases. As it was, they had to skirt Lethington, and the Secretary’s fine grey house there in the park; but the place was close-barred—nothing hindered them. They passed unknown through Haddington, the Queen desperately tired. Sixteen hours in the saddle, a cold welcome at the end.

Bothwell received them without cheer. ‘You would have been wiser to have stayed. Here you are in the midst of war.’

‘My place was by your side.’

The mockery of the thing struck him all at once. This schemed-for life of his—a vast, empty shell of a house!

‘Oh, God, I sicken of this folly!’ He turned from her.

She had nothing to say, could hardly stand on her feet. Seton took her to bed.

A message next day from Huntly in Edinburgh. Balfour held the castle; all the rest of the town was Grange’s. Morton, Atholl, and Lethington were rulers. Atholl had

Holyroodhouse; Lethington and his wife were with Morton. He himself, said Huntly, would move out in a day or two and join the Hamiltons at Dalkeith. Let Bothwell raise the Merse and meet them. He named Gladsmuir for rendezvous, on the straight road from Haddington to the city, five miles by west of Haddington.

Bothwell read all this to the Queen, who said nothing. She was thinking of a business of her own, as appeared when she was alone. She beckoned up Baptist.

‘There’s not a moment to be lost. Find me a messenger, a trusty one, who will get speech with Mary Fleming.’

‘Madam,’ says Baptist, ‘let me go.’

‘No, no: I need you. Try Paris—no! my lord would never spare him. And he would deny me again. Do you choose somebody.’

‘What is he to say to her, ma’am?’

‘He shall speak to her in private. She knows where my coffer is—my casket.’

Ah! this was a grave affair. Des-Essars made up his mind at once. ‘Madam,’ he said, ‘let me advise your Majesty. Either send me, or send no one. If you send me I will bring the casket back. That I promise. If you send no one—if you do not remind her—it will slip her memory.’

The Queen’s eyes showed her fears. ‘Remember you, Baptist, of my casket. If Fleming were to betray me to Lethington——’ No need to end.

‘Again I say, madam, send me.’

She thought; but even so her eyes filled with tears, which began to fall fast.

‘Dearest madam, do you weep?’

‘I cannot let you go. Do not ask me—I need you here.’

He leaned to her. ‘Alas, what can I do to help your Majesty?’

She took his hand. ‘Stay. You are my only friend. The end is not far. Have a little patience—stay.’

‘But your casket——’

She shook her head. ‘Let all go now. Stay you with me.’

‘Certainly I will stay with you,’ he said. ‘It will be to see you triumph over your enemies.’

And again she shook her head. ‘Not with a broken heart!’ Then in a frightened whisper she began to tell him her fears. ‘Do you know what they make ready for me? The stake, and the faggot, and the fire! Fire for the wife that slew her husband. Baptist, you will never forsake me now! This is my secret knowledge. Never forsake me!’ She hid her face on his shoulder and cried there, as one lost.

Bothwell burst into the room: they sprang apart. He was eager, flush with news. ‘We march to-morrow with the light. My men are coming in—in good order. Be of good cheer, madam, for with God’s help we shall pound these knaves properly.’

‘How shall God help us, my lord,’ said she, ‘who have helped not Him?’

‘Why, then, my dear,’ cries he with a laugh, ‘why, then, we will help ourselves.’

CHAPTER XI APPASSIONATA

Grange, that fine commander, got his back to the sun and gave the lords the morning advantage. ‘We shall want no more than that,’ he told Morton; ‘by ten o’clock they will be here, and by noon we shall be through with it.’

‘Shall we out banner, think you?’ says Morton.

‘Nay, my lord, nay. Keep her back the now.’ Grange was fighting with his head, disposing his host according to the lie of the ground, and his reserves also. He took the field before dawn, and had every man at his post by seven o’clock. There was a ground mist, and the sea all blotted out: everything promised great heat.

They were to be seen, a waiting host, when the Queen crested Carbery Hill and watched her men creep round about; with Erskine beside her she could make them out—arquebusiers, pikemen, and Murrays from Atholl on the lowest ground

(Tillibardine leading them), on either wing horsemen with spears. They had a couple of brass field-pieces in front. One could see the chiefs walking their horses up and down the lines, or pricking forward to confer, or clustering together, looking to where one pointed with his staff. There was Morton on his white horse, himself, portly man, in black with a steel breastplate—white sash across it—in his steel bonnet a favour of white. White was their badge, then; for, looking at them in the mass, the host was seen to be spattered with it, as if in a neglected field of poppies and corncockles there grew white daisies interspersed. The stout square man in leather jerkin and buff boots was Grange—on a chestnut horse; with him to their right rode Atholl on a black—Atholl in a red surtout, and the end of his fine beard lost in the white sash which he too had. Who is the slim rider in black—haunting Atholl like a shadow? Who but careful Mr. Secretary Lethington could have those obsequious shoulders, that attentive cock of the head? Lethington was there, then! Ah! and there, by one's soul, was Archie Douglas's grey young head, and his white minister's ruff, where a red thread of blood ought to be. Glencairn was there, Lindsay, Sempill, Rothes—all those strong tradesmen, who had lied for their profit, and were now come to claim wages: all of them but the trader of traders, the white-handed prayerful man, the good Earl of Moray, safe in France, waiting his turn.

So prompt as they stood down there in the grey haze, all rippling in the heat; without sound of trumpet or any noise but the whinnying of a horse; without any motion save now and then, when some trooper plunged out of line and must pull back—that thing of all significant things about them was marked by the Queen, who stood shading her eyes from the sun atop of Carbery Hill. 'Oh, Erskine!' she said, 'oh, Bothwell! they have no standard. Against whom, then, do we fight?'

Bothwell, exasperated by anxiety, made short answer: 'It is plain enough to see what and who they are. They are men—desperate men. They are men for whom loss means infamous death. For, mark you well, madam, if Morton lose this day he loses

his head.'

'Ay,' she gloomed, 'and many more shall lose theirs. I will have Lindsay's and Archie's—and you shall have Lethington's.'

'I would have had that long ago, if you had listened to me. And now you see whether I was right or wrong. But when women take to ruling men——'

She touched his arm. 'Dear friend, for whom I have suffered many things, do not reproach me at this hour.' The tears were in her eyes—she was always quick at self-pity.

But he had turned his head. 'Ha! they need me, I see. Forgive me, madam, I must have a word with Ormiston.' He saluted and rode down to meet his allies. Monsieur Du Croc, the French Ambassador, approached her, hat in hand. He was full of sympathy; but, with his own theories of how to end this business, could not give advice.

Sir James Melvill, watching the men come up, shook his head at the look of them. 'No heart in their chance—no heart at all,' he was heard to say.

The Queen's forces deployed across the eastern face of Carbery Hill in a long line which, it was clear, was not of equal strength with the lords'. It became less so as the day wore; for had you looked to its right you would have seen a continual trickle of stooping, running men crossing over to the enemy. These were deserters at the eleventh hour; Bothwell rode one of them down, chased him, and when he fell drove his horse over him and over in a blind fury of rage, trampling him out of semblance to his kind. It stayed the leak for a while; but it began again, and he had neither heart nor time to deal with it. Where were the Hamiltons who should have been with her? Where, alas, were the Gordons? In place of them the Borderers and Foresters looked shaggy thieves—gypsies, hill-robbers, savage men, red-haired, glum-faced, many without shoes and some without breeches. The tressured Lion of Scotland was in Arthur Erskine's hold: at near ten o'clock Bothwell bade him display it. It unfurled

itself lazily its full length; but there was no breath of air. It clung about the staff like so much water-weed; and they never saw the Lion. No matter; it would be a sign to that watchful host in the plain: now let us see what flag they dare to fly. They waited tensely for it, a group of them together—the Queen with her wild tawny hair fallen loose, her bare thin neck, her short red petticoat and blue scarf; Bothwell biting his tongue; Ormiston, Des-Essars, sage Monsieur Du Croc.

They saw two men come out of the line bearing two spears close together. At a word they separated, backing from each other: a great white sheet was displayed, having some picture upon it—green, a blot like blood, a wavy legend above. One could make out a tree; but what was the red stain? They talked—the Queen very fast and excitedly. She must know what this was—she would go down and find out—it was some insult, she expected. Was that red a fire? Who would go? Des-Essars offered, but she refused him. She chose Lord Livingstone for the service, and he went, gallantly enough—and returned, a scared old optimist indeed. However, she would have it, so she learned that they had the King lying dead under a tree, and the Prince his son praying at his feet—with the legend, ‘Judge and avenge my cause, O Lord!’ The red was not a fire, but the Prince’s robe. The Queen cried out: ‘Infamy! Infamy! They carry their own condemnation—do you not see it?’ If anybody did, he did not say so.

Monsieur Du Croc had his way at last, and was allowed to carry messages between the hosts. The burden of all that he brought back was that the lords would obey the Queen if she would give up the murderers, whom they named. The offer was ludicrous, coming from Morton—but when she ordered Du Croc back to expose it, he fairly told her to read below the words. They had come for Lord Bothwell. ‘I will die sooner than let him be touched,’ said she. ‘Let some one—Hob Ormiston, go you—fetch Grange to speak with me.’ Hob went off, with a white scarf in his held-up hand; and the Queen rode half-way down the hill for the parley. The great banner dazzled her: it was noticed that she bent her head down, as one rides against

the sun.

Grange came leisurely up towards her—a rusty man of war, shrewd, terse, and weathered. He could only report what his masters bade him: they called for the surrender of the murderers. She flamed and faced him with her royal anger. ‘And I, your sovereign lady, bid you, Grange, go over there and bring the murderers to me. Look, there goes one on his white horse! And there shirk two after him, hiding behind him—the one with a grey head, and the other with a grey face. Fetch you me those.’

‘Bah!’ snarled Bothwell, ‘we talk for ever. Let me shoot down this dog.’ A Hepburn—quiet and sinewy—stepped out of the ranks with a horse-pistol. Grange watched him without moving a muscle; but ‘Oh!’ cried the Queen, ‘what villainy are you about?’ She struck down the pistol-arm,—as once before she had struck down Fawdonsyde’s.

Bothwell, red in the face, said, ‘Let us end this folly. Let him who calls for me come and fetch me. I will fight with him here and now. Go you, Grange, and bring my Lord Morton hither.’

‘No need for his lordship, if I will serve your turn, Earl of Bothwell,’ says Grange.

But Bothwell said, ‘Damn your soul, I fight with my equals. None knows it better than you.’ He would have no one below an Earl’s rank—himself being now, you must recollect, Duke of Orkney and Zetland—and it should be Morton for choice.

Grange, instructed by the Queen, rode back. They saw Morton accost him, listen, look over the valley. He called a conference—they talked vehemently: then Morton and Lindsay pricked forward up the hill, and stopped within hailing distance.

‘You, Bothwell,’ cried Morton, ‘come you down, then; and have at you here.’

The Queen’s high voice called clearly back. ‘He shall never fight with you, murderer.’

Lindsay bared his head. ‘Then let him take me, madam; for I am nothing of that sort.’

‘No, no, Lindsay,’ said Bothwell; ‘I have no quarrel with you.’

The Earl of Morton had been looking at Bothwell in his heavy, ruminating way, as if making up his mind. While the others were bandying their cries, the Queen’s voice flashing and shrieking above the rest, he still looked and turned his thoughts over. Presently—in his time—he gave Lindsay his sword and walked his horse up the hill to the Queen’s party. He saluted her gravely. ‘With your gracious leave, madam, I seek to put two words into my Lord Bothwell’s ear. You see I have no sword.’

The Queen looked at once to her husband. He nodded, gave his sword to Huntly, and said, ‘I am ready for you.’ They moved ten yards apart; Morton talked and the other listened.

‘Bothwell, my man,’ he said, ‘there’s no a muckle to pick between us, I doubt—I played one card and you another; but I have the advantage of ye just now, and am no that minded to take it up. Man!’ he chuckled, ‘ye stumbled sorely when ye let them find for the powder!’

‘Get on, get on,’ says Bothwell, drawing a great breath.

‘I will,’ Morton said. ‘I am here to advise ye to make off while you can. Go your ways to Dunbar, and avoid the country for a while. I’ll warrant you you’ll not be followed oversea. All my people will serve the Queen—have no fear for her. Now, take my advice; ’tis fairly given. I’ve no wish to work you a mischief—though, mind you, I have the power—for you and I have been open dealers with each other this long time. And you brought me home—I’m not one to forget it. But—Lord of Hosts! what chance have you against Grange?’ He waited. ‘Come now, come! what say you?’

Lord Bothwell considered it, working his strong jaw from side to side: a fair proffer, an honourable proffer. He looked at the forces against him—though he had no need;

he knew them better men than his, because Grange was a better man than he. That banner of murder—the cry behind it—the Prince behind the cry, up on the rock of Stirling: in his heart he knew that he had lost the game. No way to Stirling—no way! But the other way was the sea-way—the old free life, the chances of the open water. Eh, damn them, he was not to be King of Scots, then! But he had known that for a week. He turned his head and saw the sea like molten gold, and far off, dipped in it, a little ship with still sails—Ho! the sea-way!

'By God, Morton,' he said, 'you may be serving me. I'll do it.'

'Go and tell her,' says Morton; and they both went back to the Queen.

Both took off their bonnets. Bothwell said: 'Madam, we must avoid blood-shedding if we may, and I have talked with my lord of Morton. He makes an offer of fair dealing, which I have taken. I have a clear road to Dunbar, thence where I will. All these hosts will follow you if I am not there. They pay me the compliment of high distrust, you perceive. After a little, I doubt not but you shall see me back again where I would always be. Madam, get the Prince in your own hands: all depends upon him. And now, kiss me, sweetheart, for I must be away.'

She heard him—she understood him—she believed him. She was curious to observe that she felt so little. Her voice when she answered him had no spring in it—it was worn and thin, with a little grating rasp in it—an older voice.

'It may be better so. I hate to shed good blood. Whither shall I write to you? At Dunbar? In England? Flanders?' There had been a woman in Dunkirk—she remembered that.

He was looking away, answering at random, searching whom he should take with him, or on whom he could reckon to follow him if he asked. 'I will send you word. Yes, yes, you will write to me. You shall know full soon. But now I cannot stay.'

Morton had returned to his friends.

'Paris, come you with me. Ormiston, are you for the sea? No? Stay and be hanged,

then. Hob? What, man, afraid? Where is Michael Elliott? Where is Crookstone? What Hepburn have I?' He collected six or eight—both the Ormistons decided for him—Powrie and Wilson, Dalgleish, one or two more.

He took the Queen's hand gaily. 'Farewell, fair Queen!' he said; and she, 'Adieu, my lord.' He leaned towards her: 'One kiss, my wife!' but she drew back. 'Your lips are foul—you have kissed too many—no, no.' 'I must have it—you must kiss me'—he pressed against her. For a while she was agitated, defending herself; but then, with a sob, 'Ay, take what you will of me,' she said—'it is little worth.' He got his cold kiss, and rode fast through his scattering host. This going of his was the Parthian shot. He had beaten her. Desire was dead.

The Queen sat still—with a face like a rock. 'Has he gone?' she asked Des-Essars in a whisper.

'Yes, thank God,' said he.

She shook herself into action, gathered up the reins, and turned to Erskine. 'Come,' she said, 'we will go down to them now.'

She surrendered to the Earl of Atholl, who, with Sempill and Lindsay, came up to fetch her. Followed by one or two of her friends—Des-Essars, Melvill, Du Croc, and Livingstone—she rode down the hill from her host and joined the other. Grange cantered up, bareheaded, to meet her, reined up short, took her hand and kissed it. Many followed him—Glencairn, Glamis, young Ruthven. Each had his kiss; but then came Archie Douglas smelling and smiling for his—and got nothing. She drew back from him shuddering: he might have been a snake, he said. Lethington was not to be seen. The host stood at ease awaiting her; the white banner wagged and dipped, as if mocking her presence. 'Take that down,' she said, with a crack in her dry throat; but no one answered her. She had to go close by the hateful thing—a daub of red and green and yellow—crowned Darnley crudely lying under a tree, a crowned child kneeling at his feet, spewing the legend out of his mouth. She averted

her eyes and blinked as she passed it: an ominous silence greeted her, sullen looks; one or two steady starers showed scornful familiarity with ‘a woman in trouble’; one said ‘Losh!’ and spat as she passed.

She was led through the Murrays, Humes, and Lindsays; murmurs gathered about her; all eyes were on her now, some passionate, some vindictive, some fanatic. On a sudden a pikeman ran out of his ranks and pointed at her—his face was burnt almost black, his eyes showed white upon it. ‘Burn the hure!’ he raved, and when she caught her breath and gazed at him, he was answered, ‘Ay, ay, man. Let her burn herself clean. To the fire with her!’

Her fine heart stood still. ‘Oh!’ she said, shocked into childish utterance, ‘oh, Baptist, they speak of me. They will burn me—did you hear them?’ Her head was thrown back, her arm across her face. She broke into wild sobbing—‘Not the fire! Not the fire! Oh, pity me! Oh, keep me from them!’

‘Quick, man,’ said Atholl, ‘let us get her in.’ Orders were shortly given, lieutenants galloped left and right to carry the words. The companies formed; the monstrous banner turned about. Morton bade sound the advance; between him and Atholl she was led towards Edinburgh. ‘If Erskine is a man he will try a rescue,’ thought Des-Essars, and looked over his shoulder to Carbery Hill—now a bare brae. The Queen’s army had vanished like the smoke.

So towards evening they came to town, heralded by scampering messengers, and met by the creatures of the suburb, horrible women and the men who lived upon them—dancing about her, mocking obscenely, hailing her as a spectacle. She bowed her head, swaying about in the saddle. Way was driven through; they passed under the gates, and began to climb the long street, packed from wall to wall with raving, cursing people. They shook their fists at her, threw their bonnets; stones flew about—she might have been killed outright. The cries were terrible—‘Burn her, burn her! Nay, let her drown, the witch!’ Dust, heat, turmoil, a brown fetid air,

hatred and clamour—the houses seemed to whirl and dizzy about her. The earth rocked; the people, glued in masses of black and white, surged stiffly, like great sea waves. Pale as death, with shut eyes and moving, dumb lips, she wavered on her seat, held up on either side by a man's arm. Des-Essars prayed aloud that a stone might strike her dead.

They took her to a house by the Tron Church, a house in the High Street, and shut her in an upper room, setting a guard about the door. The white banner was planted before the windows, and the crowd swarmed all about it, shrieking her name, calling her to come out and dance before them. Her dancing was notorious, poor soul; many a mad bout had she had in her careless days. 'Show your legs, my bonnie wife!' cried some hoarse shoemaker. 'You had no shame to do it syne.' This lasted till near midnight—for when it grew dark torches were kindled from end to end of the street, drums and pipes were set going, and many a couple danced. The Queen during this hellish night was crouched upon the floor, hiding her face upon Mary Seton's bosom. Des-Essars knelt by her, screening her from the windows. She neither spoke nor wept—seemed in a stupor. Food was brought her, but she would not move to take it; nor would she open her mouth when the cup was held at her lips.

Next morning, having had a few hours' peace, the tumult began betimes—by six o'clock the din was deafening. She had had a sop in wine, and was calmer; talked a little, even peeped through the curtain at the gathering crowd. She watched it for, perhaps, an hour, until they brought the mermaid picture into action—herself naked to the waist, with a fish-tail—confronted it with the murder flag, and jigged it up against it. This angered her; colour burned in her white cheeks. 'Infamous! Swine that they are! I will brave them all.'

Before they could stop her she had thrown open the window, and stood outside on the balcony, proudly surveying and surveyed.

At first there was a hush—'Whisht! She will likely speak till us,' they told each

other. But she said nothing, and gave them time to mark her tumbled bodice and short kirtle, her wild hair and stained face. They howled at her, mocking and gibing at her—the two banners flacked like tailless kites. Presently a horseman came at a foot's pace through the press. The rider when he saw her pulled his hat down over his eyes—but it was too late. She had seen Lethington. 'Ha, traitor, whose rat-life I saved once,' she called out, in a voice desperately clear and cold, 'are you come to join your friends against me? Stay, Mr. Secretary, and greet your Queen in the way they will teach you. Or go, fetch your wife, that she may thank her benefactress with you. Do you go, Mr. Secretary?'

He was, in fact, going; for the crowd had turned against him and was bidding him fetch his wife. 'Give us the Popish Maries together, sir, and we'll redd Scotland of them a'.'

'Rid Scotland of this fellow, good people,' cried the Queen, 'and there will be room for one honest man.'

They jeered at her for her pains. 'Who shall be honest where ye are, woman? Hide yourself—pray to your idols—that they keep ye from the fire.'

'Oh, men, you do me wrong,' she began to moan. 'Oh, sirs, be pitiful to a woman. Have I ever harmed any?'

They shrieked her down, cursing her for a witch and a husband-killer. The flags were jigged together again—a stone broke the window over her head. Des-Essars then got her back by force.

It is amazing that she could have a thought in such a riot of fiends—yet the sight of Lethington had given her one. She feared his grey, rat's face. She whispered it to Des-Essars. 'Baptist, you can save me. Quick, for the love of Christ! The coffer! the coffer!'

He knew what she meant. That coffer contained her letters to Bothwell, her sonnets—therefore, her life. He understood her, and went away without a word. He

took his sword, put a hood over his head, got out of the backside of the house, over a wall, into the wynd. Hence, being perfectly unknown, he entered the crowd in the High Street and worked his way down the Canongate. He intended to get into Holyroodhouse by the wall and the kitchen window, as he had done many a time, and notably on the night of David's slaughter.[12]

Des-Essars had gone to save her life; but whether he did it or no, he did not come back. She wore herself to thread, padding up and down the room, wondering and fretting about him. This new anxiety made her forget the street; but towards evening, when her nerves were frayed and raw, it began to infuriate her—as an incessant cry always will. She suddenly began panting, and stood holding her breasts, staring, moving her lips, her bosom heaving in spite of her hands. 'God! Mother of God! Aid me: I go mad,' she cried, strangling, and 'Air! I suffocate!' and once more threw open the windows and let in the hubbub.

She was really tormented for air and breath. She tore at her bodice, split it open and showed herself naked to the middle.

'Yes—yes—you shall look upon me as I was made. You shall see that I am a woman—loved once—loved much. See, see, my flesh!' Horrible scandal!—but the poor soul was mad.

Soon after this some of the lords came to her—Lindsay, Morton, and Atholl. The windows, they said, must be closed at once; they feared a riot. They would take her back to Holyroodhouse if she would be patient. But she must be rendered decent: Atholl gave her his cloak. She had quieted immediately they came, and thanked them meekly.

They took her away at once. Mary Seton followed close, but was gently pushed back by Lord Morton. 'No, no: she must come alone. You shall see her after a little. You cannot come now.' For the first time in her life, as I believe, Mary Seton shed tears.

A very strong guard, with pikes presented, hedged her in. She reached Holyrood on

foot, and was shut into her own cabinet. It was empty and dark but for the candle they had left with her. She snatched it up, and began a mad, fruitless hunt for her casket. It was not in its place—it was nowhere. She hunted until she dropped. She began to tear at herself and to shriek. Doom! Doom! She must be burned. They had taken her coffer. She was alone—condemned and alone.

Then Des-Essars crawled out of the dark on his hands and one knee, dragging a broken leg after him, and fell close beside her, and kissed the hem of her petticoat.

[12] The casket, which was not at Holyrood, is supposed to have been secured by Bothwell in the Castle, where it was to be found in due time. But Des-Essars did not know that. Nor is it clear to me how Bothwell had found opportunity to get it there.

CHAPTER XII ADDOLORATA

She sat on the floor, and had his head at rest on her lap. Her hands were upon him, and so he rested. The great tears fell fast and wetted his hair.

Her grief was silent and altogether gentle. Still as she sat there, looking before her with wide unwinking eyes and lips a little parted, she was unconscious of what she was suffering or had suffered: all about her was the blankness of dark, and without her knowledge the night fell; the dusk like a vast cloak gathered round about her, fold over fold; and still she sat and looked at nothing with her wide unwinking eyes. Slowly they filled and brimmed, and slowly the great tears, as they ripened, fell. There were no other forms of grief, none of grief's high acts: only their bitter symbol—lamentation embodied in tears, and nakedly there.

'Nay, move not your hands—nay, touch my brows: my head aches—I am blind.' The lad supine in her lap pleaded in whispers.

Gentle-voiced she answered him. 'There is no work left for my hands to do but to tend thee, my dear.'

He lay dumb for a while; then said he: 'You shall not blame me. It is not here—not

in the house. I know not where it is. They are seeking it now. He came here with two archers. He snarled like a fox to find me.'

'Who was this, Baptist? Was it Lethington?'

'Lethington. He believed it was here. He forced that knowledge from his wife——'

She said, 'Fleming too?'

'——I fought. They tried to make me tell them where I had hid it. They lifted and threw me. I am hurt—cannot move. Oh, they will have it now.'

'Rest, my dear, rest. Think no more of it. They have all but me.' Out of the heart of this poor nameless youth she was to learn good love; but to learn it only to know its impossibility. Not for her now, not for her! Not so could she ever have loved; no! but she could be kind. She stooped her head over him and breathed softly through the dark—'and I, Baptist, am yours if you will.'

He sighed. 'Oh, that it were possible! That night when you looked back—that night——you let me take——remember you of that?'

She knew his thought and all his heart. Her own were at leagues of distance: but she could not now refuse him kindness. She stooped her head lower towards his, and whispered, 'Baptist, can you hear me?'

'Yes, yes.'

'My last gift—all I have left: yours by right. Do you hear me? Listen—understand. I am yours now—I am forsaken by all but you.'

He moved uneasily, sighed again. 'Too late, too late: I lie dying here.'

She leaned down yet nearer; he felt her warm breath beat upon him—quick and short and eager. 'If I die this night, and if thou die, I will love thee first.'

'Ah!' said he, 'I know very well that you desire to love me now.'

'How knowest thou, my love?'

'By the way you lean to me, and by other things.'

She said, ‘You are well schooled in love.’

‘Not so well,’ he answered; ‘but I am well schooled in you, my Queen.’

‘Prove me, then—desire of me—ask—take. I shall never deny thee anything.’

Again he said, ‘Too late, too late. You cannot—and I lie dying. Yet, since the dead can do you no wrong, let me lie here at rest, that I may die loving you.’

She stooped to kiss him. She anointed him with her hot tears. ‘Rest, rest, my only true lover!’

‘Peace,’ said he: ‘let me sleep. I am tired to death.’

She kissed his eyelids. He slept.

Men came about the door—more than one. She sprang from her mate and kneeled to face that way, screening him where he lay short-breathing. They knocked, then opened. The torchlight beat upon her, and showed her dishevelled and undone. She covered her bosom with her crossed arms. ‘What is it? Who comes?’

‘Madam’—this was Lord Lindsay—‘it is I. I have horses beyond the wall. It is time to be going. You and I must take the road.’

‘Whither, sir? Whither will you take me so late?’

‘To Lochleven, ma’am.’

‘You order me? By whose warrant?’

‘By the Council’s. In the name of the Prince.’

‘It is infamy that you do. I cannot go. I am alone here.’

‘Women, clothing, all, shall follow with good speed, madam. But we must be speedier.’

‘If I refuse you—if I command——?’

‘I cannot consider with your Majesty the effect of that.’

‘Do you take me, Lindsay—you alone? No, but I will die here sooner.’

Lord Sempill spoke. ‘I offer myself to your Majesty, with the consent of the Lords.’

She rose up then. ‘I thank you, Lord Sempill: I will go with you.’

She gave him her hand, which, having kissed, he held. He would have taken her away then and there, but that she pulled against him. ‘I leave my servant dead here. He loved me well, and I him. Let me pray a while; then I will go.’

Des-Essars turned and rose to his arm’s length from the ground. He could not move his legs. ‘I am a prisoner also—take me.’

‘You, my man?’ says Lindsay: ‘unlikely.’

She withdrew her hand from Sempill’s by leave, stooped over the fading lad and kissed his eyes. ‘Adieu, my truest love and last friend—adieu, adieu! I have been death to all who have had to do with me.’ She kissed him once more.

‘Sweet death,’ said Des-Essars.

‘Come,’ she said to Lord Sempill, and gave him her hand again. He led her away.

Des-Essars fell his length upon the floor. She would have turned back to him; they hurried her forward between them.

The door shut upon Queen Mary.

EPILOGUE WHEREIN WE HAVE A GREAT MAN GREATLY MOVED

It is said that when the Earl of Moray, in France, received from the messengers sent out to him the news that he was chosen Regent of Scotland, he bowed his head in a very stately manner and said little more than ‘Sirs, I shall strive in this as in all things to do the Lord’s will.’ He added not one word which might enhance or impair so proper a declaration; he remained invisible to his friends for the three or four days he needed to be abroad; and when he set out for the north, travelled in secret and mostly by night—and still chose to keep apart. As secret in his hour of success as he

had been in those of defeat, admirable as his sobriety may be, we must make allowances for the mortification of a learned man, Mr. George Buchanan, who, having laboured to be of the heralding party, found himself and his baggage of odes of no more account than any other body. Was the chilly piety of such a reception as my lord had vouchsafed them all the acknowledgment he cared to admit of ancient alliances, of sufferings shared, of hopes kept alive by mutual fostering? Could a man look forward to any community of mind in the future between a prince who would not recognise his old friends and those same tried friends frozen by such a blank reply to their embassage? Mr. Buchanan urged these questions upon his fellow-legate, Sir James Melvill of Halhill—a traveller and fine philosopher, who, with less latinity than the learned historian, had, I think, more phlegm. When Mr. Buchanan, fretfully exclaiming upon the isolation of his new master, went on to concern himself with poor Scotland's case, and to muse aloud upon Kings Log and Stork, Sir James twiddled his thumbs; when the humanist paused for a reply, he got it. 'Geordie, my man,' said Sir James, 'my counsel to you is to bide your good time, and when that time comes to ca' canny, as we have it familiarly. Remember you, that when you sang your bit epithalamy at the marriage-door of Log, our late King, although he never stinted his largess (but rewarded you, in my opinion, abundantly), he had no notion in the world what you were about, and (as I believe) paid you the more that you might end the sooner. Late or soon you will be heard by our new gracious lord, and late or soon recompensed. He too will desire you to stop, my man: not because he does not understand you, but because he understands you too well. Mark my words now.' This was a curious prophecy of Sir James's, in one sense curiously fulfilled. In the very middle of his oration the orator was desired to stop by the subject of it.

Not until the Regent was in Edinburgh did a chance present itself to Mr. Buchanan of declaiming any of his Latin. This, be it said, was no fault of Mr. Buchanan's, who, if abhorrence of the old order and acceptance of the new, expressed with

passion at all times of the day, can entitle a man to notice, should certainly have had it before. Some, indeed, think that he got it by insisting upon having it; others that he proved his title by exhibiting the heads of a remarkable work which afterwards made some stir in the world: he was, at any rate, summoned to the Castle, and in the presence of the Lord Regent of Scotland, of the Lords Morton, Crawfurd, Atholl, Argyll, and Lindsay, of the Lairds of Grange and Lethington, and of others too numerous to mention, was allowed to deliver himself of an oration, long meditated, in the Ciceronian manner.

The occasion was weighty, the theme worthy, the orator equal. Tantæ molis erat was the burden of his discourse, wherein the late miseries of God's people were shown clearly to be, as it were, the travail-pangs of the august mother of new-born Scotland. From these, by a series of circuits which it would be long to follow, he passed to consider the Hero of the hour; and you may be sure that the extraordinary dignity and reserve which this personage had recently shown were not forgotten. They were, said the orator, reasonable, not only as coming from a man who had never failed of humility before God, but as crowning a life-long trial of such qualities. The child is father of the man. Who that had ever known this magnanimous prince had seen him otherwise than remote, alone in contemplation, unspotted from the world? In a peroration which was so finely eloquent that enthusiasm broke in upon it and prevented it from ever being finished, he spoke to this effect:—

'It is furthermore,' he said, 'a singular merit of your lordship's, in these days of brawl and advertisement, that you have always approved, and still do approve yourself one who, like the nightingale (that choice bird), avoids the multitude, but enriches it, quasi out of the dark. For as the little songster in his plain suit of brown, hardly to be seen in the twiggy brake, pours forth his notes upon the wayfarer; so has your lordship, hiding from the painful dusty mart, ravished the traffickers therein to better things by your most melodious, half-hidden deeds. O coy benefactor of

Scotland! O reluctantly a king! O hermit Hercules! O thou doer-of-good-by-stealth!' Here he turned to the Lords of the Privy Council. 'Conscript Fathers, we have prevailed upon our Cincinnatus to quit his plough lest haply the State had perished; but with him have come to succour us those virtues which are his peculiar—to which, no less than to those which he hath in community with all saviours of Commonwealths, our extreme tribute is due. Let us respect Austerity whenas we find it, respect True Religion, respect Abnegation, respect, above all, the tender feelings of Blood and Family, lacerated (alas!) of late in a princely bosom. Great and altogether lovely are these things in any man: in a statesman how much the more dear in that they are rare! But a greater thing than austerity and the crown of true religion is this, Conscript Fathers, that a man should live through blood-shedding, and not see it; that he should converse with bloody men, and keep clean hands! For King David said, "I will wash my hands in innocency," and said well, having some need of the ablution. Conscript Fathers! this man hath the rather said, "But I will keep my hands innocently clean, lest at any time lustral water fail me and I perish." O wise and honourable resolve——'

Irrepressible applause broke in upon this peroration, and just here. The Regent was observed to be deeply moved. He had covered his face with his hand; he could not bear (it was thought) to hear himself so openly praised. When silence was restored, in obedience to his lifted hand, speaking with difficulty, he said, 'I thank you, Mr. Buchanan, for your honourable and earnest words; none the less honourable in yourself in that the subject of your praise is unworthy of them. Alas! what can a man do, set in the midst of so many and great dangers, but keep his eyes fixed upon the hope of his calling? He may suffer grievous wounds in the heart and affections, grievous bruises to the conscience, grievous languors of the will and mind: but his hopes are fixed, his eyes are set to look forward; he cannot altogether perish. Yourself, sir, whose godly office it is to direct the motions of princes and governors that way which is indeed the way, the truth, and the life, can but add to the

obligations which this young (as new-born) nation must feel towards you, by continuing me steadfast in those things for which you praise me. I am touched by many compunctious thorns—I cannot say all that I would. I have suffered long and in private—I feel myself strangely—I am not strong enough as yet. So do you, Mr. Buchanan, so do you to me-ward, that I may run, sir; and that, running—please the Lord and Father of us all—that, running, I may obtain.'

It was felt on all hands that more would have been a superfluity. Mr. Buchanan was very ready to have continued; but my Lord Regent had need of repose; and my Lord of Morton moved the rest of their lordships that they go to supper: which was agreed to, and so done.

THE END

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