FORD FORD MADOX

THE FIFTH QUEEN CROWNED

Ford Ford
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The Fifth Queen Crowned:

Содержание

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To

Arthur Marwood

PART ONE
THE MAJOR CHORD

I

'The Bishop of Rome – '

Thomas Cranmer began a hesitating speech. In the pause after the words the King himself hesitated, as if he poised between a heavy rage and a sardonic humour. He deemed, however, that the humour could the more terrify the Archbishop – and, indeed, he was so much upon the joyous side in those summer days that he had forgotten how to browbeat.

'Our holy father,' he corrected the Archbishop. 'Or I will say my holy father, since thou art a heretic – '

Cranmer's eyes had always the expression of a man's who looked at approaching calamity, but at the King's words his whole face, his closed lips, his brows, the lines from his round nose, all drooped suddenly downwards.

'Your Grace will have me write a letter to the – to his – to him – '

The downward lines fixed themselves, and from amongst them the panic-stricken eyes made a dumb appeal to the griffins and crowns of his dark green hangings, for they were afraid to turn to

the King. Henry retained his heavy look of jocularity: he jumped at a weighty gibe —

'My Grace will have thy Grace write a letter to his Holiness.'

He dropped into a heavy impassivity, rolled his eyes, fluttered his swollen fingers on the red and gilded table, and then said clearly, 'My. Thy. His.'

When he was in that mood he spoke with a singular distinctness that came up from his husky and ordinary joviality like something dire and terrible – like that something that upon a clear smooth day will suggest to you suddenly the cruelty that lies always hidden in the limpid sea.

'To Cæsar – egomet, I mineself – that which is Cæsar's: to him – that is to say to his Holiness, our lord of Rome – the things which are of God! But to thee, Archbishop, I know not what belongs.'

He paused and then struck his hand upon the table: 'Cold porridge is thy portion! Cold porridge!' he laughed; 'for they say: Cold porridge to the devil! And, since thou art neither God's nor the King's, what may I call thee but the devil's self's man?'

A heavy and minatory silence seemed to descend upon him; the Archbishop's thin hands opened suddenly as if he were letting something fall to the ground. The King scowled heavily, but rather as if he were remembering past heavinesses than for any present griefs.

'Why,' he said, 'I am growing an old man. It is time I redded up my house.'

It was as if he thought he could take his time, for his heavily pursed eyes looked down at the square tips of his fingers where they drummed on the table. He was such a weighty man that the old chair in which he sat creaked at the movement of his limbs. It was his affectation of courtesy that he would not sit in the Archbishop's own new gilded and great chair that had been brought from Lambeth on a mule's back along with the hangings. But the other furnishings of that Castle of Pontefract were as old as the days of Edward IV – even the scarlet wood of the table had upon it the arms of Edward IV's Queen Elizabeth, side by side with that King's. Henry noted it and said —

'It is time these arms were changed. See that you have here fairly painted the arms of my Queen and me – Howard and Tudor – in token that we have passed this way and sojourned in this Castle of Pontefract.'

He was dallying with time as if it were a luxury to dally: he looked curiously round the room.

'Why, they have not housed you very well,' he said, and, as the Archbishop shivered suddenly, he added, 'there should be glass in the windows. This is a foul old kennel.'

'I have made a complaint to the Earl Marshal,' Cranmer said dismally, 'but 'a said there was overmuch room needed above ground.'

This room was indeed below ground and very old, strong, and damp. The Archbishop's own hangings covered the walls, but the windows shot upwards through the stones to the light; there was

upon the ground of stone not a carpet but only rushes; being early in the year, no provision was made for firing, and the soot of the chimney back was damp, and sparkled with the track of a snail that had lived there undisturbed for many years, and neither increasing, because it had no mate, nor dying, because it was well fed by the ferns that, behind the present hangings, grew in the joints of the stones. In that low-ceiled and dark place the Archbishop was aware that above his head were fair and sunlit rooms, newly painted and hung, with the bosses on the ceilings fresh silvered or gilt, all these fair places having been given over to kinsmen of the yellow Earl Marshal from the Norfolk Queen downwards. And the temporal and material neglect angered him and filled him with a querulous bitterness that gnawed up even through his dread of a future – still shadowy – fall and ruin.

The King looked sardonically at the line of the ceiling. He had known that Norfolk, who was the Earl Marshal, had the mean mind to make him set these indignities upon the Archbishop, and loftily he considered this result as if the Archbishop were a cat mauled by his own dog whose nature it was to maul cats.

The Archbishop had been standing with one hand on the arm of his heavy chair, about to haul it back from the table to sit himself down. He had been standing thus when the King had entered with the brusque words —

'Make you ready to write a letter to Rome.'

And he still stood there, the cold feet among the damp rushes, the cold hand still upon the arm of the chair, the cap pulled

forward over his eyes, the long black gown hanging motionless to the boot tops that were furred around the ankles.

'I have made a plaint to the Earl Marshal,' he said; 'it is not fitting that a lord of the Church should be so housed.'

Henry eyed him sardonically.

'Sir,' he said, 'I am being brought round to think that ye are only a false lord of the Church. And I am minded to think that ye are being brought round to trow even the like to mine own self.'

His eyes rested, little and twinkling like a pig's, upon the opening of the Archbishop's cloak above his breastbone, and the Archbishop's right hand nervously sought that spot.

'I was always of the thought,' he said, 'that the prohibition of the wearing of crucifixes was against your Highness' will and the teachings of the Church.'

A great crucifix of silver, the Man of Sorrows depending dolorously from its arms and backed up by a plaque of silver so that it resembled a porter's badge, depended over the black buttons of his undercoat. He had put it on upon the day when secretly he had married Henry to the papist Lady Katharine Howard. On the same day he had put on a hair shirt, and he had never since removed either the one or the other. He had known very well that this news would reach the Queen's ears, as also that he had fasted thrice weekly and had taken a Benedictine sub-prior out of chains in the tower to be his second chaplain.

'Holy Church! Holy Church!' the King muttered amusedly into the stiff hair of his chin and lips. The Archbishop was driven

into one of his fits of panic-stricken boldness.

'Your Grace,' he said, 'if ye write a letter to Rome you will – for I see not how ye may avoid it – reverse all your acts of this last twenty years.'

'Your Grace,' the King mocked him, 'by your setting on of chains, crucifixes, phylacteries, and by your aping of monkish ways, ye have reversed – well ye know it – all my and thy acts of a long time gone.'

He cast himself back from the table into the leathern shoulder-straps of the chair.

'And if,' he continued with sardonic good-humour, 'my fellow and servant may reverse my acts – videlicet, the King's – wherefore shall not I – videlicet, the King – reverse what acts I will? It is to set me below my servants!'

'I am minded to redd up my house!' he repeated after a moment.

'Please it, your Grace – ' the Archbishop muttered. His eyes were upon the door.

The King said, 'Anan?' He could not turn his bulky head, he would not move his bulky body.

'My gentleman!' the Archbishop whispered.

The King looked at the opposite wall and cried out —

'Come in, Lascelles. I am about cleaning out some stables of mine.'

The door moved noiselessly and heavily back, taking the hangings with it; as if with the furtive eyes and feathery grace of

a blonde fox Cranmer's spy came round the great boards.

'Ay! I am doing some cleansing,' the King said again. 'Come hither and mend thy pen to write.'

Against the King's huge bulk – Henry was wearing purple and black upon that day – and against the Archbishop's black and pillar-like form, Lascelles, in his scarlet, with his blonde and tender beard had an air of being quill-like. The bones of his knees through his tight and thin silken stockings showed almost as those of a skeleton; where the King had great chains of gilt and green jewels round his neck, and where the Archbishop had a heavy chain of silver, he had a thin chain of fine gold and a tiny badge of silver-gilt. He dragged one of his legs a little when he walked. That was the fashion of that day, because the King himself dragged his right leg, though the ulcer in it had been cured.

Sitting askew in his chair at the table, the King did not look at this gentleman, but moved the fingers of his outstretched hand in token that his crook of the leg was kneeling enough for him.

'Take your tablets and write,' Henry said; 'nay, take a great sheet of parchment and write – '

'Your Grace,' he added to the Archbishop, 'ye are the greatest penner of solemn sentences that I have in my realm. What I shall say roughly to Lascelles you shall ponder upon and set down nobly, at first in the vulgar tongue and then in fine Latin.' He paused and added —

'Nay; ye shall write it in the vulgar tongue, and the Magister

Udal shall set it into Latin. He is the best Latinist we have – better than myself, for I have no time – '

Lascelles was going between a great cabinet with iron hinges and the table. He fetched an inkhorn set into a tripod, a sandarach, and a roll of clean parchment that was tied around with a green ribbon.

Upon the gold and red of the table he stretched out the parchment as if it had been a map. He mended his pen with a little knife and kneeled down upon the rushes beside the table, his chin level with the edge. His whole mind appeared to be upon keeping the yellowish sheet straight and true upon the red and gold, and he raised his eyes neither to the Archbishop's white face nor yet to the King's red one.

Henry stroked the short hairs of his neck below the square grey beard. He was reflecting that very soon all the people in that castle, and very soon after, most of the people in that land would know what he was about to say.

'Write now,' he said. '"Henry – by the grace of God – Defender of the Faith – King, Lord Paramount."' He stirred in his chair.

'Set down all my styles and titles: "Duke Palatine – Earl – Baron – Knight" – leave out nothing, for I will show how mighty I am.' He hummed, considered, set his head on one side and then began to speak swiftly —

'Set it down thus: "We, Henry, and the rest, being a very mighty King, such as few have been, are become a very humble man. A man broken by years, having suffered much. A

man humbled to the dust, crawling to kiss the wounds of his Redeemer. A Lord of many miles both of sea and land." Why, say —

'"Guide and Leader of many legions, yet comes he to thee for guidance." Say, too, "He who was proud cometh to thee to regain his pride. He who was proud in things temporal cometh to thee that he may once more have the pride of a champion in Christendom – "'

He had been speaking as if with a malicious glee, for his words seemed to strike, each one, into the face of the pallid figure, darkly standing before him. And he was aware that each word increased the stiff and watchful constraint of the figure that knelt beside the table to write. But suddenly his glee left him; he scowled at the Archbishop as if Cranmer had caused him to sin. He pulled at the collar around his throat.

'No,' he cried out, 'write down in simple words that I am a very sinful man. Set it down that I grow old! That I am filled with fears for my poor soul! That I have sinned much! That I recall all that I have done! An old man, I come to my Saviour's Regent upon earth. A man aware of error, I will make restitution tenfold! Say I am broken and aged and afraid! I kneel down on the ground – '

He cast his inert mass suddenly a little forward as if indeed he were about to come on to his knees in the rushes.

'Say – ' he muttered – 'say – '

But his face and his eyes became suffused with blood.

'It is a very difficult thing,' he uttered huskily, 'to meddle in

these sacred matters.'

He fell heavily back into his chair-straps once more.

'I do not know what I will have you to say,' he said.

He looked broodingly at the floor.

'I do not know,' he muttered.

He rolled his eyes, first to the face of the Archbishop, then to Lascelles —

'Body of God – what carved turnips!' he said, for in the one face there was only panic, and in the other nothing at all. He rolled on to his feet, catching at the table to steady himself.

'Write what you will,' he called, 'to these intents and purposes. Or stay to write – I will send you a letter much more good from the upper rooms.'

Cranmer suddenly stretched out, with a timid pitifulness, his white hands. But, rolling his huge shoulders, like a hastening bear, the King went over the rushes. He pulled the heavy door to with such a vast force that the latch came again out of the hasp, and the door, falling slowly back and quivering as if with passion, showed them his huge legs mounting the little staircase.

A long silence fell in that dim room. The Archbishop's lips moved silently, the spy's glance went, level, along his parchment. Suddenly he grinned mirthlessly and as if at a shameless thought.

'The Queen will write the letter his Grace shall send us,' he said.

Then their eyes met. The one glance, panic-stricken, seeing no issue, hopeless and without resource, met the other – crafty, alert,

fox-like, with a dance in it. The glances transfused and mingled. Lascelles remained upon his knees as if, stretching out his right knee behind him, he were taking a long rest.

II

It was almost within earshot of these two men in their dim cell that the Queen walked from the sunlight into shadow and out again. This great terrace looked to the north and west, and, from the little hillock, dominating miles of gently rising ground, she had a great view over rolling and very green country. The original builders of the Castle of Pontefract had meant this terrace to be flagged with stone: but the work had never been carried so far forward. There was only a path of stone along the bowshot and a half of stone balustrade; the rest had once been gravel, but the grass had grown over it; that had been scythed, and nearly the whole space was covered with many carpets of blue and red and other very bright colours. In the left corner when you faced inwards there was a great pavilion of black cloth, embroidered very closely with gold and held up by ropes of red and white. Though forty people could sit in it round the table, it appeared very small, the walls of the castle towered up so high. They towered up so high, so square, and so straight that from the terrace below you could hardly hear the flutter of the huge banner of St George, all red and white against the blue sky, though sometimes in a gust it cracked like a huge whip, and its shadow, where it fell upon the terrace, was sufficient to cover four men.

To take away from the grimness of the flat walls many little banners had been suspended from loopholes and beneath

windows. Swallow-tailed, long, or square, they hung motionless in the shelter, or, since the dying away of the great gale three days before, had looped themselves over their staffs. These were all painted green, because that was the Queen's favourite colour, being the emblem of Hope.

A little pavilion, all of green silk, at the very edge of the platform, had all its green curtains looped up, so that only the green roof showed; and, within, two chairs, a great leathern one for the King, a little one of red and white wood for the Queen, stood side by side as if they conversed with each other. At the top of it was a golden image of a lion, and above the peak of the entrance another, golden too, of the Goddess Flora, carrying a cornucopia of flowers, to symbolise that this tent was a summer abode for pleasantness.

Here the King and Queen, for the four days that they had been in the castle, had delighted much to sit, resting after their long ride up from the south country. For it pleased Henry to let his eyes rest upon a great view of this realm that was his, and to think nothing; and it pleased Katharine Howard to think that now she swayed this land, and that soon she would alter its face.

They looked out, over the tops of the elm trees that grew right up against the terrace wall; but the land itself was too green, the fields too empty of dwellings. There was no one but sheep between all the hedgerows: there was, in all the wide view, but one church tower, and where, in place and place, there stood clusters of trees as if to shelter homesteads – nearly always the

homesteads had fallen to ruin beneath the boughs. Upon one ridge one could see the long walls of an unroofed abbey. But, to the keenest eye no men were visible, save now and then a shepherd leaning on his crook. There was no ploughland at all. Now and then companies of men in helmets and armour rode up to or away from the castle. Once she had seen the courtyard within the keep filled with cattle that lowed uneasily. But these, she had learned, had been taken from cattle thieves by the men of the Council of the Northern Borders. They were destined for the provisioning of that castle during her stay there, they being forfeit, whether Scotch or English.

'Ah,' she said, 'whilst his Grace rides north to meet the King's Scots I will ride east and west and south each day.'

At that moment, whilst the King had left Cranmer and his spy and, to regain his composure, was walking up and down in her chamber, she was standing beside the Duke of Norfolk about midway between the end of the terrace and the little green pavilion.

She was all in a dark purple dress, to please the King whose mood that colour suited; and the Duke's yellow face looked out above a suit all of black. He wore that to please the King too, for the King was of opinion that no gathering looked gay in its colours that had not many men in black amongst the number.

He said —

'You do not ride north with his Grace?'

He leaned upon his two staves, one long and of silver, the

other shorter and gilt; his gown fell down to his ankles, his dark and half-closed eyes looked out at a tree that, struck lately by lightning, stretched up half its boughs all naked from a little hillock beside a pond a mile away.

'So it is settled between his Grace and me,' she said. She did not much like her uncle, for she had little cause. But, the King being away, she walked with him rather than with another man.

'I ask, perforce,' he said, 'for I have much work in the ordering of your progresses.'

'We meant that you should have that news this day,' she said.

He shot one glance at her face, then turned his eyes again upon the stricken tree. Her face was absolutely calm and without expression, as it had been always when she had directed him what she would have done. He could trace no dejection in it: on the other hand, he gave her credit for a great command over her features. That he had himself. And, in the niece's eyes, as they moved from the backs of a flock of sheep to the dismantled abbey on the ridge, there was something of the enigmatic self-containment that was in the uncle's steady glance. He could observe no dejection, and at that he humbled himself a little more.

'Ay,' he said, 'the ordering of your progresses is a heavy burden. I would have you commend what I have done here.'

She looked at him, at that, as if with a swift jealousy. His eyes were roving upon the gay carpets, the pavilions, and the flags against the grim walls, depending in motionless streaks of colour.

'The King's Grace's self,' she said, 'did tell me that all these things he ordered and thought out for my pleasuring.'

Norfolk dropped his eyes to the ground.

'Aye,' he said, 'his Grace ordered them and their placing. There is no man to equal his Grace for such things; but I had the work of setting them where they are. I would have your favour for that.'

She appeared appeased and gave him her hand to kiss. There was a little dark mole upon the third finger.

'The last niece that I had for Queen,' he said, 'would not suffer me to kiss her hand.'

She looked at him a little absently, for, because since she had been Queen – and before – she had been a lonely woman, she was given to thinking her own thoughts whilst others talked.

She was troubled by the condition of her chief maid Margot Poins. Margot Poins was usually tranquil, modest, submissive in a cheerful manner and ready to converse. But of late she had been moody, and sunk in a dull silence. And that morning she had suddenly burst out into a smouldering, heavy passion, and had torn Katharine's hair whilst she dressed it.

'Ay,' Margot had said, 'you are Queen: you can do what you will. It is well to be Queen. But we who are dirt underfoot, we cannot do one single thing.'

And, because she was lonely, with only Lady Rochford, who was foolish, and this girl to talk to, it had grieved the Queen to find this girl growing so lumpish and dull. At that time, whilst

her hair was being dressed, she had answered only —

'Yea; it is good to be a Queen. But you will find it in Seneca – ' and she had translated for Margot the passage which says that eagles are as much tied by weighty ropes as are finches caught in tiny fillets.

'Oh, your Latin,' Margot had said. 'I would I had never heard the sound of it, but had stuck to clean English.'

Katharine imagined then that it was some new flame of the Magister Udal's that was troubling the girl, and this troubled her too, for she did not like that her maids should be played with by men, and she loved Margot for her past loyalties, readiness, and companionship.

She came out of her thoughts to say to her uncle, remembering his speech about her hands —

'Aye; I have heard that Anne Boleyn had six fingers upon her right hand.'

'She had six upon each, but she concealed it,' he answered. 'It was her greatest grief.'

Katharine realised that his sardonic tone, his bitter yellow face, the croak in his voice, and his stiff gait – all these things were signs of his hostility to her. And his mention of Anne Boleyn, who had been Queen, much as she was, and of her bitter fate, this mention, if it could not be a threat, was, at least, a reminder meant to give her fears and misgiving. When she had been a child – and afterwards, until the very day when she had been shown for Queen – her uncle had always treated her

with a black disdain, as he treated all the rest of the world. When he had – and it was rarely enough – come to visit her grandmother, the old Duchess of Norfolk, he had always been like that. Through the old woman's huge, lonely, and ugly halls he had always stridden, halting a little over the rushes, and all creatures must keep out of his way. Once he had kicked her little dog, once he had pushed her aside; but probably, then, when she had been no more than a child, he had not known who she was, for she had lived with the servants and played with the servants' children, much like one of them, and her grandmother had known little of the household or its ways.

She answered him sharply —

'I have heard that you were no good friend to your niece, Anne Boleyn, when she was in her troubles.'

He swallowed in his throat and gazed impassively at the distant oak tree, nevertheless his knee trembled with fury. And Katharine knew very well that if, more than another, he took pleasure in giving pain with his words, he bore the pain of other's words less well than most men.

'The Queen Anne,' he said, 'was a heretic. No better was she than a Protestant. She battened upon the goods of our Church. Why should I defend her?'

'Uncle,' she said, 'where got you the jewel in your bonnet?'

He started a little back at that, and the small veins in his yellow eye-whites grew inflamed with blood.

'Queen – ' he brought out between rage and astonishment that

she should dare the taunt.

'I think it came from the great chalice of the Abbey of Rising,' she said. 'We are valiant defenders of the Church, who wear its spoils upon our very brows.'

It was as if she had thrown down a glove to him and to a great many that were behind him.

She knew very well where she stood, and she knew very well what her uncle and his friends awaited for her, for Margot, her maid, brought her alike the gossip of the Court and the loudly voiced threats and aspirations of the city. For the Protestants – she knew them and cared little for them. She did not believe there were very many in the King's and her realm, and mostly they were foreign merchants and poor men who cared little as long as their stomachs were filled. If these had their farms again they would surely return to the old faith, and she was minded to do away with the sheep. For it was the sheep that had brought discontent to England. To make way for these fleeces the ploughmen had been dispossessed.

It was natural that Protestants should hate her; but with Norfolk and his like it was different. She knew very well that Norfolk came there that day and waited every day, watching anxiously for the first sign that the King's love for her should cool. She knew very well that they said in the Court that with the King it was only possession and then satiety. And she knew very well that when Norfolk's eyes searched her face it was for signs of dismay and of discouragement. And when Norfolk had said

that he himself had placed the banners, the tents, the pavilions and carpets that made gay all that grim terrace of the air, he was essaying to make her think that the King was abandoning the task of doing her honour. This had made her angry, for it was such folly. Her uncle should have known that the King had discussed all these things with her, asking her what she liked, and that all these bright colours and these plaisaunces were what her man had gallantly thought out for her. She carried her challenge still further.

'It ill becomes us Howards and all like us,' she said, 'to talk of how we will defend the Church of God – '

'I am a swordsman only,' he said. 'Give me that – '

She was not minded to listen to him.

'It becomes us ill,' she said; 'and I take shame in it. For, a very few years agone we Howards were very poor. Now we are very rich – though it is true that my father is still a very poor man, and your stepmother, my grandmother, has known hard shifts. But we Howards, through you who are our head, became amongst the richest in the land. And how?'

'I have done services – ' the Duke began.

'Why, there has been no new wealth made in this realm,' she said; 'it came from the Church. Consider what you have had of this Abbey of Risings that I speak of, because I knew it well as a child, and saw many times then, sparkling in that which held the blood of my Saviour, the jewel that is now in your cap.'

The Abbey of Risings, after the visitors had been to it and the

monks had been driven out, had fallen to the Duke of Norfolk. And his men had stripped the lead from the roofs, the glass from the windows, the very tiles from the floor. And this little abbey was only one of many, large and small, that had fallen to the Duke, so that it was true enough that, through him, the Howards had become a very rich family.

Norfolk burst into a sudden speech —

'I hold these things only as a trust,' he said. 'I am ready to restore.'

'Why, that is very well,' Katharine said; 'and I have hopes that soon you will be called to make that restoration to your God.'

Norfolk looked at the square toes of his shoes for a long time.

'Will you have *all* things to be given back?' he said at last after he had thought much.

'The King will have all things be as they were before the Queen Katharine, my namesake of Aragon, was undone,' Katharine answered. 'And me he will have to take her place so that all things shall be as before they were.'

The Duke, leaning on his silver and gold staves, shrugged his shoulders very slowly.

'This will make a very great confusion,' he said.

'Ay,' Katharine answered, 'there will a very many be confounded, and a great number of hundreds be much annoyed.'

She broke in again upon his slow meditations —

'Sir,' she said, 'this is a very pitiful thing! Privy Seal that is dead and done with worked with a very great cunning. Well

he knew that for most men the heart resideth in the pocket. Therefore, though ye said all that he rode this land with a bridle of iron, he was very careful to stop all your mouths alike with pieces of gold. It was not only to his friends that he gave what had been taken from God, but he was very careful that much also should fall into the greedy mouths of those that cried out. If he had not done this, do you think that he would have remained so long above the earth that he made weary? No. But since he made all rich alike with this plunder, so there was no man, either Catholic or Lutheran, very anxious to have him away. And, now that he is dead he worketh still. For who among you lords that do call yourselves sons of the Church, but holdeth of the Church's goods? Oh, bethink you! bethink you! The moment is at hand when ye may work restoration. See that ye do it willingly and with good hearts, smoothing and making plain the way by which the bruised feet of our Saviour shall come across this, His land.'

Norfolk kept his eyes upon the ground.

'Why, for me,' he said, 'I am very willing. This day I will send to set clerks at work discovering that which is mine and that which came from the Church; but I think you will find some that will not do it so eagerly.'

She believed him very little; and she said —

'Why, if you will do this thing I think there will not many be behindhand.'

He did what he could to conceal his wincing, and her voice changed its tone.

'Sir,' she said, and she was eager and pleading, 'you have many men that take counsel with you, for I trow that you and my Lord of Winchester do lead such lords as be Catholic in this realm. I know very well that you and my Lord Bishop of Winchester and such Catholic lords would have me to be your puppet and so work as you would have me, giving back to the Church such things as have fallen to Protestants or to men that ye mislike. But that may not be, for, since I owe mine advancement not to you, nor to mine own efforts, but to God alone, so to God alone do I owe fealty.'

She stretched out towards him the hand that he had kissed. The tail of her coif fell almost to her feet; her body in the fresh sunlight was all cased in purple velvet, only the lawn of her undershirt showed, white and tremulous at her wrists and her neck; and, fair and contrasted with the gold of her hair, her face came out of its abstraction, to take on a pitiful and mournful earnestness.

'Sir,' she said, 'if you shall speak for God in the councils that you will hold, believe that your rewards shall be very great. I think that you have been a man of a very troubled mind, for you have thought only or mostly of the affairs of this world. But do now this one good stroke for God His piteous sake, and such a peace shall descend upon you as you have never yet known. You shall have no more griefs; you shall have no more fears. And that is better than the jewels of chalices, and than much lead from the roofs of abbeys. Speak you thus in these councils that you

shall hold, give you such advice to them that come to you seeking it, and this I promise you – for it is too little a thing to promise you the love of a Queen and a King's favour, though that too ye shall not lack – but this I promise you, that there shall descend upon your heart that most blessed miracle and precious wealth, the peace of God.'

III

When Henry was calmed by his pacing in her chamber he came out to her in the sunlight, rolling and bear-like, and so huge that the terrace seemed to grow smaller.

'Chuck,' he said to her, 'I ha' done a thing to pleasure thee.' He moved two fingers upwards to save the Duke of Norfolk from falling to his knees, caught Katharine by the elbow, and, turning upon himself as on a huge pivot, swung her round him so that they faced the pavilion. 'Sha't not talk with a citron-faced uncle,' he said; 'sha't save sweet words for me. I will tell thee what I ha' done to pleasure thee.'

'Save it a while and do another ere ye tell me,' she said.

'Now, what is your reasoning about that, wise one?' he asked.

She laughed at him, for she took pleasure in his society and, except when she was earnest to beg things of him, she was mostly gay at his side.

'It takes a woman to teach kings,' she said.

He answered that it took a Queen to teach him.

'Why,' she said, 'listen! I know that each day ye do things to pleasure me, things prodigal or such little things as giving me pouncet boxes. But you will find – and a woman, quean or queen, knows it well – that to take the full pleasure of her lover's surprises well, she must have an easy mind. And to have an easy mind she must have granted her the little, little boons she asketh.'

He reflected ponderously upon this point and at last, with a sort of peasant's gravity, nodded his head.

'For,' she said, 'if a woman is to take pleasure she must guess at what you men have done for her. And if she be to guess pleasurably, she must have a clear mind. And if I am to have a clear mind I must have a maiden consoled with a husband.'

Henry seated himself carefully in the great chair of the small pavilion. He spread out his knees, blinked at the view and when, having cast a look round to see that Norfolk was gone – for it did not suit her that he should see on what terms she was with the King – she seated herself on a little foot-pillow at his feet, he set a great hand upon her head. She leaned her arms across over his knees, and looked up at him appealingly.

'I do take it,' he said, 'that I must make some man rich to wed some poor maid.'

'Oh, Solomon!' she said.

'And I do take it,' he continued with gravity, 'that this maid is thy maid Margot.'

'How know you that?' she said.

'I have observed her,' he maintained gravely.

'Why, you could not well miss her,' she answered. 'She is as big as a plough-ox.'

'I have observed,' he said – and he blinked his little eyes as if, pleasurably, she were, with her words, whispering around his head. 'I have observed that ye affected her.'

'Why, she likes me well. She is a good wench – and to-day

she tore my hair.'

'Then that is along of a man?' he asked. 'Didst not stick thy needle in her arm? Or wilto be quit of her?'

She rubbed her chin.

'Why, if she wed, I mun be quit of her,' she said, as if she had never thought of that thing.

He answered —

'Assuredly; for ye may not part man and lawful wife were you seven times Queen.'

'Why,' she said, 'I have little pleasure in Margot as she is.'

'Then let her go,' he answered.

'But I am a very lonely Queen,' she said, 'for you are much absent.'

He reflected pleasurably.

'Thee wouldst have about thee a little company of well-wishers?'

'So that they be those thou lovest well,' she said.

'Why, thy maid contents me,' he answered. He reflected slowly. 'We must give her man a post about thee,' he uttered triumphantly.

'Why, trust thee to pleasure me,' she said. 'You will find out a way always.'

He scrubbed her nose gently with his heavy finger.

'Who is the man?' he said. 'What ruffler?'

'I think it is the Magister Udal,' she answered.

Henry said —

'Oh ho! oh ho!' And after a moment he slapped his thigh and laughed like a child. She laughed with him, silverly upon a little sound between 'ah' and 'e.' He stopped his laugh to listen to hers, and then he said gravely —

'I think your laugh is the prettiest sound I ever heard. I would give thy maid Margot a score of husbands to make thee laugh.'

'One is enough to make her weep,' she said; 'and I may laugh at thee.'

He said —

'Let us finish this business within the hour. Sit you upon your chair that I may call one to send this ruffler here.'

She rose, with one sinuous motion that pleased him well, half to her feet and, feeling behind her with one hand for the chair, aided herself with the other upon his shoulder because she knew that it gave him joy to be her prop.

'Call the maid, too,' she said, 'for I would come to the secret soon.'

That pleased him too, and, having shouted for a knave he once more shook with laughter.

'Oh ho,' he said, 'you will net this old fox, will you?'

And, having sent his messenger off to summon the Magister from the Lady Mary's room, and the maid from the Queen's, he continued for a while to soliloquise as to Udal's predicament. For he had heard the Magister rail against matrimony in Latin hexameters and doggerel Greek. He knew that the Magister was an incorrigible fumbler after petticoats. And now, he said, this

old fox was to be bagged and tied up.

He said —

'Well, well, well; well, well!'

For, if a Queen commanded a marriage, a marriage there must be; there was no more hope for the Magister than for any slave of Cato's. He was cabined, ginned, trapped, shut in from the herd of bachelors. It pleased the King very well.

The King grasped the gilded arms of his great chair, Katharine sat beside him, her hands laid one within another upon her lap. She did not say one single word during the King's interview with Magister Udal.

The Magister fell upon his knees before them and, seeing the laughing wrinkles round the King's little eyes, made sure that he was sent for – as had often been the case – to turn into Latin some jest the King had made. His gown fell about his kneeling shins, his cap was at his side, his lean, brown, and sly face, with the long nose and crafty eyes, was like a woodpecker's.

'Goodman Magister,' Henry said. 'Stand up. We have sent for thee to advance thee.' Without moving his head he rolled his eyes to one side. He loved his dramatic effects and wished to await the coming of the Queen's maid, Margot, before he gave the weight of his message.

Udal picked up his cap and came up to his feet before them; he had beneath his gown a little book, and one long finger between its leaves to keep his place where he had been reading. For he had forgotten a saying of Thales, and was reading through Cæsar's

Commentaries to find it.

'As Seneca said,' he uttered in his throat, 'advancement is doubly sweet to them that deserve it not.'

'Why,' the King said, 'we advance thee on the deserts of one that finds thee sweet, and is sweet to one doubly sweet to us, Henry of Windsor that speak sweet words to thee.'

The lines on Udal's face drooped all a little downwards.

'Y'are reader in Latin to the Lady Mary,' the King said.

'I have little deserved in that office,' Udal answered; 'the lady reads Latin better than even I.'

'Why, you lie in that,' Henry said, "a readeth well for she's my daughter; but not so well as thee.'

Udal ducked his head; he was not minded to carry modesty further than in reason.

'The Lady Mary – the Lady Mary of England – ' the King said weightily – and these last two words of his had a weight all their own, so that he added, 'of England' again, and then, 'will have little longer need of thee. She shall wed with a puissant Prince.'

'I hail, I felicitate, I bless the day I hear those words,' the Magister said.

'Therefore,' the King said – and his ears had caught the rustle of Margot's grey gown – 'we will let thee no more be reader to that my daughter.'

Margot came round the green silk curtains that were looped on the corner posts of the pavilion. When she saw the Magister her great, fair face became slowly of a fiery red; slowly and silently

she fell, with motions as if bovine, to her knees at the Queen's side. Her gown was all grey, but it had roses of red and white silk round the upper edges of the square neck-place, and white lawn showed beneath her grey cap.

'We advance thee,' Henry said, 'to be Chancellier de la Royne, with an hundred pounds by the year from my purse. Do homage for thine office.'

Udal fell upon one knee before Katharine, and dropping both cap and book, took her hand to raise to his lips. But Margot caught her hand when he had done with it and set upon it a huge pressure.

'But, Sir Chancellor,' the King said, 'it is evident that so grave an office must have a grave fulfiller. And, to ballast thee the better, the Queen of her graciousness hath found thee a weighty helpmeet. So that, before you shall touch the duties and emoluments of this charge you shall, and that even to-night, wed this Madam Margot that here kneels.'

Udal's face had been of a coppery green pallor ever since he had heard the title of Chancellor.

'Eheu!' he said, 'this is the torture of Tantalus that might never drink.'

In its turn the face of Margot Poins grew pale, pushed forward towards him; but her eyes appeared to blaze, for all they were a mild blue, and the Queen felt the pressure upon her hand grow so hard that it pained her.

The King uttered the one word, 'Magister!'

Udal's fingers picked at the fur of his moth-eaten gown.

'God be favourable to me,' he said. 'If it were anything but Chancellor!'

The King grew more rigid.

'Body of God,' he said, 'will you wed with this maid?'

'Ahí!' the Magister wailed; and his perturbation had in it something comic and scarecrowlike, as if a wind shook him from within. 'If you will make me anything but a Chancellor, I will. But a Chancellor, I dare not.'

The King cast himself back in his chair. The suggested gibe rose furiously to his lips; the Magister quailed and bent before him, throwing out his hands.

'Sire,' he said, 'if – which God forbid – this were a Protestant realm I might do it. But oh, pardon and give ear. Pardon and give ear – '

He waved one hand furiously at the silken canopy above them.

'It is agreed with one of mine in Paris that she shall come hither – God forgive me, I must make avowal, though God knows I would not – she shall come hither to me if she do hear that I have risen to be a Chancellor.'

The King said, 'Body of God!' as if it were an earthquake.

'If it were anything else but Chancellor she might not come, and I would wed Margot Poins more willingly than any other. But – God knows I do not willingly make this avowal, but am in a corner, *sicut vulpis in lucubris*, like a fox in the coils – this Paris woman is my wife.'

Henry gave a great shout of laughter, but slowly Margot Poins fell across the Queen's knees. She uttered no sound, but lay there motionless. The sight affected Udal to an epileptic fury.

'Jove be propitious to me!' he stuttered out. 'I know not what I can do.' He began to tear the fur of his cloak and toss it over the battlements. 'The woman is my wife – wed by a friar. If this were a Protestant realm now – or if I pleaded pre-contract – and God knows I ha' promised marriage to twenty women before I, in an evil day, married one – eheu! – to this one – '

He began to sob and to wring his thin hands.

'*Quod faciam? Me miser! Utinam. Utinam —*'

He recovered a little coherence.

'If this were a Protestant land ye might say this wedding was no wedding, for that a friar did it; but I know ye will not suffer that – ' His eyes appealed piteously to the Queen.

'Why, then,' he said, 'it is not upon my head that I do not wed this wench. You be my witness that I would wed; it gores my heart to see her look so pale. It tears my vitals to see any woman look pale. As Lucretius says, "Better the sunshine of smiles – "'

A little outputting of impatient breath from Katharine made him stop.

'It is you, your Grace,' he said, 'that make me thus tied. If you would let us be Protestant, or, again, if I could plead pre-contract to void this Paris marriage it would let me wed with this wench – eheu – eheu. Her brother will break my bones – '

He began to cry out so lamentably, invoking Pluto to bear him

to the underworld, that the King roared out upon him —

'Why, get you gone, fool.'

The Magister threw himself suddenly upon his knees, his hands clasped, his gown drooping over them down to his wrists. He turned his face to the Queen.

'Before God,' he said, 'before high and omnipotent Jove, I swear that when I made this marriage I thought it was no marriage!' He reflected for a breath and added, at the recollection of the cook's spits that had been turned against him when he had by woman's guile been forced into marriage with the widow in Paris, 'I was driven into it by force, with sharp points at my throat. Is that not enow to void a marriage? Is that not enow? Is that not enow?'

Katharine looked out over the great levels of the view. Her face was rigid, and she swallowed in her throat, her eye being glazed and hard. The King took his cue from a glance at her face.

'Get you gone, Goodman Rogue Magister,' he said, and he adopted a canonical tone that went heavily with his rustic pose. 'A marriage made and consummated and properly blessed by holy friar there is no undoing. You are learned enough to know that. Rogue that you be, I am very glad that you are trapped by this marriage. Well I know that you have dangled too much with petticoats, to the great scandal of this my Court. Now you have lost your preferment, and I am glad of it. Another and a better than thou shall be the Queen's Chancellor, for another and a better than thou shall wed this wench. We will get her such a

goodly husband – '

A low, melancholy wail from Margot Poins' agonised face – a sound such as might have been made by an ox in pain – brought him to a stop. It wrung the Magister, who could not bear to see a woman pained, up to a pitch of ecstatic courage.

'*Quid fecit Cæsar*,' he stuttered; 'what Cæsar hath done, Cæsar can do again. It was not till very lately since this canon of wedding and consummating and blessing by a holy friar hath been derided and contemned in this realm. And so it might be again – '

Katharine Howard cried out, 'Ah!' Her features grew rigid and as ashen as cold steel. And, at her cry, the King – who could less bear than Udal to hear a woman in pain – the King sprang up from his chair. It was as amazing to all them as to hunters it is to see a great wild bull charge with a monstrous velocity. Udal was rigid with fear, and the King had him by the throat. He shook him backwards and forwards so that his book fell upon the Queen's feet, bursting out of his ragged gown, and his cap, flying from his opened hand, fell down over the battlement into an elm top. The King guttered out unintelligible sounds of fury from his vast chest and, planted on his huge feet, he swung the Magister round him till, backwards and staggering, the eyes growing fixed in his brown and rigid face, he was pushed, jerking at each step of the King, out of sight behind the green silk curtains.

The Queen sat motionless in her purple velvet. She twisted one hand into the chain of the medallion about her throat, and one hand lay open and pale by her side. Margot Poins knelt at her side,

her face hidden in the Queen's lap, her two arms stretched out beyond her grey coifed head. For a minute she was silent. Then great sobs shook her so that Katharine swayed upon her seat. From her hidden face there came muffled and indistinguishable words, and at last Katharine said dully —

'What, child? What, child?'

Margot moved her face sideways so that her mouth was towards Katharine.

'You can unmake it! You can unmake the marriage,' she brought out in huge sobs.

Katharine said —

'No! No!'

'You unmade a King's marriage,' Margot wailed.

Katharine said —

'No! No!' She started and uttered the words loudly; she added pitifully, 'You do not understand! You do not understand!'

It was the more pitiful in that Margot understood very well. She hid her face again and only sobbed heavily and at long intervals, and then with many sobs at once. The Queen laid her white hand upon the girl's head. Her other still played with the chain.

'Christ be piteous to me,' she said. 'I think it had been better if I had never married the King.'

Margot uttered an indistinguishable sound.

'I think it had been better,' the Queen said; 'though I had jeoparded my immortal part.'

Margot moved her head up to cry out in her turn —

'No! No! You may not say it!'

Then she dropped her face again. When she heard the King coming back and breathing heavily, she stood up, and with huge tears on her red and crumpled face she looked out upon the fields as if she had never seen them before. An immense sob shook her. The King stamped his foot with rage, and then, because he was soft-hearted to them that he saw in sorrow, he put his hand upon her shoulder.

'Sha't have a better mate,' he uttered. 'Sha't be a knight's dame! There! there!' and he fondled her great back with his hand. Her eyes screwed tightly up, she opened her mouth wide, but no words came out, and suddenly she shook her head as if she had been an enraged child. Her loud cries, shaken out of her with her tears, died away as she went across the terrace, a loud one and then a little echo, a loud one and then two more.

'Before God!' the King said, 'that knave shall eat ten years of prison bread.'

His wife looked still over the wooded enclosures, the little stone walls, and the copses. A small cloud had come before the sun, and its shadow was moving leisurely across the ridge where stood the roofless abbey.

'The maid shall have the best man I can give her,' the King said.

'Why, no good man would wed her!' Katharine answered dully.

Henry said —

'Anan?' Then he fingered the dagger on the chain before his chest.

'Why,' he added slowly, 'then the Magister shall die by the rope. It is an offence that can be quitted with death. It is time such a thing were done.'

Katharine's dull silence spurred him; he shrugged his shoulders and heaved a deep breath out.

'Why,' he said, 'a man can be found to wed the wench.'

She moved one hand and uttered —

'I would not wed her to such a man!' as if it were a matter that was not much in her thoughts.

'Then she may go into a nunnery,' the King said; 'for before three months are out we will have many nunneries in this realm.'

She looked upon him a little absently, but she smiled at him to give him pleasure. She was thinking that she wished she had not wedded him; but she smiled because, things being as they were, she thought that she had all the authorities of the noble Greeks and Romans to bid her do what a good wife should.

He laughed at her griefs, thinking that they were all about Margot Poins. He uttered jolly grossnesses; he said that she little knew the way of courts if she thought that a man, and a very good man, might not be found to wed the wench.

She was troubled that he could not better read what was upon her mind, for she was thinking that her having consented to his making null his marriage with the Princess of Cleves that he

might wed her would render her work always the more difficult. It would render her more the target for evil tongues, it would set a sterner and a more stubborn opposition against her task of restoring the Kingdom of God within that realm.

Henry said —

'Ye hannot guessed what my secret was? What have I done for thee this day?'

She still looked away over the lands. She made her face smile —

'Nay, I know not. Ha' ye brought me the musk I love well?'

He shook his head.

'It is more than that!' he said.

She still smiled —

'Ha' ye – ha' ye – made make for me a new crown?'

She feared a little that that was what he had done. For he had been urgent with her, many months, to be crowned. It was his way to love these things. And her heart was a little gladder when he shook his head once again and uttered —

'It is more than that!'

She dreaded his having made ready in secret a great pageant in her honour, for she was afraid of all aggrandisements, and thought still it had been better that she had remained his sweet friend ever and not the Queen. For in that way she would have had as much empire over him, and there would have been much less clamour against her – much less clamour against the Church of her Saviour.

She forced her mind to run upon all the things that she could wish for. When she said it must be that he had ordered for her enough French taffetas to make twelve gowns, he laughed and said that he had said that it was more than a crown. When she guessed that he had made ready such a huge cavalcade that she might with great comfort and safety ride with him into Scotland, he laughed, contented that she should think of going with him upon that long journey. He stood looking at her, his little eyes blinking, his face full of pride and joy, and suddenly he uttered —

'The Church of God is come back again.' He touched his cap at the sacred name. 'I ha' made submission to the Pope.'

He looked her full in the face to get all the delight he might from her looks and her movements.

Her blue eyes grew large; she leaned forward in her chair; her mouth opened a little; her sleeves fell down to the ground. 'Now am I indeed crowned!' she said, and closed her eyes. '*Benedicta sit mater dei!*' she uttered, and her hand went over her heart place; '*deo clamavi nocte atque dië.*'

She was silent again, and she leaned more forward.

'*Sit benedicta dies haec; sit benedicta hora haec benedictaque, saeculum saeculûm, castra haec.*'

She looked out upon the great view: she aspired the air.

'*Ad colles*,' she breathed, '*levavi oculos meos; unde venit salvatio nostra!*'

'Body of God,' Henry said, 'all things grow plain. All things

grow plain. This is the best day that ever I knew.'

IV

The Lady Mary of England sat alone in a fair room with little arched windows that gave high up on to the terrace. It was the best room that ever she had had since her mother, the Queen Katharine of Aragon, had been divorced.

Dressed in black she sat writing at a large table before one window. Her paper was fitted on to a wooden pulpit that rose before her; one book stood open upon it, three others lay open too upon the red and blue and green pattern of the Saracen rug that covered her table. At her right hand was a three-tiered inkstand of pewter, set about with the white feathers of pens; and the snakelike pattern of the table-rug serpentined in and out beneath seals of parcel gilt, a platter of bread, a sandarach of pewter, books bound in wooden covers and locked with chains, books in red velvet covers, sewn with silver wire and tied with ribbons. It ran beneath a huge globe of the world, blue and pink, that had a golden pin in it to mark the city of Rome. There were little wooden racks stuck full with written papers and parchments along the wainscoting between the arched windows, but all the hangings of the other walls were of tinted and dyed silks, not any with dark colours, because Katharine Howard had deemed that that room with its deep windows in the thick walls would be otherwise dark. The room was ten paces deep by twenty long, and the wood of the floor was polished. Against the wall,

behind the Lady Mary's back, there stood a high chair upon a platform. Upon the platform a carpet began that ran up the wall and, overhead, depended from the gilded rafters of the ceiling so that it formed a dais and a canopy.

The Lady Mary sat grimly amongst all these things as if none of them belonged to her. She looked in her book, she made a note upon her paper, she stretched out her hand and took a piece of bread, putting it in her mouth, swallowing it quickly, writing again, and then once more eating, for the great and ceaseless hunger that afflicted her gnawed always at her vitals.

A little boy with a fair poll was reaching on tiptoe to smell at a pink that depended from a vase of very thin glass standing in the deep window. The shield of the coloured pane cast a little patch of red and purple on to his callow head. He was dressed all in purple, very square, and with little chains and medallions, and a little dagger with a golden sheath was about his neck. In one hand he had a piece of paper, in the other a pencil. The Lady Mary wrote; the child moved on tiptoe, with a sedulous expression of silence about his lips, near to her elbow. He watched her writing for a long time with attentive eyes.

Once he said, 'Sister, I – ' but she paid him no heed.

After a time she looked coldly at his face and then he moved along the table, fingered the globe very gently, touched the books and returned to her side. He stood with his little legs wide apart. Then he sighed, then he said —

'Sister, the Queen did bid me ask you a question.'

She looked round upon him.

'This was the Queen's question,' he said bravely: '"*Cur*– why —*nunquam*– never —*rides*– dost thou smile —*cum*– when —*ego, frater tuus*– I, thy little brother —*ludo*– play —*in camerâ tuâ*– in thy chamber?"'

'Little Prince,' she said, 'art not afeared of me?'

'Aye, am I,' he answered.

'Say then to the Queen,' she said, '"*Domina Maria*– the Lady Mary —*ridet nunquam*– smileth never —*quod*– because —*timoris ratio*– the reason of my fear —*bona et satis*– is good and sufficient."'

He held his little head upon one side.

'The Queen did bid me say,' he uttered with his brave little voice, '"Holy Writ hath it: *Ecce quam bonum et dignum est fratres – fratres* —"' He faltered without embarrassment and added, 'I ha' forgot the words.'

'Aye!' she said, 'they ha' been long forgotten in these places; I deem it is overlate to call them to mind.'

She looked upon him coldly for a long time. Then she stretched out her hand for his paper.

'Your Highness, I will set you a copy.'

She took his paper and wrote —

'*Malo malo malâ.*'

He held it in his chubby fist, his head on one side.

'I cannot conster it,' he said.

'Why, think upon it,' she answered. 'When I was thy age I

knew it already two years. But I was better beaten than thou.'

He rubbed his little arm.

'I am beaten enow,' he said.

'Knowest not what a swingeing is,' she answered.

'Then thou hadst a bitter childhood,' he brought out.

'I had a good mother,' she cut him short.

She turned her face to her writing again; it was bitter and set. The little prince climbed slowly into the chair on the dais. He moved sturdily and curled himself up on the cushion, studying the words on the paper all the while with a little frown upon his brows. Then, shrugging his shoulders, he set the paper upon his knee and began to write.

At that date the Lady Mary was still called a bastard, though most men thought that that hardship would soon be reversed. It was said that great honours had been shown her, and that was apparent in the furnishing of her rooms, the fineness of her gear, the increase in the number of the women that waited on her, and the store of sweet things that was provided for her to eat. A great many men noted the chair with a dais that was set up always where she might be, in her principal room, and though her ladies said that she never sat in it, most men believed that she had made a pact with the King to do him honour and so to be reinstated in the estate in which she held her own. It was considered, too, that she no longer plotted with the King's enemies inside or out of the realm; it was at least certain that she no longer had men set to spy upon her, though it was noted that the Archbishop's gentleman,

Lascelles, nosed about her quarters and her maids. But he was always spying somewhere and, as the Archbishop's days were thought to be numbered, he was accounted of little weight. Indeed, since the fall of Thomas Cromwell there seemed to be few spies about the Court, or almost none at all. It was known that gentlemen wrote accounts of what passed to Gardiner, the Bishop of Winchester. But Gardiner was gone back into his see and appeared to have little favour, though it was claimed for him that he had done much to advance the new Queen. So that, upon the whole, men breathed much more freely – and women too – than in the days before the fall of Privy Seal. The Queen had made little change, and seemed to have it in mind to make little more. Her relatives had, nearly none of them, been advanced. There were few Protestants oppressed, though many Catholics had been loosed from the gaols, most notably him whom the Archbishop Cranmer had taken to be his chaplain and confessor, and others that other lords had taken out of prison to be about them.

All in all the months that had passed since Cromwell's fall had gone quietly. The King and Queen had gone very often to mass since Katharine had been shown for Queen in the gardens at Hampton Court, and saints' days and the feasts of the life of our Lady had been very carefully observed, along with fasts such as had used to be observed. The King, however, was mightily fond with his new Queen, and those that knew her well, or knew her servants well, expected great changes. Some were much

encouraged, some feared very much, but nearly all were heartily glad of that summer of breathing space; and the weather was mostly good, so that the corn ripened well and there was little plague or ague abroad.

Thus most men had been heartily glad to see the new Queen upon her journey there to the north parts. She had ridden upon a white horse with the King at her side; she had asked the names of several that had come to see her; she had been fair to look at; and the King had pardoned many felons, so that men's wives and mothers had been made glad; and most old men said that the good times were come again, with the price of malt fallen and twenty-six to the score of herrings. It was reported, too, that a cider press in Herefordshire had let down a dozen firkins of cider without any apples being set in it, and this was accounted an omen of great plenty, whilst many sheep had died, so that men who had set their fields down in grass talked of giving them to the plough again, and upon St Swithin's Day no rain had fallen. All these things gave a great contentment, and many that in the hard days had thought to become Lutheran in search of betterment, now looked in byres and hidden valleys to find priests of the old faith. For if a man could plough he might eat, and if he might eat he could praise God after his father's manner as well as in a new way.

Thus, around the Lady Mary, whilst she wrote, the people of the land breathed more peace. And even she could not but be conscious of a new softness, if it was only in the warmth that

came from having her window-leads properly mended. She had hardly ever before known what it was to have warm hands when she wrote, and in most days of the year she had worn fur next her skin, indoors as well as out. But now the sun beat on her new windows, and in that warmth she could wear fine lawn, so that, in spite of herself, she took pleasure and was softened, though, since she spoke to no man save the Magister Udal, and to him only about the works of Plautus or the game of cards that they played together, few knew of any change in her.

Nevertheless, on that day she had one of her more ill moods and, presently, having written a little more, she rang a small silver bell that was shaped like a Dutch woman with wide skirts.

'The Prince annoys me,' she said to her woman; 'send for his lady governess.'

The woman, dressed all in black, like her mistress, and with a little frill of white cambric over her temples as if she were a nun, stood in the open doorway that was just level with the Lady Mary's chair, so that the stone wall of the passage caught the light from the window. She folded her hands before her.

'Alack, Madam,' she said, 'your Madamship knows that at this hour his Highness' lady governess taketh ever the air.'

The little boy in the chair looked over his paper at his sister.

'Send for his physician then,' Mary said.

'Alack, sister,' the little Prince said before the woman could move, 'my physician is ill. *Jacet*– He lieth —*in cubiculo*– in his bed.'

The Lady Mary would not look round on him.

'Get thee, then,' she uttered coldly, 'to thine own apartments, Prince.'

'Alack, sister,' he answered,'thou knowest that I may not walk along the corridors alone for fear some slay me. Nor yet may I be anywhere save with the Queen, or thee, or with my uncles, or my lady governess, or my physicians, for fear some poison me.'

He spoke with a clear and shrill voice, and the woman cast down her eyes, trembling a little, partly to hear such a small, weary child speak such a long speech as if by wizardry – for it was reported among the serving maids that he had been overlooked – and partly for fear of the black humour that she perceived to be upon her mistress.

'Send me then my Magister to lay out cards with me,' the Lady Mary said. 'I cannot make my studies with this Prince in my rooms.'

'Alack, Madam,' the girl said. She was high coloured and with dark eyes, but when she faltered then the colour died from her cheeks. The Lady Mary surveyed her coldly, for she was in the mood to give pain. She uttered no words.

'Alack, alack – ' the maid whimpered. She was full of fear lest the Lady Mary should order her to receive short rations or many stripes; she was filled with consternation and grief since her sweetheart, a server, had told her that he must leave her. For it was rumoured that the Magister had been cast into gaol for sweethearting, and that the King had said that all sweethearts

should be gaoled from thenceforth. 'The Magister is gaoled,' she said.

'Wherefore?' the Lady uttered the one expressionless word.

'I do not know,' the maid wailed; 'I do not know.'

The form of the Archbishop's gentleman glided noiselessly behind her back. His eyes shot one sharp, sideways glance in at the door, and, like a russet fox, he was gone. He was so like a fox that the Lady Mary, when she spoke, used the words —

'Catch me that gentleman.'

He was brought to the doorsill by the panting maid, for he had walked away very fast. He stood there, blinking his eyes and stroking his fox-coloured beard. When the Lady Mary beckoned him into the room he pulled off his cap and fell to his thin knees. He expected her to bid him rise, but she left him there.

'Wherefore is my secretary gaoled?' she asked cruelly.

He ran his finger round the rim of his cap where it lay on the floor beside him.

'That he is gaoled, I know,' he said; 'but the wherefore of it, not.'

He looked down at the floor and she down at his drooped eyelids.

'God help you,' she uttered scornfully. 'You are a spy and yet know no more than a Queen's daughter.'

'God help me,' he repeated gravely and touched his eyelid with one finger. 'What passed, passed between the King and him. I know no more than common report.'

'Common report?' she said. 'I warrant thee thou wast slinking around the terrace. I warrant thee thou heardst words of the King's mouth. I warrant thee thou followedst here to hear at my doorhole how I might take this adventure.'

One of his eyelids moved delicately, but he said no word. The Lady Mary turned her back on him and he expected her order to be gone. But she turned again —

'Common report?' she uttered once more. 'I do bid you give me the common report upon this, that the Queen sends to me every day this little Prince to be alone with me two hours.'

He winced with his eyebrows again.

'Out with the common report,' she said.

'Madam,' he uttered, 'it is usually commended that the Queen should seek to bring sister and Prince-brother together.'

She shrugged her stiff shoulders up to her ears.

'What a poor liar for a spy,' she said. 'It is more usually reported' – and she turned upon the little Prince – 'that the Queen sends thee here that I may work thee a mischief so that thou die and her child reign after the King thy father.'

The little Prince looked at her with pensive eyes. At that moment Katharine Howard came to the room door and looked in.

'Body of God,' the Lady Mary said; 'here you spy out a spy committing treason. For it is still treason to kneel to me. I am of illegal birth and not of the blood royal.'

Katharine essayed her smile upon the black-avised girl.

'Give me leave,' she said.

'Your Grace's poor room,' Mary said, 'is open ever to your Grace's entry. *Ubi venis ibi tibi.*'

The Queen bade her waiting women go. She entered the room and looked at Lascelles.

'I think I know thy face,' she said.

'I am the Archbishop's poor gentleman,' he answered. 'I think you have seen me.'

'No. It is not that,' she said. 'It was long ago.'

She crossed the room to smell at the pinks in the window.

'How late the flowers grow,' she said. 'It is August, yet here are still vernal perfumes.'

She was unwilling to bid the gentleman rise and go, because this was the Lady Mary's room.

'Where your Grace is, there the spring abideth,' Mary said sardonically. '*Ecce miraculum sicut erat, Joshuâ rege.*'

The little Prince came timidly down to beg a flower from the Queen and they all had their backs upon the spy. He ran his hands down his beard and considered the Queen's words. Then swiftly he was on his feet and through the door. He was more ready to brave the Lady Mary's after-wrath than let the Queen see him upon his knees. For actually it was a treason to kneel to the Lady Mary. It had been proclaimed so in the old days when the King's daughter was always subject to new debasements. And who knew whether now the penalty of treason might not still be enacted? It was certain that the Queen had no liking for the

Archbishop. Then, what use might she not make of the fact that the Archbishop's man knelt, seeming to curry favour, though in these days all men knelt to her, even when the King was by? He cursed himself as he hastened away.

The Queen looked over her shoulder and caught the glint of his red heel as it went past the doorpost.

'In our north parts,' she said, and she was glad that Lascelles had fled, 'the seasons come ever tardily.'

'Well, your Grace has not delayed to blossom,' Mary said.

It was part of her humour when she was in a taunting mood to call the Queen always 'your Grace' or 'your Majesty' at every turn of the phrase.

Katharine looked at the pink intently. Her face had no expression, she was determined at once to have a cheerful patience and not to show it in her face.

The little Prince stole his hand into hers.

'Wherefore did my father —*rex pater meus*– pummel the man in the long cloak?' he asked.

'You knew it then?' Katharine asked of her stepdaughter.

'I knew it not,' the Lady Mary answered.

'I saw it from this window, but my sister would not look,' the Prince said.

The Queen was going to shut, with her own hand, the door, the little boy trotting behind her, but, purple-clothed and huge, the King was there.

'Well, I will not be shut out in mine own castle,' he said

pleasantly.

In those, the quiet days of his realm when most things were going well, his face beneath his beard had taken a rounder and a smoother outline. He moved with motions less hasty than those he had had two years before, and when he had cast a task off it was done with and went out of his mind, so that he appeared a very busy man with, between whiles, the leisure to saunter.

'In a half hour,' he said, 'I go north to meet the King o' Scots. I would I had not the long journey to make but could stay with ye. It is pleasant here; the air is livening.' He caught his little son by the armpits and hoisted him on to his purple shoulders. 'Hey, princekin,' he said, 'what news ha' you o' the day?'

The little Edward pulled his father's bonnet off that he might the better see the huge brows and the little eyes.

'I told my sister that you did pummel a man in a long gown. What is even "long gown" in the learned tongue?' He played daintily and languidly with the hair of the King's temples, and when the King had said that he might call it '*doctorum toga*,' he added, 'But my sister would not come to look.'

'Well, thy sister is a monstrous learned wench,' the King said with a heavy benignity. 'She could not leave her book.'

The Lady Mary stood rigid, with a mock humility. She had her hands clasped before her, the folds of her black skirt fell stiffly just to the ground. She pursed her lips and strove with herself to speak, for she was minded to exhibit disdain, but her black mood was too strong for her.

'I did not read in my book, because I could not,' she said numbly. 'Your son disturbed my reading. But I did not come to look, because I would not.'

With one arm round the boy's little waist as he sat on high, and one hand on the little feet, the King looked at his daughter in a sudden hot rage; for to speak contemptuously of his son was a thing that filled him with anger and surprise. He opened his mouth to shout. Katharine Howard was gently turning a brass sphere with the constellations upon it that stood upon the table. She moved her fair face round towards the King and set her finger upon her lips. He shrugged his shoulders, prince and all moving up together, and his face took on the expression, half abashed and half resigned, of a man who is reminded by his womankind that he is near to a passionate folly.

Katharine by that time had schooled him how to act when Mary was in that humour, and he let out no word.

'I do not like that this Prince should play in my room,' the Lady Mary pursued him relentlessly, and he was so well lessoned that he answered only —

'Ye must fight that cock with Kat. It is Kat that sends him, not I.'

Nevertheless he was too masterful a man to keep his silence altogether; he was, besides, so content upon the whole that he was sure he could hold his temper in check, and the better to take breath for a long speech, he took the little boy from his shoulder and planted his feet abroad on the carpet.

'See now, Moll,' he said, 'make friends!' and he stretched out a large hand. She shrugged her shoulders half invisibly.

'I will kneel down to the King of this country and to the Supreme Head of the Church as it is here set up by law. What more would you have of me?'

'See now, Moll!' he said.

He fingered the medal upon his chest and cast about for words.

'Let us have peace in this realm,' he said. 'We are very near it.'

She raised her eyelids with a tiny contempt.

'It hangs much around you,' he went on. 'Listen! I will tell ye the whole matter.'

Slowly and sagaciously he disentangled all his coil of policies. His letter to the Holy Father was all drafted and ready to be put into fine words. But, before he sent it, he must be sure of peace abroad. It was like this —

'Ye know,' he said, 'though great wrangles have been in the past betwixt him and thee and mine own self, how my heart has ever been well inclined to my nephew, thy cousin the Emperor. There are in Christendom now only he and France that are anyways strong to stand against me or to invade me. But France I ha' never loved, and him much.'

'Ye are grown gentle then,' Mary said, 'and forgiving in your old age, for ye know I ha' plotted against you with my cousin and my cousin with me.'

'It is a very ancient tale,' the King said. 'Forget it, as do I and he.'

'Why, you live in the sun where the dial face moves. I in the shadow where Time stays still. To me it is every day a new tale,' the Lady Mary answered.

His face took on an expression of patience and resignation that angered her, for she knew that when her father looked so it was always very difficult to move him.

'Why, all the world forgets,' he said.

'Save only I,' she answered. 'I had only one parent – a mother. She is dead: she was done to death.'

'I have pardoned your cousin that he plotted against me,' he stuck to his tale, 'and he me what I did against your mother.'

'Well, he was ever a popinjay,' the Lady Mary said.

'Lately,' Henry continued, 'as ye wiz he had grown very thick with Francis of France. He went across the French country into the Netherlands, so strict was their alliance. It is more than I would do to trust myself to France's word. All Holland marvelled.'

'What is this to me?' the Lady Mary said. 'Will you send me across France to the Netherlands?'

He left her gibe alone.

'But in these latter months,' he said, 'Kat and I ha' weakened with true messages and loyal conceits this unholy alliance.'

'Why, I ha' heard,' Mary said, 'ye did send the Duke of Norfolk to tell the King o' France that my cousin had said in private that he was the greater King of the twain. These be princely princes!'

'An unholy alliance it was,' Henry went on his way, 'for the

Emperor is a very good Christian and a loyal son of the Church. But Francis worships the devil – I have heard it said and I believe it – or, at least, he believes not in God and our Saviour; and he pays allegiance to the Church only when it serves his turn, now holding on, now letting go. I am glad this alliance is dissolving.'

'Why, I am glad to hear you speak like this,' Mary said bitterly. 'You are a goodly son to Mother Church.'

The King took her scorn with a shrug of the shoulders.

'I am glad this alliance is dissolved or dissolving,' he said, 'for when it is fully dissolved I will make my peace with Rome. And I long for that day, for I am weary of errors.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.